



Conference Report

Spring 2024

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Policy Motions

Are you Drinking What We're Drinking?

Conference notes that:

- i) Sewage dumping remains a major problem affecting Britain's lakes, rivers and coastal areas.
- ii) Between 2020-2022, sewage has been dumped by England's water companies over a million times lasting over 7.5 million hours.
- iii) Water company executives in England, Wales and Scotland have paid themselves £76 million between 2020-2022 including £42 million in bonuses, benefits and incentives.
- iv) The problem is not limited to England, with sewage dumping also a problem in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.
- v) Water companies lose millions of litres of water every day through leaks.

Conference believes that:

- I. The Government and regulators have failed to hold the water companies to account for their failures, while also failing to encourage the right investment from water companies.
- II. Local authorities need far more powers to hold water companies accountable and need to work closely with them to prevent discharges and leaks.
- III. Citizens should be able to hold water companies accountable directly.
- IV. No-one should be in water poverty.
- V. The UK has significantly fewer designated bathing sites than other countries in Europe.

Conference reaffirms calls for:

- A. Meaningful targets and deadlines to be set for water companies to end sewage discharges.
- B. The introduction of a Sewage Tax on water companies profits to fund the cleanup of waterways.
- C. The abolition of Ofwat and its replacement with a new 'Coastal, Rivers and Lakes Authority', taking on relevant powers from the Environment Agency and working with Natural Resources Wales.
- D. The addition of local environmental groups onto water companies' boards.
- E. The transformation of water companies into public benefit companies, so that particular economic and environmental policy objectives must be considered explicitly in the running of the companies.

Conference therefore supports the following policies on the water industry, taken from the spokesperson's paper *Are You Drinking What We're Drinking?*:

1. Strengthening the powers of the new 'Coastal, Rivers and Lakes Authority' by:
 - a) Ending self-monitoring by water companies of rivers, lakes and coastlines and increasing monitoring by the regulator.
 - b) Issuing fines to the top executives of water companies and initiating prosecutions.
 - c) Ensuring that water companies can make the right investments with a 25-year investment plan, including innovative options, such as nature based solutions.
 - d) Closely regulating the ownership of water companies.
 - e) Revoking water company licences in extreme circumstances.
2. Increasing the powers of local authorities to hold water companies accountable by:
 - a) Creating new water boards.
 - b) Establishing my catchment partnerships between the water companies and local authorities.
 - c) New planning powers to require sustainable drainage systems are installed and existing properties don't make the sewage crisis worse.
3. Ensuring citizens and the environment are protected by:
 - a) Increasing monitoring by ensuring that new storm overflow monitors measure volume and percentage of sewage, particularly in sensitive areas such as SSSIs and designating bathing waters.
 - b) Extending the Freedom of Information Act to cover water companies.
 - c) Establishing a new 'Sewage Illness Victim Compensation Scheme'.
 - d) Permitting citizens as well as charities and other groups to take water companies to court.
 - e) Forcing the water company to fund local environmental reporters.
4. Adding consumer representatives to water company boards and making water bills show exactly where money is spent.
5. Trialling the creation of new not-for-profit mutual debt free companies to take over water company assets, particularly in sensitive areas, allowing them to raise the required capital to make investments.
6. Creating a new water social tariff, aiming to eliminate water poverty by the end of the next parliament.
7. Ensuring that energy retrofitting programmes also includes measures to improve water resilience and cut bills.
8. Aiming to increase the number of designated bathing water sites to 1,500 by 2030.
9. Setting legally binding targets to prevent sewage dumping into bathing waters and highly sensitive nature sites by 2030.

Applicability: England; except C. and 1, which are England and Wales.

Background briefing

This motion updated and developed policy on the water industry, sewage and water courses.

This built on existing policy as set out in the policy paper 156 *Tackling the Nature Crisis* (September 2023), pre-manifesto policy paper 153 *For a Fair Deal* (September 2023), policy motion *Ending Sewage Discharges* (March 2022) and policy paper 140 *Giving Consumers a Fair Deal* (2021).

Vote on motion: Conference passed the motion

Beyond Rwanda: A Fairer Way Forward on Asylum

Conference notes with grave concern the Conservative Government's latest efforts to push through their failing Rwanda scheme amid general chaos in the Home Office - including their controversial Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill which has passed through the House of Commons in January and February and is now in the House of Lords, the sacking of David Neal as Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration in February, and near-constant political infighting.

Conference further notes that:

- I. Under this policy, refugees removed to Rwanda will not be eligible to return to the UK, even if their asylum claims are successful.
- II. The Supreme Court has already ruled that the scheme is illegal due to serious deficiencies in the Rwandan asylum system.
- III. More than 241 million has already been spent on the scheme, despite no flights taking off - equivalent to the cost of delivering more than 5.7 million GP appointments.
- IV. The Home Office's own figures show that it will cost 69,000 more to send each asylum seeker to Rwanda, compared to if they remained in the UK.
- V. The Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill has been described by some lawyers as "legislating for a lie", declaring Rwanda as a safe third country - despite the Supreme Court upholding that it is not and Conservative ministers own admissions it currently is not.
- VI. A similar Israeli program of sending asylum seekers to Rwanda resulted in most of them being smuggled out of Rwanda in the hands of criminal gangs.

Conference believes that the Government's Rwanda policy:

- a) Has been an extraordinary waste of time and money.
- b) Is immoral, ineffective and incredibly expensive for the taxpayer.
- c) Will do nothing to stop dangerous Channel crossings or combat people smuggling and human trafficking.
- d) Fails to address the backlog of asylum applications that has ballooned under this Conservative Government.
- e) Betrays the UK's proud tradition of providing sanctuary to refugees fleeing war and persecution, and breaches our international law commitments.

Conference further believes that the best way to stop these dangerous crossings and tackle people smuggling is to provide safe and legal routes to sanctuary for refugees.

Conference therefore calls on the UK Government to:

1. Abandon the Rwanda scheme and related legislation with immediate effect.

2. Reaffirm its commitment to upholding important human rights legislation, including the European Convention on Human Rights, the UN Refugee Convention and the Human Rights Act.
3. Fix the broken asylum system by establishing a new, dedicated unit to make decisions quickly and fairly.
4. Provide safe and legal routes to sanctuary for refugees from all countries, as outlined in policy motion *Safe and Legal Routes to Save Lives*.
5. Manage the costs of the asylum system by giving asylum seekers the right to work and introducing a service standard of three months for all but the most complex claims to be processed.

Applicability: Federal.

Background briefing

This motion updated and developed policy on refugees and asylum, in particular responding to the government's Rwanda scheme.

It built on existing policy as set out in the pre-manifesto policy paper 153 *For a Fair Deal* (September 2023), policy motion *Protecting the European Convention on Human Rights* (September 2023) and policy motion *A Better Alternative to the Small Boats Legislation* (March 2023)

Vote on motion: Conference passed the motion.

Boosting Cancer Survival

Conference notes with concern that:

- A. One in two of us will get cancer in our lifetime.
- B. By 2040, the number of new cases of cancer is estimated to increase by a fifth, the equivalent of half a million new cases being diagnosed each year.
- C. Cancer targets for diagnosis and starting treatment have not been met since 2015.
- D. Nearly 100,000 patients in 2023 waited longer than the NHS target of 62 days to start cancer treatment.
- E. The current Conservative Government broke its promise on a ten-year cancer plan that would have made a real difference to patients.
- F. Every four-week delay to starting cancer treatment is associated with a 10% decrease in survival.
- G. The majority of cancer research in the UK is funded by the charity sector and the challenge of tackling cancer requires more sustainable funding.
- H. The UK ranks one of the lowest globally - between 14th and 27th out of 29 countries - for five-year survival for the less survivable cancers.
- I. The Conservative Government has slashed spending on public health grants, that support programmes and initiatives that support people's health and prevent illness, by around a fifth or £800m since 2015.
- J. An extra 33,000 cancer cases per year in the UK (nearly one in 10) are associated with deprivation and inequality.
- K. The Conservative Government has allowed the UK research environment to deteriorate, and is presiding over the closure of the National Cancer Research Institute, which has coordinated cancer research for more than two decades.
- L. There are shortages across all professions in the cancer workforce, which has contributed to growing expenditure on short-term staffing across all areas of NHS care, estimated by the British Medical Association at £9 billion in 2022.

