

Remit – Empowering Local Communities

A deep commitment to community politics has always been fundamental to the Liberal Democrats. We believe that, if someone wants to do their bit, and play their part in their community, they should have the opportunity and the power to do so. The state should support everyone to contribute fully to their communities and take part in the decisions that affect their lives. Local decisions should be made locally, with powers and resources devolved to councils and communities.

This policy working group on empowering local communities should develop our vision of a society where residents and community groups have far more control over the decisions that affect their communities. It should be a cross-cutting, thematic project, embracing voluntary community activity as well as elected local government. Local government is a vital part of the democratic and institutional framework within which communities exercise power. The group should therefore consider the roles and relationships of different levels of local government, including principal authorities and town and parish councils, and the fiscal and institutional conditions they need to fulfil their democratic and community leadership roles. Its purpose is not, however, to develop a new blueprint for the structural reorganisation of local government.

A liberal approach should start from the premise that individuals and communities already possess potential agency, relationships, knowledge, assets, rights and responsibilities; the task of politics is not to bestow power from above, but to understand why agency has been weakened or blocked, and what needs to change for people and communities to exercise it in practice. We should also recognise that strong local communities contribute to the resilience of society in the face of external shocks such as new technology, economic crises, geopolitical threats and climate change.

The inquiry's primary focus will be on communities of place. It should nevertheless recognise that people also form communities through shared identities, experiences, interests, cultures, faiths or circumstances, including communities whose relationships are maintained partly or principally online. The group should consider these non-geographical communities where they illuminate how people develop agency, belonging, mutual support and collective voice, or how they interact with local places and institutions. It should not attempt a comprehensive examination of every form of non-geographical community.

Throughout its work, the group should consider how power, voice, resources, opportunities and responsibilities are shared between generations. It should pay particular attention to whether children and young people are able to participate meaningfully in the life of their communities and in decisions that affect both their lives now and the future they will inherit.

The working group will develop policies to empower communities in a way that communicates our values and ultimately helps to secure the election of as many Liberal Democrats as possible at local, regional and national level, in order to promote our vision to put more power in people's hands and hold the already powerful to account.

The group will specifically consider:

- How has agency been weakened in people's lives and communities?
- What are the material, civic, democratic and intellectual conditions that allow people to exercise agency?
- How do communities and local institutions build resilience in the face of economic, environmental, technological and geopolitical shocks?
- How should public institutions behave if they start from the assumption that people and communities already have power, rather than waiting to be empowered?
- What would it mean to make public control genuinely public in terms of accountability to citizens and communities, not just state control?
- How do we disperse power through society, rather than merely devolving it down the state?
- The fiscal and institutional conditions needed for local government to fulfil its democratic role. What fiscal, institutional and democratic conditions are needed for local government to be financially sustainable and to fulfil its role in supporting empowered and resilient communities?

The group will, as a top priority, develop up to three headline policies that the party can communicate widely to help elect as many Liberal Democrats as possible – especially at the next general election.

It will build on the policies in our 2024 general election manifesto, as well as the motion *Local Government Finance Emergency* (2026) and policy paper 130, *Power for People and Communities* (2018).

It will take evidence and consult widely both within and outside the party. This evidence should inform the group's proposals, which will be presented alongside an analysis of costs and an Equalities Impact Assessment.

A policy paper of no longer than 10,000 words should be produced for debate at Autumn Conference 2027. Prior to that a consultative session should be held at Spring Conference 2027, and a draft policy paper should be presented to the Federal Policy Committee by June 2027.