

Liberal
Democrats

Autumn Conference
Bournemouth 2023

Policy Paper 153

**FOR A
FAIR
DEAL**

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1 Foreword

In very tough times, the British people have shown remarkable decency and strength. Everywhere I go across our great United Kingdom, I see people from all backgrounds and all walks of life, working hard, raising families, helping others and playing by the rules – but finding it harder and harder to make ends meet.

Now more than ever, people deserve a fair deal.

Everyone should be able to afford a decent home in a safe, clean neighbourhood – with a comfortable retirement when the time comes. Every child should be able to go to a good school and have real opportunities to fulfil their potential. If anyone in your family is ill, frail or disabled, they should get the high-quality healthcare they need.

But that's not the reality for too many people in the UK today, because this out-of-touch Conservative Government is letting us all down and taking everyone for granted.

Soaring energy bills, food prices and housing costs are overwhelming millions of families and pensioners. We need a Government with a plan to tackle this cost-of-living crisis, but instead the Conservatives have made it so much worse because they just don't care.

They have let the NHS crisis spiral out of control, failing to deliver the new hospitals they promised and making people wait hours for an ambulance, weeks to see a GP or months for urgent cancer treatment. They are allowing water companies to pump filthy sewage into our rivers, damaging our precious local environment.

All that must change.

More and more people are turning to the Liberal Democrats to put an end to this terrible Conservative Government. They know that every vote for the Liberal Democrats is a vote to elect a strong local champion who will fight for a fair deal for you and your community.

A fair deal that gives everyone the opportunity to get on in life, wherever they start.

A fair deal that puts power in your hands, so you can do your bit – for your children, your community, your business and your environment.

A fair deal that holds the powerful to account, to make sure they do their bit too. Where everyone plays by the same rules.

That is the fair deal the Liberal Democrats are fighting for. I know we can achieve it. So join us, and let's make it happen!

Ed Davey

2 Our Fair Deal

2.0.1 Over the centuries, Britain has taken enormous strides to becoming the fair, free and open society we all know it can be.

2.0.2 For more than 150 years, Liberals and Liberal Democrats have led that change: championing free trade, introducing the state pension and free school meals, laying the foundations of the welfare state and the National Health Service, legalising same-sex marriage, and taking urgent action to tackle the climate emergency.

2.0.3 But after years of Conservative neglect, the social contract – or fair deal – between people and government has been shattered. Liberal Democrats will never stop fighting to rebuild and strengthen it.

2.0.4 Furthermore, the UK's political system is fundamentally broken. Millions of people feel powerless and excluded, robbed of their rightful say and unable to hold the powerful to account.

2.0.5 We want to give everyone the power to make the most of their potential, and real freedom to decide how they live their lives.

2.0.6 The task is extensive. That is why the fair deal we propose has five themes which are set out below.

1. A fair, prosperous and innovative economy that promotes opportunity and wellbeing.

2.1.1 Everyone deserves the chance to get on in life and see their hard work and aspiration properly rewarded. Businesses and entrepreneurs

should be supported to create worthwhile jobs in every part of the UK. But the Conservatives' botched deal with Europe has damaged trade and prosperity and is acting as a permanent brake on the economy.

2.1.2 Liberal Democrats are the champions of small businesses – the engines of our economy and the beating heart of local communities. We put people first, with a focus on education, training and flexible working. We believe in harnessing the benefits of new technology and innovations for everyone. And we understand that to grow the UK's economy we must fix the broken relationship with Europe.

2.1.3 We will **invest in renewable power and home insulation** to drive a strong economic recovery, bring down energy bills and create clean, secure, well-paid new jobs.

2. Fair access to good public services and a strong social safety net.

2.2.1 Every child deserves the best possible start in life. Everyone should receive the care they need when they are ill or frail, and a helping hand when they fall on tough times. Liberal Democrats believe that an active state is essential to empower people and provide the support they need.

2.2.2 That means a government which helps struggling families and pensioners when they face a cost-of-living crisis, rather than one which plunges them into poverty. We understand that education is the key to opportunity and the best possible investment in our country's future. We cherish the NHS, a Liberal invention and one of the UK's proudest achievements.

2.2.3 We will **give everyone a new right to see their GP within seven days, or 24 hours if it's urgent**, with the extra doctors needed to make it happen.

3. A flourishing environment, with fair access to nature for all.

2.3.1 Everyone should be able to enjoy the benefits of our wonderful natural environment, and our children should inherit the future they deserve. The climate and nature emergencies are the most pressing threats to prosperity facing the UK and the world.