Conference notes with optimism that:

- I. Twice as many people survive cancer today compared to the 1970s, and in the last 10 years cancer mortality has fallen by 10% and is predicted to fall another 6% by 2040.
- II. More than a million lives have been saved from cancer across the UK since the 1980s due to the progress made in prevention, diagnosis and treatment.
- III. Since the launch of the NHS HPV vaccination programme in 2008, around 450 cancers and 17,200 pre-cancers have been prevented and the programme is considered to be one of the most successful in the world.

Conference believes that:

- a) Cancer should be a top priority for any Government.

- b) Far too many patients have been let down and forgotten by the Conservative Government, which has run local health services into the ground.
- c) All cancer patients in the UK should be confident that they will receive the best treatment for them quickly and won't experience negative outcomes associated with delays.
- d) Patients should not have to travel unreasonable distances to access lifesaving treatment and such distances should have no bearing on clinical decisions about treatment.
- e) The UK should be a global leader in cancer research and outcomes.
- f) A fair deal for the NHS workforce is vital to delivering better patient care, outcomes and research. Investing in the recruitment and retention of specialised cancer doctors and nurses is investment in patients and tackling growing cancer waiting lists.

Conference re-affirms our commitment progressively to restore the Public Health Grant to at least 2015 levels, with a proportion of these funds to 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.

Conference calls on the Government to:

1. Implement a legal right to start the most suitable treatment within two months.
2. Introduce a new Cancer Research Act that requires the Government to coordinate and ensure funding for research into cancers with the lowest survival rates, including lung, liver, brain, pancreatic and some childhood cancers.
3. Boost access to radiotherapy by investing in 200 new radiotherapy machines and the staff to deliver an increased service, eliminating any blackspots in geographical coverage.
4. Expand day units and satellite services for chemotherapy so that cancer patients in all parts of the country can access routine treatment within 60 minutes of travel from their home.
5. Halve the time for new tests, treatments and innovations to reach patients by expanding MHRA capacity.
6. Ensure that all cancer patients navigating treatment have a dedicated clinical nurse specialist they can contact directly throughout their treatment and monitoring.
7. Save the National Cancer Research Institute which plays a vital role in coordinating cancer research.
8. Recruit 3,400 more cancer nurses to boost capacity and provide high quality care to patients.
9. Publish a ten-year cancer plan with an overall goal of improving survival.
10. Plug the £1bn gap in cancer research funding over the next decade.
11. Ensure that patients and their families are given information about charities, patient support groups and financial support at every key stage.

12. Provide cancer patients and families of children with cancer with appropriate support to assist them through the treatment and aftercare process.
13. Develop targeted action plans to address inequalities in access to and speed of cancer treatment.

Applicability: England only.

Background briefing

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

It built on existing policy as set out in the pre-manifesto policy paper 153 *For a Fair Deal* (September 2023), and policy paper 137 *Save the NHS and Social Care by Stopping Brexit* (September 2019).

Amendments: Conference passed one amendment.

The amendment updated figures on cancer rates and costs throughout the motion.

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

Liberal Values in a Dangerous World (International Security policy paper)

Conference believes that the UK needs a new international security strategy, with key objectives of:

- I. Keeping the UK safe, free and secure, by working closely with NATO and European allies and promoting peace globally.
- II. Tackling the global rise of authoritarianism, particularly the regimes in China and Russia, by promoting liberal, democratic values.
- III. Supporting the world's vulnerable through international cooperation and recalling the commitment in Spring conference 2021 policy motion, Safe and Legal Routes to Save Lives, to the creation of pathways for submission of humanitarian visa applications, including at embassies and consulates at countries of origin and at channel crossings.

Conference further believes that achieving and sustaining these objectives must be grounded in our liberal values, especially:

- A. A vigilant and prepared approach to defence, with armed forces that are well-trained and well-equipped.
- B. Upholding human rights, democracy and liberal principles, at home and abroad, for example through the ECHR.
- C. Internationalism and tackling shared issues together for the common good.
- D. Tackling poverty and inequality wherever we find them.
- E. Mutually beneficial global trade.
- F. Environmentalism and a sustainable future for all peoples.
- G. Partaking in global responsibility-sharing through providing protection for refugees fleeing conflicts wherever they arise such as through expansion of resettlement schemes and demonstrating a consistent commitment to family unification, recalling our commitment in Autumn conference 2018 policy motion A Fair Deal for Everyone: Prosperity and Dignity in Migration, to offer safe and legal routes to the UK for at least 10,000 refugees each year as well as welcoming 10,000 unaccompanied refugee children over a period of 10 years.

Conference deplores that the Conservative government have made both the UK and the world less safe and secure, through a series of policy failures and broken promises, including:

- i) Cuts in troops, ships, aircraft and equipment, despite heightened global tension.
- ii) Consistent failures of defence procurement, with budget overruns and insufficient equipment.
- iii) Undermining the UK's development superpower status by cutting the international development budget and abolishing the Department for International Development.

- iv) Trashing the UK's diplomatic and moral credibility by antagonising our allies and threatening to break international law.
- v) Allowing dirty money linked to autocratic regimes, particularly Russia, to infect our politics and our economy.
- vi) Attacking Britain's globally respected institutions like the BBC and our universities, undermining our soft power globally.
- vii) Abandoning our role as a global leader on tackling the climate emergency.

Conference therefore endorses policy paper 157, *Liberal Values in a Dangerous World*, in particular its policies to:

1. Restore the UK's diplomatic credibility by:
 - a) Consistently supporting democracies and human rights at home and abroad, particularly supporting Ukraine, Hong Kong and Taiwan against aggression.
 - b) Standing up for international law and speaking out when it is violated.
 - c) Standing against authoritarianism globally, particularly against aggressive actions from the Russian and Chinese governments.
 - d) Investing in the skills and training of the diplomatic service.
 - e) Working collaboratively through multilateralism and with our sister parties abroad to promote peace and security.
 - f) Restoring the UK's role as a global leader on climate change.
2. Reclaim the UK's development superpower status by:
 - a) Restoring the international development budget to 0.7% of national income and restoring an independent department for development.
 - b) Supporting the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and encouraging partner countries to support this framework for human security and human development.
 - c) Working on the basis of equality and partnership with the Global South to counter global authoritarianism, particularly the challenge posed by China's 'Belt and Road' Initiative, and advocate for liberal, democratic values.
 - d) Adopting a fair and humane approach to the challenge of global refugees and asylum seekers; this includes ensuring a rapid response to displacement caused by conflicts wherever they arise by creating a global process for applying for protection from outside the UK, and by offering Sponsorship Scheme Visas and Family Unification Schemes such as the Ukraine Family Scheme visa to those fleeing conflicts globally, not just for Ukrainians.
 - e) Increasing the proportion of the international development budget committed to tackling climate change and environmental degradation.
3. Support our armed forces to defend our freedoms, interests, and allies by:
 - a) Meeting all of our NATO commitments on defence spending and cooperation at a minimum.
 - b) Reversing the Conservatives' cut to the army.
 - c) Ensuring the UK armed forces have the right training, equipment, and policies to defend Britain and our overseas territories.

