



Conference Report

Autumn 2023

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Policy Motions

A Better Start in Life (Early Years Education and Childcare Policy Paper)

Conference believes that flexible, affordable childcare and early years education is a critical part of a liberal society and contributes to economic performance because:

i) It gives parents more choice over how to organise their lives and helps them return to work if they want to.

ii) Lack of access to affordable childcare is a key driver of the gender pay gap.

iii) High-quality early years education is the best possible investment in the future and the most effective way of narrowing the gap between rich and poor children.

Conference also believes that:

A. Parents should also have greater flexibility and choice over how to juggle work with parenting in the first months of their child's life and many fathers would like to have more involvement in directly caring for their children.

B. All parents, whether or not they wish to return to work or spend more time raising their children, deserve more help. Conference further believes that every child deserves access to high-quality education, including children with young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), and that early diagnosis is crucial. Conference recalls that:

I. In Government, Liberal Democrats increased the number of free childcare hours for three- and four-year-olds, introduced 15 hours a week of free early years education for disadvantaged two-year-olds, and created the Early Years Pupil Premium to give extra support to disadvantaged three- and four-year-olds.

II. At the 2019 general election, Liberal Democrats called for a properly-funded entitlement to free, high-quality childcare for every child aged two to four and children aged between nine and 24 months where their parents or guardians are in work: 35 hours a week, 48 weeks a year. Conference regrets that the funding promised by the Conservatives for their 30 hour childcare proposal falls far short of what it will actually cost to provide these hours or to address the existing underfunding of early years provision, and may exacerbate the problems parents already face: a lack of nursery or childminder places and eye-watering fees for full time childcare.

Conference therefore endorses the vision for early years and childcare set out in policy paper 152, *A Better Start in Life*, and in particular welcomes its proposals to:

1. Move towards our vision of universal free high-quality childcare and early years education by:

a) Fixing the problems with the Government's expansion of free childcare, starting with a review of the rates paid to providers to ensure they cover the actual costs of delivering high-quality childcare and early years education.

b) Investing in high-quality early years education and closing the attainment gap by giving disadvantaged children aged two to four an extra five free hours a week and tripling the Early Years Pupil Premium to £1,000 a year.

c) Developing a career strategy for nursery staff, including a training programme with the majority of those working with children aged two to four to have a relevant Early Years qualification or be working towards one.

d) Restoring childminding as a valued part of the early years system by replacing the three different current registration processes with a single childcare register and commissioning a practitioner-led review to simplify regulation, reduce administrative burdens and attract new childminders while maintaining high standards.

e) Reaffirming our long-term commitment to universal free childcare as set out in our last election manifesto.

2. Achieve greater flexibility and choice for parents by:

a) Giving all families (including self-employed parents, adoptive parents and kinship carers):

i) 6 weeks of use-it-or-lose-it leave for each parent, paid at 90% of earnings.

ii) 46 weeks of parental leave to share between themselves as they choose, paid at the level of the minimum wage (double the current statutory rate).

b) Introducing paid neonatal care leave.

c) Paying an enhanced rate of Child Benefit for one- year-olds.

3. Ensure every child with SEND or potential SEND considerations has the support they need by:

a) Giving local authorities extra funding to halve the amount that schools pay towards the cost of a child's Education, Health and Care plan.

b) Introducing a National Body for SEND which will fund the costs of very high needs over £25,000 a year.

c) Addressing the chronic shortage of speech and language therapists and educational psychologists to provide timely assessments of individual children, in order to assign individual Educational Health & Care Plans where appropriate

Background briefing

This motion and the accompanying policy paper updated and developed policy on childcare and early years.

They built on previous policy as set out in General Election Manifesto *Stop Brexit and Build a Brighter Future* (2019) and policy paper 128 *Every Child Empowered: Education for a Changing World* (March 2018).

Amendments: Conference passed one amendment.

The amendment added references to SEND in line 3 and added new line c.

Vote on motion as amended: Conference passed the motion as amended.

A Fair Deal for the Armed Forces Community

Conference notes:

i) The findings of the Haythornthwaite report which found that the most common reason for leaving the armed forces is the impact on family and personal life, and the Armed Forces Continuing Attitudes Survey which found that one third of spouses said that they would be happier if their partner chose to leave the service.

ii) Ongoing issues with access to childcare for personnel and their families stationed overseas, lack of support when moving children around schools, and with spousal employment overseas.

iii) The poor state of MOD housing, including sewage leaks, mould and damp, and the complaints regarding maintenance contractors.

iv) Families of service personnel frequently struggle to access information about important provisions like childcare, preventing them from being able to make informed choices and leaving them feeling like they do not have agency.

v) The experience of female personnel in the armed forces, as outlined by the Atherton Report which found that “the MoD and the Services are failing to protect female personnel and to help servicewomen achieve their full potential”.

vi) There are over 1.8 million veterans in England and Wales according to the 2021 Census, many of whom are caught by gaps in support across services from mental healthcare to housing.

vii) The cost-of-living crisis which is impacting the Armed Forces community – with veterans and their families twice as likely to be unpaid carers or to be in receipt of sickness or disability benefits.

viii) The Armed Forces Covenant, which serves as a promise by the nation that the Armed Forces community is treated fairly, plays an important role but needs strengthening.

ix) The role of local authorities in delivering the Armed Forces Covenant and supporting the Armed Forces community, including through education, housing and healthcare.

x) The excellent work of Councillor Armed Forces Champions in raise awareness of the needs and build support for members of the armed forces, their families and veterans.

Conference believes that:

- a) The Armed Forces community – service personnel, veterans and their families – have been taken for granted for too long by the Government and deserve a fair deal.
- b) It is shameful that service families are too frequently unable to get basic support such as living in a decent home or getting access to information, except through the member of the family who serves.
- c) It is unacceptable that the experience of women in the armed forces and the challenges which many female personnel face, such as sexual harassment and discrimination, have not been properly addressed.
- d) These factors taken together are serving to impact both retention and recruitment for the Armed Forces.
- e) The make-up of the UK Armed Forces is not reflective of the diversity of British society, but it should better reflect Society.

Conference therefore calls on the UK Government to establish a 'Fair Deal for Service Personnel, Veterans and Families' Commission.

Conference further urges the Government to start bringing about that Fair Deal by:

1. Strengthening the Armed Forces Covenant by placing a legal duty on the Defence Secretary and government departments to give due regard to the Armed Forces Covenant.
2. Establishing a one-stop shop for families of service personnel so they can easily access information, including the publication of a guide and an accessible helpline.
3. Aiming to reach a deal with the EU on reciprocal access for spousal employment for families of service personnel, as part of the four-stage roadmap set out in policy paper 144, *Rebuilding Trade and Cooperation with Europe*.
4. Improving the standard of MOD housing, including by reviewing the contract with maintenance contractors and introducing a minimum quality standard for Single Living Accommodation.
5. Accepting the recommendations of the Atherton report.
6. Abolishing the arbitrary, complex Minimum Income Requirement for spouse and partner visas, so that families, including service personnel and their families, are not forced to live apart.

7. Conducting a review of Armed Forces recruitment processes, to ensure all possible steps are being taken to improve diversity in the Forces.
8. Waiving application fees for indefinite leave for members of families of Armed Forces personnel on discharge.
9. Instructing the Office of Veterans Affairs to launch an inquiry into the impact of the cost of living crisis on the Armed Forces community.
10. Ensuring that military compensation which is awarded because of illness or injury does not count towards means testing for benefits.
11. Supporting members of the Armed Forces community who are unpaid carers, by increasing Carer's Allowance and providing unpaid carers with greater rights in the workplace and more broadly.
12. Cancelling the Conservative Government's cut to the Army.
13. Support local authorities to meet and exceed their duties within the Armed Forces Covenant and encourage councils to appoint a member as Armed Forces Champion (that haven't already done so).
14. Bolster the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme to ensure more employers achieve accreditation, and instil an expectation that all public sector organisations should be working towards Gold Award.

Background briefing

This motion updated and developed policy on armed forces and veterans welfare.

It built on previous policy as set out in General Election Manifesto *Stop Brexit and Build a Brighter Future* (2019) and policy motion *Armed Forces Personnel: Recruitment, Retention and Welfare* (September 2017).

Amendments: Conference passed one amendment.

The amendment added lines ix, x, 13 and 14 to include reference to local government.

Vote on motion as amended: Conference passed the motion as amended.

Bring Back the Industrial Strategy

Conference believes that:

- a) An industrial strategy is essential for achieving strong and sustainable economic growth, which in turn will create good jobs, fund vital public services and build strong communities.
- b) An industrial strategy should create a purpose-driven partnership between Government and business with the aim of tackling the great economic and societal challenges of our time.
- c) A successful industrial strategy should coordinate policies across a range of key areas, such as skills, Research & Development (R&D), climate change, infrastructure, taxation, finance and trade.

Conference notes that:

- I. A range of generational challenges, including the legacy of the Covid-19 pandemic, the climate emergency, the energy crisis, the Government's failed deal with Europe and declining economic growth under the Conservatives make the adoption of an industrial strategy more necessary than ever.
- II. Other major economies, including Germany, China, the US and the EU have developed industrial policy responding to these challenges.
- III. The US Inflation Reduction Act, supply chain pressures involving China, and EU plans to reshore manufacturing also create a vital need for a UK industrial strategy.
- IV. In contrast, this Conservative Government took the ideological and damaging step of scrapping the UK's industrial strategy in 2021 and disbanding the Industrial Strategy Council oversight body.
- V. Since 2016, the Conservative Party's muddled and confused approach saw the business department restructured twice and the Secretary of State changed seven times, undermining stability and business confidence.
- VI. As a result of the Conservatives' economic failures, the UK has experienced falling business investment, lower productivity, skills shortages, gaping regional disparities and anaemic growth.
- VII. An industrial strategy is vital for addressing the rise of Artificial Intelligence technology (AI), which presents huge opportunities to transform our economy and people's lives for the better, whilst also presenting significant risks.

Conference celebrates Liberal Democrat achievements on industrial strategy in Government, including:

A. Unlocking vital investment by setting up the Green Investment Bank, the British Business Bank and the Regional Growth Fund.

B. Supporting manufacturing and SMEs, through the Business Growth Service, the Manufacturing Advisory Service and the Growth Accelerator Programme.

C. Bringing together business and academia to power regional Saturday 23 September cont. growth, by creating the Catapult centres, and creating two million new apprenticeships.

Conference reaffirms Liberal Democrat commitments to:

i) Scrap business rates and replace them with a Commercial Landowner Levy.

ii) Replace the broken apprenticeship levy with a broader and more flexible skills and training levy.

iii) Follow the four-step roadmap towards rebuilding trade and cooperation with Europe set out in policy paper 144, *Rebuilding Trade and Cooperation with Europe*.

iv) The devolution of responsibility for regional economic development as set out in the 2021 motion "A Framework for England in a Federal UK".

Conference therefore calls on the Government to:

a) Establish a comprehensive industrial strategy, in partnership with business, civil society (including Trade Unions) and academia, focused on key economic and societal challenges.

b) Ensure that the principles of tackling the climate emergency; boosting living standards; spreading prosperity everywhere in the UK; and growing the economy are at the heart of the industrial strategy.

c) Provide a strategic framework for effectively addressing the needs of economically disadvantaged, remote or rural areas by collaborating with local, regional and devolved authorities in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, to establish and set out how the strategy supports and facilitates industrial regeneration and innovation across all UK nations and regions.

d) Work towards four key business priorities: a positive business climate; leveraging technology to supercharge the green economy; empowering small businesses to create prosperity in local communities, and boosting trade.

e) Enable businesses to achieve these priorities by taking action in four key areas: enabling the workforce of tomorrow; investing in key infrastructure; scaling digital innovation and technology adoption; and creating financial markets that work for all businesses.

Conference further calls on the Government to:

1. Rebuild business and investor confidence by committing to fiscal responsibility, respect of international treaties, and the creation of a stable business environment.
2. Effectively communicate the objectives and tools of the industrial strategy to industry, to provide clear signals for investment and business decisions.
3. Build an inclusive economy with broad access to training and skills, by scrapping the lower 'apprentice's wage' band and boosting the take-up of apprenticeships.
4. Set up effective incentives for R&D investment, decarbonisation, and the take-up of digital technologies, especially among SMEs; and ensure that the UK's regulatory, R&D and tax frameworks are geared towards fostering innovation.
5. Set up a plan for investment in key infrastructure to enable the industrial strategy, covering areas including rail, building insulation, the national grid and EV charging.
6. Create a thriving manufacturing sector by investing in the skills of the future; promoting net-zero transport and energy efficiency; harnessing affordable clean energy; and adopting an ambitious international trade policy.
7. Power scale-up companies, especially outside of London and the South East, using innovative ways of crowding-in private sector investment, drawing from successful international models such as the French Tibi scheme.
8. Reestablish the Industrial Strategy Council (ISC) and put it on a statutory footing, to ensure vital oversight, monitoring and evaluation of the industrial strategy for the long-term.
9. Explore new ways to improve interdepartmental work on cross-cutting policies, such as giving the Cabinet Office Saturday 23 September cont. more powers to coordinate and implement industrial strategy.
10. Bring forward legislation with the aim of creating a clear, workable and well-resourced cross-sectoral regulatory framework for AI, that promotes innovation while creating certainty

for AI users, developers and investors; and establishing transparency and accountability for AI systems in the public sector.

11. Negotiate the UK's participation in the Trade and Technology Council so we can play a leading role in global AI regulation, and work with international partners in agreeing common standards for AI risk and impact assessment, testing, monitoring and audit.

Background briefing

This motion updated and developed policy on industrial strategy and economic development.

It built on previous policy as set out in policy paper 144, *Rebuilding Trade and Cooperation with Europe* (March 2022), and policy motions *Boosting Small Businesses and Jobs in the Post-Pandemic Economy* (September 2021) and *A Green Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic* (September 2020).

Amendments: Conference passed two amendments.

Amendment one added lines VII, 10 and 11 to include references to AI

Amendment two added lines iv and c to include reference to regional government

Vote on motion as amended: Conference passed the motion as amended.

Child Maintenance Service That Works For Children

Conference notes with concern that:

I. Around half of children in separated families – 1.8 million children – continue to receive no support from their nonresident parent.

II. The House of Commons Public Accounts Committee found that unpaid maintenance owed to parents on Collect & Pay, the service operated by the Child Maintenance Service (CMS) to distribute payments, is set to rise to £1 billion by March 2031.

III. The National Audit Office review into the CMS in March 2022 stated that the work of the CMS has “not, so far, increased the number of effective child maintenance arrangements across society”.

IV. The DWP upholds more complaints for every 1,000 customers on child maintenance than any other area.

V. Withholding or artificially reducing child maintenance payments is being used as a form of economic abuse and that some survivors find it especially difficult to obtain the evidence necessary to get the Child Maintenance Service to increase the amount their abuser has to pay

Conference believes that:

A. Every child has a legal right to be supported financially by both their parents and that child maintenance payments are vital for the well-being of children from separated families, particularly single parent families.

B. For survivors of domestic abuse, using the statutory child maintenance system is not a matter of choice, it is a matter of safety.

C. Service charges for the Collect & Pay service are unfair and penalise the parent receiving funds for the unwillingness of the other parent to pay.

D. The Government has little strategy to improve the Child Maintenance Service and seems incapable of retrieving payments from parents that refuse to pay.

E. The formula used to determine maintenance payments does not accurately reflect the true cost of raising a child.

Conference calls for:

1. A full review and reform of the Child Maintenance Service to ensure it works for all children and parents.
2. The removal of the 4% charge for receiving parents using the Collect and Pay service as well as the initial £20 charge to be enrolled onto Collect and Pay.
3. A review of the formula used to determine maintenance payments to better reflect parents' circumstances, such as the age of their children and their differing needs.
4. Guidance on child maintenance payments to survivors of domestic abuse to be written into law, including direction on extracting payment from those using payments as a form of ongoing coercive control.

Background briefing

This motion updated and developed policy on children and their welfare.

It built on previous policy as set out in the General Election Manifesto *Stop Brexit and Build a Brighter Future* (2019) and policy paper 128 *Every Child Empowered: Education for a Changing World* (March 2018).

Vote on motion: Conference passed the motion.

Combating Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery

Conference believes that:

- i) Slavery is one of the greatest affronts to the fundamental British principle of individual liberty; no human being should be enslaved.
- ii) Modern slavery must be eradicated, exploitation prevented and traffickers brought to justice.
- iii) Survivors of human trafficking and modern slavery are among the most vulnerable people in our society and they must all be supported and protected by the Government, regardless of immigration status.

Conference notes with grave concern the Conservative Government's assault on protections for victims of human trafficking and modern slavery – including the Nationality and Borders Act and the Illegal Migration Act – which roll back crucial provisions of the Modern Slavery Act.

Conference further notes that:

- a) There are estimated to be at least 100,000 modern slavery victims in the UK, and referrals to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) are at a record high.
- b) The vast majority of people referred into the system are confirmed to be genuine victims by detailed investigations, despite Conservative accusations of people 'gaming the system' through false claims.
- c) The Conservative Government has consistently broken its promises on tackling human trafficking and modern slavery – from its pledge to create a new single enforcement body, to abandoned plans to remove the 'family worker exemption' that permits employers to pay domestic staff less than minimum Wage.
- d) The UK has just 0.29 labour market inspectors per 10,000 workers – less than a third of the International Labour Organization's minimum benchmark of one per 10,000.
- e) On average, victims have to wait almost 2 years for a decision on their NRM case.
- f) The Conservative Government's immigration policies have increased the risk of exploitation – whether by making some industries over-reliant on temporary visa schemes or closing safe and legal routes for asylum, pushing desperate people into the hands of traffickers.

g) In January 2023, the Government raised the threshold of evidence for victims to be recognised, despite criticism from human rights organisations including the Helen Bamber Foundation and Anti-Slavery International.

h) Conservative Ministers have left the crucial post of Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner vacant for over a year.

Conference commends Liberal Democrat parliamentarians for consistently opposing both the Nationality and Borders Bill and the Illegal Migration Bill.