2.3.2 We must act now: investing in green technologies and skills training, cutting air and water pollution, and taking a new approach to farming and the countryside. The UK can lead the world with innovation and ingenuity, while boosting the economy and enhancing everyone's quality of life.

2.3.3 We will hold big companies to account by giving them a duty to protect the environment, including **banning water companies from dumping raw sewage into rivers, lakes and coastal areas**.

4. A strong United Kingdom and a fair international order.

2.4.1 Liberal Democrats are proud internationalists. We believe that our country and our people thrive when we are open and outward-looking. The UK can be an incredible force for good when it stands tall on the world stage, championing the values of equality, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Both the Covid pandemic and Vladimir Putin's illegal war in

Ukraine show that events beyond Britain's borders inevitably become our concern.

2.4.2 We are passionate about close British-European cooperation, which benefits us and our allies. While we support a longer-term objective of EU membership, we recognise that the Conservatives have damaged trust in the UK so badly that there is a lot of work to do before that is possible. We have therefore set out a comprehensive step-by-step plan to rebuild our ties of trade, trust and friendship with our nearest neighbours – ties that can only be built back gradually over time.

2.4.3 We will immediately **fix our broken relationship with Europe**, forge a new partnership built on cooperation, not confrontation, and move to conclude a new comprehensive agreement which removes as many barriers to trade as possible.

5. A truly fair democracy, where everyone's rights are respected and individuals and communities are empowered.

2.5.1 Every person matters. Every life is precious. Liberal Democrats believe that basic rights and dignity are the birthright of every individual, to be respected, cherished and enhanced. We want to shift more power out of the centre in Whitehall, so local decisions are made by and for the people and communities they affect. We want to break up concentrations of power, and put real power in everyone's hands.

2.5.2 For a hundred years, Liberals and Liberal Democrats have been fighting for fair votes, to give everyone equal power in our democracy and hold all Members of Parliament properly to account. Our goal is to

transform the nature of British politics itself to make it more relevant, engaging and responsive to people's needs and dreams.

2.5.3 We will **introduce proportional representation** for electing MPs, and local councillors in England.

3 The Economy

3.1 Liberal Democrats believe in enabling people and allowing businesses to thrive by encouraging investment, boosting productivity and taxing fairly.

3.2 We believe that strong public services are vital for the wellbeing of individuals and society as whole. Fair and progressive taxation is vital to sustain the services that support our economy and society.

3.3 The Conservatives have badly mismanaged the economy and recklessly damaged the public finances, failing to deliver strong economic growth after the Covid pandemic and adding billions to the cost of servicing our debt through their shambolic mini-budget.

3.4 And they have taken people for granted, failing to deliver the investment needed to bring prosperity to all nations and regions of the UK. They responded too slowly to the cost-of-living crisis and their promises to “level up” have proved hollow.

3.5 We will build a strong, fair economy that benefits everyone in the UK, through wise investment, fair taxes and responsible management of the public finances.

3.6 In particular we will:

- Invest in infrastructure, innovation and skills to create good jobs and prosperity in every region and nation of the UK, while tackling the climate emergency.

- Help people with the cost of living and their energy bills by implementing a proper, one-off windfall tax on the super-profits of oil and gas producers and traders.
- Make taxes fair, ensuring that tax burdens don't fall disproportionately on low earners, reversing the Conservatives' tax cuts for big banks, and abolishing the separate Capital Gains tax-free allowance, to tax income from wealth more similarly to income from work.
- Give taxpayers real value for money, by clamping down on tax avoidance and evasion, narrowing the tax gap, and giving HMRC more resources to properly tackle tax fraud, which has cost the taxpayer billions under the Conservatives.
- Safeguard the UK's economic prosperity while making the investments our country needs. We will make sure that day-to-day spending does not exceed the amount of money raised in taxes over the medium term, with additional flexibility during periods of economic crisis.
- Uphold fiscal responsibility by ensuring that all fiscal events are accompanied by forecasts from the Office for Budget Responsibility.

4 Business and Jobs

4.1 Private enterprise is the principal engine of growth and prosperity in the UK. British employers must be able to hire the workers they need, and those who choose to come to the UK to work or study should be welcomed for the skills and contributions that they bring.

4.2 The Conservative Government has failed businesses and workers. It has damaged business confidence, failed to support the high street by retaining the rating system, imposed unfair tax hikes and failed to provide the skills training so desperately needed. The Conservatives' botched deal with Europe has done enormous damage to British businesses, and they have broken their manifesto pledge to sign a trade deal with the US.

