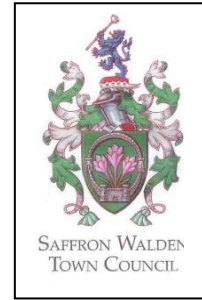


Saffron Walden Town Council
The Town Hall
Market Street
Saffron Walden
CB10 1HZ



20th April 2022

The Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

Dear Priti Patel

I write on behalf of Saffron Walden Town Council, a Town Council in the Uttlesford District of Essex. At the Town Council's Full Council meeting on 11th April 2022, Members unanimously passed the following motion:

This Council notes:

1. The Russian Federation's illegal and unapproved invasion of Ukraine has seen (alleged) brutal attacks on civilians and civil infrastructure, as well as the (alleged) abduction of civilians and civil leaders in territory now occupied by Russian forces.
2. Ukraine's legitimate and democratically elected government has long aimed to join the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Alliance (NATO). Russia has no right to dictate whether Ukraine or any other sovereign country can join these organisations.
3. The conflict has already displaced 10 million Ukrainians, according to the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), 3.5 million of whom have left the country. The majority of these people are women, children and elderly people. Poland has now taken 2 million people.
4. The Nationality and Borders Bill currently before Parliament would make changes to the asylum system that would make it much more difficult for refugees - whether from Ukraine, Syria, Afghanistan or any other country where civilians are at danger from armed conflict or ethnic cleansing - to claim asylum in the UK, and would create a two-tier system, penalising people seeking safety based on the journeys they make.

This Council believes:

5. Russia's invasion of Ukraine should be condemned in the strongest possible terms, and Saffron Walden Town Council should stand in solidarity with the people of Ukraine against Russian aggression.
6. Ukraine has the full right to exist as a sovereign, democratic state, rather than as part of Russia or as a vassal state of a Russian empire.
7. Europe is facing the biggest refugee crisis since the Second World war, and both the UK, Saffron Walden Town Council and all layers and tiers of Council, have a duty to accept as many refugees as possible. The Government should immediately do as the EU has already done and waive the visa requirements that are causing cruel and unnecessary obstruction to refugees to refugees urgently seeking asylum.
8. This crisis should prompt the Government to revisit the Nationality and Borders Bill, as this would treat as criminals' people who are forced to make dangerous journeys to safety - whether from Ukraine or other conflict zone.
9. The right to seek asylum is a universal right. This council supports the rights of refugees from all parts of the world regardless of ethnicity or creed.
10. For refugees to be integrated into communities, support themselves and have access to vital public services, it is essential to lift the 'No Recourse to Public Funds' (NRPF) status and any employment restrictions. Our asylum system should empower people seeking safety to rebuild their lives, and support communities in welcoming them.

Saffron Walden Town Council resolves to:

1. Collectively write a public letter to the Government stating the views laid out in this motion, and calling on it to:
 - revisit the Nationality and Borders Bill, removing elements of it that criminalise asylum-seekers,
 - waive visa requirements for refugees trying to enter from Ukraine and any other conflict areas
 - request that Councils are given the necessary funding to support refugees,
 - work with Local Authorities and communities to build a fairer and more effective asylum system, including the provision of safe and legal routes to claim asylum, lifting the ban on asylum seekers working, and lifting the ban on asylum seekers receiving benefits (the 'No Recourse to Public Funds' condition).
2. Use Council resources to support efforts providing aid to refugees displaced from their homes, within and outside Ukraine.

3. Continue working proactively with the Government and other agencies to support the Homes for Ukraine scheme connecting refugees with individuals who are able to provide accommodation.
4. To request the DBS checks on potential host families are thorough and vigorous to rule out the possibility of exploitation of the system for illegal ends such as modern-day slavery or sex trafficking.
5. To request that a similar scheme for the placement of other refugees such as the Afghans, who are still being housed in hotels.
6. Publicly restate its commitment to refugees through its website and public statements.
7. We will encourage and support those Councils with primary responsibility for housing, social care, and education to support refugees through their policies and practices. We will provide information on our website to ensure that we are helping asylum seekers and refugees to the maximum of our legal ability, with reference to the Local Government Association guidance 'Resettling refugees' and the No Recourse to Public Funds Networks 'Guidance for Councils'.

Saffron Walden Town Council is committed to positively working with and supporting Ukrainian refugees; we are currently working with a number of partners and agencies in actively supporting local refugees and families. Whilst these efforts will make a positive difference to our local community, they do not and cannot address wider, more national issues such as the Nationality and Borders Bill or visa requirements for refugees and their subsequent status in the UK. These are matters for the Home Office to address and we respectfully request that you give consideration to the matters as raised in this letter.

I thank you for your time and consideration and look forward to hearing further from you. I copy to this letter the Saffron Walden MP, Kemi Badenoch and Councillors and Chief Officers from our County and District Councils respectively for their further information and advice.

Yours sincerely

Cllr Richard Porch
Town Mayor of Saffron Walden

Lisa Courtney
Town Clerk

Copy by email to:

Kemi Badenoch MP

Cllr Kevin Bentley, Leader of Essex County Council

Mr Gavin Jones, Chief Executive Officer at Essex County Council

Cllr Petrina Lees, Leader of Uttlesford District Council

Mr Peter Holt, Chief Executive at Uttlesford District Council