Conference therefore calls on the Government to:

1. Reverse its rollbacks on modern slavery protections and ensure that all legislation is compatible with the UK's international law obligations, including the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings.
2. Take power out of the hands of smugglers by scrapping the Illegal Migration Act and providing safe and legal routes to sanctuary in the UK.
3. Prevent exploitation of migrant workers by removing the Conservatives' arbitrary salary threshold for work visas and replacing it with a more flexible merit-based system, making employers and employees less reliant on temporary visas.
4. Establish a powerful new Worker Protection Enforcement Authority to protect people in precarious work, with proactive intelligence-led enforcement of labour market standards and a firewall with immigration enforcement.
5. Transfer responsibility for identifying modern slavery victims from the Home Office to local safeguarding Agencies and for any additional costs to be fully funded by central government.
6. Appoint a new Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner and strengthen the role, while giving Parliament the power to fill the post if left vacant for three months or more.
7. Bring more traffickers to justice by resourcing the criminal justice system properly to improve prosecution and conviction rates.
8. Create a financial deterrent by establishing a civil remedy for survivors seeking redress from their traffickers.
9. Give survivors the support they deserve as victims of a grievous crime, such as access to legal aid – including early advice prior to entering the NRM – and protection from detention or removal.

10. Lift the ban on people in the NRM working if they have been waiting for a decision for over three months, enabling survivors to gain independence and move on with their lives while contributing to the economy.

11. Improve first responders' ability to support victims through mandatory training and allowing more civil society organisations to become accredited first responders.

Background briefing

This motion updated and developed policy on human trafficking, modern slavery and workers rights, as well as responding to the Nationality and Borders Bill and the Illegal Migration Bill.

It built on previous policy as set out in the policy motion *A Better Alternative to the Small Boats Legislation* (March 2023) and *Safe and Legal Routes to Save Lives* (March 2021).

Reference Back: conference voted to reject a reference back.

Amendments: Conference passed one amendment.

The amendment amended line 5. To ensure additional costs are funded by central government.

Vote on motion as amended: Conference passed the motion as amended.

Connecting Communities: Building a Transport Network Fit for the 21st Century

Conference notes that:

- A. Road transport contributes the greatest proportion of UK emissions (24%).
- B. Bus fares across England have risen by 89% since 2005, while rail fares rose by 3.8% in 2022 and 5.9% in 2023 – the biggest rise since 2012, meanwhile fuel duty has been frozen since 2010 and air passenger duty has been cut on internal flights.
- C. The government is committed to spending £24 billion on new roads.
- D. Almost a quarter of bus routes have been cut in the last ten years outside London, while rail passenger levels have only just recovered to their pre-pandemic levels.
- E. Despite promises to establish Great British Railways (GBR) to manage the railway's day-to-day operation the government is dragging its feet.
- F. Rail electrification is at a standstill, with just 101 miles (162.5 km) of track due to be electrified this year with new lines such East-West Rail not being electrified as standard.
- G. The government does not have a plan to replace the revenue from fuel taxes as more people buy electric vehicles.

Conference believes that:

- i) Buses are one of the most accessible and affordable modes of public transport and are often relied upon by the very poorest as well as the old and the young.
- ii) Providing bus, tram and rail links boosts local economies and enables people to access a wider range of local services.
- iii) Buses are the easiest form of public transport to introduce, improve and expand because they require minimal infrastructure investment, especially when compared to trains or trams.
- iv) Rapidly improving bus and rail services is essential if the UK is to reduce CO₂ emissions and cut air pollution, but decarbonisation is happening far too slowly.
- v) The railways should be a green and environmentally friendly option for passengers and freight.

vi) Within an Integrated Transport Strategy there remain, in some locations, opportunities for expanding the use of light rail (trams and tram trains) a form of green mass transport with less costly infrastructure than heavy rail.

vii) The rail ticketing system is outdated and does not reflect the needs of passengers in the 21st century.

Conference reaffirms pledges in the Liberal Democrat 2019 manifesto to:

a) Give new powers and funding to local authorities and communities to improve transport in their areas, including the ability to introduce network-wide ticketing, as in London.

b) Support rural bus services and encourage alternatives to conventional bus services where they are not viable.

c) Fix the railway's broken fares and ticketing system so that it provides better value for money.

d) Improve the experience of people who rely on the railways for work by investing in commuter routes and the integration of rail, bus, tram and cycle routes and improve disabled access to public transport via the Access for All programme.

e) Be far more proactive in sanctioning and ultimately sacking train operators if they fail to provide a high-quality public service to their customers

Conference calls on the Government to:

1. Temporarily maintain the £2 cap on bus fares while fares are reviewed, including ensuring that bus operators and local authorities are not left out of pocket from bus fares, reviewing reimbursement rates for concessionary fares and that all fare revenue is reinvested in bus services.

2. Freeze rail fares until the end of the next parliament and introduce new incentive schemes to encourage people to travel by rail.

3. Give all local authorities greater powers and resources to franchise bus services and simplify the franchise application system and reverse the ban on local authorities setting up their own bus companies.

4. Extend half-fares on buses, trams and trains to 18 year-olds, allowing them to continue receiving half-fares while still in full time education.

5. Introduce a 'Young Person's Buscard', also available for use on trams, similar to the Young Person's Railcard, for 19 to 25 year olds giving them a third off bus and tram fares.
6. Support the development of innovative rural schemes for bus services.
7. Urgently establish the new Great British Railways before the next election to act as a "guiding mind" for the railway, ensuring that the needs of passengers and freight are put first, while abolishing the rail regulator.
8. Ensure that new rail timetables are focused on passenger needs rather than the interests of the rail operating company, with an emphasis on connectivity between buses, trams and trains.
9. Abandon current government-mandated proposals to close ticket offices at railway stations.
10. Establish a ten-year plan for rail electrification to increase the number of passenger journeys covered by electric trains prioritising freight routes in the first five years to move more freight to rail.
11. Ensure all new railway lines are electrified as standard, including East West Rail.
12. Mandate and ensure all new builds include lift and ramp access from both platform to transport and platform to street; where possible the retrofitting of lifts should be funded.
13. Give all local councils, metro mayors and combined authorities which do not already have them the powers to pilot innovative schemes to increase public transport usage and reduce congestion, including the ability to heavily discount public transport fares or make them free – learning from successful schemes introduced in European cities such as Tallinn and Zlin.
14. Explore the introduction of an annual pass covering all public transport in a region or across the country for a one-off fee.
15. Redirect some of the £24 billion road building budget towards investing in public transport and funding councils to maintain existing roads, including repairing potholes.
16. Reverse the government cuts to the active travel budget and introduce a nationwide strategy to promote walking and cycling, including the creation of dedicated safe cycling lanes.
17. Explore a new system to replace revenue from fuel duty which is fair and based on how often people drive, while recognising the needs of rural and remote communities.

Background briefing

This motion updated and developed policy on transport.

It built on previous policy as set out in policy paper 139A *Tackling the Climate Emergency: Proposals for Carbon Pricing* (September 2021), General Election Manifesto *Stop Brexit and Build a Brighter Future* (2019) and policy motion *Future of Transport* (September 2016).

Amendments: Conference passed three amendments.

Amendment one added 12 on accessibility.

Amendment two added line 9 on ticket offices.

Amendment three added line 13 on local councils.

Vote on motion as amended: Conference passed the motion as amended.

Ending Period Poverty

Conference notes that:

I. The average spend on sanitary products is £120 a year, according to the charity Bloody Good Period.

II. A poll from Plan International reveals that over a quarter (28%) of girls aged 14–21 in the UK are struggling to afford period products, and nearly 1-in-5 (19%) report being unable to afford period products at all since the start of 2022.

III. An ActionAid 2022 survey showed that of those who have struggled to afford menstrual products in the last six months, 75% said they had prioritised spending money on food, 49% had prioritised gas/electric, and 31% prioritised fuel.

IV. Nearly half (46%) of those who struggled to afford sanitary products in the last six months kept sanitary pads or tampons in for longer than recommended or used toilet paper, and 10% doubled up their underwear; and women, girls and others who menstruate are at risk of Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS) if they do not have access to clean period products.

V. There is significant evidence of the widespread adverse impact of periods on attendance in education and at work.

VI. Menstruation is not just a women's issue, and also affects some trans and non-binary people.

VII. Vulnerable people, such as asylum seekers, have particular difficulty in accessing sanitary products. Three quarters of such women interviewed by Women for Refugee Women struggled to obtain period pads or tampons while destitute.

VIII. The Scottish Parliament has enacted legal requirements in the Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Act 2021 to allow anyone who needs period products to receive them free of charge; to have the power to make other public bodies provide free period products; and for local councils and education providers to make period products freely available within their buildings.

IX. The Period Products Scheme for schools and colleges in England has provided free period products to all state- maintained schools and 16–19 education organisations in England since 2020.

X. Many local authorities, including Liberal Democrat- controlled Sutton Council, have committed to providing sanitary products in council buildings but need long-term funding from the UK Government to continue this support.

XI. The public health grant is used to provide vital services that support health and it has been cut by 26% in real terms per capita since 2015/16 (equivalent to a reduction of £1bn).

XII. More than a quarter of women (26%) have experienced negative comments about their periods.

XIII. Half (48%) of women and girls aged between 14 and 21 are embarrassed by their periods, and 22% do not feel comfortable discussing periods with their teachers.

Conference believes that:

A. Period products are a human right, not a luxury.

B. Nobody should experience period poverty.

C. England's current free period product provision is not fit for purpose.

D. It is in everyone's interests for stigma around periods to be addressed.

Conference reaffirms:

i) The Liberal Democrat commitment to expand the rollout of free menstrual products to homeless shelters, women's refuges, foodbanks, NHS GP surgeries, and universities in England.

ii) The principle of equality of opportunity in which everyone should expect a fair start in life and equal opportunities throughout life.

Conference calls on the UK Government to:

a) Introduce a right for people in England to access a choice of free period products.

b) Place a duty on local authorities and education providers to make period products freely available in their buildings, providing guidance and additional funding to support them in doing so.

c) Give consideration as to how free period products can be made available to groups who might face barriers to accessing them, including people with disability, gypsy/ travellers, victims of domestic abuse, carers, asylum seekers, refugees, homeless people, and people living in remote locations.

d) Improve comprehensive education on periods for both educators and young people, to ensure an appreciation for the lived experience of menstruation, and a widespread understanding of period products.

e) Reinststate the public health grant to a minimum real-terms per capita equivalent of 2015 – the grant from which these activities will be funded.

Conference further calls for:

1. Universities to develop action plans to tackle period poverty and its stigma on campus.
2. Employers to voluntarily provide free period products in the workplace.

Background briefing

This motion created new policy in relation to period poverty. It also built on previous health policy as set out in policy paper 137 *Save the NHS and Social Care by Stopping Brexit* (September 2019).

Vote on motion: Conference passed the motion.

Food and Farming (Food and Farming Policy Paper)

Conferences believes that:

- I. It is a national disgrace that anyone is living in food poverty in the UK.
- II. Farming, fishing and rural communities have been let down and taken for granted by the Conservatives and deserve Better.
- III. The current global food system is failing to serve the interests and needs of citizens, food producers, the environment and our climate.
- IV. Global warming represents an urgent threat to the sustainability of UK agriculture and food security.
- IV. The UK's food security needs to be strengthened, with more sustainable domestic produce and reliable and trusted trading partners abroad.
- V. There is no trade off between the environment and food production, both can work together in harmony with the right investment and support.
- VI. A fair deal is needed for the UK's food system, which works for the natural environment, our climate consumers and Producers.

Conference notes a string of Conservative failures on food and farming, particularly:

- A. The dramatic rise in food poverty over the past decade, especially among children.
- B. Their botched deal with Europe, that has strangled trade and investment in food, farming and fishing.
- C. Trade agreements with Australia and New Zealand, which have undermined both UK standards and the farmers who adhere to them.
- D. Their poor implementation of the Environmental Land Management schemes (ELMs) which has undermined farmers confidence in the future and undermined our natural environment.
- E. A series of failed immigration policies have deprived farmers and fishers of hard working and skilled labour.

F. The dramatic rise in food prices since 2022, made worse by the Conservatives' incompetent handling of the economy.

Conference also notes that in Scotland and Wales the SNP and the Labour Party have also let down our farmers and fishers, failing to use the powers of the devolved assemblies to properly support Scottish and Welsh fishers, farmers, producers, processors and crofters.

Conference therefore endorses policy paper 154, Food and Farming, and its proposals for a comprehensive National Food Strategy, in particular:

1. End food poverty, and particularly child food poverty, within a decade by: a) Ending deep financial poverty, as set out in policy paper 150, Towards a Fairer Society.

b) Extending free school meals to all children in primary education and to all secondary school children whose families receive Universal Credit, and automatically enrolling eligible children and funding schools properly to pay for this.

c) Introducing a holistic and comprehensive strategy to provide everyone with nutritious and healthy food, through better education, industry reformulation and reforms to advertising.

2. Provide a fair deal for farmers and saving our natural environment by:

a) Immediately raising the ELM budget by £1bn, so that farmers are properly rewarded and supported to transition to environmentally sustainable farming.

b) Supporting natural carbon sequestration including through increasing woodland canopy cover to at least 20% by 2050 and banning horticultural peat use and the burning of heather.

b) Fully funding and resourcing the Agricultural Development & Advisory Service (ADAS) so that it can provide all farmers with the support and training they need.

c) Introducing a range of other public money for public goods programmes, contingent on farmers and land managers opting in to an ELM scheme.

d) Introducing a comprehensive plan to tackle antimicrobial resistance in farm animals.

e) Introducing a new Land and Sea Use Framework, to strategically manage our natural resources as set out in policy paper 155, Tackling the Nature Crisis.

f) Using public procurement policy to support the consumption of food produced to high standards of environmental and social sustainability, and which is nutritious, healthy and locally and seasonally sourced.

3. Strengthen UK food security and tackling food price rises by:

a) Introducing a proper visa and seasonal worker system which allows our farmers and fishers to get access to the workforce they need.

b) Sustainably increasing domestic food production by providing our farmers with investment, training and support.

c) Working with and rewarding farmers to reduce the use of costly imported and environmentally harmful artificial fertilisers and pesticides.

d) Developing a comprehensive land use and horticulture strategy to effectively manage the competing demands on land.

4. Allow our farmers and fishers to trade freely with Europe and tackle food price rises by:

a) Signing a veterinary and phytosanitary agreement with the EU as soon as possible.

b) Mutual recognition and alignment on standards and quality.

c) Rebuilding trust and cooperation with Europe by following the four-stage roadmap as set out in policy paper 144, *Rebuilding Trade and Cooperation with Europe*.

5. Prevent the undercutting of UK farmers and fishers in international trade deals by:

a) Mandating proper democratic scrutiny and accountability in trade deals.

b) Ensuring all imports meet UK environmental, climate and animal welfare standards.

c) Renegotiating the Australia and New Zealand Free Trade Agreements so that farmers get a fair deal and ensuring that in our future deals, UK standards are upheld.

6. Put the world's food system on a sustainable footing by restoring the International Development budget and using the money to invest and support sustainable farming overseas.

7. Put the UK at the forefront of food and farming innovation by introducing a Research and Innovation Fund to support new and emerging technologies in the sector including the further development of alternative proteins in which the UK can become a world leader.

8. Give everyone confidence in the security and safety of the food they buy by:

a) Providing local authorities with greater powers and resources to inspect and monitor food production.

b) Ensuring all food meets UK standards for health, and ensure goods are properly checked where necessary.

c) Introducing robust and clear to understand food labelling.

Background briefing

This motion and the accompanying policy paper updated and developed policy on food, farming, fishing, trade, animal welfare and rural affairs.

They built on previous policy as set out in the policy motion *International Trade and the DIT* (September 2021), policy motion *Back British Farmers* (March 2021), policy paper 139 *Tackling the Climate Emergency*, and policy paper 129 *A Rural Future: Time to Act* (March 2018).

Amendments: Conference passed one amendment.

The amendment added references to climate change and the nature crisis.

Vote on motion as amended: Conference passed the motion as amended.

For a Fair Deal (Pre-Manifesto Policy Paper)

Conference applauds the remarkable decency and strength of people across the United Kingdom, from all backgrounds and all walks of life: working hard, raising families, helping others and playing by the rules, even in very tough times.

Conference reaffirms that the Liberal Democrats exist to build and safeguard a fair, free and open society, welcomes the enormous strides that Britain has taken towards that goal over the centuries, and celebrates the role that Liberals and Liberal Democrats have played in leading that change.

However, Conference believes that, after years of Conservative neglect, the social contract – or fair deal – between people and government has been shattered.

Conference condemns the out-of-touch Conservative Government for letting the British people down and taking them for granted, and in particular for:

I. Failing to help struggling families and pensioners in the face of the biggest out-of-living crisis since the 1950s, and instead making it worse by badly mismanaging the economy and recklessly damaging the public finances.

II. Plunging the NHS into crisis, running local health services into the ground and putting people, buildings and beds under immense pressure, and breaking their promise to fix the crisis in social care.

III. Neglecting education and failing to grasp the scale of the damage that the Covid pandemic has done to children's learning and mental health.

IV. Damaging our natural environment, failing to bring forward credible plans to tackle climate change, and allowing water companies to pump raw sewage into rivers, lakes and coastal areas.

V. Failing even to get the basics right on crime and policing, allowing far too many criminals to get away with it.

VI. Failing to stand up to hatred and prejudice or tackle entrenched inequalities, and repeatedly undermining fundamental British rights and freedoms.

VII. Creating a crisis for democracy with their cronyism, rule-breaking and constant sleaze scandals.

VIII. Damaging British families and businesses with their botched deal with Europe, and undermining the UK's international reputation by threatening to break international law, slashing the international development budget and trashing our relations with our allies.

Conference utterly condemns the Prime Minister's scrapping or delaying of key net zero policies, which will accelerate global heating, undermine business confidence and investment and increase the cost of living.

Conference also condemns the Labour Party for failing to offer an ambitious vision for the country or long-term solutions to the challenges we face, and the SNP for its record of failure, chaos and division in Scotland.

Conference decries the UK's political system as fundamentally broken – millions of people feel powerless and excluded, robbed of their rightful say and unable to hold the powerful to account.

Conference believes that the British people deserve a fair deal that gives everyone the power to make the most of their potential and real freedom to decide how they live their lives.

Conference calls for a fair deal with five key themes:

- A. A fair, prosperous and innovative economy that promotes opportunity and wellbeing.
- B. Fair access to good public services and a strong social safety net.
- C. A sustainable and flourishing global and national environment.
- D. A strong United Kingdom and a fair international order.
- E. A truly fair democracy, where everyone's rights are respected and individuals and communities are empowered.