- d) Prioritising interoperability with NATO allies and other strategic partners.
 - e) Tackling the recruitment and retention crisis in the armed forces by securing a fair deal for the armed forces community, including by:
 - i) Improving the standard of MoD housing, including by reviewing the contract with maintenance contractors.
 - ii) Accepting the recommendations of the Atherton report on women in the armed forces.
 - iii) 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.
4. Tackle the longstanding problems in defence procurement by:
- a) Replacing the current system with a more flexible approach of continuous reviews of security threats and evolution of defence plans.
 - b) Ensuring that defence procurement is part of a comprehensive Industrial Strategy, to secure a reliable long-term pipeline of equipment procurements including European industry being able to replenish stocks rapidly by ramping up production to meet the threat triggered by Russia putting her economy on a war footing.
 - c) Making defence capital spending allocations more flexible and focused on meeting required in-service dates.
 - d) Investing in recruiting, training and retaining staff at the MoD with specialist skills and reducing its dependency and expenditure on external consultants.
5. Work collaboratively with our democratic European partners and promote security in Europe by:
- a) Working hand-in-glove with NATO countries to support Ukraine during the war and to rebuild the country including finding lawful ways of using the estimated \$300 billion of frozen sovereign assets of the Russian state as reparations for the violations of international law by Russia in Ukraine.
 - b) Signing a comprehensive security treaty with the European Union.
 - c) Collaborating with European and NATO partners on development of new defence technologies, equipment, systems and training, including via the Northern Group.
 - d) Prioritising interoperability with NATO allies and other strategic partners, so that we can support each other during peace and war.
6. Tackle organised crime, terrorism and keep our security services accountable by:
- a) Properly resourcing the National Crime Agency and Serious Fraud Office, and strengthening economic crime legislation to remove loopholes.
 - b) Working with Europol and Eurojust to develop and implement a joint strategy for dealing with cross-border threats, with the closest possible cooperation on shared priorities.
 - c) Developing a national cybersecurity and digital infrastructure strategy, through investing in skills and training and developing a UK Chips Act.

- d) Ensuring that the Intelligence and Security Committee has teeth and is independent from government interference.
- 7. Promote the UK's security and global standing with our cultural and soft power by:
 - a) Protecting and defending the BBC, Channel 4, BBC Alba and S4C as independent, publicly-owned, public service broadcasters.
 - b) Properly funding the impartial BBC World Service from the Foreign Office Budget and restoring its global reach.
 - c) Promoting and defending Britain's universities and think tanks, so that our values and image can be promoted around the world.
 - d) Restore the British Council's in-country presence to 2019 levels of offices and staffing.

Applicability: Federal

Background briefing

This motion and the accompanying policy paper updated and developed policy on international affairs and defence.

It built on existing policy as set out in the pre-manifesto policy paper 153 *For a Fair Deal* (September 2023), policy motion *A Fair Deal for the Armed Forces* (March 2023), and policy paper 132 *Britain at the Heart of a Changing World* (September 2018).

Amendments: Conference passed four amendments.

The first amendment added references to safe and legal routes for refugees in III, G and 2. d)

The second amendment added references to climate change in vii), 1. f) and 2. e)

The third amendment added lines on European ammunition supplies and using Russian assets to rebuild Ukraine in 4. b) and 5. a)

The fourth amendment added references to the British Council in 7. d)

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

Navalny

Conference notes that:

- I. Alexei Navalny, the leader of democratic opposition to Vladimir Putin in Russia, was killed on 16 February 2024.
- II. Navalny's widow, Yulia Navalnaya, has said that Navalny was 'tortured, starved, cut off and killed by Putin'.
- III. Navalny had been serving a sentence at an Arctic penal colony, after being arrested upon his return to Russia in January 2021, having previously spent months recovering in Germany following a Novichok assassination attempt.
- IV. Other democratic activists imprisoned in Russia include Vladimir Kara-Murza, British-Russian dual national and member of our sister party Yabloko; there is now a real risk that he is also killed.

Conference believes that:

- A. Navalny's tragic death, at the hands of Putin, cannot and will not stifle the democratic ideals that he fought for.
- B. Navalny cast a light on the corruption of Putin and his cronies.
- C. Following Navalny's death, the UK Government did sanction some individuals operating the Arctic penal colony, but they have failed to sanction the entirety of the 'Navalny List'.
- D. Navalny's opposition to Putin is embodied in the brave resistance of the Ukrainians.
- E. We must be emboldened to stand with Ukraine, even as US support wavers, and help them resist Vladimir Putin's forces and liberate their territory.
- F. The UK must do all it can to secure the release of Vladimir Kara-Murza.

Conference accordingly calls on the UK Government to:

1. Sanction the rest of the Navalny List.
2. Make it a diplomatic priority to secure the release of Vladimir Kara-Murza.
3. Support Vladimir Kara-Murza and all other British dual nationals in similar situations by enshrining in law a right for British dual nationals who have been politically detained to access UK consular services.
4. Stand with Ukraine as the country resists Putin's invasion, by:
 - a) Beginning the seizure of frozen Russian assets in the UK, with proceeds repurposed to finance support for Ukraine.
 - b) Immediately repurposing the interest accrued on frozen Russian assets for the good of Ukraine, following the plan set out by Belgium.
5. Take steps to tackle economic crime, including flows of money from Putin's cronies, by:
 - a) Publishing the long overdue review of 'golden visas', the Tier 1 (Investor) visa scheme.

- b) Close loopholes in economic crime legislation.
- c) Properly fund the National Crime Agency, so that they can pursue Russian economic crime in this country.

Applicability: Federal

Background briefing

This motion created new policy in response to the death of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

Vote on motion: Conference passed the motion.

Sport for the People

Conference notes that:

- i) Watching sport is one the nation's favourite pastimes - 31 million people watched England men's football team in the Euro 2020 final, over 17 million watched Sir Andy Murray win Wimbledon and the same number watched the England Lionesses win Euro 2022.
- ii) The Lionesses' win at the UEFA Euro 2022 Final and their journey to the final of the FIFA World Cup earlier this year has fuelled interest in women's sport in particular.
- iii) In 2022, the average viewing time per person for women's sports more than doubled and the number of people watching domestic women's sports has grown to 33 million.
- iv) Football remains the most popular sport in the United Kingdom, deeply rooted in our country's culture and tradition, attracting millions of passionate fans and players.
- v) Not a single English Premier League football game in the 2023-24 season will be shown live on free-to-air television, while ticket prices have continued to soar in a cost-of-living crisis, pricing out fans from watching the team they support.
- vi) Watching football is becoming increasingly expensive to watch on television as English Premier League rights are shared between multiple providers.
- vii) A new deal, signed in December 2023, will see English Premier League rights shared between two subscription providers from the 2025-26 season through to 2029; in Scotland Premiership football is available exclusively through Sky Sports.
- viii) A small number of sporting events such as the FIFA men's and women's World Cups are protected in law under Ofcom's 'free-to-air' list.
- ix) However, many 'crown jewels' of British sports such as the entirety of the men's Ashes and the vast majority of the women's Ashes are not protected and no longer on free-to-air TV - while others such as the Six Nations are now under threat.

Conference believes that:

- A. Watching sport as a nation helps unite people, creates a sense of belonging and fosters national pride.
- B. Key national sporting events - the 'crown jewels' of sport - should be available to all television viewers, including those who cannot afford the extra cost of subscription television, especially in a cost-of-living crisis.
- C. It is right that the FIFA Women's World Cup Finals and the Women's European Football Championship Finals have been added to the list of sports available to all viewers.
- D. It is a scandal that no English Premier League matches are available on free-to-air TV.
- E. The Government has missed an open goal by failing to protect more of the treasured sporting events which bring people together.

Conference calls on the Government to:

1. Expand the list of sporting fixtures which must have live coverage made available to free-to-air channels to include:
 - a) At least 10 Premier League matches and 10 Scottish Premiership matches every season.
 - b) At least 20 games from the English Football League and 10 from the Scottish Championship.
 - c) The men's and women's Six Nations.
 - d) The Ryder Cup and the Solheim Cup.
 - e) The England men's Ashes Test at Lord's, and the England women's Ashes fixture at Lord's.
 - f) At least one cricket test match and one day international per summer.
 - g) The entirety of the Wimbledon Championships.
2. Recognise the growing popularity of women's sports and ensure that the list of women's sporting fixtures made available to free-to-air channels mirrors men's.
3. Review opportunities to televise more disability sports.
4. Continue to protect key national sporting events such as the Summer and Winter Olympic and Paralympic games.
5. Help councils to enhance community sporting facilities which play a key role in the early sporting lives of many athletes by working with councils to reform local government finance and supporting improvements to those grassroots community facilities.
6. Review opportunities to televise and provide media coverage to sports that have not typically enjoyed mainstream coverage.

Applicability: Federal

Background briefing

This motion updated and developed policy on sport and media.

It built on existing policy as set out in the pre-manifesto policy paper 153 *For a Fair Deal* (September 2023), and policy motion *Reclaiming the People's Game* (September 2014).