4.3 We will work in partnership with business to offer stability and ensure that we maximise the opportunities for investment, growth and employment across the country. We will make the UK a world leader in ethical, inclusive new technology, including artificial intelligence. And instead of just focusing on the number of new trade agreements like the Conservatives, we will prioritise their depth and quality.

4.4 In return, we ask that businesses commit to promote skills, equality, good governance and support for local communities.

4.5 We will:

- Boost high street businesses and empower them to create new local jobs, including by reforming business rates.

- Develop an industrial strategy that will incentivise businesses to invest in new clean technologies in order to grow the economy, create good jobs and tackle the climate emergency.
- Unlock British businesses' global potential by bringing down trade barriers and building stronger future relationships with our closest trading partners, including by starting to fix the Conservatives' botched deal with Europe following the four-step roadmap as set out in chapter 21.
- Give Parliament real power in setting UK trade policy, by ensuring it is consulted on and signs off on negotiating mandates and any completed international trade agreements.
- Boost productivity and empower more people to enter the job market – such as parents, carers and people with disabilities – by changing the law so that flexible working is open to all from day one in the job, with employers required to advertise jobs accordingly, unless there are significant business reasons why that is not possible.
- Fix the skills and recruitment crisis by investing in people's skills and increasing the availability of apprenticeships and career advice for young people.
- Introduce a general duty of care for the environment and human rights in business operations and supply chains.
- Address the labour shortages that are another outcome of the Conservatives' botched deal with Europe by negotiating

reciprocal deals on low-cost, fast-tracked work visas for key economic sectors.

- Support science, research and innovation, particularly among small businesses and startups, in universities and in zero-carbon, environmental and medical technologies, including participating in the Horizon Europe scheme.
- Tackle the productivity crisis by providing incentives for businesses to invest in training, take up digital technologies, and become more energy efficient.

5 Climate Change and Energy

5.1 Climate change is the biggest threat to human existence. We urgently need to limit temperature rises to 1.5°C or we will face irreversible climate change which will cause catastrophic land loss and make parts of our planet inhabitable. Millions of people are already being directly affected by large increases in wildfires, floods, heatwaves, droughts and sea level rises.

5.2 The war in Ukraine has reinforced the need to significantly reduce Britain's dependence on fossil fuels and grow the renewables sector in order to enhance energy security and achieve net zero.

5.3 The Conservative Government has no credible plans to reduce emissions fast enough to avert irreversible climate change. Their plans for home insulation are woefully inadequate. Rather than reducing our dependence on fossil fuels they are supporting greater oil and gas production and have even given the green light to a new coal mine. The independent Climate Change Committee warns that the Government's "current strategy will not deliver net zero".

5.4 Liberal Democrats place tackling the climate crisis at the centre of all our policies. We understand that our whole economy needs to change and if done successfully will create tens of thousands of jobs while cutting emissions and ensuring that the UK becomes a world leader in moving to net zero. We will:

5.5 We will:

- Cut greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2045.

- Invest significantly in renewable power so that 80% of the UK's electricity is generated from renewables by 2030.
- Provide free retrofits for low-income homes and generous tax incentives for other households to reduce energy consumption, emissions, fuel bills and reliance on gas, and help to end fuel poverty.
- Restructure national and local government to deliver net zero by creating a Net Zero Delivery Authority and strengthening the powers and resources of local authorities to cut emissions in their area, and promote community energy, including requiring all new homes to be fitted with solar panels.
- Plant at least 60 million trees a year to help reach net zero and restore woodland habitats, and increase the use of sustainable wood in construction.
- Ensure that the UK's net zero commitments are at the forefront of any international trade agreement and represent the UK's minimum negotiating position.

6 Health

6.1 High-quality healthcare, free at the point of use, is essential for both individual freedom and national prosperity. Good health gives people the freedom to live the lives they choose, and a thriving economy needs a healthy population.

6.2 The Conservatives have plunged the NHS into crisis – as have the SNP in Scotland and Labour in Wales. They have run local health services into the ground, putting people, buildings and beds under immense pressure. With 112,000 staff vacancies in England alone, long waiting times, missed targets and poor outcomes, patient safety is being pushed into the danger zone.

6.3 People are no longer confident that when they need medical help they can get it. When they ring 999 they don't know if they will get the emergency treatment they need in time. Millions are waiting for treatment, unable to work.

6.4 Liberal Democrats believe that everyone should get the care they need, when they need it. That's why we would ensure everyone can get an appointment when they need one and get the crucial treatment they so desperately need.

6.5 In particular, we will:

- Give everyone the right to see their GP within seven days, or within 24 hours if they urgently need to. To deliver on that right, we will train, recruit and retain more GPs and free up more of their time.