Conference therefore endorses policy paper 153, For A Fair Deal, as the basis for constructing the party's manifesto for the next general election, and welcomes its key commitments to:

1. Place tackling the climate crisis at the heart of our agenda, including investing in renewable power and home insulation, driving a strong economic recovery, bringing down energy bills, creating clean, secure, well-paid new jobs and leading international efforts to address the emergency globally.

2. 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. 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. 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. Introduce proportional representation for electing MPs, and local councillors in England and reform the House of Lords with a proper democratic mandate.
6. Build a strong, fair economy that benefits everyone in the UK, through investment in infrastructure, innovation and skills, fair taxes and responsible management of the public finances.
7. Ensure that everyone can get the care they need by recruiting, training and retaining more doctors and nurses, reforming NHS dentistry, and fixing the crisis in social care.
8. Invest in education, from early years throughout adulthood, and give every child the support and attention they need to flourish at school.
9. Repair the broken benefits safety net and set a target of ending deep poverty within a decade.
10. Restore proper community policing, where officers are visible, trusted and focused on preventing and solving crimes.
11. Mend our broken politics by strengthening democratic rights and participation and ensuring that MPs, and especially Ministers, are held to account for corruption and sleaze.
12. Empower local communities and regions to take the action they need to improve their areas and ensure that everyone has access to housing that meets their needs.
13. Champion the freedom, dignity and well-being of every individual, and resist any attempts to weaken or repeal the UK's Human Rights Act.
14. Ensure that the UK stands tall on the world stage, championing the values of equality, democracy, human rights and the rule of law, including by creating a comprehensive UK strategy to challenge regimes such as that led by the CCP in China, restoring the UK's reputation as an international development superpower, reinstating the 0.7% of GNI aid

target, re-establishing a Department for International Development, and fixing the UK's broken relationship with Europe following the four- step roadmap set out in policy paper 144, *Rebuilding Trade and Cooperation with Europe*.

15. Protect the BBC, Channel 4, S4C and BBC Alba as independent, publicly-owned, public service broadcasters, and support growth in the creative industries.

Background briefing

This motion and the accompanying policy paper set out five key themes for our next General Election Manifesto, and highlighted policies which will illustrate those themes.

They built on policy paper 143 *A Fairer, Greener, More Caring Society* (Autumn 2021).

Suspension of Standing Orders: Conference voted not to suspend standing orders to add in another amendment.

Amendments: Conference passed five amendments.

Amendment one added in references to the climate crisis and its importance.

Amendment two added reference to House of Lords reform.

Amendment three added in the need for a UK strategy to challenge authoritarian regimes.

Amendment four added reference to reinstating the Department for International Development.

Amendment five added references to protected public broadcasters.

Vote on motion as amended: Conference passed the motion as amended.

Fixing Fast Fashion – Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

Conference notes with concern that:

- i) The fashion industry is responsible for 10% of greenhouse gas emissions globally.
- ii) The UK consumes more new clothing than any other European country at 26.7kg per capita, with individuals spending an average of £980 per year.
- iii) Further environmental damage is caused by the fashion industry, including:
 - a) 20% of water pollution resulting from the textile dyeing process, the second largest polluter of water globally.
 - b) Microplastics from synthetic clothing contributing to 20–35% of primary source marine microplastics, with up to 700,000 fibres released in a single 6kg domestic wash.
 - c) A water footprint of eight billion cubic metres, from clothing use in the UK.
 - iv) Fabric accounted for 800,000 tonnes of waste in the UK in 2016, a considerable increase from 700,000 tonnes in 2012.
 - v) Overall consumption of garments since the 1980s has increased due to the ongoing decline in quality and longevity driven by the fast fashion business model.
 - vi) Landfill and incineration, often in less economically developed countries, is the endpoint of at least 64% of garments globally, only 1% of garments are recycled into new clothing.
 - vii) Modern slavery and unethical labour practices are notoriously linked to the fashion industry both globally and locally, including Shein employees being paid as little as three pence per garment, and forced labour of the Uyghur minority in China; there are also reports that garment workers in UK production centres such as Leicester are frequently paid below the minimum wage.

Conference believes that:

- A. The fast fashion business model is inherently dependent on exploitative environmental practices and human rights abuses.
- B. Everyone should have access to high quality clothing and informed consumer choice upon purchase.

C. Everyone deserves fair wages and employment practices, no matter where they live in the world.

D. Urgent action is needed to tackle the climate emergency, including a shift towards circular economies.

E. Solutions to global crises require action on both the national and local level.

Conference calls for:

1. The introduction of a 1p levy on new garments produced for sale on the UK market, with the proceeds ringfenced for the improvement and development of local recycling facilities and collection.

2. A ban on the incineration or landfilling of used and new textiles which can be reused or recycled.

3. The UK Government to incentivise the reuse and repurposing of garments by offering favourable VAT rates to resale shops and online platforms, rental services, and tailoring and repair services, together with providers of training and skills for repair work.

4. Support for the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) to work with clothing manufacturers to develop minimum standards of durability, reducing the need to purchase new clothes.

5. Legislation obliging retailers to guarantee full traceability in their supply chains, ensuring ethically sourced materials, decent livelihoods, and safe working conditions, as well as the introduction of 'joint liability' for subcontractors in the fashion and fabric industry.

6. The UK Government to effectively enforce current labour rights including compliance with minimum wage requirements.

7. The cost of clothing to be explicitly considered in the calculation of benefit rates.

8. Support for local clothes swapping initiatives, especially for school uniforms and workwear.

9. Revision of the guidance on school uniform, emphasising affordability and limiting the number of unique and branded items.

10. Further research into design techniques that limit synthetic fibre emissions, including investigation of the occupational health risks associated with synthetic fibres, with quick actions taken by the Health and Safety Executive based on findings.

11. Government-led collaboration among fashion retailers, water firms, and washing machine manufacturers to tackle microfibre pollution, holding product-producing companies ultimately responsible.

12. Extension of the proposed virgin plastics tax to textile products containing less than 50% recycled PET, to stimulate the UK market for recycled fibres.

13. Measures encouraging the adoption of sustainable fibre production, with an emphasis on reducing the water footprint.

Background briefing

This motion created a new policy on Fast Fashion, as well as updating policy on climate change and resource use.

It built on previous policy as set out in the General Election Manifesto *Stop Brexit and Build a Brighter Future* (2019) and Policy Paper 139 *Tackling the Climate Emergency* (September 2019).

Amendments: Conference passed one amendment.

The amendment amended line 3 and added lines 4 and 5 regarding repairing clothes and forced labour

Vote on motion as amended: Conference passed the motion as amended.

Investing in our Children's Future

Conference believes that:

I. Every child, no matter their background, can achieve great things; they deserve the best possible start in life, with schools that enable them to attain academic and all other forms of excellence.

II. Education is the best investment we can make in our country's future.

III. The Conservatives have consistently let down children and parents, neglected schools and colleges, and failed to grasp the scale of the pandemic's damage to children's learning and mental health.

IV. Art subjects help children and young people to develop crucial creative and emotional skills, as well as preparing them for jobs in the thriving creative industries.

Conference notes that:

A. Schools are being forced to cut back on staff, school trips and IT equipment to manage rising costs.

B. Between 2019 and mid-2023, 39 schools had fully or partly closed because they were unsafe. As of 31st August, over 140 more schools had to close one or more buildings due to the RAAC crisis.

C. The Pupil Premium has proved very effective at closing the attainment gap for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, but since 2015 the Conservatives have cut it by more than 10% in real terms.

D. 18% of children have a probable mental health disorder, yet government funding for mental health support teams for schools ends next year.

E. 800,000 children in poverty are ineligible for free school meals, and more than 200,000 eligible children are not registered – meanwhile, the Conservatives have cut funding for free school meals by 15% in real terms since 2015.

F. There is a crisis in teacher recruitment and retention, leaving millions of secondary school pupils to be taught by someone who isn't a specialist teacher in their subject.

G. Employers are losing faith in England's exam system and using their own assessments instead.

H. The death of a headteacher in Reading tragically underscored the high-stakes nature of Ofsted inspections, which places teachers and school leaders under enormous strain.

I. Participation in extra-curricular activities improves school attendance and exam performance, and helps children to develop valuable skills such as creativity and teamwork.

J. Parental engagement in children's education can have a big, positive impact on attainment.

K. Only half of children with complex special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) receive an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan within the 20-week limit, and 96% of SEND Tribunal cases are decided in the parents' favour.

L. The number of pupils in local authority-funded alternative provision (AP) settings has increased by 79% over the last five years, and there are now 6,800 AP placements with unregistered providers.

M. The number of students taking arts and creative subjects at GCSE has fallen by 30% since 2015, and A Level entries have fallen by 15%.

N. Over one in five children are persistently absent from school, twice the proportion before the pandemic.

Conference calls on the Government to:

1. Invest in education by:

a) Increasing school and college funding per pupil above the rate of inflation every year.

b) Ending the scandal of crumbling school and college buildings by investing in new buildings and clearing the backlog of repairs.

c) Reversing Conservative cuts to the Pupil Premium and free school meals, and introducing a Young People's Premium for those aged 16–18.

2. Ensure that children are healthy, happy and ready to learn by:

a) Putting a dedicated, qualified mental health professional in every school.

b) Extending free school meals to all children in primary education and all secondary school children whose families receive Universal Credit, and automatically enrolling eligible children.

c) Addressing the underfunding and neglect of children's mental health services, youth services and youth justice services, so that less of the burden falls on schools.

3. Tackle the crisis in teacher recruitment and retention by:

a) Creating a teacher workforce strategy to ensure that every secondary school child is taught by a specialist teacher in their subject.

b) Reforming the School Teachers' Review Body to make it properly independent of Government and able to recommend fair pay rises for teachers, and fully funding those rises every year.

c) Funding teacher training properly so that all trainee posts in school are paid.

d) Introducing a clear and properly funded programme of high-quality professional development for all teachers, including training on effective parental engagement.

4. Urgently establish a standing commission to build a long-term consensus across parties and teachers to broaden the curriculum and make qualifications at 16 and 18 fit for the 21st century, drawing on best practice such as the International Baccalaureate and also developing vocational and practical courses in secondary schools.

5. Implement root-and-branch reform of school inspections, to make Ofsted trusted by parents and a critical friend to schools, by:

a) Replacing single-grade judgements with report cards that show parents the true strengths and weaknesses of each school.

b) Ensuring that inspections deliver a complete evaluation of the whole school, including attainment, discipline, curriculum breadth, teacher workload, provision for children with SEND and mental ill health, and suitability of the workforce to deliver the curriculum.

c) Introducing annual safeguarding and financial check-ups, separate to Ofsted, to ensure consistent good governance.

d) Requiring Ofsted to work with schools, providing the guidance and support they need to improve, rather than simply changing governance.

6. Expand provision of extra-curricular activities, such as sport, music, drama, debating and coding, starting with a new free entitlement for disadvantaged children.

7. Implement a new parental engagement strategy, including a regular, published parent survey and guidance for schools on providing accessible information to parents on what their children are learning.

8. Tackle the crisis in SEND funding by:

a) Giving local authorities extra funding to halve the amount that schools pay towards the cost of a child's EHC plan.

b) Establishing a National Body for SEND to fund support for children with high needs.

9. Require all AP settings to be registered.

10. Support the education of children in care, extend Pupil Premium Plus funding to children in kinship care, and guarantee any child taken into care a school place within three weeks, if required to move schools.

11. Include arts subjects in the English Baccalaureate and give power to Ofsted to monitor the curriculum so that schools continue to provide a rich curriculum including subjects like art, music or drama.

12. Support the education of children in temporary accommodation by extending Pupil Premium Plus funding to them

Background briefing

This motion updated and developed policy on children and education.

It built on previous policy as set out in policy motion *Catching Up on Our Children's Education* (March 2022), the General Election Manifesto *Stop Brexit and Build a Brighter Future* (2019) and policy paper 128 *Every Child Empowered: Education for a Changing World* (March 2018).

Amendments: Conference passed two amendments.

Amendment one added a variety of minor amendments to local authorities and the co-production of services.

Amendment two would have deleted line 6 and introduced an alternative approach to vaping.

Vote on motion as amended: Conference passed the motion as amended.

Making the Fight Against Climate Change Accessible

Conference notes that:

a) Single-use plastics used in Health and Social Care contexts create millions of tonnes of plastic waste a year, much of which will go to landfill or be incinerated.

b) While there are some alternatives to single-use plastics in equipment used for medical, social care and accessibility equipment, many are unavailable, unaffordable or impractical for many people.

c) Many older and disabled people have experienced difficulties with different climate change or pollution prevention strategies such as the banning of plastic straws, pedestrianisation, cycle lanes and LTNs, which often fail to take their needs into account.

d) Many transport alternatives to private cars remain inaccessible or unaffordable for disabled and older people, especially where they require adaptive or alternate Provision.

e) Eco-ableism is a large issue within the climate emergency debate that leads to the stigmatisation of disabled people who often rely, for example, on single use plastic medical equipment such feeding tubes, cannulas and IV tubes to survive.

f) Disabled people are amongst the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change, yet are some of those least likely to be meaningfully included in the climate justice movement.

Conference believes that while there have been many progressive steps in reducing climate change in recent years, efforts to consider the specific needs of disabled and older people have often been missed, leading to many disabled people experiencing significant difficulty in supporting the fight against climate change, or feeling excluded from society by some measures.

Conference further believes that disabled and older people deserve to have access to options which allow them to take a full and equal part in the fight against climate change and in society as a whole.

Conference therefore calls for:

1. The allocation of at least 3% of government research and development funding on environmental and anti-climate change to projects centred around bringing benefits and change to the health and social care sectors and a further 2% to projects that will support disabled people to live more environmentally friendly lives while maintaining their health and

independence (e.g. developing affordable biodegradable or recyclable alternatives to commonly used items such as gloves, packaging and incontinence pads).

2. Requirements on NHS trusts, care agencies, residential facilities and local authorities to develop strategies to reduce plastic use and increase the recycling of non-biohazardous plastic waste.

3. Schemes aimed at increasing the uptake of environmentally friendly transport options to provide accessible and adaptable options (e.g. hand cycles and tricycles in cycle salary sacrifice schemes).

4. Requirements on public transport and infrastructure companies to make all their provision completely and independently accessible by 2027.

5. Requirements on central and local government initiatives focusing on reducing emissions and improving public transport and public spaces to work with disabled people in the planning and implementation stages of projects to mitigate any negative impact on disability communities.

6. Education surrounding the importance of inclusive climate solutions that acknowledge the needs of disabled people and their increased vulnerability to the effects of the changing climate, for example more frequent extreme heat and flooding.

7. The government to establish a scrutiny group of intersectional representatives from those communities that are most heavily impacted by the effects of climate change to consult on the inclusivity of all climate mitigation measures before they are implemented.

Background briefing

This motion updated and developed climate change policy, specifically looking at ways in which climate change action can be inclusive for all people.

It built on previous policy as set out in the General Election Manifesto *Stop Brexit and Build a Brighter Future* (2019) and Policy Paper 139 *Tackling the Climate Emergency* (September 2019).

Amendments: Conference passed one amendment.

The amendment added lines e, f, 6 and 7 regarding intersectionality and inclusivity.

Vote on motion as amended: Conference passed the motion as amended.

Protecting the European Convention on Human Rights

Conference condemns the comments made by Conservative ministers during summer 2023, including Home Secretary Suella Braverman and Immigration Minister Robert Jenrick, about their desires to leave the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

Conference notes with concern reports arising in August 2023 that the Conservatives may campaign to leave the ECHR.

Conference further notes that:

- i) The European Convention on Human Rights has strong British roots, counting Winston Churchill as a key architect and the UK as the first country to formally ratify it.
- ii) The only country to have left the Convention is Russia.
- ii) The Convention plays a crucial role in underpinning the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement.
- iii) For the first time, the Conservative Government has invoked the ability to ignore injunctions from the European Court of Human Rights in their Illegal Migration Act, passed earlier this year.

Conference believes that:

- a) The comments of Ministers such as Suella Braverman are yet another deeply concerning indicator of the Conservatives' failed ideological approach to the UK's relationship with Europe, which prioritises division over working pragmatically with our allies.
- b) The ECHR is an important guarantor of human rights, which the Conservatives have all too frequently disregarded while in Government.
- c) The UK's full participation in the European Convention on Human Rights is a crucial part of our commitment to protect, defend and promote human rights internationally.
- d) Conservative Ministers' comments only serve to do harm to the UK's global reputation and to deeply undermine the leading role we should be playing as upholders of the ECHR and within the Council of Europe.

Conference commends the work of Liberal Democrat parliamentarians to champion both the European Convention on Human Rights, and the Human Rights Act that incorporates the Convention into domestic law.

Conference reaffirms the Liberal Democrats' commitment to fixing the UK's broken relationship with Europe, in line with the four-stage roadmap set out in Liberal Democrat policy paper 144, *Rebuilding Trade and Cooperation with Europe*.

Conference calls on the Government to:

1. Unequivocally commit to staying in the European Convention on Human Rights.
2. Ensure that all current UK legislation is compliant with the Convention, making amendments where necessary and scrapping the Illegal Migration Act in full.

Background briefing

This motion updates policy in response to the recent Conservative attacks on the European Convention on Human Rights.

It built on previous human rights policy as set out in policy motion and paper *For A Fair Deal* (September 2023).

Vote on motion: Conference passed the motion.

Protecting our Neighbourhoods: A Return to Community Policing

Conference believes that:

- i) Everyone deserves to feel safe in their own home and walking down their own streets.
- ii) High rates of unsolved crimes embolden criminals, making them feel like they can get away with it.
- iii) Public trust in the police is essential for policing by consent, and feeling confident that the police will respond to and properly investigate local crime is key for building that trust.

Conference notes with grave concern that under the Conservative Government, police resources have not been used effectively – and as a result, frontline policing across the country has been left over-stretched, under-resourced, and unable to properly focus on local crime.