Amendments: Conference passed two amendments.

The first amendment added references to councils and community sports in 5.

The second amendment added reference to televising lesser known sports in 6.

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

Tackling Persistent Absence

Conference believes that:

- I. Every child can achieve great things - they deserve the best possible start in life and the opportunity to flourish, no matter what their background.
- II. Liberal Democrats believe that education is the best investment we can make in our children's potential and 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. The current level of persistent absence, driven in part by the pandemic, is a national crisis which is doing untold harm to children's education and well-being as well as impacting their future life chances.
- V. Persistent absence is a very complex issue and a multi-faceted approach is needed to tackle the problem.

Conference notes that:

- a) One in five children are now persistently absent from school, missing 10% or more of their classes.
- b) Included in the absence figures are children who can not attend rather than will not attend - those whose social and emotional needs make attendance exceptionally challenging and in some cases impossible.
- c) Pupils who are eligible for free school meals or who are young carers are twice as likely to be persistently absent from school that those who are ineligible or who do not have caring responsibilities.
- d) NHS Data shows school absence rates are higher in children with a probable mental health disorder.
- e) The rate of persistent absence in special schools is significantly higher.
- f) Currently it is impossible to determine how many children have disappeared from the school roll as there is no register of children not in school.

Conference believes that:

- i) The costs associated with going to school such as transport, school uniform and lunch, as well as not having suitable costumes or clothing for themed and non-uniform days affect children's attendance.
- ii) There is a growing crisis in mental health support for young people, a quarter of a million young people have been denied NHS support in the last year and the lack of any concrete mental health workforce planning means waiting lists in much of the country are longer than two years.

- iii) The demand and expectations for SEND support exceed the current funding and capacity available, and the situation will continue to deteriorate rapidly unless substantial changes are made.
- iv) Young carers should be proactively identified and supported with their education and their caring responsibilities so they can have the same educational opportunities as their peers.
- v) It is critical that the welfare and education of every child who is not in school can be monitored.
- vi) In order to drive up attendance at school we need to make the classroom and school a place where children want to be.

Conference notes with concern that:

- A. A third of school-age children in England (900,000) living in poverty miss out on free school meals.
- B. When funding for mental health support teams ends in 2024, only half of secondary schools and a quarter of primary schools will have a team in place.
- C. 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.
- D. Forty percent of young carers report that they are not getting the help they need to balance their caring responsibilities and their education.

Conference therefore calls on the Government to:

1. Enact legislation from the 'Schools Bill' that was abandoned by the Government, to place a duty on local authorities to maintain a register of children who are not in school and provide the funding for councils to compile these records.
2. Introduce a commitment that permanently excluded pupils must be placed with a registered provider.
3. Give clear guidance to parents on when their child should be off of school due to illness, as the pandemic has made parents unsure if it is appropriate to send their child to school if they have a cough or cold.
4. Roll out a programme of education welfare officers and attendance hubs across England and train more teachers to be able to undertake home visits to work with families to understand and remove the underlying barriers to school attendance and make schools more inclusive.
5. Introduce a commitment to provide pupils with an extracurricular offer within schools, including things like sports, music, drama, and art, drawing from best practice in the youth sector, so that school becomes a place that pupils want to go.
6. Provide a dedicated mental health professional in every school, so every child and every parent has someone they can turn to for help.
7. Expand Free School Meals to all children on universal credit.
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. Improving identification and support for young carers by:
- a) Developing a cross-Government Carers Strategy with clear actions to improve support for young carers.
 - b) Ensuring that all schools have a young carers' lead and a young carers' policy so that all young carers know what support is available inside and outside of school.

Applicability: England only.

Background briefing

This motion updated and developed policy on children and education, particularly tackling absence in schools.

It built on existing policy as set out in the pre-manifesto policy paper 153 *For a Fair Deal* (September 2023), and policy paper 128 *Every Child Empowered: Education for a Changing World* (March 2018).

Amendments: Conference passed two amendments.

The first amendment added references to carers in b), iv), D, 9. a) and 9 b).

The second amendment added funding councils to compile records on absence in 1.

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

The Funding Crisis in Local Government

Conference notes:

- A. That the Local Government Association (LGA) estimates that councils in England have a funding gap of £4 billion over the next two years.
- B. One in five English local authorities are in danger of issuing a Section 114 notice this year or next.
- C. Half of English councils are not confident that they have the money to fulfil their legal duties next year.
- D. Concern about funding for local authorities is cross-party.

Conference recognises similar pressures and concerns faced by councils in Scotland and Wales and calls on the Scottish and Welsh Governments to work with their councils to take action.

Conference further notes that:

- i) The National Audit Office estimates that between 2010/2011 and 2021/2022 the real spending power of English councils was reduced by 29%.
- ii) The 2023 Autumn Spending Statement failed to address the needs of local authorities and the people they serve.
- iii) The older age population is increasing faster than the general population and an ageing population is increasing the complexity of the care required - the Health Foundation suggests that £14 billion may be needed by 2030/31 to fund Adult Social Care alone.
- iv) The number of looked after children is 80,000 and rising.
- v) Many councils in England are struggling to meet the demand for SEND support already.
- vi) Councils are struggling to fund the increase in the need for homeless placements and supported accommodation.
- vii) Councils are under increasing pressure on costs, in particular to meet inflation and rising staff costs, including the National Living Wage.

Conference believes that:

- a) Local authorities play a vital role in delivering local services.
- b) The current funding arrangements are unable to meet the needs of local authorities.
- c) The government's approach to encourage councils to use reserves and capital receipts to subsidise their revenue expenditure is fundamentally wrong and unsustainable.
- d) Most councils have reached the limits of what can be achieved by efficiency savings; further cuts can only come from core services highly valued by the communities

councils serve - these are non-statutory and include leisure centres, swimming pools, many libraries, bus routes and the arts, among others.

- e) If properly funded, local government can play a key role in tackling climate change and protecting our environment.
- f) Liberal Democrat councillors up and down the country have a strong record in community engagement and delivering good quality, value for money local public services to respond to local need.
- g) The Government's levelling-up funding is an inefficient way to support local initiatives and undermines local decision-making and democracy.

Conference resolves to:

1. Support the LGA's 'Make It Local' campaign, which outlines how local government is key to delivering solutions to the biggest issues for the public.
2. Argue for the next Government to put in place proper long term funding of local government and, as a matter of urgency, to close the £4 billion funding gap.
3. Support policies to build a consensus on long-term funding of social care.

Applicability: England only.

Background briefing

This motion updated and developed policy on local government, and created new policy in response to the local government funding crisis.

It built on existing policy as set out in the pre-manifesto policy paper 153 *For a Fair Deal* (September 2023), and policy paper 130 *Power for People and Communities* (September 2018).

Amendments: Conference passed one amendment.

The amendment added lines on supporting homelessness, condemning using capital spending to cover day to day spending and praising Liberal Democrat councillors for their record in vi), c), and f).

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

40 New Hospitals

Conference notes that:

- I. The Government has broken their 2019 manifesto pledge to build "40 new hospitals by 2030" according to the National Audit Office (NAO), and delays to the programme have only been made worse by the Government's failure to address Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) in hospitals.
- II. Many of the projects that make up the Government's New Hospital Programme are not new hospitals but renovations or expansions of existing sites, and several projects' planning and approval commenced long before the announcement of the programme undermining the pledge itself.
- III. It is a national scandal that patients are being treated in hospitals with roofs and floors at risk of collapse, as well as in other life-expired buildings.
- IV. The NHS estate is deteriorating and now has an £11.6bn backlog of maintenance, almost half of which relates to high or significant risk repairs.
- V. The Government's New Hospitals Programme (NHP) reset in May 2023 has delayed the completion date of eight hospitals to after 2030.
- VI. The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) concluded that they have no confidence that the government will achieve their latest target of 32 new hospitals by 2030.
- VII. Those hospitals being built based on the Hospital 2.0 design are very likely to be too small for future patient demand.
- VIII. The final standardised design for Hospital 2.0 is not expected to be completed until May 2024.
- IX. Only ten out of the 40 projects have received full planning permission and several projects have no planning permission at all.