- Reform NHS dentistry so that no one is forced to pay hundreds of pounds for private care.
- Finally put mental health on the same footing as physical health.
- Invest in public health and prevention so that fewer people get ill and need treatment.
- Recruit, train and retain more doctors and nurses to fill the thousands of vacancies in the NHS and cut waiting times.
- Fix the life-threatening crisis in our ambulance services and provide emergency funding to tackle poor response times.

7 Care

7.1 Everyone deserves high-quality social care if they need it.

7.2 But social care services in this country are in crisis. Hundreds of thousands of people in England are waiting for care, many stranded in hospital beds due to the lack of space in care homes.

7.3 The Conservatives promised to “fix” the crisis in our social care system, that no one would have to sell their house to pay for care and that they would not raise tax to do it. They have broken all these promises.

7.4 Liberal Democrats want everyone to be able to live independently and in dignity, to support those who provide care to their loved ones, and ensure that no one has to sell their house to pay for their personal care.

7.5 In particular, we will:

- Ensure no one has to sell their home to pay for care by introducing free personal care based on the model introduced by the Liberal Democrats in government in Scotland in 2002.
- Hire more social care staff, provide training and advancement, and pay them a higher wage by introducing a Carer’s Minimum Wage.
- Increase Carer’s Allowance so that unpaid carers have the support they so desperately need.

- Introduce a statutory guarantee of regular respite breaks for unpaid carers.

8 Education, Children and Young People

8.1 Every child can achieve great things. They deserve the best possible start in life and the opportunity to flourish, no matter their background.

8.2 Liberal Democrats believe that education is the best investment we can make in our children's potential and our country's future. We also want to give families maximum choice and flexibility over how to juggle work and home life.

8.3 The Conservatives have consistently let down children and parents and neglected schools and colleges. They have failed to grasp the scale of the damage that the Covid pandemic has done to children's learning and mental health.

8.4 We will invest in education, starting in the crucial early years and continuing throughout adulthood. We want every child to get the support and attention they need at school, so they leave with the skills, confidence and resilience to be happy and successful – whatever they choose to do next.

8.5 In particular, we will:

- Put a dedicated, qualified mental health professional in every school, making sure all children and parents have someone they can turn to for help.
- Increase school and college funding per pupil above the rate of inflation every year.

- End the scandal of crumbling school and college buildings by investing in new buildings and clearing the backlog of repairs.
- Extend free school meals to all children in primary education and all secondary school children whose families receive Universal Credit.
- Tackle the crisis in special educational needs provision by giving local authorities extra funding to reduce the amount that schools pay towards the cost of a child's Education Health and Care Plan.
- Appoint a Cabinet Minister for Children and Young People.
- Ensure that all parents can access childcare that is flexible, affordable and fair, including by reviewing the rates paid to providers for free hours to ensure they cover the actual costs of delivering high-quality childcare and early years education.
- Reinstate maintenance grants for disadvantaged students immediately to make sure that living costs are not a barrier to studying at university.
- Create new Skills Wallets, giving all adults £10,000 to spend on education and training throughout their lives.
- Expand opportunities for young people to study, teach and volunteer abroad by returning to the Erasmus Plus programme as an associated country.

9 Pensions and Benefits

9.1 The cost-of-living crisis has caused huge financial hardship across the country and restricted the life chances of millions. The Government response has been a series of patchy and short term fixes.

9.2 Liberal Democrats believe that no one should fear for their future, struggle to put food on the table, or heat their home.

9.3 Our aim is to make the UK the best place in the world to work, raise children and enjoy retirement by ensuring that proper support is in place for those that need it.

9.4 In particular, we will:

- Repair the broken safety net by reversing the Conservatives' £20-a-week cut to Universal Credit, raising legacy benefits, and replacing the sanctions regime with an incentive-based scheme to help people into work.
- Set a target of ending deep poverty within a decade, and establish an independent commission to recommend annual increases in Universal Credit to achieve it.
- Support our pensioners by protecting the triple lock ensuring that pensions rise in line with inflation, wages or 2.5% – whichever is highest.

- Ensure that women born in the 1950s are finally treated fairly, by properly compensating them in line with the recommendations of the Parliamentary Ombudsman.
- Bring down energy bills and help to end fuel poverty by insulating existing homes, ensuring all new homes are warm and cheap to heat, and introducing a social tariff for the most vulnerable.
- Make pensions green by requiring funds to comply with the climate goals in the Paris Agreement.