Conference further notes that:

- a) An average of 5,700 crimes went unsolved across England and Wales every day in 2022, with only 5.6% of crimes leading to a suspect being charged or summoned.
- b) The vast majority of burglaries go unsolved, while more than 45,000 burglaries were not even attended by an officer last year.
- c) 56% of people reported to never see police on foot patrols in their neighbourhoods as of February 2023, despite the Government achieving the 20,000 officer uplift.
- d) As of 2022, only 12% of officers across England and Wales were assigned to frontline neighbourhood police teams.
- e) More than 4,000 Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) have been taken off the streets by the Conservative Government since 2015.
- f) Over £100 million has been spent to run Police and Crime Commissioners' offices since 2019, despite little evidence they have made the police more accountable to local communities.
- g) A recent report from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) highlighted that police services are overwhelmed and under-equipped to deal with digital forensics.

h) Revelations uncovered by the Baroness Casey report, difficult to implement and draconian new anti-protest laws, as well as statistics on minority ethnic communities being disproportionately targeted by police stop and searches, have understandably eroded public trust in the police.

Conference therefore calls on the Government to:

1. Enable and encourage local forces to restore proper community policing, where officers have the time and resources they need to focus on preventing and solving crime.
2. Work with police services to determine what tasks are using disproportionate amounts of police officers' time, and how those processes could be streamlined so that police can spend more time in their communities.
3. Set up a new national Online Crime Agency, to better protect people from online crime while freeing up local forces' time to tackle local crime.
4. Create a new statutory guarantee that all burglaries will be attended by the police and properly investigated.
5. Scrap Police and Crime Commissioners and replace them with Police Boards – made up of local councillors and representatives from relevant local groups – while investing the savings in frontline policing instead.
6. Urgently draw up a national recruitment, training and retention strategy to tackle the shortage of detectives.
7. Require 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 including on revamping vetting and misconduct procedures, while encouraging other police forces to implement those recommendations where appropriate.
8. Help rebuild public trust in policing by ending the disproportionate use of Stop and Search, repealing the Public Order Act 2023 and improving access to restorative justice services.
9. Introduce mandatory training for police in understanding the impact of trauma on victims of violence against women and girls, so that victims can be better supported and women's trust in the police can start to be rebuilt.

10. Introduce mandatory training for police in understanding discrimination and hate crime - inclusive of all protected characteristics – so victims can be better supported and do not face further discrimination from the police.

11. Make youth diversion a statutory duty so that every part of the country has a pre-charge diversion scheme for young people up to the age of 25, ensuring better outcomes for young people and less strain on police resources.

Background briefing

This motion updated and developed policy on crime and policing.

It built on previous policy as set out in the General Election Manifesto *Stop Brexit and Build a Brighter Future* (2019) and policy paper 138 *United Against Crime* (September 2019).

Amendments: Conference passed one amendment.

The amendment introduced line 10 on police training.

Vote on motion as amended: Conference passed the motion as amended.

Restore Standards in Public Life

Conference notes:

- i) The deterioration of standards in public life under the Conservatives.
- ii) The resignation of Boris Johnson, who was subsequently found to have deliberately misled Parliament by the Privileges Committee, and Liz Truss, after the Conservative Government crashed the economy.
- iii) Rishi Sunak's promise on the steps of Downing Street to govern with 'integrity, accountability and professionalism', which was immediately followed by his decision to appoint Suella Braverman, Dominic Raab, Gavin Williamson and Nadhim Zahawi.
- iv) That the seemingly endless stream of standards scandals has not abated under Rishi Sunak - with three Cabinet resignations over standards as well as a number of Conservative MPs.
- v) That the role of the Government Ethics Adviser was vacant for six months and when the Prime Minister finally made an appointment, he decided not to give them powers to initiate investigations.
- vi) That the Ministerial Register of Interests was not updated for almost a year, despite a significant turnover of Government Ministers, having the effect that Government Ministers were subject to lower transparency requirements than backbench MPs.
- vii) The resignation of Richard Sharp, the Chair of the BBC, after failing to declare his connection to a loan made to Boris Johnson.
- viii) That Rishi Sunak granted Boris Johnson honours to his cronies, and failed to approve the Privileges Committee report which found that Johnson had deliberately misled Parliament.

Conference believes that:

- A. Those in power must be held to account.
- B. Rishi Sunak's promise to govern with 'integrity, accountability and professionalism' has been comprehensively trashed.
- C. The Conservatives' seemingly endless standards scandals are damaging trust in the UK's political system.

D. It is vital that standards in public life are restored.

Conference accordingly calls on the Government to:

1. Make the role of the Ethics Adviser truly independent by:
 - a) Empowering the Ethics Adviser so they can initiate their own investigations, determine breaches and publish their report.
 - b) Putting the role of the Ethics Adviser on a statutory basis and giving Parliament the power to appoint the Ethics Adviser.
2. Enshrine the Ministerial Code in legislation.
3. Introduce motions of no confidence in respect to individual ministers which will allow Members of Parliament to table motions to remove a Minister of the Crown from office if they fail to command the confidence of the House of Commons.
4. Introduce new rules to ensure that a Prime Minister must have served for at least one year before becoming eligible to access the Public Duty Cost Allowance fund of up to £115,000 per annum.
5. Ensure that Ministers receive annual training to prevent further standards scandals.
6. Establish a rigorous, transparent and independent process to appoint significant public roles, including the BBC Chair, involving a confirmatory vote by the relevant Parliamentary select committee.
7. Bring reporting standards for the Ministerial Register of Interests in line with the House of Commons Register of Members' Interests, so that publication takes place more frequently.
8. Given the deficit of trust, restore confidence that the public have in politics by implementing fair votes via proportional representation.
9. Put the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments and the Commissioner for Public Appointments into legislation, along with their underlying rules, as recommended by the Committee on Standards in Public Life.
10. Ensure more equal access to government by lobbyists and other vested interests by issuing guidance for departments and requiring them to report annually on the steps they have taken.

Conference calls on the Prime Minister to apologise for Conservative standards scandals and recommit to the Nolan principles of public life.

Background briefing

This motion updated and developed policy on standards in public life, the accountability of politicians and the behaviour of parliamentarians.

It built on previous policy as set out in policy motion *Political Reform to Tackle Sleaze* (March 2022) and the General Election Manifesto *Stop Brexit and Build a Brighter Future* (2019).

Amendments: Conference passed three amendments.

Amendment one introduced line 3

Amendment two added line 9

Amendment 3 added line 9

Vote on motion as amended: Conference passed the motion as amended.

Scrap the Voter ID Scheme

Conference notes that:

A. The Conservative Government has introduced a new law requiring voters to show photo ID in order to vote in:

ii) General elections, parliamentary by-elections and recall petitions across the UK.

iii) Local elections and referendums in England.

iv) Police and Crime Commissioner elections in England and Wales.

B. The crime of personation – pretending to be someone else in order to vote – is incredibly rare: in the May 2022 elections, there were just seven allegations of personation in polling stations and in none of those cases was there enough evidence for further action by the police.

C. The Cabinet Office estimates that implementing the voter ID scheme will cost the taxpayer approximately £120 million over the next decade.

D. Jacob Rees-Mogg, who was a Cabinet Minister when the voter ID law was introduced, has described it as an attempt to “gerrymander” elections in the Conservatives’ favour.

E. The Electoral Commission’s analysis of the May 2023 local elections – the first elections with the voter ID law in force – found that:

i) At least 0.25% of people who tried to vote (approximately 14,000 people) were denied a vote because they could not show an accepted form of ID; in a general election that would be the equivalent of around 80,000 people.

ii) Around 4% of all non-voters said they didn’t vote because of the voter ID requirement.

Conference believes that the Conservatives’ voter ID scheme is expensive, unnecessary and undemocratic, robbing thousands of people of their right to vote in elections and hold those in power to account.

Conference further notes that:

1. The Liberal Democrats in both the House of Commons and the Lords consistently led opposition to the introduction of the voter ID law.

2. Helen Morgan MP has tabled the Elections (Voter Identification Requirements) Bill, which would scrap the voter ID scheme.

Conference calls on the Government to repeal the voter ID law by supporting Helen Morgan's Bill and making government time available for it to pass both Houses of Parliament as soon as possible.

Background briefing

This motion created new policy in response to the introduction of voter ID that came into effect at the Local Elections in 2023.

Vote on motion: Conference passed the motion.

Standing with Ukraine

Conference notes the rapidly changing situation in Ukraine, including:

I. The courage shown by Ukrainians in defending their country since Russia's illegal full-scale invasion in February 2022.

II. Ukraine has – at the time of drafting – liberated more than half of the territory Russia seized since the beginning of the invasion.

III. Russia's near-victory in Bakhmut and its intensive manufacturing of new assets, its deployment of Iranian drones – necessitating urgent additional support for Ukraine from allies.

IV. President Biden's decision to permit the transfer of F16 jets to Ukraine, with Ukrainian pilots due to be trained in the UK.

Conference further notes:

i) The potential threat that Putin's warmongering poses to Europe's future security unless Russia is resisted.

ii) Finland's full accession to NATO in April 2023, with Sweden also in the process of joining the organisation.

iii) Concerns about the potential for Russia to foment crises in Moldova, in the annexed territory of Transnistria, as well as potential difficulties arising for NATO in the Western Balkans.

iv) The role of the Wagner Group in Bakhmut and the UK Government's decision in September 2023 to proscribe the Group, over eighteen months after the Liberal Democrats were the first to call for the Group's proscription.

v) The request by Ukraine for the formation of a Special Tribunal to prosecute Russia for the crime of aggression and the work of a Core Group of countries to advocate for a hybrid Tribunal.

vi) The UK Government's failure to take sufficient action to deal with Russian dirty money in the UK, including their refusal to publish the full golden visas review.

vii) The effect of Russia's invasion on the cost-of-living crisis in the UK.

viii) The ongoing persecution of anti-war activists inside Russia, including criminal proceedings for the dissemination of accurate information regarding the conflict that contradicts the official narratives of the Russian Government. These proceedings carry a maximum sentence of 10-15 years. After 7. (line 79), add: 8. Take a stance to defend anti-war activists inside Russia, through initiatives such as:

a) Raising in all appropriate forums the cases of individuals in Russia who face persecution for expressing criticism of the invasion of Ukraine or disseminating truthful information about it.

b) Making offers of asylum to and issuing asylum visas for individuals in such cases.

Conference believes that:

A. The defence of freedom, human rights and the rule of law lie at the heart of liberal values.

B. This conflict will determine our security, freedom and democracy in Europe, and Europe's standing on the world stage.

Conference therefore reaffirms the Liberal Democrats' commitment to forcefully stand up to Putin, alongside Ukraine and Ukraine's international partners, in defence of liberal values, and accordingly calls on the UK Government to:

1. Do all it realistically can, in view of Putin's brazen actions, to help arm Ukraine, including with longer-range precision weapons, as well as provide regular materiel, humanitarian equipment, medical supplies and the training it needs to defeat Russia.

2. Continue to strengthen the supply of British arms and ammunition to Ukraine, and work with our allies to boost the supplies coming from the EU and the USA – including to replenish the UK's and allies' stockpiles.

3. Build on the long-overdue proscription of the Wagner Group, by making the case to our international allies such as the US and the EU to take the same step, and working with them to ensure proscription orders and sanctions are not circumvented.

4. Strive to establish formal cooperation mechanisms on foreign and security issues with the EU and NATO, including through the Kyiv Security Compact.

5. Lead calls amongst Ukraine's allies for the setting up of a Special Tribunal to prosecute alleged perpetrators of the crime of aggression.

6. Take further action to stop the flow of dirty Russian money through the UK, including:

a) Wider use of Magnitsky sanctions to target relatives who have had wealth transferred to them in an attempt to dodge sanctions.

b) Strengthening economic crime legislation to remove loopholes exploited by oligarchs such as those in the Register of Beneficial Ownership.

c) Significantly increase funding to economic crime fighting organisations like the National Crime Agency,

d) empowering them to seize Russian assets which can be used for the reconstruction of Ukraine.

e) Releasing the full golden visas report.

7. Restore the 0.7% of GNI target for international development spending, to ensure that humanitarian aid which the UK supplies to Ukraine is not at the cost of cutting aid spending in other countries.

Background briefing

This motion updated and developed policy on the on-going war in Ukraine.

It built on previous policy as set out in the policy motion *A Sovereign Ukraine* (March 2022).

Vote on motion: Conference passed the motion.

Transforming the Nation's Health

Conference notes with concern that

A. The United Kingdom is lagging behind its peers when it comes to people's health – it is 29th in the Global obesity rankings, has the worst healthy life expectancy in Western Europe, and according to one study has the worst mental health in the world. B. A quarter of a million more Britons died sooner than expected compared to our European peers between 2012 and 2022.

C. Health inequalities are on the rise – a man in Kensington and Chelsea can now expect to live for 27 years longer than a man in Blackpool.

D. Two-thirds of the adult UK population is overweight – the NHS spends a tenth of its entire budget on treating diabetes, and the proportion is rising year on year.

E. The public health grant has been cut by 26% on a real- terms per person basis since 2015/16.

F. Since the Covid-19 pandemic economic inactivity in the UK has increased by around 700,000 people to 2.5 million, with ill health being the main reason reported by people aged 50 to 69. G. Smoking, obesity and mental-health-related issues alone are estimated to cost the UK economy almost £200 billion per year.

H. More than 7 million people are currently waiting for treatment on the NHS, cancer wait times targets continue to be missed across the board, and demand for GP services continues to outstrip supply. Conference believes that:

I. The UK should be one of the healthiest countries in the world.

II. Government should actively support its citizens to lead healthy lives by empowering individuals to improve their own health, creating healthier environments, and funding communities to decide how to better their health.

III. The Conservatives have squandered numerous opportunities to reform public health, and take easy steps to improve children's health in particular

IV. A key way to improve people's health and wellbeing, alleviate the pressure on NHS services and to spend tax- payers money more effectively, both now and in the future, is to invest in prevention by expanding public health initiatives and primary care.

Conference reaffirms commitments to:

- a) Closing many of the loopholes that exist in the current sugar levy and extending it to include juice- and milk-based drinks that are high in added sugar.
- b) Restricting how products high in fat, salt and sugar are marketed and advertised by retailers.
- c) Reducing smoking rates by introducing a new levy on tobacco companies to contribute to the costs of healthcare and smoking cessation services.
- d) Reversing government cuts to public health grants.
- e) Legislating for a right to clean air.

Conference calls for:

1. Improving the health of the nation to be the central driving mission for this and the next government, with a shift in focus to preventing ill health, tackling health inequalities, adopting an 'invest to save' funding model and the creation of a 'health creation' unit in the Cabinet Office to ensure that all legislation maximises opportunities for improving the nation's health.
2. The progressive restoration of the Public Health Grant to at least 2015 levels, with a proportion of these funds be set aside for local communities experiencing the worst health inequalities to co-design, co-deliver, and co-produce plans on how the money should be spent.
3. A concerted effort to improve children's health, including an end to the sale of energy drinks to under 16s; adverts promoting junk-food to only be allowed after 9pm to ensure that they are less likely to be seen by children, and for local authorities to be given the powers to limit the location and number of junk-food advertising and unhealthy food outlets in the vicinity of nurseries and schools.
4. The launch of a government-backed nation-wide public health campaign working with local authorities and Directors of Public Health, to get the country moving, encourage exercise and strength training, and forming healthier habits, backed by a dedicated bank holiday dedicated to healthier lifestyles events nationwide.
5. Higher food standards in schools, colleges, care homes, nurseries, prisons, universities and hospitals so that everyone in a publicly-funded setting is offered a healthy and balanced diet.
6. The halt of the dangerous use of vapes amongst children and non-smokers by introducing tougher regulation on vapes, such as standardised packaging, including health

warnings on types of vapes containing harmful ingredients, an end to toy-like advertising targeted at children, a ban on the sale of single use vapes, and the licensing of their sales, whilst recognising their role in smoking cessation for adult.

7. The development in association with local authorities of a range of public health clinics within community spaces (for example pharmacies, libraries, job centres and community centres), to reach those who are less likely or able to seek health care from their GP, which could offer blood pressure checks, diabetes checks, cholesterol checks, family planning clinics, mental health clinics, smoking cessation clinics; employers could also offer these 'health clinics' to their employees/volunteers where budgets are available.

8. An expansion of social prescribing by sharing best practice across the Primary Care sector, and investment in community projects that bring people together to combat loneliness.

9. A new kite-mark for health apps and digital tools that are clinically proven to help people lead healthier lives so patients can take control of their own health.

10. A consultation on a new national designation of 'critical health infrastructure' to cover local authority swimming pools and leisure centres for example, to ensure that people's access to affordable local health facilities is not overlooked in future national crises.

Background briefing

This motion updated and developed policy on health care, with a particular focus on preventive and public health.

It built on previous policy as set out in the policy paper 151 *A More Caring Society* (March 2021), the General Election Manifesto *Stop Brexit and Build a Brighter Future* (2019) and policy paper 137 *Save the NHS and Social Care by Stopping Brexit* (September 2019).

Reference Back: conference voted to reject a reference back.

Amendments: Conference passed one amendment and rejected one amendment.

Amendment one added a variety of minor amendments to local authorities and the co-production of services.

Amendment two would have deleted line 6 and introduced an alternative approach to vaping.

Separate Vote: Conference rejected a separate vote on lines 45-47

Vote on motion as amended: Conference passed the motion as amended.

Tackling the Housing Crisis (Homes and Planning Policy Paper)

Conference believes that:

I. England's housing market is profoundly unfair, with a secure home become increasingly impossible for millions of people, especially the young, less well-off and ethnic minorities.

II. Successive governments have pursued policies to benefit homeowners, without considering the impact on those without property while other policies such as cuts to stamp duty have increased demand for homes without increasing the supply, exacerbating the crisis.

III. A secure home is a fundamental right that all people should have.

IV. A fair deal is needed for housing, which provides for the needs of everyone, not just homeowners and meets the aspirations of millions of younger people and the less well-off to have the security that older generations and the wealthy enjoy.

Conference condemns a string of Conservative failures on housing, which has created England's housing crisis, including:

A. The 2015 promise to build 200,000 starter homes by 2020, none of which were built.

B. The failure to build replacement council houses for those lost under Right to Buy.

C. Only 21 of the 59 recommendations of the Grenfell Inquiry have been incorporated into the law and the delayed decision over cladding, which has left millions of people in mental anguish and uncertain finances unnecessarily.

D. Conservative MPs voting against proposals to ensure that rental properties are 'fit for human habitation' in 2017.

E. 'Help to Buy', condemned by the IMF, Mervyn King, the Institute of Directors and the Office for Budget Responsibility as ineffective and costing £21bn by Q2 2021.

F. The proposed introduction of Right to Buy for housing association properties, which would further reduce the availability of social housing.