Conference believes that:

- i) It is scandalous that the Conservatives pledged to build 40 new hospitals in full knowledge that many of the projects were not hospitals and were not new.
- ii) Patients and staff deserve the dignity of safe, modern and clean hospitals.
- iii) This Government's commitment to eradicate RAAC from the NHS estate by 2035 is not quick enough, putting patients and staff at risk of harm and hospitals at risk of closure.
- iv) The Government has not adequately accounted for the increase in construction costs due to inflation and the impact these costs will have on the success of the NHP.

Conference notes with concern that:

- A. NHS patients and staff cannot use affected buildings unless safety measures are installed and RAAC replaced.

- B. The Government has pilfered capital spend budgets to plug Conservative cuts to frontline spending which has contributed to the NHS repairs backlog which is more than £11.6bn.
- C. The Government has not allocated enough funding to ensure all the hospitals in the NHP will be built.
- D. The Government's NHP is behind schedule and will not be able to help many hospital buildings which are in urgent need of repair.
- E. The Government neglected to include five hospitals they knew to have RAAC in the NHP announced in October 2020 and they were only added to the programme in May 2023.

Conference calls on the Government to:

1. Urgently release the funds that they have already committed, so that construction can start as soon as possible.
2. Refresh the 10-year major capital programme to give long-term certainty to delivering new or replaced hospital buildings.
3. Review outdated government finance rules which prevent NHS Trusts from investing the funds they've raised into their buildings.
4. Take action to fix crumbling hospitals and replace RAAC by:
 - a) Providing urgent clarity over where RAAC has been found in hospitals and set up a national risk register.
 - b) Bringing forward their commitment to eradicate RAAC by 2035 and review whether the existing £685 million fund up to 2024-25 is sufficient.
 - c) Bringing construction forward on replacements for the seven entirely RAAC hospitals before the end of 2025 where possible.
 - d) Amending their Minimum Viable Product version of Hospital 2.0 to ensure future hospitals are not too small and set out how these future hospitals meet the total required hospital capacity nationally and by region.
5. Publish a plan to recruit and retain a skilled workforce to carry out the NHP.
6. Work with relevant NHS organisations to create a package of support and advice for hospitals that are in a poor condition but are not a top priority to be fixed, to help address the additional problems affecting patients and staff.

Applicability: England only.

Background briefing

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

It built on existing policy as set out in the pre-manifesto policy paper 153 *For a Fair Deal* (September 2023), and policy paper 137 *Save the NHS and Social Care by Stopping Brexit* (September 2019).

Vote on motion: Conference passed the motion.

Constitutional Amendments

Federal Appeals Panel

Conference notes that:

1. The Federal Appeals Panel (FAP) has experienced difficulties for a number of years due to not being consistently at full strength.
2. Following a review, the Federal Audit and Scrutiny Committee (FASC) recommended changes to the rules about who can be a member of the FAP in order to:
 - a) Better foster and preserve relevant expertise, including through how people join the panel.
 - b) Make it easier to ensure the FAP is at full strength.
 - c) Make it easier to assemble suitable panels for specific cases.

Conference therefore agrees to change Article 22.1 of the Federal Constitution by:

- i) Deleting 'There shall be a Federal Appeals Panel, which shall consist of 18 members elected as follows' and inserting 'There shall be a Federal Appeals Panel, which shall consist of 18 members chosen as follows'.
- ii) In 22.1A, deleting 'elected' and inserting 'chosen'.
- iii) In 22.1B, deleting 'elected' and inserting 'chosen'.
- iv) In the last paragraph of 22.1, deleting 'the members elected to it by the Federal Board' and inserting 'those of its members chosen by the Federal Board'.
- v) In the last paragraph of 22.1, deleting 're-appointed as a member of the Panel' and inserting 'chosen again as a member of the Panel by the Federal Board and confirmed by Conference'.

Conference also agrees to change Article 22.2 of the Federal Constitution by:

- I. Deleting 'Each member of the Panel shall hold office for five years, and shall be eligible for re-appointment provided that no person shall be entitled to hold office for more than ten years in aggregate' and inserting 'Each member of the Panel shall hold office for five years, and shall be eligible for re-appointment provided that no person shall be entitled to hold office for more than ten years out of twelve in aggregate'.
- II. Deleting 'No person shall be eligible for appointment if (and any member shall forthwith vacate office upon becoming) an MP, MEP or prospective parliamentary candidate (save that the Chief Whip may be a federal appointee) or a member of the Federal Board or the Federal Policy Committee' and inserting 'No person shall be eligible for appointment if (and any member shall forthwith vacate office upon becoming) an MP (save that the Chief Whip may be a federal appointee) or a member of the Federal Board'.

Conference further agrees to change Article 22.4(B) by deleting 'and at least one shall be a Federal appointee' from the end of 'at least three members shall be appointed to hear any other case of whom at least one shall be an appointee of the State Party of which the applicant is a member and at least one shall be a Federal appointee;'.

Conference also notes that following the Board filling various party posts during 2023, it reviewed the processes for doing so and concluded that providing more time to fill posts after the start of each Board term would better ensure that a skilled, diverse set of appointments and elections are made; it also concluded that having different posts with similar names can be confusing.

Conference therefore agrees to delete Article 8.5 of the Federal Constitution and insert new 8.5 as follows:

1. The term of office for each Committee of the Federal Party shall be three years. All elections to Federal Committees by party members and other Federal Committees shall be governed by this term of office.
2. The first meeting of each Federal Committee shall take place no later than three months after the declaration of the results in the triennial election.
3. The term of office shall commence from the first meeting of that Committee following a triennial election, save that the Board may decide that the term for those party members which the Board elects to other committees may start up to four months after the first meeting of the Committee, and for those previously elected to continue in post until that date.

Conference also agrees to change Article 12.2 B and 16.3 B (iii) of the Federal Constitution by deleting 'Treasurer' and inserting 'Federal Treasurer'.

Conference further agrees to change Article 20.5 of the Federal Constitution by deleting 'The Treasurer, who shall be responsible for fund-raising, shall be elected by the Federal Board at its first meeting in every term and shall serve for a term of three years' and inserting 'The Federal Treasurer, who shall be responsible for fund-raising, shall be elected by the Federal Board and shall serve for a term of three years'.

Vote on motion: Conference passed the motion as amended

Report Questions and Answers

Federal Conference Committee Report

Q1. Submitted by John Grout

Given the potential for an Autumn election to disrupt the Autumn Conference (for the 4th time in the last 5 years!), what plans do FCC have to minimise any disruption and ensure that something can still take place (e.g. purely online)? Given the high number of cancelled conferences over recent years, and the possibility of yet another cancellation in the autumn, on what grounds does FCC believe that any party member should arrange to attend any party conference ever again?

Answer by Nick da Costa

The Federal Board is currently consulting members on a number of options with regards to Autumn Conference 2024, and once that consultation is complete it is likely that the responsible Federal Committees will discuss the outcome of the consultation and make a decision on the next steps.

I appreciate that there have been a number of cancellations due to very valid reasons; the outbreak of COVID and the death of Her Late Majesty the Queen.

We are facing the increasing prospect of an Autumn election, unless the PM calls an election between today and my birthday (25 March), and I think many of us can appreciate how significant this election might be for us. It is important, not only that our focus is on winning as many seats as possible, but that as responsible members of a federal committee we also take into consideration the financial and logistical impact on our staff, on the party campaign and also on our members.

The aim with starting the consultation process now, is so that we have time to talk with members, hear their concerns and views and be able to make a decision based on evidence. And up until this point, we have had 2215 members respond to the consultation.

In the case that Conference does go ahead as normal, then the FCC will need to work very hard with HQ, State, Regional and Local staff to ensure as little disruption as possible to our campaigns, and also see what we can offer, within the very limited budget envelope that we have.

I would hope that members appreciate that we are having these discussions now, well in advance of the Autumn Conference which, depending what the outcome is, will allow members to change or adapt their bookings. Finally, FCC doesn't want to cancel conferences; our purpose, as per the constitution, is to "be responsible for organising the Conference." The decision to cancel Conference constitutionally lies with the Federal Board

and not FCC, and if we make a recommendation to cancel Conference, we do so with a heavy heart and after a lot of debate. It is not a decision we would ever take lightly.

