



Conference Report Spring 2026

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Policy Motions

A Liberal Future for Social Media for Under 18s

Conference notes that:

- i) On 21 January 2026, the House of Lords voted in favour of an amendment to the Children, Schools and Wellbeing Bill proposing a blanket statutory ban on social media access for under 16s.
- ii) This vote represents a significant and immediate shift in the policy landscape, creating urgency for the Party to clarify its position.
- iii) The amendment relies on age-based prohibition without equivalent strengthening of platform accountability, safety-by-design, or enforceable duties on technology companies.
- iv) The Government announced, on 19th January, a consultation on children's social media use, to run from 2nd March to 26th May, which invites responses for what minimum age there should be for social media use.
- v) Evidence from international research programmes, including UNICEF, the OECD and EU Kids Online, finds no robust causal evidence that blanket bans reduce harm.
- vi) Research instead identifies risks of displacement to less regulated spaces, concealment of use, and reduced access to support, education and community.
- vii) Online harms are real and include compulsive use driven by addictive design, algorithmic reinforcement, and commercial incentives that reward prolonged engagement.

Conference believes that:

- a) A liberal approach to child online safety must balance protection with autonomy, recognising that resilience is built through supported participation, not exclusion.
- b) Children and young people are developing digital citizens whose rights to information, communication and participation apply online as well as offline.
- c) Blanket prohibitions risk disproportionate harm to vulnerable groups, including disabled young people, LGBTQ+ young people, and those in rural or isolated communities who rely on digital access for services, friendships and opportunities unavailable locally.
- d) The greatest risks arise not from access itself but from poorly regulated platform design, particularly features intended to maximise time spent online.
- e) Effective policy must address those structural drivers of harm rather than substitute simple restrictions for meaningful regulation.
- f) Children's access should develop through a graduated framework reflecting age, maturity and digital literacy, not a single rigid threshold.
- g) Governments must build the technical and regulatory capacity required to oversee complex digital systems effectively.

Conference calls for:

1. The introduction of a statutory age rating and classification framework for online platforms, as proposed by Victoria Collins MP, in which services are rated according to the risks posed by their content, design and features, with regulatory requirements scaled accordingly.
2. Age ratings to operate as the gateway to proportionate safeguards, requiring platforms used by under 18s to implement a default safer mode aligned to their rating rather than excluding young people entirely.
3. Safer modes to embed high privacy settings, limits on behavioural advertising, reduced algorithmic amplification, and constraints on addictive engagement features, alongside clear and accessible user controls.
4. Statutory, auditable standards governing these protections, backed by enforceable duties and rapid response requirements where harms occur.

Applicability: England.

Background Briefing

This motion developed policy on a harm-based approach to social media.

It built on existing policy as set out in Policy Paper 163, *Whole Person Mental Health: Care, Choice, Community, and Combatting Populism*.

Driving Forward: The Road to Access

Conference notes that:

- i) Learning to drive is a vital life skill for many young people, particularly in rural and semi-rural areas where public transport is limited or unreliable; around one in five people in England live in rural areas, where car dependency is significantly higher and alternatives to driving are often impractical.
- ii) Learning to drive is also especially important for many disabled people, for whom driving can provide greater independence and access to work, education, healthcare and social opportunities than public transport alone.
- iii) There is a severe and persistent national backlog in practical driving tests; as of 2024, average waiting times at many Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) test centres exceeded 20 weeks, with waits of six months or more in some areas, compared with pre-pandemic averages of six to eight weeks.
- iv) This backlog is driven by long-term examiner shortages, insufficient test centre capacity, and limited system resilience within the DVSA following the pandemic, despite sustained and predictable demand.
- v) Scarcity of test slots has enabled exploitation by third-party bots, resellers, and touts, who reserve appointments in bulk and resell them at inflated prices; learners have reported being charged hundreds of pounds above the official test fee to secure earlier slots.
- vi) The cost of learning to drive has risen substantially - most learners require 40-50 hours of professional instruction, with average lesson prices exceeding £35 per hour, placing the cost of lessons alone above £1,500 before tests or insurance.
- vii) The cost of car insurance for young drivers remains disproportionately high. Average annual premiums for drivers aged 17-24 have exceeded £2,000, with affordability often made conditional on the use of telematics or black box policies that monitor driving behaviour and location with limited transparency or choice.
- viii) The DVSA practical driving test does not require demonstrated experience of night-time driving, motorway driving, or adverse weather conditions, despite these being common real-world scenarios for new drivers.
- ix) Taken together, these barriers restrict access to employment and education, entrench geographic inequality, and disproportionately disadvantage young people, disabled people, and those without family financial support.
- x) Less than 1% of the approximately 39,500 Approved Driving Instructors (ADIs) in the UK have vehicles with adaptations for disabled learners, despite 25% of the population being disabled.
- xi) Disabled people are more likely to rely on driving, and often can only be independent through their vehicles.

Conference believes that:

- a) Access to transport is a matter of social and economic justice, and no one should be prevented from learning to drive because of their income, disability or where they live.
- b) Public transport must be improved and expanded, but driving remains essential to the freedom, mobility and life chances of many young people, particularly in rural and poorly connected communities.
- c) A fair market cannot function where artificial scarcity is exploited through opaque systems, weak enforcement or automated intermediaries that profit from public service failure.
- d) Privacy and personal autonomy should be respected, and intrusive monitoring through telematics should not become a de facto requirement for affordable insurance for young drivers.
- e) Improving access to high-quality driver education, fair testing systems and transparent insurance practices can improve road safety and opportunity without reliance on surveillance.