G. The promised reform of leasehold rules, which have failed to materialise.

H. The promised abolition of unfair evictions in 2019 which is yet to be delivered. Around 1 million homes already have planning permission and are not yet built, with another 1 million homes in local plans that have not yet reached the planning stage.

Conference calls for a Fair Deal for housing, one which meets the aspirations of young people to own a home, provides affordable and secure social housing for the less well off, gives those in the private rental sector the stability and security that they need to live fulfilling lives and helps the UK meet its climate change goals.

Conference maintains its commitment to a national housing target of 380,000 new homes per year, to set a clear direction of travel and to indicate serious intent to address the housing crisis.

Conference believes that local housing targets need to exist as part of delivering an overall national target; local and central government share responsibility for delivering the housing we desperately need. Local Planning Authorities should co-operate at regional or sub-regional level to ensure that they deliver homes where they are needed.

Conference agrees that Liberal Democrats should put in place detailed policies to address the ongoing national failure to build enough homes. Only with an ambitious response to the housing crisis can people in desperate housing need have a realistic ambition to buy or rent the home they need.

Conference therefore endorses policy paper 155, Tackling the Housing Crisis, and in particular its proposals to improve housing in England by:

1. Building 150,000 social homes a year, including council houses, by the end of the next parliament.
2. Introducing a new approach to housing targets, that translates the national target into achievable local targets, creating sustainable communities and rewarding local authorities that support the housing growth agenda'.
3. Introducing binding targets for affordable and social housing set by the local authority, who would be allowed to build their own social and affordable housing to meet their targets, using borrowing to do so.
4. Building ten new garden cities to tackle the housing crisis.
5. Introducing a package of measures to tackle the climate crisis including:
 - a) Higher minimum standards for new builds.
 - b) Insulating all Britain's homes to the highest possible EPC standard in ten years.
 - c) Creating locally designed and implemented Environmental Improvement Areas.

6. Ensuring that all development has appropriate infrastructure, services and amenities in place, including, through integrating infrastructure and public service delivering into the planning process.

7. Abolishing residential leaseholds and cap ground rents to a nominal fee, so that everyone has control over their property.

8. Ensuring a fair deal for renters by:

a) Introducing a national register and minimum standards for landlords.

b) Extending the default tenancy to 3 years.

c) Introducing rent smoothing for the first 3 years of a tenancy.

d) Abolishing all eviction except where a tenant has been proven to be breaking the terms of the rental Agreement.

e) Giving social tenants more powers to run ballots, giving them greater opportunity and control, including the possibility to back new social homes.

9. Managing the impact of second homes and holiday lets by:

a) Giving local authorities new powers to control second homes and holiday lets including new planning classes.

b) Requiring second homeowners, holiday lets and investment property to pay their fair share of tax.

10. Ensuring our construction sector is on a sustainable footing by investing in skills, training and new technologies such as Modern Methods of Construction.

11. Encouraging meaningful community engagement in the planning process by:

a) Legally requiring developers and councils to seek the views of underrepresented groups.

b) Expanding Neighbourhood Planning across England.

c) Encouraging councils to develop innovative methods of democratic engagement in the Local Plan process.

d) Exploring methods for communities to back new developments, including giving residents of streets the ability to support more homes on their street.

12. Creating a fairer market in land by:

a) Reforming the Land Compensation Act so public infrastructure and housing can be delivered at a fair price.

b) Extending the Commercial Landowner Levy to land that has planning permission.

c) Ensuring full transparency in the market for developable land.

d) Continue and, if successful, expand trials of Community Land Auctions to ensure that local communities receive a fair share of the benefits of new development in their areas and to help fund vital local services

13. Exploring methods to encourage the sustainable use of existing buildings to allow people to make the most of their home, whilst complying with all relevant local plan requirements.

14. Encouraging development of existing brownfield sites with financial incentives and ensuring that affordable and social housing is included in these projects.

15. Introducing 'use-it-or-lose-it planning permission' for developers who fail to develop land that has been given full planning permission.

16. Strengthening the investment in infrastructure works to free up sites where permission has been agreed.

17. Ensuring that when offices are converted to residential properties through permitted development the local planning authority has the power to insist social and affordable housing is included.

18. Ensuring vacant land and buildings in public ownership can be prioritised for development projects which deliver public good socially, economically or environmentally by:

a) Giving councils the power to mandate that public land is developed for social housing only.

b) Introducing guidance for central government departments and arms-length bodies to ensure social value is factored in when publicly owned assets are sold off.

Background briefing

This motion and the accompanying policy paper updated and developed policy on homes, housing targets, planning and renters rights.

They built on previous policy as set out in the policy motion *Building Communities* (September 2021), the General Election Manifesto *Stop Brexit and Build a Brighter Future* (2019) and policy paper 104 *Decent Homes for All* (September 2012).

Amendments: Conference passed three amendments.

The first amendment added a target of 380,000 homes a year to the paper.

The second amendment added several changes to planning permission rules and development of brownfield sites.

The third amendment added policies on public engagement.

Vote on motion as amended: Conference passed the motion as amended.

Tackling the Nature Crisis (Natural Environment Policy Paper)

Conferences notes with concern that:

A. The UK has lost nearly half of its biodiversity since the Industrial Revolution and is ranked in the bottom 10% in the world and the worst among G7 nations for biodiversity.

B. The Conservative Government has missed its 2020 target for 50% of Sites of Special Scientific Interest to be in favourable condition and for UK seas to meet Good Environmental Status.

C. The Conservative Government is set to miss its target for 75% of rivers and streams to be in good condition by 2027, with just 14% of surface waters in good ecological condition in England and 0% in good overall condition.

D. There has been a global decline of 68% in animal population sizes since 1970.

E. The climate emergency and the ecological emergencies are intrinsically linked, and that there has been insufficient action in the UK and globally to tackle the climate emergency.

Conference recognises that the ecological emergency is one of the greatest threats to life on Earth, and to people's health, wellbeing and prosperity, and without urgent and effective action domestically and internationally nature and human life will be put in serious jeopardy.

Conference also believes that the Liberal Democrats are the only party that understands the scale of the challenge, and has the right solutions to deliver a vibrant and thriving natural world with clean rivers, seas, lakes and air that will safeguard the wellbeing of present and future generations.

Conference therefore endorses policy paper 156, Tackling the Nature Crisis, in particular its proposals to:

1. Reverse the decline of nature by 2030 and double nature by 2050 by:

- a) Increasing the protected area network from 8% of the land to at least 16%.
- b) Doubling the area of the most important wildlife habitats across England.
- c) Doubling the abundance of species in the UK from the current baseline.

d) Empowering and funding local government to increase the network of local nature reserves and to ensure they are well managed, to move to nature-friendly management policy of council land, including highway verges and farm land.

2. Introduce a 'Right to Nature', which would include:

a) A new Environmental Rights Act, which would recognise everyone's human right to a healthy environment and guarantee access to environmental justice.

b) Establishing a new Open Environment Standard.

c) Introducing a Duty of Care for businesses to protect the environment.

3. Reduce the UK's environmental impact globally by:

a) Mandating disclosure of impacts on nature in major financial and business sectors.

b) Upholding the highest environmental standards in our trade deals.

c) Aligning with the EU's rules at a minimum and rejoining the EU REACH programme and the European Chemical Agency.

4. Manage our land for nature by:

a) Providing a fair deal for farmers with a long-term funding guarantee, based on public money for public goods, to pay for a shift to a wildlife-friendly, high welfare, climate-positive and economically thriving farming sector.

b) Establishing a new Environmental Markets Authority, setting standards to ensure all markets work for nature and climate, and eliminating greenwash.

c) Introducing a strategic Land and Sea Use Framework to effectively balance competing demands on our land and oceans.

d) Introducing a new Sustainable Land Standard.

5. Manage our seas for nature by:

a) Reforming marine spatial planning to deliver a new, integrated approach, focused on sustainability.

- b) Reforming the fishing quota allocation system to reward the most sustainable fleet, and ensure all catch limits are set at sustainable levels.
- c) Putting in place effective management rules, to support the ecology of each protected area, including a ban on bottom trawling in marine protected areas.
- d) Ensuring at least 30% of our seas will be fully or highly protected by 2030.
- e) Funding coastal local government authorities to increase the monitoring of the health of coastal waters and to develop ways to increase the communication of the results.

6. Manage our lakes, rivers and streams for nature by:

- a) Taking urgent measures, including mandating major infrastructure upgrades in the sewage system and implementing natural catchment solutions, to end sewage pollution, prevent harmful run-off from agriculture, and ensure developments do not add to the pollution burden on our precious freshwaters.
- b) Introducing nutrient budgeting in English catchments, requiring projects in vulnerable areas to demonstrate 'nutrient negativity' before they proceed.
- c) Setting new 'blue flag' standard and introducing a 'blue corridor' programme for rivers, streams and lakes to ensure clean, healthy water.
- d) Abolishing Ofwat and replacing it with a regulator with real and meaningful powers.

7. Make the economy and government work for nature by:

- a) Delivering an Environment and Wellbeing Budget, introducing a new fiscal rule to ensure that tax and spending plans are sustainable and implementing a green finance plan.
- b) Undertaking regular systematic reviews to ensure that green taxes and spending make up an increasing proportion of the overall fiscal picture.
- c) Increasing the tax reliefs offered for greener choices and phase out subsidies for polluting industries.
- d) Ensuring that the twin purposes of nature's recovery and climate stability are written into the guiding statutory purposes of all relevant public bodies.

8. Reduce the UK's resource consumption by:

- a) Embedding circular economy principles to reduce use of raw materials and minimise pollution at home and abroad.
- b) Ensuring the right incentives are in place to cut back on waste and overconsumption, including comprehensive deposit return schemes and Extended Producer Responsibility.
- c) Introducing standards for repairability, interoperability, sustainable construction and Reusability.
- d) Allowing local government to put sustainability at the core of purchasing policy and fully funding councils for any cost involved in delivering this.

9. Make planning work for nature by:

- a) Reforming the planning system to make environmental improvement and quality of life explicit purposes of planning.
- b) Funding local authorities to invest in their planning departments to ensure they are able to properly assess plans for environmental improvement, and resourcing local authorities to properly defend planning appeals when they deem applications to be inadequate on environmental improvement grounds.
- b) Improving biodiversity net gain requirements by increasing the length of time that net gain habitat must be maintained from 30 years to 120 years and increasing the net gain requirement for major developments from 10% in smaller sites up to 100% in larger greenfield sites.
- c) Empowering Local Nature Recovery Strategies to identify a new Wild Belt for nature's recovery.
- d) Completing our Nature Recovery Network by strengthening and completing the network of England's environmental protected areas and improving the management and funding of AONBs and National Parks for nature.

10. Tackle the climate emergency by:

- a) Mapping out the areas that are most important for nature and climate and extend planning protection and investment to those areas.

- b) Setting new standards, including a Blue Carbon Standard and a Soils Carbon Standard.
- c) Protecting the UK's most important carbon store with a complete ban on horticultural peat use, burning heather on peatlands, and restoring the peatlands that have been damaged.
- d) Doubling woodland cover by 2050.
- e) Empowering local government to continue to develop and deliver practical local action to tackle climate change.

Background briefing

This motion and the accompanying policy paper updated and developed policy on the natural environment, including farming, fishing, planning, biodiversity, water quality and resource use.

They built on previous policy as set out in the policy motions *Ending Sewage Discharges* (March 2022) and *Back British Farmers* (March 2022), the General Election Manifesto *Stop Brexit and Build a Brighter Future* (2019), policy paper 139 *Tackling the Climate Emergency* (September 2019), policy paper 129 *A Rural Future: Time to Act* (March 2018), and policy paper 93 *Our Natural Heritage* (2009).

Amendments: Conference passed one amendment.

The amendment added reference to local government and the role it can play in tackling the nature crisis.

Vote on motion as amended: Conference passed the motion as amended.

Constitutional Amendments

Membership Subscriptions and Federal Levy

Conference agrees:

1. To continue to freeze the existing minimum membership rates (£15 for new members, £12 for members from before 2022).
2. To continue to freeze the £6 minimum for those in receipt of or entitled to state benefits, and the £6 minimum for members paying via Young Liberals.
3. To drop the recommended membership rate, as this is no longer used in our membership work (for example, people are encouraged to pay more by reference to the average membership subscription, not the recommended rate).
4. That nothing in this motion shall prevent a State Party from setting via their internal procedures higher recommended or minimum subscription rates or from introducing additional concessionary rates.
5. That the Federal Levy shall be reduced from 55 per cent to 50 per cent. Conference notes that the Federal and State Parties have committed to implement financial mechanisms that uphold the principles of Federalism, removing any negative financial impact on either the Federal or State Parties resulting from this amendment.

Amendments: Conference passed one amendment.

The amendment reduced the federal to 50 per cent.

Vote on motion as amended: Conference passed the motion as amended.

Standing order amendment: Limiting the Number of Constitutional Amendments and Standing Order Amendments that can be Discussed At Any One Conference

Conference voted to refer back the motion.

Standing order amendment: Speaker Card Selection

Conference voted to reject the motion.

Standing order amendment: Tidying-up Standing Orders

Conference notes that:

- a) Conference standing orders currently do not allow for 'hybrid' conferences, where some voting members participate in person and some participate online.
- b) Recent experience has revealed a number of issues on which conference standing orders lack clarity or could be improved.

Conference therefore agrees to the following amendments to

conference standing orders:

1. In Glossary of Terms, delete the definition of 'Emergency motion' and replace with: 'A proposal which derives from a significant recent development which occurred after the deadline for submission of motions. Emergency motions

must be brief (maximum 500 words).'

2. In SO 1.3 (Right to submit agenda items) para (b), after 'Federal Council' insert 'Federal Conference Committee', and delete last sentence 'Business motions, standing order amendments and secondary standing order amendments

may also be submitted by the Federal Conference Committee'.

3. In SO 8.2 (Withdrawal of motions and amendments), add at end: 'A request to withdraw a motion may be submitted to Saturday 23 September cont. conference either by the movers of the motion or the Committee'.

4. In SO 9.1 (The method of voting), add at end: 'and by voting members voting securely online'.

5. In SO 11.4 (Separate vote), in lines 10–11, delete: 'by the same deadline as that for emergency motions' and insert: 'no later than 48 hours before the opening of conference'.

6. In SO 11.6 (Suspension of standing orders), para (a), insert after first sentence: 'Such a motion may contain no more than one proposed change to the agenda or conduct of debate'.

7. In SO 12.4 (Supplementary questions to reports), lines 7-8, delete 'two minutes' and insert '1 minute'.

Amendments: Conference passed one amendment.

The amendment amended line 7. to say '1 minute' instead of '30 seconds'.

Vote on motion as amended: Conference passed the motion as amended.

Young Liberals' Representatives to Party Committees

Conference resolves to amend the Constitution as follows:

1. In Article 10.2 (I), add new H:

H. one representative of the Affiliated Organisation representing youth and students, elected by its own procedures (the Youth and Student Affiliated Organisation may appoint a substitute member should the elected member be unable to attend a specific meeting of the FPC).

2. In Article 11.2 (I), add new D. and renumber accordingly:

D. one representative of the Affiliated Organisation representing youth and students, elected by its own procedures (the Youth and Student Affiliated Organisation may appoint a substitute member should the elected member be unable to attend a specific meeting of the FCC).

The current Federal Party constitution is available at www.libdems.org.uk/constitution. The existing text of the relevant parts of the articles amended above are as follows:

ARTICLE 10: The Federal Policy Committee

10.2 The FPC shall consist of the following:

I. voting members:

A. the Leader who shall act as its Chair;

B. six members of the Parliamentary Group as defined in Article 17.5, normally including at least one from each Parliamentary Party;

C. the President;

D. one person elected by the Federal Communications & Elections Committee from amongst its membership;

E. two principal local authority councillors, elected by principal local authority councillors of the Party from among their own number (including, for both purposes, Police and Crime Commissioners and directly elected Mayors);

F. one representative of each State Party, elected by its internal procedures (State Parties may appoint a substitute member should the elected member be unable to attend a specific meeting of the FPC); and

G. one more person than the total number elected or appointed under paragraphs (a) to (f) above, who shall be party members elected by all members of the Party except that persons who, at the date of close of nominations for election under this paragraph, are members of any of the Parliamentary Parties listed in Article 17 shall not be eligible to be candidates for election under this paragraph. Casual vacancies amongst this group shall be filled in accordance with the election regulations.

ARTICLE 11: The Federal Conference Committee

11.2 The Conference Committee shall consist of:

I. Voting members:

A. the President;

B. the Chief Whip of the Parliamentary Party in the House of Commons or their substitute from within the Parliamentary Group as defined in Article 17.5;

C. one representative of each State Party, elected by its internal procedures (State Parties may appoint a substitute member should the elected member be unable to attend a specific meeting of the FCC);

D. one person elected by the Federal Board from amongst its Members;

E. two persons elected by the Federal Policy Committee from amongst its members;

F. one person elected by the Federal Communications & Elections Committee from amongst its members;

G. one person elected by the Federal People Development Committee from amongst its members; and

H. 12 persons elected by party members. Casual vacancies amongst this group shall be filled in accordance with the election regulations.

Amendments: Conference passed one amendment.

The amendment moved the placing of the amendment within the constitution so that an additional member would not be added to the committees.

Vote on motion as amended: Conference passed the motion as amended.

Report Questions and Answers

Federal Conference Committee Report

Q1. Submitted by Toby Keynes.

At Spring Conference this year, a number of friends attending online told me they were unable to cast their votes for some sessions. Which sessions were affected, what proportion of members trying to vote are believed to have been unable for each of these sessions, and how confident are you that members won't have similar problems this Conference?

Answer by Nick da Costa

We had a very small number of people have issues, and had our team providing remote support. The numbers were small throughout the conference weekend, and it was not focused on one particular session or not, but based on probability of course the first session or two had the most issues, as this was where people were using the platform for the first time and maybe were not familiar with how it worked. It would have been a tiny percentage of people who had issue. Using the online MiVoice voting for Spring was also a useful exercise for us to work on improvements for the future. We've made a number of changes to the system and processes so that we will be able to link up better experiences for our members and to reduce the number of issues that people may have and speed up response times. Firstly, the vote will be launched within the auditorium, which should assist with problems relating to timing delays. There is a dedicated support email address which will be on the conference live webpage, within MiVoice, in the Conference Daily and the Facebook group too. Additionally, we've changed processes within the office/back-end so that we are able to free up staff time to assist with people if they have any issues or problems.