Q2. Submitted by Abrial Jerram

Do you plan to increase the diversity of conference venues beyond York, Brighton and Bournemouth in the long term?

Answer by Nick da Costa

Yes. The Conference Office have explored over 50 different alternatives for Spring and Autumn Conferences, but are limited by our specific requirements, availability and budget.

Q3. Submitted by Abrial Jerram & John Grout

Did the possibility that this could be our last conference before the General Election have an impact on selection of motions for the agenda and if so, what was the impact? Given that this may well be the last Conference before the General Election, can FCC explain the decision not to have any GE- or manifesto-focused items on the main agenda?

Answer by Nick da Costa

Firstly, the FCC can only consider topics for conference that are submitted to it. With regards to General Election/manifesto focused items, this was covered at Autumn 2023 with the pre-manifesto motion which was debated, amended and passed, which then goes into the FPC manifesto process. However, nothing was submitted for FCC to consider for Spring.

Q4. Submitted by Abrial Jerram

Please explain your selection of F23, Tackling the Funding Crisis in Local Government, given its lack of substance.

Answer by Nick da Costa

Respectfully, I think the 3000 Liberal Democrat Councillors and the almost 70 Councils we lead would disagree with your assessment that this motion lacks in substance. Furthermore, there's been a 25% real terms cut in central funding for Local Authorities since 2016.

Q5. Submitted by Toby Keynes

For Autumn Conference 2023, a number of submitted questions were 'composited' together, supposedly to prevent duplication – but major concerns raised within some questions were removed entirely. Does FCC undertake not to use compositing to suppress awkward questions that members are entitled to raise?

Answer by Nick da Costa

I appreciate your feedback on this matter. FCC has the right under standing orders to composite questions on similar topics / similar questions. This then allows as many members to have their questions answered at Conference. Each member who submitted

their question still has the ability to ask a follow-up question. I appreciate that our view on this differs, but I appreciate the feedback and the FCC will (and has) taken this under consideration.

Q6. Submitted by Michael Berwick Gooding & Andrew Hudson

According to Standing Order 12.4 “After the Conference the Committee shall publish the answers to all questions submitted under Standing Orders 1.5 (d) and (e) which are in order, and to all supplementary questions asked”. After last Autumn’s Conference I emailed asking where this information would be published, but I didn’t receive an answer. Please can you say where these have been published for the Federal Conferences last year and where they will be published for this Conference?

Answer by Nick da Costa

Conference Final (which includes responses to questions) are published via the Lib Dem website in the Conference section, and then also shared on the Facebook Group. We had some delays this year as some people were late in submitting their written questions.

Q7. Submitted by Dionne Daniel

The Questions input form says, at the final submission stage, “Recommended maximum 25 words” for Questions to Reports. You’ve already tried and failed to limit us to 30 seconds for follow-up questions. Are you trying to neuter this important way of holding committees to account at Conference?

Answer by Nick da Costa

As per your question, it is a recommendation rather than enforced. You can check the questions submitted to reports and plenty of them are over the 25 word recommendation. We just want to avoid people writing essays as their questions.

Q8. Submitted by Joe Norris

What’s been your committee’s biggest mistake, and what did you learn from it?

Answer by Nick da Costa

This is a difficult question to answer, as a Chair I will defend the decisions that the committee make. However, I think that in the past that we’ve been a little conservative in introducing new innovations; and that the COVID pandemic forced us to innovate; for example the introduction of online attendance and voting. We want to be able to do more, but we work with a very limited budget envelope, and very tight resources, so it is important to be able to balance that as well.

Q9. Submitted by Alisdair McGregor

Why is the conference registration process still acting in a discriminatory fashion against people with long-term disabilities?

Answer by Nick da Costa

I am sorry to hear about the difficulties that you have had. I have responded (albeit a bit too late) to you via email. The challenge we have this time is that we've moved onto a new system (which offers increased member experience); however, for data protection reasons we were unable to transfer people's details over to the new system, and therefore everyone had to re-register for the new system, and upload supporting documentation. However, the guidance on the registration states to reach out to the Conference team for them to assist you if needed.

Q10. Submitted by James Bliss

At Bournemouth conference there was an issue of partisan leaflets on a major policy debate being handed out on chairs during a fringe event by a major party group. What steps are FCC taking to prevent this happening in future?

Answer by Nick da Costa

It took us a while to get to the bottom of those leaflets, but the moment we were made aware of them we had them removed from the fringe event. We have, and will continue, to remind members and conference attendees that leafleting is not permitted without the expressed permission of FCC officers.

Federal Policy Committee Report

Q1. Submitted by Em Dean

I welcome the efforts of the FPC to index our recent policy, however, some key policy is missing as it is much older, for example on Culture, Transport, and Equalities, which tend not to be updated as frequently. Could the FPC commit to going a bit further back in time on such issues, and add policy from prior years?

Answer by Lucy Nethsingha

Thanks to the staff who have done a lot of work on this. In terms of expanding the coverage of policy issues, yes we do want to do this but given the demands on staff time in the run-up to a general election I can't make any commitments on when it may happen.

Q2. Submitted by Michael Berwick-Gooding

Will FPC look into the tax expert Richard Murphy's Taxing Wealth Report, and into Margaret Hodge's claim made on 25th November 2023 in the House of Commons that there are 100 tax reliefs which could raise £195 billion if scrapped, with a view to the party adopting some of them?

Answer by Lucy Nethsingha

As part of the work on the manifesto, we have been looking into tax reliefs that could be removed and used as a source of funding. Once the elections are over, we will need to wait to see what the new Government does on tax reform before giving this further consideration.

Parliamentary Party Reports

Q1. Submitted by Sam Cook and Emily Tester

What can our Parliamentarians do to tackle the rise of Antisemitism and Islamophobia?

Answer by Dick Newby and Wendy Chamberlain

It's been deeply disturbing to see that both Antisemitism and Islamophobia are massively on the rise across the UK. I know our Equalities Team are very concerned about this, and are keeping a watching brief on what's most helpful for us to be doing or saying in response.

This includes meeting regularly with groups that monitor these issues, like the Community Security Trust (CST) and Tell MAMA. One thing that has become clear throughout these meetings is that as parliamentarians, we have an important role to play in being measured and responsible with our language. This is essential for helping take the heat out of the debate at a time when tensions are high.

At the same time, we have routinely raised a number of issues with the Equalities minister, including to:

- 1) Push for more action on funding to tackle antisemitism in schools
- 2) Call to immediately hire an Independent Adviser on Islamophobia after Conservative ministers leave the post vacant for two years;
- 3) Challenge the government on their decision to pull funding for the Inter Faith Network

Q2 Submitted by Rebecca Jones

Following a meeting with Transgender members of the Liberal Democrats, what is the parliamentary party doing to advance transgender rights nationally?

Answer by Dick Newby and Wendy Chamberlain

Liberal Democrats will always fight to advance the rights of everyone in the LGBT+ community, including trans people. In terms of recent efforts by our parliamentarians, I'm particularly proud of Baroness Lorely Burt's tireless work with her Private Member's Bill which seeks to finally deliver a comprehensive ban on conversion therapy.

Following an impressive effort to garner cross-party support, the bill has now passed its Second Reading, and we are pushing the Government to make time for it to continue passing through Parliament. Throughout this process, we have been abundantly clear - any conversion therapy ban needs to be inclusive of trans people.

Meanwhile in the House of Commons, our MPs have stood up for trans people in the face of attacks from Conservative MPs, like Sunak at PMQs. This includes Wera Hobhouse speaking out against the Government's attempts to restrict the number of countries we accept gender recognition certificates from.

At the same time, our party policy on these issues remains firm. We will continue fighting to make the gender recognition process less bureaucratic and intrusive, while pushing for better access to specialist healthcare.

Q3. Submitted by Chase Smith

What can the Liberal Democrats do to promote clean energy production in the UK?

