

A couple of constituents have criticised me for “abstaining” on the vote on child refugees. I have corrected them by explaining that I am still excused from being in Parliament to vote, which is our equivalent of maternity leave but thought I’d clarify my position on the matter.

I was extremely sympathetic to the argument being put forward that we should take more unaccompanied child refugees in the UK. There are an estimated 95,000 unaccompanied children in Europe fleeing war torn countries for safety, and yet putting themselves in the face of dangers that would make any rational human sick to their stomach.

Children escape the horrors of civil war and extremism, seeking safe refuge in Europe, only to find themselves victims of sexual and violent exploitation. The Government’s initial objection was that us taking more children would only encourage others to come. While this may be true to some extent, it should not have defined the UK’s response to the matter especially as a country whose own history, such as during World War II, is steeped in providing a safe haven for children.

Another argument put forward was that local authorities couldn’t cope. If we, the world’s 5th largest economy, cannot cope with taking in 5 children per constituency then there is something morally wrong with our system. I appreciate KCC is under pressure at the moment but with proper support, financial and practical, this is not a problem that cannot be overcome.

Thanks to arguments put forward by charities, opposition and some of my own colleagues, such as my very good parliamentary friend Stephen Phillips, the Government changed its mind on unaccompanied child refugees. This was the right decision and I am proud that going forward children, alone and scared, should no longer fear exploitation and violence and instead be protected and welcomed into our safe country.