Supplementary question by Toby Keynes.

At Spring Conference, some speakers had to cope with abuse while speaking. Are steps being taken to reduce heckling?

Answer by Nick da Costa

People should keep in mind the Code of Conduct, chairs will be reminding people throughout.

Q2. Submitted by Joe Norris.

In your report, you welcome first time attendees. What steps have FCC taken to ensure first timers and returning attendees alike know where to go for safeguarding concerns?

Answer by Nick da Costa

Information regarding welfare and safeguarding is available in the Conference Directory, the Conference Website and the app. If members are concerned please do also speak to our

amazing and brilliant Stewards - who you can see around the Conference Venues in their distinctive yellow t-shirt and lovely smiles! Additionally all members of the party have access to the Health Assured Support Helpline which is available via 0800 028 0199. Additionally, if you have a concern, please raise it with a Steward or FCC member immediately, so we are aware and can potentially take action.

Q3. Submitted by Fraser Graham.

Do you think it is proper that chairs and aides of debates are being expected to police all speeches for compliance with the code of conduct as well as ensuring an orderly debate?

Answer by Nick da Costa

I have addressed this in my previous answer.

Q4: Submitted by James Bliss.

Does FCC recognise that scheduling the GE Manifesto consultation, an important place that members input into the next manifesto, and the FB + others report session at the same time could be a serious conflict in the membership effectively holding board and council to account?

Answer by Nick da Costa

Yes. It was not ideal and unfortunately, we have many diary clashes at conference which are not ideal. We do try and avoid them where possible, but in this case it was not. I will take on board your feedback for next time.

Supplementary question by James Bliss.

Can I confirm that leafleting within BIC is not allowed?

Answer by Nick da Costa

That is correct.

Q5. Submitted by Joe Norris

From its mid-July meeting, what updates can you share from the Innovation Working Group?

Answer by Nick da Costa

The IWG and FCC have been working on prioritisation of potential projects, and we are now looking into those projects further to start establishing feasibility.

Q6. Submitted by Joe Norris

With the rising cost of living, what are FCC doing to maintain and expand the support offered by the Conference Access Fund?

Answer by Nick da Costa

The Conference Access Fund is an especially important resource for members who need support at or supporting getting to conference. We are highly reliant on member donations for this, and are looking at how we can first ensure we are able to generate more donations to the Conference Access Fund, so that we can support as many members as possible. This forms part of the work of the Innovation Working Group, and will be looking at communications, and promotion. In conjunction, we are going to work with various party groups to make sure that the Conference Access Fund is appropriately promoted, so that people are aware of what support it can offer.

Q7. Submitted by Adam Belcher

On what basis would a motion be rejected if an identical motion had been accepted for the cancelled conference last autumn?

Answer by Nick da Costa

This can be down to a multitude of reasons, and hypothetically it could be rejected due to lack of time or due to other more salient motions on the agenda.

Q8. Submitted by Joe Norris

What has been your committee's worst mistake, and what have you learnt from it?

Answer by Nick da Costa

I would defend the decisions that the committee has made during my tenure as Chair.

Q9. Submitted by Joe Norris

Two of the biggest carbon dioxide emitters in the world, why do you think it is appropriate that BP and Chevron are at this conference?

Q10. Submitted by Joe Norris

Why did FCC select 'F31: Tackling the Housing Crisis', which seeks to abolish the national housing target - a policy committed to by conference only two years prior?

Answer by Nick da Costa

This was a FPC working paper, which had been rejected from debate at A22, as it was seeking to overturn policy passed at the previous Autumn Conference. The FCC usually states that motions will not be accepted if they are on the same paper within the last two years, and as two years had passed it was felt that the paper was to be accepted. Additionally, in my personal view, the debate was a cracking debate and I think highlighted some of the best elements of our party. It was a delight to chair that debate.

Q11. Submitted by James Bliss

Both F17 and F44 have within them a ban on disposable vapes, which is by no means an uncontroversial policy in a liberal party, does FCC recognise it could be an issue selecting multiple agenda items that seek to sneak in the same policy at one conference?

Answer by Nick da Costa

No. There would be no issue. If F17 had the ban overturned, then likely FCC would have proposed an emergency draft in amendment to update F44

Q12. Submitted by Judith Bailey

What steps is FCC taking to discourage or sanction abusive language being shouted at conference speakers, as happened at Spring Conference?

Answer by Nick da Costa

FCC reminds all members that when speaking at conference and when engaging with other members we should always take into consideration the Members Code of Conduct. We are all members of the same party, and whilst we do disagree on items, we should do so with respect. People should also be aware that if they ignore or step over the Members Code of Conduct this could open them up to complaints via the party's complaint system, or exclusion from Conference by the Co-Chief Steward.

Q13. Submitted by Gareth Epps

Why has FCC not acted to deal with the issue arising at York Conference of the abuse of motions to amend the Constitution (and/or Conference Standing Orders) that are egregiously at odds with the Party's fundamental values?

Answer by Nick da Costa

FCC has been trying to as part of our Constitution and Standing Orders Working Group. (UPDATED AFTER CONFERENCE): Unfortunately, our motion failed on this, and the FCC accepted the Reference Back at Conference and we will be working on this further.

Q14. Submitted by John Grout

Can FCC explain why there was a police perimeter outside the York Barbican at the end of F15 at this year's Spring Conference?

Answer by Nick da Costa

Not sure! I didn't see one. I am aware that the York Police did decide to unilaterally send a team down to Conference for some 'general engagement' but this was not pre planned or coordinated with HQ.

Q15. Submitted by John Grout

Does FCC feel that the rules around submission selection of questions to party bodies at Conference need to be revised to better-ensure that repetitious and vexatious questions, or those creating a hostile environment for a protected group, are discouraged?

Answer by Nick da Costa

Yes. The challenge is that we do welcome more questions from members, but that time is limited and we are inevitably not able to answer almost all of the questions. However, I do not think increasing reports time would solve this question, as it would reduce the amount of time we have available for policy debates. Based on my calculation of Spring 2023 questions, if we were able to take all of the questions submitted, it would be taken up the whole day-and-a-half of Conference.

Q16. Submitted by Trish Kilgour

Is FCC aware of any instances, whatsoever, of trans/non-binary members being harassed/endangered at Spring Conference 2023 by party members with gender critical beliefs?

Answer by Nick da Costa

Yes. I am aware of some cases.

Q17. Submitted by Fraser Graham

Have FCC noticed any increase in new people submitting motions for consideration, or is it still the case that most motions come from the same few people? What can the Federal and Regional parties be doing to encourage a wider range of submissions for conference?

Answer by Nick da Costa

We have seen some slight increase in new people submitting motions for Conference; however, it is still generally similar people submitting motions. There is more variety, however, with regards to amendments being submitted to Conference. I would love to see more variety in items being submitted to Conference, and would welcome support from state and regional parties in this matter.

Q18. Submitted by Fraser Graham

Do you think it is proper that chairs and aides of debates are being expected to police all speeches for compliance with the code of conduct as well as ensuring an orderly debate?

Answer by Nick da Costa

No. However, this is not the case. I would like to refer you to the article written by Candy Piercy on Lib Dem Voice before conference: LINK:
<https://www.libdemvoice.org/in-support-of-robust-and-respectful-debate-at-conference-73852.html>

Q19. Submitted by Michael Berwick-Gooding

Please can you state how many people registered for the in-person Spring Conference in York and how many registered for online access? Please can you state how many of each group had a party staff or parliamentary staff voting pass?

Answer by Nick da Costa

Spring 2023 had 1647 attendees, of which 1378 were members and 376 attended online. 4 members of party staff had a voting pass and 21 parliamentary staff had voting passes.

Q20. Submitted by Michael Berwick-Gooding

Yet again we find ourselves on the South Coast of England for a conference, resulting in many members having to make difficult decisions on the cost of transport and accommodation and the time spent on a train vs air travel. Are we ever likely to see Autumn Conference return to a more central and affordable location?

Answer by Nick da Costa

The FCC and Conference Office are continually looking at alternative venues for both the Spring and Autumn Conference. The challenge that we face is that many of the other suitable locations, especially for Autumn Conference are at a minimum 2-3 times as expensive as the venues that we choose. In some cases some venues would have an additional cost base on conference of around 10x. This is challenging, and of course we would love to see Conference in other locations. However, the current financial situation makes this challenging.

Federal Policy Committee Report

Q1. Submitted by Joe Norris

What has been your committee's worst mistake, and what have you learnt from it?

Answer by Lucy Nethsingha

The last few manifestos have had fantastic content but haven't told our story very well. We've put more effort into it this time, which you can see in the pre-manifesto being debated tomorrow.

Q2. Submitted by John Grout and Joe Norris

The timetable laid out for policy paper consultations goes to Autumn 2024, which may well take us beyond the next General Election. Does this reflect FPC's view of these areas' respective priority for the party, and how will FPC ensure that these policy areas are adequately covered in our manifesto, should the election happen first? What would happen to any working group should a GE be called before they can conclude their work?

Answer by Lucy Nethsingha

We commissioned these well aware that there could be a General Election in that time. They will continue as planned whether a GE or not, though it is not impossible GE might cause a slight delay to their timetable. One of a working group's key roles is to be a forum for discussion of these issues within the party, so any discussion about them can be fed into the manifesto if needed. Not areas we envisage being hugely controversial within the party.

Q3. Submitted by James Bliss

Housing targets are a policy that in recent memory have been approved by conference on at least two occasions. Why does FPC feel it appropriate to attempt to subvert the settled will of conference by sneaking in abandoning targets in a policy paper, whose work started around the same time as conference last approved targets?

Answer by Lucy Nethsingha

Conference will have the opportunity to debate this important issue on Monday, it has been two years since this was last debated. I don't think it's been snuck in, it's very clear in the motion and paper.

Supplementary question by James Bliss

Do you think it is appropriate that party literature is gaslighting people?

Answer by Lucy Nethsingha

I have not seen the literature. I don't think the party is gaslighting people.

Q4. Submitted by Tony Vickers

When will FPC return to the work of the last Local Government Finance working party whose work was subsumed into the 2011 Tax Commission but which that body never dealt with?

Answer by Lucy Nethsingha

Tax is an issue that the FPC regularly looks at issues of tax, but there are currently no plans to look at local government taxes at the moment.

Supplementary question by Tony Vickers

It's been 25 years since we last looked at this and it's a major issue.

Answer by Lucy Nethsingha

The Party will want to look at tax policy in the future. The Committee discussed it at some length but decided not to for this conference.

Q5. Submitted by Tony Vickers

What work has been undertaken recently or is planned in future to look at inter-generational wealth inequality and appeal to younger voters who create wealth rather than privatise it?

Answer by Lucy Nethsingha

We are always looking at tackling inequality wherever we find it, as well as ways to support younger people.

Q6. Submitted by Zoe Hollowood

Does FPC agree that the Equality Act 2010 is an important piece of legislation in protecting groups with different protected characteristics from discrimination and harassment? Will FPC agree to a written commitment to maintain the Equality Act 2010 in the Party's manifesto?

Answer by Lucy Nethsingha

As our constitution makes clear, equality is one of the party's fundamental values, and we will certainly reflect that as we develop the manifesto

Of course the party supported the Equality Act when it was passed and has continued to support it since. It's an important piece of legislation that protects hard-won rights and equalities. I'm not aware of any moves to repeal the Equality Act, but I'm sure we would oppose them.

Obviously I'm not going to write the manifesto for you now, but we are always keen for input from members either through the official consultation sessions or any other channels.

Q7. Submitted by Fraser Graham

What is our manifesto going to say about Europe?

Answer by Lucy Nethsingha

Europe is an important issue, the pre-manifesto shows where our current policy is.

Q8. Submitted by Michael Berwick-Gooding

Have the 750 members who attended the online manifesto consultation sessions been surveyed to ask if they believed that their attending these sessions had any influence on what is in the pre-manifesto document? Have the survey results from the eleven thousand members who responded to the pre-manifesto online survey been collated? And if so, can the results be published in the members' only section of our website?

Answer by Lucy Nethsingha

We have not surveyed the members who attend the consultation events, but their views have been fed into the development of the pre-manifesto.

Federal International Relations Committee Report

Q1. Submitted by Joe Norris

What has been your committee's worst mistake, and what have you learnt from it?

Answer by David Chalmers

Thank you for your question. As I only took over as Chair of FIRC in January it is difficult for me to pinpoint a major mistake that we have made in the past few months. However, my meetings with our sister parties from Estonia and Latvia in the summer reminded me that – as a party and as a liberal family – we should have taken more heed of their concerns regarding Russia. The former Soviet Republics tried to warn us about Russia and its intentions towards its neighbours – especially after the invasion of Crimea in 2014 – but we preferred to ignore their warnings. German support for Nord Stream 2 and their dependence on Russian energy supplies should have been given greater attention and acknowledged as a reason for their reaction to those warnings and their support for Russia.

When I was involved with launching the Kaleidoscope Trust in 2011, we were aware of Russia's ill treatment of the LGBT+ community and the infringement of their human rights and should have taken this more on board. It is always easy in hindsight to have a clearer vision of what would have been the best action or position to take, but it is important that we defend our core liberal values and allow them to guide our international policy. I hope that by listening to others and their experiences and reflecting better on our liberal values, that FIRC under my Chairmanship will try to avoid making mistakes and in doing so better assist the party's foreign policy and international relations.

Q2. Submitted by Fraser Graham

Given the rolling back of LGBT+ rights in parts of the USA (such as Florida), what can we as liberals be doing to campaign internationally to prevent the loss of already hard-earned rights for the LGBT+ community?

Answer by David Chalmers

Thank you for your question regarding what we as liberals can do to support LGBT+ rights internationally as this issue is very important to me and to the work of FIRC.

In 2011 I was one of the cofounders of the Kaleidoscope Trust – the leading charity supporting and campaigning for international LGBT+ rights, and it is this issue that first brought me into politics. It was witnessing the difference that Lynne Featherstone, as an individual politician, could achieve in bringing about same sex marriage that helped me realise that political parties can be real agents of change and that the LibDems, with our liberal values, were my political home.

When I first stood for a seat on FIRC in 2019 and again in 2022, I made it quite clear in my manifesto that support for LGBT+ rights are an important issue for me and should be important for our party. Having been elected as Chair of FIRC in January, I shall continue to make this a priority of the work of FIRC. I am not alone in my position – I am supported by the other elected members of FIRC and many of those representing party bodies and party Committees, for whom LGBT+ rights are a key issue. The Lib Dems are recognised globally for our leading stance on human rights, and I want us to take the message, we have

been making so clearly and eloquently for LGBT+ rights, forward to encompass fighting for the rights of women, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, refugees and other marginalised groups in society. A group of us attended the Congress of the Canadian Liberals in Ottawa in May and it was revealing to learn how our Canadian sister party has made support for LGBT+ and women's rights central to their foreign policy whilst in government and are keen to work with the LibDems in this area.

I was privileged to witness Hilary Clinton's speech to the UN in Geneva in 2011, where she declared the fight for LGBT+rights to be the fight of our generation. I agree with her. Over the past year the LibDems have helped to establish the Rainbow Platform in ALDE – the Alliance of Liberal and Democrats for Europe – which aims to encourage and support LGBT+ candidates and members in our European sister parties. I was named a Rainbow Ambassador last year and the LibDems were one of the first parties to sign the Dublin Declaration supporting LGBT+ rights which now has 45 of our sister parties as signatories. In 2021 working with Nowoczesna our sister party in Poland, the LibDems established the campaign -Protect our Twins – which used twinning relationships between town in the UK and Poland to support LGBT+ communities in Poland which had been designated LGBT+ free zones. At the ALDE Council meeting in Bratislava in December last year we brought forward a motion calling for our sister parties to enact legislation recognising LGBT+ hate crime, which was strengthened at the ALDE Congress in Stockholm in May through our motion calling for a European Framework to combat hate speech, which was endorsed unanimously by our European sister parties. In my meetings with our sister parties in Estonia and Latvia, I am told that they were inspired by the LibDems to bring about same sex marriage. In the summer I participated in Riga Pride – walking alongside our Latvian sister parties to acknowledge and support their bravery. I would like to see us as a party take part in more such international Pride events.

The Lib Dem delegation to the ALDE Congress in Stockholm in May was one of our most diverse – enabling us to contribute to debates with our own life experiences. Helen Belcher's intervention in the debate on trans rights was outstanding and warmly received by delegates. I would like to encourage more party members to consider putting themselves to join ALDE delegations.

At the Liberal International meeting in Ottawa in May the LibDems brought forward a motion condemning the Anti Homosexuality Bill in Uganda with the full support of our sister parties in Africa and we have garnered support for LGBT+ rights through Liberal International's Human Rights Committee. We were able to ensure that a similar motion was adopted at the ALDE Congress in Stockholm which led to the debate in the European Parliament, where LGBT+ activists were invited to speak. We can and are able to make a difference.

At the Fringe debate hosted by LGBT+ LibDEMs in Bournemouth Layla Moran MP – our Foreign Affairs Spokesperson and I reaffirmed our party's support for LGBT+ refugees and the debate highlighted the barriers LGBT+ refugees often face in seeking asylum in the UK. Debates of this kind raise awareness of these important issues and I shall be looking to see how we can engage with our sister parties to explore finding a common solution. I should like to register my thanks to Layla and our Parliamentary team for their support for international LGBT+ rights, by raising questions in Parliament and speaking up in relevant debates.

Unfortunately, whilst in some countries there have been improvements in LGBT+ rights in recent years – in others there have been moves to restrict those rights. I believe that as individuals and through our political party based on liberal values, we have a responsibility to take the lead and stand up for the human rights of those who are marginalised or oppressed for who they are. As Chair of FIRC I shall endeavour to make that happen. Party members can become involved in supporting LGBT+ rights through the various party Associated Organisations like LDEG, LIBG, LGBT+ LibDEMs and LD4SOS, who include supporting LGBT+ rights around the world in their work. As Chair of FIRC I am keen to encourage and support the AOs in this field of work.

I hope that I have been able to answer your question effectively and demonstrate how important LGBT+ rights are to FIRC and that as its Chair I shall strive to ensure that it remains a key part of our work.

Parliamentary Party Reports

Q1. Submitted by Callum Robertson

The Lib Dems have a track record standing up for refugees. What more work do we have planned to support resettling of refugees from Afghanistan?