Answer by Dick Newby and Wendy Chamberlain

To tackle climate change, cut energy bills and create well paid jobs for the future, we would:

- Make homes warmer and cheaper to heat with a ten year emergency upgrade programme and provide incentives for the installation of solar and heat pumps
- Require all new homes and non-domestic buildings to be built to a zero-carbon standard
- Remove the Conservatives' unnecessary restrictions on new solar and wind power, and support investment and innovation in tidal and wave power
- Help people with the cost of living and their energy bills by implementing a proper, one-off windfall tax on the super-profits of oil and gas producers and traders.
- Invest in more energy storage and build more electricity interconnectors and grid infrastructure.
- Expand community and decentralised energy
- Maintaining the ban on fracking, introduce a ban on new coal mines and end fossil fuel subsidies.

Q4. Submitted by Adam Robertson

What can Liberal Democrat members in England and Wales do to help preserve the United Kingdom in the face of the SNP's drive to divide?

Answer by Dick Newby and Wendy Chamberlain

The Liberal Democrats are committed to campaigning against nationalism in all of its forms and this includes Scottish Nationalism. The Brexit nationalist agenda of the Conservatives and the separatist nationalist agenda of the SNP are both cut from the same cloth.

The SNP are well known for adopting causes as their own political footballs if they think it will further their independence campaign. For example, in recent years, they have run on a Pro-Europe platform. However, they spent more money on the Shetland byelection (which they famously still lost to us) than they did during the whole Brexit referendum.

Listen to your Scottish colleagues. They work incredibly hard advocating for desperately needed improvements to public services that the SNP have neglected, who instead devote all their energy to pedalling their narrow nationalist agenda.

Advocate for federalism! This is a system that would give more power and autonomy to regions whilst still maintaining the unity and cooperation that is crucial for the UK to flourish. This is a principle that makes our party unique and is at the very heart of our values.

Q5. Tara Copeland

Does the Parliamentary Party support the abolition of leasehold?

Answer by Dick Newby and Wendy Chamberlain

We've long supported abolishing residential leasehold and capping ground rents to a nominal fee.

Lloyd George launched a campaign against leasehold in 1909, describing the leasehold system as blackmail, not business. Under leasehold, owners can be charged extortionate rents and fees by the owner of the land, a relic of feudalism. We'd abolish leasehold for all residential properties.

The Conservatives promised leasehold reform in their manifesto and have pledged to abolish it, but this remains another one of their broken promises, as their Leasehold and Freehold (Reform) Bill still contains loopholes.

Q6. Jack Roberts

Do we support Labour's proposed reforms to the House of Lords?

Answer by Dick Newby and Wendy Chamberlain

The Liberal Democrats have a long-standing commitment to reforming the House of Lords with a proper democratic mandate in order to make Government properly accountable.

We support the measures laid out in the 2017 Burns Report, particularly the reduction of the size of the House - levels of Peers should be reduced, not increased when a new PM is appointed.

Liberal Democrats have consistently spoken out against the current system of Prime Ministerial appointments which ingrains patronage, reinforces the elitism of British politics and causes so many people to lose faith in our system.

Hereditary Peers no longer have a place in our society to be making laws based on their family background – it is an antiquated tradition, as is the hereditary by-election process. It is currently our view that hereditary peers should be allowed to stay until their retirement or passing, in which case they should not be replaced.

Q7. Joshua Price

What more will the Party be doing to highlight the impact of real-terms Local Government Funding cuts?

Answer by Dick Newby and Wendy Chamberlain

We'll be getting more Liberal Democrats into government and building on the steadfast campaigns of Lib Dem local councils and parliamentarians who are campaigning for proper long term funding for local government.

To relieve the pressure on local councils, we will also continue our work to address the greatest areas of need - adult social care, SEND provision, rising costs due to inflation and housing provision for the most vulnerable.

Federal Board Report

Q1. Submitted by John Grout

Since 01/01/2020, how many in-person Conferences have been cancelled to date, and what is the total aggregate financial cost to the Party of those cancellations? Given the number of conference cancellations in recent years, and the possibility of yet another in the autumn, on what grounds does the Federal Board believe that any party member should arrange to attend any party conference ever again?

Answer by Mark Pack

Two conferences have been cancelled, one in Spring 2020 due to COVID-19 and one in Autumn 2022 due to the death of the Queen.

Comparing their outturn to what was budgeted for them, Spring 2020 was £88,000 worse than budget and Autumn 2022 was £207,000 worse. That latter figure takes into account the kind decision by many members to turn their registration fees into donations.

Given the content of the question, it is perhaps useful to add that cancelling a conference this autumn at short notice due to a general election would cost considerably more, such as due to the likely need to buy out staff from time off in lieu usually accumulated in the run up to and during conference, as with a general election around the same time, staff they will be needed for other urgent tasks.

It is a shame that we have had to cancel two conferences. I say that as someone who came to their first federal conference in Spring 1992 and has come to them all since. So I've literally put my money where my mouth is when saying that conference is important.

Thinking of, for example, that Spring 2020 cancellation and what we now know about how COVID spreads - cancellation was definitely the right option, and it would have been a tragic mistake not to have done so.

Looking to the future, it is possible - not certain, but possible - that our planned Autumn 2024 conference will happen just before or even during a general election campaign. If the election is called straight after Parliament returns in September, it could even be the case that people will be in the middle of their full-on election campaigning, with nominations closing during our conference dates. Taking several days out of a full-on election campaign in order to come to conference would not be a realistic option for anyone fighting a full campaign.

Given that potentially unprecedented circumstance, it would be irresponsible of the Board not to be making contingency plans, and it's responsible to let members know of the risks so that, for example, anyone wanting to book accommodation well in advance to get lower prices knows to check the cancellation terms for such bookings.

Finally, in answer to the supplementary question asked at York, when we put on the online event for Autumn 2020, the outturn was £74,000 worse than the (pre-COVID-19) budget.

Q2. Submitted by Abrial Jerram, Michael Berwick-Gooding, and Adam Roberston

How successful have you been in achieving the objective of “developing a compelling and distinctive narrative” and how important is it compared to the other organisational priorities listed in the report? The slogan ‘For a Fair Deal’ could be open up to interpretation, and therefore could mean something different to each individual. When we are talking about ‘Fairness’ is it the overarching theme of equality of opportunity or economic equality?

Answer by Mark Pack

There are two main parts to our messaging for the next Westminster general election. One is that we are going to play our full part in getting the Conservatives out after all their failures in government in Westminster. That is a simple, compelling narrative - with the good folk, the bad folk, a plot, a denouement and - if we get it right - a happy ending.

The other is our vision for how we would do things differently, which is set out in the [Fair Deal pre-manifesto](#), and especially the introduction setting out what fairness means to us and how it’s different from what others offer.

Fairness is also a theme that has been central to previous successful general election campaigns and a theme that adapts well to elections at levels other than Westminster, including where we are incumbents in power running on our record.

It’s also a theme that is working - as you can see in the record-breaking run of Parliamentary by-election wins, the gains in every round of council elections this Parliament, in council by-elections month after month and in both our internal research and the feedback from our top canvassers.

That is the crucial test: does it help us win? Colleagues all around the country, week in and week out show it does.

Q3. Submitted by Daniel Jones

Given the advice to all members regarding antisemitism and the risks of being drawn into conspiracist thinking online (especially on social media), what is the board doing to support members (especially those involved in vetting council candidates) in spotting and being aware of such arguments?

Answer by Mark Pack

You are right about this being a serious issue, particularly as we have sadly seen an increase in the number of cases where our independent complaints system has had to take action over antisemitism.

As well as a training programme being rolled out for staff and those holding key posts in the party, we have also increased the content in our internal communications on topics such as our Code of Conduct and how to recognise Islamophobia and antisemitism. The last few years have also seen significant improvements in the online due diligence processes used across the party, along with more widespread use of them.

ALDC also has an important role to play with its best practice advice for local council approval processes and its promotion of them through its activities.

We are always keen to hear more suggestions on what could be done.

Q4. Submitted by John Grout

How can we give LGBT+ candidates confidence and support given the culture wars the opponents of the Lib Dems are likely to be fighting on at the General Election?

Answer by Mark Pack

It is important we do our best to field a diverse set of candidates, but we can only do that if those candidates feel welcome and supported within the party.

