

Full Council – 20 November 2023

2nd Labour Group Motion

Lift the Ban

This Council notes that:

- Brent has a proud history of embracing individuals seeking safety within our borough. Our diverse community of communities has contributed to the values which make Brent the open and welcoming borough it is today.
- The Conservative Government's attitude towards asylum seekers is unacceptable. It seeks to demonise families who have come to the UK for safety and a better life. This is reflected in both the UK-Rwanda partnership, which will criminalise refugees and threaten them with removal to Rwanda. It is also seen in the recent rhetoric of the Home Secretary who has said that multiculturalism has "failed".
- The government's approach can be seen in the significant problems with the UK asylum system, with over 700 individuals residing indefinitely in hotels in Brent while awaiting the outcome of their application to remain. There is a record backlog of cases awaiting a decision alongside a de facto ban on working, all of which leads to a circle of impoverishment.
- Since 2002, people seeking asylum have only been able to apply for the right to work after they have been waiting for a decision on their asylum claim for over a year, and only if they can be employed into one of the narrow, highly-skilled professions included on the government's Shortage Occupation List.
- That people seeking asylum are left to live on £5.39 per day, struggling to support themselves and their families, and left vulnerable to destitution, isolation, and exploitation.
- The potential for economic gain of millions of pounds to the UK via increased taxable income and reduced payments of accommodation and subsistence support is foregone.

This Council believes that:

- The Home Secretary's view that multiculturalism has failed is an insult to the residents that have built their lives in Brent and contributed to this borough.
- People seeking asylum want to be able to work so that they can use their skills and make the most of their potential, integrate into their communities, and provide for themselves and their families.
- Restrictions on the right to work can lead to extremely poor mental health outcomes, a waste of potentially invaluable talents and skills for the economy, and greater poverty and homelessness in Brent.
- Allowing people seeking asylum the right to work would therefore lead to positive outcomes for the local and national economy.
- The UK needs an asylum system that empowers people seeking safety to rebuild their lives and enables communities to welcome them, not to isolate them.

This Council therefore resolves to:

- 1) Join the Lift the Ban Coalition (led by refugee action), which is campaigning to restore the right to work for everyone waiting for more than 6 months for a decision on their asylum claim.
- 2) Request that the Leader of the Council writes to the Home Secretary to request that:
 - People seeking asylum and the right to work should be unconstrained by the shortage occupation list, after they have waited six months for a decision on their initial asylum claim or further submission.
 - The Home Office work with local authorities and communities to build a refugee protection system that treats all people with dignity and compassion.
 - Financial support be made available for councils like Brent, that will have more refugees that require wraparound support with housing, upon being awarded the right to remain.
 - The Home Secretary apologise for describing rough sleeping as a "lifestyle choice." There are at least 1.5 million people residing in the UK that have no recourse to public funds, many facing homelessness and many whose visa status has not been determined.

Councillor Ishma Moeen
Wembley Hill Ward