Answer by Dick Newby and Wendy Chamberlain

The Conservative Government broke its promise to Afghans. We said that we'd support those who'd supported us in Afghanistan - along with those under particular threat from the Taliban. But the Government has failed to.

There have been operational issues every step of the way - from housing refugees in unsuitable hotels, to poor communication from the Home Office.

We have kept up the pressure, calling on the Government to fix these issues immediately and ensure that Afghan refugees are properly supported. As Chair of the cross party Parliamentary Group on Afghan women and girls, I have been advocating that the UK Government honours its obligations towards them in Parliament.

We also continue to advocate for broader, comprehensive reform to the asylum system - examples like the Afghan resettlement scheme are an example of how the current system is broken - and that means creating long-term safe and legal routes for refugees in the UK. We have long advocated for these in Parliament and beyond, most recently tabling amendments to the Illegal Migration Bill that would have created:

- An expanded, properly-funded refugee resettlement scheme.
- A new scheme to resettle unaccompanied child refugees from elsewhere in Europe.
- Humanitarian visas that would allow asylum seekers to travel to the UK safely to proceed with their claims.

Of course, the best way to go about implementing this type of change is getting the Conservatives out of government. This remains our top priority as a parliamentary party.

Q2 Submitted by Elaine Bagshaw

I was disappointed that post the passage of the illegal migration bill, the government has effectively criminalised asylum seeking. What more can we do to oppose this backwards step?

Answer by Dick Newby and Wendy Chamberlain

We absolutely share your disappointment. Liberal Democrats opposed this legislation every step of the way - from voting against it at every turn, to tabling countless amendments to try to improve some of the worst aspects of the bill.

Now, we have said we want to scrap the Illegal Migration Act in full – making us the only political party with that clear commitment.

At the same time, we want to go further - which means creating safe and legal routes to sanctuary in the UK, limiting the use of immigration detention to 28 days, and ending the Conservative's discriminatory Hostile Environment policy.

Q3. Submitted by Candy Piercy

I am concerned by reports that the Tory Lords are opposing Wera Hobhouse's Worker Protection Bill. Why are they trying to block these protections, especially for women in the workplace?

Answer by Dick Newby and Wendy Chamberlain

Firstly, we are incredibly proud of this Bill, of Wera Hobhouse for introducing it, and Lorely Burt for carrying it through the Lords. It is very disappointing that a group of backbench Conservative peers decided to play politics on such an important issue.

The Bill amends the Equality Act to strengthen the legislative protections against workplace harassment. This will help create the safer working environments that everyone deserves. What we saw in the Lords was essentially an argument over language and technicalities. A group of Conservative backbench Peers argued the language would place too significant a burden on employers to protect employees from harassment. This was specifically around the phrase "all reasonable steps."

We argued that the Equality Act already contains a provision that requires an employment tribunal to assess whether an employer "took all reasonable steps" to stop the harassment before determining legal liability so our Bill wasn't creating any new parameters. This led to some negotiations between us, the Government, and backbench Conservative Peers. We were able to reach a settlement that diluted the language of the Bill in exchange for allowing some of its key provisions to pass.

Despite this, what we will achieve by taking this Bill forward is still incredible, and it will make a material difference to the lives of so many women. We now look forward to October 20th, when we expect the Bill to conclude in the Commons and seek Royal Assent.

Q4. Submitted by Adam Robertson

Should Technical Groups be given permission to be formed in the House of Commons, such as the Irish Dail allows?

Answer by Dick Newby and Wendy Chamberlain

The UK Parliament and Irish Dail do not have easily comparable internal arrangements given the vast difference between First Past the Post and Proportional Representation (via Single Transferable Vote) systems. Structures which create opportunities for Independent TDs do

not obviously translate as useful into the context of a Parliament dominated by a two-party system.

The UK does have, to an extent, relevant equivalents, Parliamentarians can form All Party Political Groups. These provide the cross-party interaction which, among other things, makes technical groups attractive as a mechanism for democratic engagement.

We would encourage members interested in this topic to add their thoughts to any future consultations on electoral and constitutional reform. Overarching reform would be necessary before specific details such as this can be usefully explored.

Q5. Submitted by George Cunningham

3.5 million British citizens abroad will be enfranchised by the next General Election.

How will our MPs serve their overseas constituents and issues better in Parliament?

Answer by Dick Newby and Wendy Chamberlain

Liberal Democrats continue to stand up for millions of overseas British citizens. We were pleased that, earlier in this Parliament, the Government finally changed the law and scrapped the 15 year rule for overseas voters. That was a campaign victory for the Liberal Democrats - it is great news that millions of British citizens will, once again, be able to exercise their democratic right and vote.

We continue to make the case for overseas constituencies in Parliament whenever the opportunity allows. Back in 2020, we campaigned on the matter during the passage of the Parliamentary Constituencies Bill. Then last year, during the passage of the Elections Bill, Lord Wallace of Saltaire laid an amendment on overseas constituencies. We are clearly the party advocating most strongly for overseas voters, and the creation of overseas constituencies.

Of course, all of our MPs represent constituents. We do all our to work for them, just as we do for all our constituents. But we absolutely believe that the best way for their interests as a group to be raised - on everything from consular assistance to frozen pensions - is by having specific, directly-elected representatives in Parliament.

Q6. Submitted by Leon Duveen

What efforts have the Parliamentary Parties to support peacemakers in Palestine & Israel and oppose the "Judicial Reforms" in Israel

Answer by Dick Newby and Wendy Chamberlain

Liberal Democrats continue to fully support a two-state solution in Israel and Palestine, and all of us have been dismayed to see the ongoing violence - violence which we condemn - in the region throughout this year.

We are strong supporters of peace and peacemakers in the region. Our comprehensive policy motion passed at Autumn Conference 2021 - 'Towards a Lasting Peace in Israel and

Palestine' - continues to provide the cornerstone for the approach we believe the UK Government should be taking to the conflict. As part of that, we support humanitarian and civil society efforts within Israel and Palestine to promote peace, including the creation of an international fund for peace like that proposed by the organisation ALLMEP. Our continuing campaign to reverse the cut to the international development budget would mean the UK Government is far more able to support such initiatives, as well as provide more funding to UN programmes for Palestinian refugees.

In regards to the judicial reforms, we were disappointed that the UK Government did not say more about this, given Israel is a democratic ally of the UK. We set out those concerns to the Prime Minister in writing in March, ahead of the visit of the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu. We urged the Prime Minister to raise the reforms - and the significant opposition to them within both Israeli society and the British Jewish organisations. All the Commons Parliamentary Party signed the letter - sadly, as far as I'm aware, the Prime Minister has failed to respond directly.

Q7. Submitted by Andrew Hudson

Will the parliamentary parties oppose the Rail Delivery Groups proposals to close booking offices?

Answer by Dick Newby and Wendy Chamberlain

The government is failing our railways; their failure to resolve the strikes is leading to chaos for commuters. The suggestion on ticket offices is likely to cause even further issues with the unions. Instead of inflaming tensions further, the government needs to get round the table and negotiate a deal.

The Government has said that 12% of tickets are purchased through a ticket office, with 1.4 billion separate rail journeys in the past year, that translates to 168 million ticket purchases through a ticket office.

It is important that these passengers, especially those who are elderly, disabled, or are less able to buy tickets from machines are not unfairly inconvenienced or deterred by the closure of offices.

It is vital that with or without ticket offices, major stations are staffed from the first train to the last train to ensure that passengers can get assistance - whether that's buying tickets, help if trains are delayed or cancelled, or advice about how to continue their journey. We have pressed the Government to commit to no ticket office closures until the Government has delivered on their long-awaited commitment to simplify the fare structure.

Q8. Submitted by Joe Norris

Do you recognise the importance of working with diversity AOs before submitting Private Member's Bills on topics that directly affect the groups they represent?

Answer by Dick Newby and Wendy Chamberlain

Absolutely. Our AOs have a wealth of specialised experience - and our parliamentary team does our best to put it to good use.

Our parliamentary equalities team is in regular contact with our diversity AOs, to ensure that their lived experience is properly fed into our policy and campaigning work. This includes hosting monthly meetings where diversity AOs talk about their current priorities and our spokespeople discuss what they're working on in Parliament, to see how our work can converge.

Of course, the parliamentary party is always open to learning how we can improve our ways of communicating and working together. I would encourage any diversity AO to get in touch with our Equalities Spokesperson, Christine Jardine, if they have ideas on how we can engage more smoothly.

Private Member's Bills are often responses to, or part of, Constituent-led campaigns, however. While we strive to include all voices in our work, in the context of Private Members' Bills not generally leading to legislation, it is not always the case that colleagues will widely consult on a matter if the proposed Bill is already in line with Party Policy.

Q9. Submitted by Paul Edgeworth

What steps are being taken by Parliamentarians to distinguish ourselves from the Labour Party?

Answer by Dick Newby and Wendy Chamberlain

By taking every opportunity we can to push our distinctive Liberal Democrat priorities – whether on access to GPs and dentistry, environmental protection, international development or human rights. Our teams have done a fantastic job of securing debates on crucial issues that come up time and again on the doorsteps or in our mailbags, but which frankly the Labour Party doesn't seem interested in challenging the Government on. For instance, in this Parliament, we have secured a debate in the Commons on electoral reform (the first since 2016); and Urgent Questions on the merger of the Department for International Development with the Foreign Office, as well as one on Voter ID just over a week ago. All of these are issues where we stand apart from the Labour Party.

The other main way we have distinguished ourselves is by showing a lot more backbone than Labour when it comes to standing up to the worst pieces of legislation the Conservatives have brought forward. On both the Illegal Migration Bill and the voter ID law, for example, we tabled motions to kill them in the House of Lords – but sadly Labour chose to sit on their hands.

So we are using every chance we have to show that we are both more in-touch than Labour with people's concerns, and more ambitious when it comes to charting a different course to this appalling, out-of-touch Conservative Government.

Q10. Submitted by Alison Jenner.

Does the party recognise that gender critical parliamentarians, councillors and party members have experienced significant abuse for their protected beliefs from within the party; how does it propose to tackle this?

Answer by Dick Newby and Wendy Chamberlain

Our party should always aim to disagree well - which means debating difficult issues openly but sensitively, in a way that respects everyone's rights and dignity. Sadly, trans rights is a topic where the debate has become increasingly toxic and fraught.

When it comes to harassment and abuse against any of our party members, we believe that this is best addressed in our complaints process. The team at HQ has done a lot of work in the past few years to strengthen our party's complaints process - including introducing new measures so that we can tackle cases quicker, and training adjudicators on how to implement the party's new definition of transphobia.

Federal Board Report

Q1. Submitted by Joe Norris

How is Board doing with implementing the recommendations of the Thornhill Review?

Answer by Mark Pack

The Thornhill Review was our 2019 general election review, which we deliberately made public and put up on the party website because although it's very critical of what happened, by making it available to all members it also helps keep people like myself, the Board and our CEO focused on implementing it.

So thank you for the very opposite question.

Overall I think we've made good progress, though there is no room for complacency and the real test will come with the general election.

But it is not just me saying that; we've had the chair, Dorothy, provide her take on progress to the Board too during this Parliament and I'm glad that the Federal Audit and Scrutiny Committee (FASC) - who commissioned the review - are thinking of looking at another stock take on how things are going

To give you a flavour of the progress, on the question of clarity of leadership and decision-making, the Board has reported to conference, or conference has debated and passed, several major changes, including a new and clear set of definitions of the role of leader, CEO and President; the biggest overhaul in our history of how the Board is structured and run; and making the Vice President responsible for working with ethnic minority communities a full voting member of the Board.

We've also invested from early in the Parliament in a much expanded field campaign team, giving time for people to be recruited, trained and gain experience rather than have new staff thrown straight into a general election. We've already been seeing the benefits of that with net gains in each round of locals plus our run of by-election wins

We've also got a proper grip of our medium and long-term finances, with a clear financial strategy to run through this Parliament and to leave us the day after the general election in a position to repeat the benefits of that early investment in staff teams.

The many improvements in how our staff are supported, managed and respected by members shows through in the huge increase in the results from our staff satisfaction surveys - and indeed, one of the financial pressures this year has come from how low staff turnover has fallen.

As the Thornhill Review recommends, we have particularly focused our diversity and inclusion work on ethnic minority representation and presence, with Project Stellar for Parliamentary candidates and a new set of diversity targets focusing on our local government diversity and on where we canvass.

And you can see in our public messaging, especially at the by-elections but also at this conference and in the Fair Deal pre-manifesto, a clear focus on the issues that matter most to voters, such as the NHS and the cost of living, and a clear strategic focus on doing our part to get the Conservatives out of government.

Much more I could add, but I hope that gives you a flavour of the progress made.

Finally, the Review wasn't just about the Board or the Federal Party. It has recommendations that apply to everyone. So for anyone involved in running any part of the party, I'd encourage you to take a look at the review again after conference and think about whether there's more you can contribute too to ensure we all collectively do our best not to repeat the mistakes so painfully set out in the Thornhill Review and instead produce the campaign that our candidates and our supporters deserve.

Q2. Submitted by Fraser Graham and Joe Norris

Since the establishment of Federal Council, how many of Federal Board's decisions have been called in for consideration, and have any been challenged or changed following input from Federal Council? How could the relationship between the Board and the Council be improved?

Answer by Mark Pack

The answer to how many have been called in is one and a bit.

The one is a call in to be heard shortly after conference, about a decision the Board made on the use of non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) in the party and reflecting Layla Moran's campaigning against the use of NDAs given the way they can be misused to cover-up bad behaviour.

As the Board decision on this followed a detailed debate, and which we had to take votes on at the end, I welcome the call-in as a good use of the process to re-check, as it were, a close decision.

I said one a bit - the bit was to do with how the Board fills various posts in the party. Although there weren't quite enough Council members to do a formal call in, we agreed to do a Q+A session on it, which I felt was very helpful, especially as all the questioning about the rules which require two nominations from Board members to fill some posts I think emboldened the Board to abolish this requirement.

There were also lots of helpful practical ideas that came out of the session for how we encourage a wider range of people to think about applying for such posts.

So I would say both show a process and relationship that has got off to a good start and I hope the Council will continue the focus shown in that discussion of post filling - that is on whether the Board has got the right processes and following the best procedures, as that's where the greatest value often comes from a good scrutiny process.

Q3. Submitted by Joe Norris

What has been your committee's worst mistake, and what have you learnt from it?

Answer by Mark Pack

As we've been up and running since just before Christmas, we've not had too long to make mistakes yet... so probably I should front up to a straight-forward mistake I made.

Earlier in the year, discussing with some party supporters online about how much media coverage we get, why we don't get more and so on, someone said they wished to see Ed Davey on a particular podcast.

I expressed scepticism, pointing out that the two presenters were well known strong supporters of other parties - one a former Labour senior 10 Downing Street aide the other a former Conservative MP.

I'm talking about Rory Stewart and Alistair Campbell, and just recently Ed Davey went on their show and it went just great.

I was quite wrong.

The lesson from that? Don't be dogmatic, and always take the time to listen to members.

Q4. Submitted by Chris Nelson

What is being done to ensure that Federal Party safeguarding protocols are fully implemented throughout the Party, including a safeguarding lead in every Local Party?

Answer by Mark Pack

Our party website, at <https://www.libdems.org.uk/safeguarding>, contains extensive safeguarding advice, support and a code of conduct for when under 18s are involved in our work.

Safeguarding concerns raised with the Federal Party are logged, and the log is regularly reviewed by our Chief Operating Officer and safeguarding officer, in particular to see if there are any patterns that we can learn from or show that we need to adjust what we do.

In particular they work closely with the Standards Office, who support our complaints system, and with Young Liberals to help ensure that the right processes are followed and, where necessary, the right action is taken.

As always in a volunteer organisation with a large number of component parts - such as several hundred local parties - it can be a challenge to make sure that every part of the party knows what it needs to do, how and when. So I'm always open to suggestions on how we can better spread the word about the advice, guidance and processes set out on the website.

Q5. Submitted by Joe Norris

What work has been done to make sure that we're getting value for money from our suppliers?

Answer by Mark Pack

Since taking up the post of President, and so seeing more of the work of our staff team at close quarters, I have been very impressed with how much of a focus there is on keeping costs down. During our budget rounds this Parliament, all of our significant contracts have been individually reviewed, and the Federal Audit and Scrutiny Committee (FASC) continues to check that our financial controls are in a good state.

Suppliers are regularly reviewed, and do get changed. Value for money, both in terms of costs and quality of service, has been a factor in various changes of IT systems, for example.

Of course we always have to balance the benefits of such changes against the costs, not only literal but also if, for example, volunteers then have to learn how to use different tools. But definitely I would say that commercial acumen is one of the strengths of our staff team and the relevant party committees have also been willing to get stuck in the details as appropriate.

Q6. Submitted by James Bliss

Do you think it was an effective use of money for the party to send the Future Fund mailing to all party members, including some under 18s, and why was this not targeted by age? Can you push for the party to start collecting date of birth at membership signup for all members like every other political party, and to work to collect that data for all current members?

Answer by Mark Pack

Our recent mailing encouraging people to think about leaving money to the party in their wills was targeted, including based on data we hold which indicates that people are particularly active in the party. The younger members who received the mailing will have been included under this category (and experience from other organisations suggests that such broader targeting can be successful). Other targeting of the mailing was also done by age.

The mailing has so far been a success, and as we're going to be increasing our fundraising efforts in this area, feedback from this mailing will definitely be taken into account for future marketing efforts.

Adding the date of birth to our join and renew pages is in the list of changes to make, but our small team has a very large number of desirable changes to make to our systems to work through.

In addition, there are always some data errors that creep through or additional opt-outs that it would be sensible to record, so any member is welcome to email help@libdems.org.uk with any that they're aware of.

Q7. Submitted by Joe Norris

Which areas of the party's work are the hardest to raise money for?

Answer by Mark Pack

The further the work is from the headlines and the public eye, and the more long-term the project, the tougher it is to fundraise for.

But both members and donors have consistently understood the importance of the more backroom roles and tasks, and been generous in funding long-term projects away from the public eye, such as improvements in our technology and investment in supporting the next generation of candidates from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Q8. Submitted by Trish Kilgour, Zoe Hollowood and Toby Keynes

Does the Federal Board agree that people with gender critical beliefs are welcome in the Liberal Democrat Party and their speech is permitted and protected as per the code of conduct? Is the revised definition of transphobia now fully implemented in the party's disciplinary processes? And will it consult with members on appropriate steps to create a more tolerant and respectful environment within the party?