10 Crime and Policing

10.1 Everyone deserves to feel safe in their own homes and walking down their own streets. But that's not the reality for too many people in the UK today.

10.2 The Conservatives have talked tough on crime, but failed even to get the basics right. Their unnecessary cuts have contributed to the rise in serious violence as police forces are left overstretched and under-resourced. Serious violence is destroying too many young lives. Our communities are plagued by burglaries, fraud and anti-social behaviour, and far too many criminals are getting away with it. Violence against women and girls remains horrifically high.

10.3 Huge backlogs in the courts are denying victims the justice they deserve. Prisons are in crisis: overcrowded, understaffed and failing to rehabilitate offenders.

10.4 Liberal Democrats will prevent crime and build communities where people can truly feel safe, including by:

- Restoring proper community policing, where officers are visible, trusted and focused on preventing and solving crimes – especially rape and other violent crime.
- Investing in the criminal justice system to tackle the backlog of court cases and ensure swift justice for victims and offenders.

- Breaking the cycle of reoffending by improving rehabilitation in prisons and on release, and strengthening the supervision of offenders in the community.
- Requiring the Home Secretary, the Mayor of London and the Metropolitan Police Commissioner to draw up an urgent plan to implement the recommendations of the Baroness Casey Review.

11 Natural Environment

11.1 The value of our shared natural environment becomes clearer with each passing year. Liberal Democrats will safeguard and enhance the environment.

11.2 Our natural environment is suffering. The UK is failing to meet 17 of its 20 biodiversity targets. The Government's own regulatory body, the Office for Environmental Protection, has rebuked the Conservatives for their lack of action on tackling the nature crisis.

11.3 Nowhere is the Conservatives' lack of care for the environment more apparent than in their failure to tackle sewage discharges. In the last three years there have been more than one million instances of sewage discharges into our rivers, lakes and coastal areas, lasting over 7.5 million hours.

11.4 Meanwhile, water company executives paid themselves £51 million in 2020 and 2021, including £30 million in bonuses, benefits and incentives.

11.5 Liberal Democrats will take strong action to tackle these problems by:

- Setting meaningful and binding targets to stop the decline of our natural environment and double nature by 2050: doubling the size of the Protected Area Network, doubling the area of most important wildlife habitats and doubling the abundance of species.

- Strengthening the Office for Environmental Protection and providing more funding to the Environment Agency and Natural England to help protect our environment.
- Ending sewage discharges by transforming water companies into public benefit companies, banning bonuses for water bosses until discharges and leaks end, and replacing Ofwat with a tough new regulator with new powers to prevent sewage dumps.

12 Food and Farming

12.1 Liberal Democrats know that farmers are key allies in the fight against climate change, preventing flooding and recovering our natural environment. They do this all while producing high quality food for our tables.

12.2 Their ability to do all this is threatened by the Conservative Government's botched transition from the Basic Payment Scheme to the new, better approach of public money for public goods.

12.3 Many farmers are seeing their incomes threatened as old payments are cut and new payments are not yet open. They are faced with increases in energy bills, fertilisers and feed stock. It is hardly surprising we are now seeing food shortages in the supermarkets.

12.4 The Conservatives' botched deal with Europe is severely damaging farmers' ability to export to their main markets in the EU, while new trade deals with Australia and New Zealand will undermine animal welfare and environmental protection, undercutting responsible British farmers.

12.5 Liberal Democrats support the move towards paying farmers for producing public goods. But they need proper support to do so. And they need protection from the low standards of imports in animal health or environmental standards.

12.6 We will:

- Keep payments in full to family farming businesses while accelerating the rollout of the better Environmental Land

Management schemes, while increasing the farming budget by £1 billion a year to support nature-friendly farming and bring down food prices.

- Guarantee that all future trade deals will maintain high health, environmental and animal welfare standards for food production, ensuring that Britain's farmers and food manufacturers are not put at an unfair disadvantage. We will renegotiate the Australia and New Zealand trade agreements in line with these objectives, withdrawing from them if that cannot be achieved.
- Stand up for Britain's farmers, including by giving them the ability to trade with our European neighbours with minimal need for checks by negotiating comprehensive veterinary and plant health agreements, guaranteeing access for UK food and animal products to the European market.
- Support farmers properly in restoring woodland and peatland, creating new natural flood protections and managing land to encourage species recovery and carbon storage, while producing food for the table.

13 Housing

13.1 Liberal Democrats know that a good home is an absolute necessity for people's wellbeing and the base on which they build their lives. So we will ensure that everyone can have access to housing that meets their needs.