The increasing number of LGBT+ candidates - and elected politicians - in the party is very welcome. This is an essential part of how we reflect our values and the communities we seek to represent.

LGBT+ Lib Dems has done some fantastic work on this with their Candidate Fund - providing not only the crucial financial support some people might need to take the plunge, but also the sense of community and peer support that can make becoming a candidate less intimidating.

We also have a range of support services for candidates and for members (such as those outlined [on the party website](#)).

As Party President, I think the best thing we can do is listen to LGBT+ members on what sort of support they would like to see. Myself and our Equalities Spokesperson, Christine Jardine, make a point of meeting regularly with LGBT+ members, and this is one of the things we regularly ask about.

As always, I am very open to any ideas about how we can do this better, so please do come to me with any thoughts or suggestions.

Looking at the bigger picture, those on the populist right who seek to fight culture wars try to divide us, and distract us from the government's failings.

The best way to defeat them is by not playing to their tune of division, by not being distracted from what matters most to voters - and by defeating them when the votes are counted.

Q5. Submitted by Mark Johnston

In cases that were already several years old, why did it take six months for the dismissal of eight so-called 'transphobia' complaints to be communicated to the members concerned? In the Board's view, do these unjustified delays and associated uncertainties caused by the party constitute victimisation within the meaning of Section 27 of the Equality Act?

Answer by Mark Pack

As we have an independent complaints process, it would be inappropriate for the Board to be involved in or given sight of all the details in any specific case. For each case, if any of the participants are unhappy with how things are handled, there is a clear appeals process.

Overall the relevant party committees do see performance figures such as how many open cases there are, or the average time taken to conclude a case. Good progress has continued to be made on both fronts, and a major reason for the changes to the complaints process reported to conference in York was to enable cases to be dealt with more efficiently.

From the evidence the Board sees, I am confident that the process operates within all legal requirements, and I have also checked with the Lead Adjudicator, who of course also has access to more information, and he is of the same view.

Q6. Submitted by Zoe Hollowood

Has the Federal Board been given direct access to, and discussed, the legal advice commissioned by the party after the adoption of the Revised Definition of Transphobia? If not, why not?

Q7. Submitted by Zoe Hollowood

Has all the expert legal advice commissioned by the party into the Definition of Transphobia consistently confirmed that the holding and expressing of gender critical beliefs by members is protected by law under the Equality Act and the European Convention on Human Rights (Arts 9 & 10), and that members must be allowed to express those beliefs freely, as long as they do not harass or discriminate against trans people or create an environment that is hostile or discriminatory to trans people?

Answer by Mark Pack for Q6 and Q7

As you have repeatedly stated that you may take the party to court, and in such legal proceedings the legal advice the party has received and any actions taken based on it may be relevant, I hope you will understand why it would be inappropriate to provide an answer.

Q8. Submitted by Alisdair McGregor

In the wake of the case of Ali vs Green Party, is the Federal Board confident that our disciplinary procedures are robust and fit for purpose in removing transphobes and others who are not aligned with the values of the party?

Answer by Mark Pack

The ruling in this case does not alter the understanding of the law on which our complaints process is based, although the Board is always open to hearing suggestions on how any party process that falls within our remit could be improved.

Q9. Submitted by Toby Keynes

Will the Federal Board take steps to disassociate the Party from the incendiary and grossly offensive assertion, in a motion adopted by English Council Executive in November 2022, that allowing party members to hold and express gender critical beliefs is “equivalent to allowing the holding and expressing of white supremacist or anti-Semitic views”?

Answer by Mark Pack

We are a Federal Party and, as part of that, the English Party has its own sovereignty. So any actions, views or decisions of the English Council Executive or its members are matters for them.

Q10. Submitted by Juliet Line

In 2022 the ex-Chair of FPDC commented that it was working on a whistleblowing policy for volunteers. When can members expect its completion, who has been consulted and how will it be communicated?

Answer by Mark Pack

The timetable is dependent on the timing of the general election as, although this is an important piece of work for the long-term, it isn't a must-do before general election polling day. The Federal People Development Committee has, and will continue to, consult with relevant stakeholders in the party and is also making use of external expertise on what best practice whistleblowing policies look like.

Q11. Submitted by Toby Keynes

On 19/11/2022, I volunteered to train as an e-ballot administrator. The first initial training session offered was in December 2023. It is now 15 ½ months since I first applied, and I am still waiting to be offered the final-stage training programme. Is there a shortage of trained e-ballot administrators, and how long is the average wait time from volunteering to completing training?

Answer by Mark Pack

While e-ballot training is a state party matter (and so this question is best addressed to the English Party, which I understand it already has been), the English Party currently has sufficient trained administrators and further training is on hold, pending the decision being made on which software the Party will be using for future e-ballots.

Q12. Submitted by JWendy Horton and Dionne Daniel

Could Federal Board put the 2022 presidential hustings videos online and link them to the 2022 President election results page as they seem to have been taken down after briefly being available on you tube?

Answer by Mark Pack

This is a matter for the Returning Officer, and I believe he has taken the view that the hustings was an internal party event and therefore that it was not something for long-term preservation in public.

Federal Communications and Election Committee Report

Q1. Submitted by John Grout and Adam Roberston

What more support can be given to T2/Moving Forward seats to help as many as possible become the target seats of the future? How are the Federal Communications and Elections Committee ensuring that Development and Start-Up seats are being supported for the General Election, with the County Council Elections being the main priority and the potential for many Liberal Democrats being elected to County Councils in 2025 and being in power?

Answer from Kath Pinnock

We have four tiers of seats, FCEC is keen that we support all seats we can. Our ambition is to elect people, which means focusing on winnable seats. Nobody is left out of the sort of support we can provide. Tiers 3 and 4 can get training on how to develop a strategy. As far as possible the resources of the party will have to be focused on the top tiers.

Supplementary by John Grout

A lot of focus in my region is on advanced seats and some support has been given to start up seats. Some moving forward seats seem to be slipping through the cracks. What more can be done to support them?

Answer from Kath Pinnock

We have to try and move everyone up the tiers to elect more MPs. Moving forward seats have strong local campaigns. Some were doing so well we had to make a differentiation - moving forward plus. They are given encouragement to become target seats. The rest of the moving forward seats get support from elsewhere - like the campaigns hub.

Q2. Submitted by Abrial Jerram

What is the process for a constituency that does not hit targets and does this process differ between held seats and non-held seats?

Answer from Kath Pinnock

All Advanced and Moving Forward Plus seats have campaign targets to achieve which include measures of the volumes of direct mail and leaflets; canvassing, and fundraising. All these targets are monitored on a regular basis by the campaign staff in the seat, the region, and HQ. FCEC reviews the data every quarter. Seats that are not managing to achieve the targets are 'put on review' which means those seats will have more targeted support to help them reach the level of campaigning required for a winning campaign. The process is the same for held and non-held seats.

Q3. Submitted by Chris Butler

Why has the committee not disseminated the findings of the Campaigns Innovation Fund that it commissioned on the effectiveness of digital and non-digital campaigning?

Answer from Kath Pinnock

I apologise, Chris, that the results of this interesting investigation have not been published. The oversight may have been the consequence of the change of chair of FCEC. I will find the results and make sure you have them and that these are then published in the normal way.

Q4. Submitted by Abrial Jerram

How many seats are in each tier and do you expect these numbers to change between now and the election?

Answer from Kath Pinnock

Thank you for the question! Many others would like to know the answer, including Conservative Party HQ! I'm sure you will appreciate that it is not in the best interests of the Party for those numbers to be made public.

Campaign for Gender Balance Report

Q1. Submitted by Alison Jenner

Numerous councillors and local party executives have told me their experiences of sex discrimination within the party, from being advised not to stand due to having young children, to refusal to make accommodations regarding meeting times. What is the Party doing to support women in this position, educate other councillors and exec members and help stop this happening?

Answer by Julia Cambridge

This isn't our remit, so I would advise talking to Liberal Democrat Women and ALDC.

Supplementary question by Alison Jenner

Would you say this kind of behaviour would prima facie be a breach of the code of conduct?

Answer by Julia Cambridge

That's not a question for CGB but thank you for raising it.