

**Council Meeting**  
**26<sup>th</sup> July 2023**

**Motion submitted by Councillor Jenny Lynn under Council Procedure Rule 14**

**Local Authority of Sanctuary & Migration Pledge**

**This council notes that:**

- Calderdale is proud of our history of welcoming people seeking safety in the borough and upholding the principles of dignity and respect for all, by promoting a compassionate and welcoming response to asylum seekers, refugees, and all migrants and supporting the inclusion and welfare of people who are fleeing violence and persecution.
- No migrant should be considered illegal. Currently there are no safe and legal routes for people to enter the UK for the purpose of seeking asylum. The circumstances a person can enter the country as a refugee on humanitarian grounds are extremely limited.
- The Nationality and Borders Act (2022) created a two-tier immigration system in the UK. Those who arrived directly and claimed asylum without passing through a safe country were classed as group 1 and given refugee status and a 5-year route to settlement. Those who arrived in the country having passed through a safe country or via 'irregular means' such as a small boat were classed as group 2 and given temporary refugee permission to stay for 30 months and a 10-year route to settlement.
- Last month it was announced that the two-tier immigration system would be 'paused' by the Government with effect from July 2023, and all refugees would be given group 1 status. The stated reason was the proposed Illegal Migration Bill will bring stronger measures, making the asylum and human rights claims of people who arrive in the UK through 'irregular means' inadmissible and imposing a duty on the Home Secretary to remove them.
- Since 2021 the number of asylum applications in the UK has increased sharply, and there is now a substantial backlog of people awaiting decisions. According to Home Office statistics on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2022 there were around 132,000 asylum applications awaiting an initial decision in the UK.
- People seeking safety in the UK face many challenges in rebuilding their lives. Waiting times for decisions can run into years, families can be separated, and refugees are at greater risk of destitution and homelessness. Refugee and asylum seekers are also more likely to be subject to criminal and sexual exploitation as well as modern slavery.
- The UK does not have the capacity to detain large numbers of people. Asylum seekers and refugees are often housed in institutional settings such as hotels and accommodation centres under national Home Office contracts. This leads

to isolation and difficulty in accessing vital services. The majority are effectively barred from working and providing for themselves and their families.

- The number of people seeking asylum in Calderdale has increased since 2014, with a sharp uplift in the last 18 months. There is often a 'lag' in receiving figures from the Home Office, however the latest available data in Q3 2022 shows over 700 people seeking asylum are living in Calderdale in community accommodation and hotels.
- Calderdale has been a Valley of Sanctuary since 2021. Practical steps taken to welcome refugees include the first Library of Sanctuary award for our library service, a School of Sanctuary at Beech Hill, and the UK's first Cinema of Sanctuary at the Hebden Bridge Picture House.

**This Council believes that:**

- The Nationality and Borders Act did not address complex issues underpinning migration, and instead punished people seeking safety based on the journeys they made. The proposed Illegal Migration Bill is even less humane, to the extent the Government itself cannot be confident it does not breach international law.
- Current Government laws have created a hostile environment for refugees which is cruel, divisive, and inefficient and causes harm to some of the most vulnerable people across the country and in our borough.
- Calderdale is a multi-cultural and diverse community which must be celebrated. We must recognise rights for people fleeing war and persecution to seek safety.

**This Council resolves:**

- To recognise the contribution of asylum seekers and refugees to Calderdale; commit to welcoming and including them in our activities; and seek to become a recognised 'Local Authority of Sanctuary' for refugees and asylum seekers.
- To find greater opportunities across the Council and borough to celebrate our migrant communities, tell their stories, and promote their voices.
- To continue working with the voluntary sector and partners including Calderdale Valley of Sanctuary, St Augustine's, health, and education, and to include those with lived experience of the asylum system in our decision making.
- To defend the right to seek safety from war and persecution in the UK
- To challenge the current government's hostile approach towards migrants and continue to identify ways to mitigate the effects of these measures in Calderdale.

- To ensure that all migrant residents of Calderdale are supported through voluntary and statutory services to meet their needs, and that our officers continue to present all options available to migrants accessing council services. This includes ensuring migrants can access information on their rights, and support for looked after migrant children.
- To learn from the City of Sanctuary local authority network to understand a best practice approach, so that migrant communities continue to be treated with dignity and respect.

**Motion seconded by Councillor Helen Rivron**