13.2 Yet, in Britain today, many people cannot afford to buy or rent a home of good quality where they live.

13.3 Government housing targets are regularly missed and the shortage of affordable and social housing is at crisis point. Newly built homes are often energy-inefficient, many leaseholders are still facing large bills because of the building safety scandal and homelessness remains shamefully high. Local authorities' powers to build the kind of homes needed in their areas are inadequate.

13.4 Liberal Democrats are committed to tackling these housing failures head-on by:

- Building at least 150,000 new council and social homes a year, giving local authorities the powers to end the right to buy in their areas, and requiring them to have a landlord licensing scheme.
- Allowing councils to buy land for housing developments based on current use rather than on a "hope value" based on planning application by reforming the Land Compensation Act 1961 and strengthening their powers to build their own homes.

- Strengthening rights for renters in the private sector by banning no-fault evictions and making longer tenancies the default, and for social housing tenants by giving them more powers over the management of their homes and estates.
- Improving standards for new homes to ensure they are warm, cheap to heat and produce zero emissions.
- Ensuring that leaseholders do not have to pay a penny towards removing dangerous cladding from their buildings.

14 Communities and Local Government

14.1 People's daily lives revolve around the communities in which they live. They need these communities to have the resources to work well for them. Liberal Democrats are committed to empowering local communities in England and allowing them to take the action they need to improve their areas.

14.2 Yet this Government is taking powers away from local communities and not giving the funding they need to do their jobs as well as they could.

14.3 Local authorities lack the powers to tackle the climate emergency, whether by insulating homes or improving air quality around schools.

14.4 In rural areas, the growth of second homes, the lack of public transport and poor broadband connectivity are undermining the viability of our communities.

14.5 We will:

- Allow communities to limit the number of second homes and holiday lets.
- Enhance powers on community assets to help local authorities protect vital infrastructure.
- Give local authorities a key role to cut emissions in their own area, including more powers and funding.

- Ensure that improving connectivity, particularly broadband and mobile, starts with the hardest to reach areas first.
- End top-down reorganisation of councils and the imposition of elected mayors on communities who do not want them.

15 Transport

15.1 Liberal Democrats believe that the transport sector is vital for our transition to net zero. People need a transport system that is safe, reliable, affordable and doesn't contribute to air pollution or climate change.

15.2 This Conservative Government has done next to nothing to tackle these issues. Its bus strategy is inadequate. Cuts to planned new rail services in the North undermine the region's prospects. And the lack of investment in rapid chargers for electric cars and vans has slowed down the take-up of this essential new technology.

15.3 Liberal Democrats will invest in clean public transport, helping to meet our environmental targets while improving local, regional and national connectivity.

15.4 In particular, we will:

- Give greater decision making powers and devolve resources for local authorities in England to design public transport infrastructure around community needs.
- Give local authorities more control over their bus networks, including the ability to run their own buses, so that bus routes can be restored or new routes added where there is local need, especially in rural areas.
- Extend and complete the electrification of Britain's rail network, improve stations, enhance disabled access, reopen smaller stations and restore twin-track lines to major routes.

- Freeze rail fares and simplify ticketing on public transport to ensure regular users are paying a fair and affordable price.
- Enable and encourage people to switch to electric vehicles with more charging infrastructure supported by a step-change in local grid capacity, a reduction in VAT on electric vehicles to 5%, and a requirement that every new car and small van sold from 2030 produces zero emissions.
- Pass a Clean Air Act, based on World Health Organization guidelines, enforced by a new Air Quality Agency.
- Transform how people travel by creating new cycling and walking networks separate from motorised traffic.

16 Culture, Media and Sport

16.1 The UK's rich and vibrant cultural heritage is a national treasure. Our creative and tourism industries contribute billions of pounds to our economy and employ millions of people. Art, music, drama and sports bring people together. They are an essential part of a thriving society.

16.2 The Covid pandemic hit culture and tourism businesses extremely hard. And now, many beloved national institutions are under threat from this Conservative Government. It has downgraded the status of arts subjects at school, slashed funding for them at university, and erected new barriers to British musicians and actors performing elsewhere in Europe.

16.3 Liberal Democrats will invest in our cultural capital and nurture the next generation of talent. We will support the creative and tourism industries across the UK so that businesses can thrive and people everywhere can enjoy the benefits of sports, music and the arts.

16.4 In particular, we will:

- Protect the BBC and Channel 4 as independent, publicly-owned, public service broadcasters.
- Promote creative skills, address the barriers to finance faced by small businesses, and support modern and flexible patent, copyright and licensing rules.
- Negotiate free and simple short-term travel arrangements for UK artists to perform in the EU, and European artists to perform in the UK.

