

The Rt Hon Sir Keir Starmer MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
Westminster
SW1A 2AA

Dear Prime Minister

We are writing to you as elected representatives in Southwark about the recent rhetoric you have used in relation to immigration.

Southwark is one of the most diverse boroughs in the country – four of every ten residents were born overseas. Like the rest of London and the UK as a whole, Southwark wears its diversity with pride. Ours is a true melting pot of cultures from across the globe. In the Latin American diaspora and Bengali community of the Elephant and Castle, the north African and middle eastern families of the Old Kent Road, the African and Caribbean communities of Peckham and the Irish and east European families across the borough, the cultural fabric of our communities is bound up with countless stories of migration.

Our borough is a shining example of how peoples from all sorts of backgrounds can cherish and celebrate differences and similarities. This mutual exchange of ideas, food, music, and culture makes our world a better place.

The language that you used to announce the immigration white paper – warning of Britain becoming an “island of strangers” – is profoundly troubling. It puts in jeopardy and undermines the shared values of inclusiveness, openness and tolerance which are evidenced so vividly in boroughs like ours.

There will always be a need for clear and fair policy on immigration. But we are particularly concerned by announced changes to immigration rules which will be applied to those already here. Hard working, decent people for whom Southwark is home and who contribute to our economy and communities will have their lives disrupted, made more uncertain or worse. This is cruel, unjust and economically unwise.

Changes to graduate visas also risk not only the great contributions made here by graduates from abroad but also could worsen the already very difficult financial situation in which the whole English higher education sector finds itself. Southwark is home to several excellent universities and campuses – including the University of Arts London, London South Bank University, King’s College London and more. The approach indicated in the white paper could reduce their ability to continue to deliver as much world class education - and just as other countries such as the USA are making foreign students less welcome.

We are proud of the contributions made by those who have chosen to make Southwark their home - to our borough, our city and our country. They are not strangers to us. They are our neighbours, friends, colleagues, and family. In our council chamber, the two political parties represented here have repeatedly put differences aside to come together to celebrate our borough’s heritage and makeup. We are a Borough of Sanctuary, support the right to work for asylum seekers and champion the right for all permanent residents to be able to vote.

If your concerns are about integration – then please look to Southwark for how this is done with compassion, tolerance and joy. We come together as community - with inclusion and participation, not with division and fear.

We therefore urge you, Prime Minister, urgently to rethink your approach to these

issues – in both policy and rhetoric.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr Victor Chamberlain
**Leader, Southwark Liberal Democrats
Borough and Bankside Ward**

Cllr Rachel Bentley
**Deputy Leader, Southwark Liberal Democrats
North Bermondsey Ward**

Cllr David Watson
**Whip, Southwark Liberal Democrats
Borough and Bankside Ward**

Cllr Jane Salmon
**Chair, Southwark Liberal Democrats
Surrey Docks Ward**

Cllr Irina Von Wiese
Borough and Bankside Ward

Cllr Maria Linforth-Hall
St George's Ward

Cllr Graham Neale
St George's Ward

Cllr Emily Tester
North Bermondsey Ward

Cllr Hamish McCallum
North Bermondsey Ward

Cllr Adam Hood
Surrey Docks Ward

Cllr Nick Johnson
Surrey Docks Ward