Answer by Mark Pack

Equality is one of our party's fundamental principles. That includes standing up for the rights of all LGBT+ people and defending trans people.

Another fundamental liberal principle is freedom of thought. Different views that are compatible with our values will always be welcome in our Party, and we have to operate within the parameters of our legal obligations on this.

We also all have a responsibility to treat each other sensitively and with respect, regardless of our views, and our code of conduct makes that clear. There is also a particular onus for people who hold posts in the party and so are in positions of authority to behave in ways that match those responsibilities.

Our complaints process follows all the different definitions and processes that have been agreed for it, and is independently run.

I'm always open to hearing new ideas from members about how we can create a more tolerant and respectful environment within the party to build on work we have already done such as the new code of conduct which conference approved.

Q9. Submitted by John Grout and Alistair Calder McGregor

Does the Federal Board agree that no-one should be enslaved by poverty, ignorance, or conformity, and if it does, why does it feel that those attempting to get the party to embrace so-called 'gender-critical' beliefs have a place in the Liberal Democrats? And can it confirm that bigots are not welcome in the party?

Answer by Mark Pack

Liberal Democrats have always been at the forefront of the fight from equality - from decriminalising abortion, to abolishing Section 28 and legalising same-sex marriage. I'm proud that we are taking a similar lead when it comes to the current fight for trans rights. Equality is one of our party's fundamental values, and that remains unchanged. I believe that our members should share our values, in line with what our constitution says.

Q10. Submitted by Joe Norris

Do you think it is reasonable to expect members to opt in to another membership uprating request, and what is the plan if this fails?

Answer by Mark Pack

When we've previously given members the choice about increasing their membership subscriptions or not, a very large number of members did kindly go for an increase, and the number of complaints was very low. It has significantly boosted our ability to fund winning election campaigns.

We have used both opt-in and opt-out approaches successfully. Which is most appropriate depends on the specific circumstances, but it's important that we continue to respect members and give them the option to freeze their existing payments if they prefer.

Given the success of our latest round of uprating, it makes sense for us to plan to use this approach again for the run-up to the general election. We'll continue to monitor the data closely to make sure that the data selections and messages being used are right, and to understand the likely net overall financial impact so that can also be managed.

As with all income lines, these are regularly scrutinised by our finance committee and, if there are any adverse trends, appropriate contingency plans are worked on.

Q11. Submitted by Zoe Hollowwod and Trish Kilgour

Do you agree that party officers could benefit from additional training on the code of conduct and the Equality Act? And what training around the Equality Act has been provided to Federal Board & Federal Committees and are there plans for local parties to be offered training also?

Answer by Mark Pack

The code of conduct has been provided to all members and is part of the party framework that our complaints process works with.

Whenever our committees take decisions which need to take into account particular legal or regulatory concerns, appropriate advice is provided to them, such as by the staff with relevant expertise and when necessary lawyers are sometimes asked too.

The party's understanding of such legal and regulatory factors is also built into the training and guidance provided, both by the Federal Party and by our State Parties too. There are no current plans to supplement this approach.

Q12. Submitted by Joe Norris

Do you think party bodies get value for money on the IT services they pay for through HQ, which are often costly bespoke solutions with teething issues?

Answer by Mark Pack

On a like-for-like basis, significant savings have been made during this Parliament in the costs of our various IT systems, although the understandable pressure for additional features and services means there is also a constant upward pressure on costs. As a result, there isn't scope for big net savings.

Some of those pressures have been offset by the excellent work of the Liberal Democrat Software Group, whose skilled volunteers have provided a range of new tools that we would not have been able to afford to develop on a paid basis.

In as much as there is a financial issue here, it is much more about us not being able to afford the level of IT investment that larger political parties are able to make.

The forbearance of volunteers and staff getting to grips with the new systems is much appreciated. One upside of having brought some significant systems in-house is that we have greater control over fixing the most important issues for us rather than being dependent on a supplier's own priorities.

Q13. Submitted by Fraser Graham

The code of conduct says that when one witnesses transphobia one must challenge it in case the person doing it does not realise they are being transphobic. Every time I have seen someone challenge transphobic behaviour it results in the challenger being piled on and accused of abuse. Could Board supply an approved form of words for issuing such a challenge?

Answer by Mark Pack

Thank you for being willing to challenge transphobic behaviour. Although the code does not directly require any witness to such behaviour or apparent behaviour to challenge it themselves, it can be particularly beneficial to do so where someone may not be aware of the ramifications of their choice of words or actions.

As every situation is different, it would be difficult to adopt a one-size-fits-all approved form of words. However, I am always willing to signpost people to groups within our party who can provide advice on dealing with situations like this.

Q14. Submitted by Joe Norris

Is it realistic to expect a 'significant surplus' during a general election year?

Answer by Mark Pack

We have seen the benefits in this Parliament of starting with a significant financial surplus and therefore being able to invest in our grassroots campaign support early in the Parliament. That has enabled us to make net gains at each round of council elections in the Parliament as well as have the team in place to start our great run of Parliamentary by-election wins. It's also allowed us to invest in areas that benefit from sustained, long-term commitment, such as improving our data and technology.

There are therefore excellent reasons for wanting to repeat this pattern in the next Parliament. That is what makes looking to end next year with a surplus realistic; it's not just a financial target, it's also the means to continued political and electoral success.

Q15. Submitted by Mark Johnston

With respect to the Board's responsibilities under Article 23 (Complaints Procedure) are all protected characteristics equal? Or are some protected characteristics more equal than others?

Answer by Mark Pack

There is no hierarchy of protected characteristics in the Equality Act or in the Board's work, and as a party we believe in protecting the rights of everyone. When it comes to take action to promote improved diversity and inclusion in the party, the Board prioritises areas in line with the strategy motion passed by party conference earlier this Parliament.

Q16. Submitted by Joe Norris

What is being done to ensure that the agent training days are accessible, so that we can train the agents we need?

Answer by Mark Pack

The agent training days are being run at multiple locations around the country and the team putting them on has only selected venues that are disabled friendly.

Due to the requirements set for us by the Electoral Commission we can only run the courses online where there is a specific reason that requires this.

If there are specific access challenges for taking part in the training, the Compliance Team at HQ would be happy to hear them and respond, and the booking form for these days also

asks about accessibility requirements. They are planning on running a one day course online shortly for two people who can't attend any of the in-person events.

Federal Appeals Panel

Q1. Submitted by Joe Norris

Do you hope to reduce the practice of single member consideration of cases, once the state party appointments to FAP are filled?

The FAP procedures provide for initial consideration to be by a single member, to case-manage appeals and determine matters that do not require a hearing because they are out of jurisdiction, or not realistically arguable by one or other party (see section 4 of the rules for applications that should not get permission to proceed, and rule 7.4 where there is no arguable defence). All cases that are arguable are required to be heard by a panel of at least 3 members and that will remain the case, because it is required by the Federal Party Constitution. The main issue with vacancies is that we have been unable to get cases to a panel at all because we were not quorate. We have not been determining properly arguable cases by a single member (save where the rules allowed for a preliminary ruling to be appealable to a full panel -see rule 7.5).

Q2. Submitted by Joe Norris

Would the Panel be more effective if its administration was placed within the Standards team at HQ, to ensure smooth communication when dealing with cases?

Administration of the Panel is already handled by the Standards Office, and has been for some years. It is important for propriety and perceived fairness that if a decision by a standards officer is itself challenged before the FAP, that officer should not both be a party and be handling the administration of a particular matter.

Q3. Submitted by Fraser Graham

Your appendix on procedure for oral hearings is allowing for the presence of lawyers to provide support to any party. Is this a change for current procedure? In addition, is this not placing those without funds to engage a lawyer at a distinct disadvantage within the appeals process?

The FAP procedures were last significantly revised in 2021 after David Graham took over as chair of the Panel. The previous wording approved by Conference in 2020 stated inter alia:

"(1)...The complainant may be assisted by a friend, who may speak for the complainant at any time...(2) Each respondent or representative may cross-examine a witness, the friend or the complainant, as directed by the Chair of the Case Panel....(4) The respondents have equivalent rights as to witnesses, a representative to aid her or him and time limit.'

The previous procedure appears to have envisaged the 'friend' and 'representative' as being the same person, though this was not clear. It was silent as to whether the 'friend' or 'representative' could be a qualified lawyer, but certainly did not exclude this. In my view there was no good reason to exclude legally qualified friends from acting as representatives just because they were lawyers, and indeed very often lawyers can assist a tribunal by focusing on relevant issues, presenting a case in a cogent and succinct way, and asking pertinent questions. I therefore amended the wording to make clear that the 'representative' could be a lawyer.

As regards whether a party without a lawyer could be unfairly disadvantaged, I would observe as follows:

(i) Points of technical law are only rarely going to be directly engaged; we are not a court of law but an internal tribunal mostly interpreting the Party's own rules and reviewing the fairness of the disciplinary processes. An overly legalistic approach is unlikely to be helpful in most cases, and overwhelmingly lawyers are not required to get to the 'right' outcome.

(ii) The procedure is at all times under the control of the panel (see rules 10.4 and 10.5 of the current rules), and they may in particular limit cross-examination or questions (paragraph 7 of the normal procedure). Rule 1.1. requires us when both interpreting and applying the rules to have regard to the desirability of putting the parties on an equal footing and ensuring that our procedures are both accessible and easy to participate in. Where necessary, a hearing panel could limit participation by a lawyer, or take other steps to ensure that a non-legally represented party was not disadvantaged.

(iii) There is no power to award legal costs or monetary remedies, so there is no incentive for lawyers to take cases unless they are being paid privately by their own client, and no threat of another party being intimidated by having to pay costs.

(iv) Most of the time, the FAP proceedings are not directly adversarial between members in the sense that appeals or applications are against a decision by a body (e.g. disciplinary case panel) or officer of the Party in their capacity as such.

Q4. Submitted by Fraser Graham

Your report seems to suggest that complaints should not be made over 'philosophical or political disagreements' where people are 'merely expressing personal opinions that others may find offensive or objectionable.' Can you provide an example of such opinions which should not be reported? Also, can you confirm that racist, homophobic, sexist or transphobic behaviour is still viewed as incompatible with party membership?

Party membership may only be revoked (and this is discretionary, not mandatory) on one of the grounds set out at articles 3.7 and 3.8 of the Federal Party Constitution: bullying, harassment, intimidation; unlawful discrimination as defined by the Equality Act 2010; bringing the party into disrepute; membership of or support for another party; and 'material disagreement, evidenced by conduct, with the fundamental values and objectives of the Party'.

UK-wide, state, regional, and local policy is a matter for democratic debate and discussion, and may be subject to change over time. Some disagreements may relate to philosophical beliefs or ethical or moral value judgments, and/or predictive judgments about practical consequences. It is wrong in principle for the Standards/disciplinary process to be used to adjudicate such questions. Where there are political or philosophical disagreements, members will be generally expected to politely and respectfully agree to disagree or, where relevant because it amounts to a matter of "political discipline", the appropriate forum for resolving those will usually be political (e.g. decisions of local party executives, council groups or cabinets; resolutions at local party meetings; conference motions; withdrawing the whip in Parliament, or excluding a councillor from a local group).

Question 4 opens up a potentially infinite range of issues which are "policy" or judgement questions. Members can have reasonable disagreements within a framework of fundamental liberal values. The Party is and aspires to be a mass-membership organisation for those who broadly support our aims and wish to participate in a liberal party. It is generally against censorship and conformity. Some of its aims are in tension with each other e.g. liberty and equality. Some recently controversial examples might be what if any policy statement to make about the Israel-Gaza conflict; whether there should be a register of home-schooled children; what approach to take to the asylum system; arguably, whether Brexit should be reversed and certainly in what timeframe (there is some language beginning "within the European Community" in the preamble to the Federal Constitution which is a hangover from before Maastricht, the constitutional relevance of which now is arguable); whether to give up the nuclear deterrent; whether gender recognition certificates should be issued solely on the basis of self-declaration; or whether there should in principle be single-sex sports competitions or hospital wards. Given the vagueness of the Party constitution and values that may, depending on the weight given to them, tend to pull in different directions, conduct evincing material disagreement with fundamental values and objectives is likely to be limited to obvious cases such as supporting totalitarianism or unequal application of the law; stirring up racial hatred; silencing or punishing dissent; abuse of office, etc.

The next point relates to regards questions of standards /misconduct properly-so-called. The Liberal Democrats' disciplinary processes are not there to police the thoughts of members or, in general, to police everything they say on social media. Not every disreputable act by a member will necessarily bring the Party into disrepute if they remain as a member. Most people are fallible and 1 in 4 adults have a criminal record; it is arguable what the standard should be for membership and for instance whether ex-offenders or serving prisoners should be permitted to join. It is not for the FAP to decide what disciplinary policies to apply or standards to apply for revoking or refusing membership; nor to determine what sanction to apply if a disciplinary charge is proven; we only decide whether decisions made were taken following a fair procedure and fall within a reasonable range given the rules and policies adopted at the time by the Party. Behaviour may be (e.g.) racist or otherwise discriminatory in effect without it necessarily being unlawful, or it being considered proportionate to expel a member (e.g. if a local party meeting or Party Conference session is held on a Saturday or religious festival, as happened this year, such that observant Jewish members are unable to attend, there might be a sufficient justification to save it from being unlawful indirect discrimination, or there may be no malice or detriment intended).

Federal Campaigns and Election Committee Report

Q1. Submitted by Joe Norris

What has been your committee's worst mistake, and what have you learnt from it?

Answer from Kath Pinnock

Ask the same question at the conference after the general election and I will tell you!

Q2. Submitted by Tim Harcourt

Will the party prioritise political reform as a major campaign platform?

Answer from Kath Pinnock

This is more the responsibility of the manifesto group and FPC.

Q3. Submitted by John Grout

How does FCEC feel the rollout of new party tools (Fleet, Targeted Email, etc.) is going, and what would they like to see next?

Answer from Kath Pinnock

This doesn't come under the remit of FCEC, though essential tools. Personally I love Fleet.

Q4. Submitted by Joe Norris

Why did FCEC think it acceptable for the Party Leader to criticise national house building targets, in contradiction of party policy at the time?

Answer from Kath Pinnock

FCEC has responsibility for the Federal oversight, scrutiny, and challenge of the HQ Campaigns and Communications teams. Its remit does not include statements by leading Party Parliamentarians.

Q5. Submitted by Joe Norris

In your efforts to stand more candidates, do you have any top tips for local parties trying to field a full slate?

Answer from Kath Pinnock

Standing a full slate of candidates is very important as it provides the opportunity to vote Lib Dem wherever you live and helps, albeit in a small way, to establish the Lib Dems in the minds of the electorate across the country. The only way to achieve a full slate is to start early, i.e. at least 6 months before nominations are due, and to contact every member personally to ask if they will stand. Then keep asking. It is important that an approval process takes place before final selection.

Q6. Submitted by Joe Norris

How is FCEC making sure it is collaborating with the states and regions in its work?

Answer from Kath Pinnock

There is a representative from each of the states on FCEC. It is their responsibility to communicate both to the state parties and back from them to FCEC.

Q7. Submitted by Fraser Graham

With the recent spate of by-elections, have any lessons been learned which can feed back into general election campaigning going forwards?

Answer from Kath Pinnock

The learning from by-elections plays a key part in understanding what works in a winning campaign.

Federal Council Report

Q1. Submitted by Joe Norris

What has been Federal Council's worst mistake, and what have you learnt from it?

Answer by Cllr Antony Hook

The role of the Federal Council is to scrutinise. The Council does not see any mistakes in 8 months but there's plenty of time!

Q2. Submitted by Fraser Graham and Joe Norris

Since Federal Council was established, how many Federal Board decisions have been called in for consideration? We're any decisions challenged or sent back to Federal Board for reconsideration? Is Federal Council succeeding in being the being critical friend to Board, or is it too adversarial?

Answer by Cllr Antony Hook

Bar for call in (13) is quite high. 2 decisions called in - appointments to the disciplinary sub group (call-in fell). Ongoing matter on NDAs. No concerns about being adversarial.

Supplementary question by Fraser Graham

Is the balance for call-ins and numbers correct?

Answer by Cllr Antony Hook

No view currently

Q3. Submitted by Joe Norris

How can Federal Council ensure it is concerned with all the aspects of Board's work, and doesn't hyper-focus on just a few issues?

Answer by Cllr Antony Hook

There are a broad range of people involved with the Council. Write to me with any concerns.

Supplementary question by Joe Norris

What is attendance like?

Answer by Cllr Antony Hook

Members are very busy - off top of head attendance in mid-low 30s.

Q4. Submitted by Joe Norris

What steps have been taken to put together a formal work plan for Federal Council?

Answer by Cllr Antony Hook

Long term planning is very helpful. Identify key issues in advance. Recently adopted standing orders - working groups can be created.

Campaign for Gender Balance Report

Q1. Submitted by Janey Little

What can party members do at the grassroots level to encourage more young women to stand as candidates and get more involved in the party?

Answer by Julia Cambridge

Good question - especially important to encourage young women. Women see inspirational women and the visibility is so important. Culture is so important.

Q2. Submitted by Fraser Graham

What are CGB doing to ensure that a large gain in MPs next election would not result in a return to a majority male parliamentary group?

Answer by Julia Cambridge

Parliamentary by-election wins are great for representation but has made people question CGB's need. Welcome the new female MPs but PPC numbers are down in terms of women. The General Election will change the gender balance. Inspiration days at CGB - skills and training.

Supplementary question by Fraser Graham

Are the training events going to remain available to trans women and non-binary women?

Answer by Julia Cambridge

Of course.

Federal Appeals Panel Report

Report of the Vice President, responsible for working with ethnic minority communities: questions and accountability

Q1. Submitted by Michael Wang

What is the relationship between the FPDC diversity subcommittee and ALDC and how to get involved?

Answer by Amna Ahmad

FPDC works on the strategic elements of diversity and where it sits. The subcommittee has just started, many of our AOs are already represented. If there is a specific issue you have come to me, it's a space to bring these issues together. I would welcome the Campaign for Race Equality joining the committee.

Supplementary question by Michael Wang

Do you think we should have an ethnic shortlist?

Answer by Amna Ahmad

There's been a debate about this for a long time. It can be difficult to become a candidate. I would support it, but there are some legal issues in doing so.