- Protect sports and arts funding via the National Lottery.

17 Immigration and Asylum

17.1 The UK has a proud history of welcoming newcomers – whether people seeking to build their lives here, or refugees fleeing war and persecution. People from all over the world have greatly enriched our economy, our culture and our communities.

17.2 But our immigration system has been broken by the Conservatives. Their damaging new rules mean British employers can't recruit the people they need and families are separated by unfair, complex visa requirements. Their dysfunction has made the asylum backlog soar. Public confidence in the system is shattered. The Home Office is not fit for purpose.

17.3 Meanwhile, the Conservatives have closed down safe and legal routes to sanctuary, leaving desperate people to make perilous attempts to cross the Channel in small boats – often in the hands of criminal smugglers and traffickers.

17.4 Liberal Democrats are fighting for a fair, effective immigration system that treats everyone with dignity and respect.

17.5 In particular, we will:

- Scrap the Conservatives' Hostile Environment and invest instead in officers, training and technology to tackle smuggling, trafficking and modern slavery.
- Transfer powers over work visas, overseas students and asylum from the Home Office to other departments, and establish a

new, arms-length unit to process applications quickly and correctly.

- Scrap the Conservatives' Illegal Migration Act and provide safe and legal routes to sanctuary for refugees, helping to prevent dangerous Channel crossings.
- Tackle the asylum backlog by establishing a dedicated unit outside the Home Office to improve the speed and quality of asylum decision-making, introducing a service standard of three months for all but the most complex asylum claims to be processed, and speeding up returns of those without a right to stay.
- Lift the ban on asylum seekers working if they have been waiting for a decision for more than three months, enabling them to support themselves, integrate in their communities and contribute through taxation.

18 Rights and Equality

18.1 Liberal Democrats exist to build a free society where every person's rights and liberties are protected. Everyone should be able to live their lives as who they are: free to pursue their dreams and fulfil their potential, safe in the knowledge that their fundamental rights will be protected.

18.2 In decades past, the UK has led the world in advancing human rights, civil liberties and equality for women and LGBT+ people. But under the Conservatives, progress has stalled. They are failing to stand up to hatred and prejudice, or tackle entrenched inequalities. Instead, they keep threatening to rip up the UK's Human Rights Act, which protects our fundamental British freedoms.

18.3 Liberal Democrats champion the freedom, dignity and wellbeing of every individual. We will combat all forms of prejudice and discrimination, wherever they exist.

18.4 We believe that the UK's rich diversity is one of its greatest strengths. We will celebrate that diversity and ensure it is better reflected throughout public life. We will apply the principles of openness, transparency and accountability to tackle institutional biases, promote equality and hold power to account.

18.5 In particular, we will:

- Champion the Human Rights Act and resist any attempts to weaken or repeal it.

- Make misogyny a hate crime and give police and prosecutors the resources and training they need to prevent and prosecute all hate crimes while supporting survivors.
- Give everyone a new right to flexible working and every person with disabilities the right to work from home if they want to, unless there are significant business reasons why it is not possible.
- Respect and defend the rights and identities of all LGBT+ people, including trans and non-binary people.
- Ban all forms of Conversion Therapy.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive Race Equality Strategy.
- Place a statutory duty of care on all social media platforms to prevent well-defined harms, based on clear evidence, and introduce a Digital Bill of Rights to protect everyone's rights online, including the rights to privacy, free expression, and participation without being subjected to harassment and abuse.
- Scrap the Conservatives' draconian anti-protest laws, restoring pre-existing protections for both peaceful assembly and public safety.
- Protect everyone's right to make independent decisions over their reproductive health without interference by the state, and ensure access to high-quality reproductive healthcare.

19 Political Reform

19.1 We want to ensure that your voice is heard – and we want to transfer power back to the people.

19.2 The shambolic Conservative Government has created a crisis for democracy in this country, with their cronyism, rule-breaking and constant sleaze scandals. Successive Conservative Prime Ministers have acted without integrity and treated Parliament and the people with disdain.

19.3 It is a symptom of a broken political system, which enables the Government to take families up and down the country for granted. It is clear that we need a political system with fair representation, so that politics is made to work for you again.

19.4 Liberal Democrats want to begin to repair the damage that has been done by the constant stream of Conservative sleaze, and to end the era of neglect.

19.5 In particular, we will:

- Ensure no politician can take you for granted, by introducing proportional representation for electing MPs, and local councillors in England.
- Strengthen democratic rights and participation by scrapping the Conservatives' voter ID scheme and giving 16- and 17-year-olds the right to vote.

