

F41 Party Business: Community Politics

Mover: Tim Farron MP (President of the Liberal Democrats)

Conference notes that because of our position as the smaller party in a Coalition Government, the need for a strong and distinctive Liberal Democrat political identity is more important than ever before.

Conference further notes that:

- i) Much of our success has, in the past, been born out of our commitment to 'community politics', engaging energetically with the communities we serve and delivering for them.
- ii) In the preamble to the constitution, we commit to enabling all citizens to "contribute fully to their communities and to take part in the decisions which affect their lives".
- iii) The nature of communities is changing: as well as being geographic they can be based on interest or identity and therefore make use of the internet and social media alongside traditional methods of communication.
- iv) Following a set of disappointing results in the May 2011 elections, as well the defeat in the Alternative Vote referendum, there is a need at every level of the party to reassert the Liberal Democrats' commitment to the communities we serve.

Conference reaffirms its determination to maintain the independent and distinctive voice of the Liberal Democrats. Conference also reasserts our commitment to the communities we serve through a strengthening of the party infrastructure to ensure our continued hard work and campaigning at national and local levels translates into electoral success thanks to genuine positive action in our local areas.

Conference believes that:

- a) Our movement into power locally and nationally in recent times is hugely positive, but it has also had a tendency to divert us from the principles and practice of 'community politics'.
- b) 'Community politics' for Liberal Democrats should be both tactic and ideology at all levels of the party: town hall to Whitehall ensuring that Liberal Democrat candidates deserve and achieve success through electoral opportunities each year.
- c) The Liberal Democrats are a very important community in their own right which the party nationally needs to engage with.
- d) The party should make a renewed commitment to the principles of 'community politics' as outlined at the 1970 Eastbourne Liberal Assembly, using an approach that has been updated to ensure its contemporary relevance in the current political climate.

Conference further believes that community politics transfers power to people in a democratically accountable manner, and is not a simplistic transfer of power from national to local government, nor a transfer of power to unaccountable institutions inside or outside the private sector.

Conference therefore calls for:

1. A renewed strategic emphasis on 'community politics': our role as political activists is to help empower, enable and encourage people in communities to take and use power, to use our political skills to redress grievances, and to represent people at all levels of the political structure.
2. The party's parliamentarians and decision-making bodies to ensure that the policies and positions they develop are conducive to community politics and are worded and presented in such a way to help the community activist.
3. The principle of subsidiarity to be adopted by elected representatives at all levels of government, ensuring that decision-making is devolved to the lowest feasible, democratically accountable level.
4. Politicians at all levels of the party to listen and respond to the communities they serve by engaging with community groups and by seeking out those without advocates, and to ensure dialogue and personal contact through 'pavement politics' including: residents surveys, street surgeries, public meetings and effective use of social media.
5. A continued emphasis on building campaigning capacity, recruiting members and activists and raising money.
6. A reaffirmed determination that the bodies within the party responsible for training and development have sufficient resources to ensure that members and activists across the party have the tools they need to ensure success.
7. Improved methods of communicating with members and activists across all levels of the party to ensure a strong, efficient and effective infrastructure that will help both to win election campaigns and help those activists serve their communities to the best possible level.

Applicability: Federal.