- Finally hold Government Ministers to account for corruption and sleaze by enshrining the Ministerial Code in legislation.
- Transfer greater powers away from Westminster and Whitehall to the nations and regions that make up the Union.
- Introduce a written constitution for a federal United Kingdom, with a strong voice for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.
- Enhance and strengthen the powers and standing of local government in England in the new federal constitutional settlement.
- Ensure a strong union with Scotland by opposing both a second independence referendum and independence.
- Make it a national security priority to protect the UK's democratic processes from any threats or interference.
- Take big money out of politics, by capping donations to political parties at £10,000 a year.

20 Defence

20.1 The Ukraine conflict demonstrates why we must always take defence seriously – and work with allies to protect all our freedoms.

20.2 The Conservative Party's approach in advance of the full scale invasion of Ukraine was characterised by complacency, particularly in the Land domain. Cutting troop numbers by 10,000 is plain irresponsible. Their failure to procure assets on time and on budget is leaving our Armed Forces without the equipment they need. And their failure to look after service personnel and veterans properly – from suitable housing to mental health support – is unforgivable.

20.3 Liberal Democrats will strengthen our Armed Forces and support the people who work in them by:

- Cancelling the Conservative Government's cut to the Army.
- Maintaining the UK's support for NATO, and accordingly meeting our NATO commitments on defence in each year of the Parliament.
- Cooperating more closely with Britain's NATO and EU partners in the joint development of innovative defence technologies.
- Introducing a fair deal for service personnel and veterans, which will include placing a legal duty on the Defence Secretary to give due regard to the Armed Forces Covenant.

- Maintaining the UK's nuclear deterrent with a posture of continuous at-sea deterrence, while pursuing multilateral global disarmament.

21 International

21.1 At this difficult time, Britain needs to stand up on the world stage for those vital liberal values which are the cornerstone of our society: democracy, liberty, human rights and the rule of law. The UK should be supporting democracies around the world – such as Taiwan – and standing up to states like China and Russia who wish to undermine our democratic values to their own end.

21.2 But the Conservative Party is holding Britain back. For years the Conservatives have undermined our international reputation – threatening to break international law, slashing the international development budget and trashing our relations with our allies.

21.3 We continue to believe that Britain is at its best when we are working closely with our allies. That is why we are determined to repair the damage that the Conservatives' deal with Europe has done to the economy, especially farmers, fishers and small businesses. We have set out a four-stage roadmap to rebuild the relationship: with initial unilateral steps to mitigate the damage of the deal followed by confidence-building measures such as joining Erasmus Plus. Then, we will deepen the trading relationship with measures like a veterinary agreement. Finally, once the ties of trust have been restored, we would aim to place the UK-EU relationship on a more formal and stable footing by seeking to join the Single Market. All these measures will help to restore the British economy and the prosperity and opportunities of its citizens, and are also essential steps on the road to EU membership, which remains our longer-term objective.

21.4 We will also:

- Restore the UK's reputation as an international development superpower, by reinstating the 0.7% of national income target and re-establishing a Department for International Development.
- Put human rights at the heart of trade, including by banning imports from areas with egregious abuses such as Xinjiang, controlling arms exports to countries with poor human rights records.
- Finally put a stop to oligarchs from corrupt regimes channelling their money through the UK, including by substantially increasing funding for the National Crime Agency.

For a Fair Deal

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This paper has been approved for debate by the Federal Conference by the Federal Policy Committee under the terms of Article 7.4 of the Federal Constitution.

Within the policy-making procedure of the Liberal Democrats, the Federal Party determines the policy of the Party in those areas which might reasonably be expected to fall within the remit of the federal institutions in the context of a federal United Kingdom.

The Party in England, the Scottish Liberal Democrats, the Welsh Liberal Democrats and the Northern Ireland Local Party determine the policy of the Party on all other issues, except that any or all of them may confer this power upon the Federal Party in any specified area or areas.

The Party in England has chosen to pass up policy-making to the Federal level. If approved by Conference, this paper will therefore form the policy of the Federal Party on federal issues and the Party in England on English issues. In appropriate policy areas, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland party policy would take precedence.

The Manifesto Working Group

The members of the working group who have prepared this paper are listed below.

Lord Dick Newby (Chair)
Sir Ed Davey MP
Cllr Josh Babarinde OBE
Wendy Chamberlain MP
Dr Christine Cheng
Jeremy Hargreaves
Cllr Lucy Nethsingha
Baroness Pinnock
Baroness Jenny Randerson
Cllr Lisa Smart
Munira Wilson MP

Staff

Christian Moon

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