Conference calls for:

1. Urgent and sustained investment to expand DVSA testing capacity, including recruiting and retaining additional examiners, expanding test centres in underserved areas, and building resilience to prevent future backlogs.
2. Targeted action to eliminate exploitation of driving test bookings, including anti-bot protections, identity-linked bookings, limits on automated reservations and enforcement against third-party reselling.
3. A national bursary scheme, the Young Drivers Support Fund, to subsidise driving lessons and test fees for low-income young people and disabled learners.
4. A formal review and reform of car insurance practices for under-25s, including improved pricing transparency and limits on age-based premium multipliers.
5. Clear consumer rights and regulatory oversight for telematics-based insurance, including transparency over data use, proportionality of monitoring and genuine non-telematics alternatives.
6. Modernisation of driver training and assessment to ensure learners gain experience of real-world conditions, including night driving, motorway driving and adverse weather.
7. Nationwide driver education programmes delivered through schools, colleges, and community settings, covering road safety, costs, insurance practices, consumer rights and driver responsibilities.
8. Allocating £50 million per year for investment in driver education, testing capacity and access support, recognising that reducing backlogs and improving access will improve road safety and opportunity.
9. The development of public-private partnerships with insurers, driving schools, and local authorities to support discounted lessons and fair access models, without compromising consumer protection or privacy.
10. More support for ADIs who wish to become instructors for disabled learners, including but not limited to support with adapting cars and their training.

Applicability: Federal.

Background briefing:

This motion developed new policy on practical driving tests and the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency.

It builds on existing policy as set out in the 2024 General Election Manifesto, *For a Fair Deal*, and policy motion *Connecting Communities - Building a Transport Network Fit for the 21st Century* (2023).

Amendments

Conference passed one amendment, which inserted line 10. which added greater support for disabled learners. Conference rejected one reference back, which sought to refer the motion back to the Federal Policy Committee on the grounds that we ought to be reducing car dependency.

From Local Roots to Global Reach: A Liberal Vision for Universities

Conference believes that:

- A. British universities are a world-leading export, attracting global talent and driving growth across the UK, particularly in regional economies.
- B. As hubs of innovation, universities are central to any credible strategy on research and development.
- C. Greater integration between Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) can open new avenues for learners to access higher education and diversify university revenue streams.
- D. Students deserve a fair deal on finance that allows them to participate meaningfully in university life regardless of background.
- E. The challenges facing the sector require a sustained, multi-pronged approach beyond the next decade.

Conference, however, notes with concern that:

- i) The failure to uprate maintenance loan eligibility thresholds has gradually eroded the level of financial support available to students, with over 40 per cent living on less than £100 a month.
- ii) Frozen student loan repayment thresholds are on track to reach parity with minimum wage by 2031.
- iii) Labour's National Insurance hike and international student levy will cost the sector over £1 billion annually, with just 1 per cent of the revenue raised to be reinvested into maintenance grants.
- iv) Short-term, fragmented research and innovation funding limits the UK's ability to commercialise new technologies.
- v) There remain significant representation gaps within UK universities, including the underrepresentation of women and ethnic minority groups among professors, with Black academics particularly underrepresented.
- vi) Estranged students under 25 are only considered independent after 12 months of no contact, and any contact with their family, whether wanted or not, resets that clock, requiring them to obtain financial information for student finance purposes.
- vii) Care leavers and estranged students are placed at a significant disadvantage by having to find and fund accommodation during holiday periods, a time when many of their peers can return to family homes but which many accommodation contracts do not cover; in addition, lack of a guarantor can make finding private accommodation impossible.

Conference therefore supports the following calls on the Government, taken from the spokesperson's paper *From Local Roots to Global Reach: A Liberal Vision for Universities*:

1. Reform student finance and support, by:

- a) Reintroducing maintenance grants on top of existing student loans, aiming to cover 35 per cent of undergraduate students, rising to 50 per cent when public finances allow.
- b) Unfreezing and uprating parental income thresholds for student finance applications.
- c) Cancelling the Chancellor's unfair freeze to graduate repayment thresholds, and instead guaranteeing that they rise in line with earnings every year.
- d) Launching a Royal Commission to build cross-party consensus on comprehensive reform of the student loan system, looking at ways to cut the interest rates on loans, cap total interest paid by graduates, ensure the repayment framework is genuinely progressive, and protect graduates – especially those on low and middle incomes – from unfairly high monthly repayment rates.
- e) Writing off a portion of student debt for those working in key NHS, education, and social service roles after 10 years of service, with further write-offs after 15 years.
- f) Improving financial support for unpaid carers wanting to access higher education, through measures such as:
 - i) Abolishing the 21-hour rule for Carers Allowance which makes carers choose between caring or learning.
 - ii) Enabling carers who are distance learners to access maintenance loans if they are unable to attend a campus-based university because of their caring responsibilities.

2. Ensure the financial sustainability of universities, by:

- a) Reversing the damaging national insurance hike and international student levy.
- b) Exploring a variety of cost-saving measures such as student loan payment reprofiling, shared-service reform and interest-free loans for internal restructuring.
- c) Renegotiating the cost of private-equity-owned academic journals, with a commitment to support a new, open-source academic journal collection if cost reductions remain unsatisfactory.
- d) Working towards ending pension inequality between pre- and post-1992 institutions.
- e) Protecting regional subject diversity so students who cannot relocate retain access to a broad range of subjects locally.

3. Strengthen skills development and employer engagement, by:

- a) Doubling the number of degree apprenticeships in skill shortage areas and reserving at least 50 per cent for these for students from low-income households.
- b) Encouraging universities to embed employer-identified skills as assessed components throughout undergraduate curricula.

- c) Designing a 'Stackable Funding' mechanism to allow employers to fund modular learning within an academic pathway, combined with Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) grants.
4. Expand modular learning and lifelong learning opportunities, by:
- a) Ensuring regulatory oversight to manage and promote collaboration between the FE and HE sectors, working towards a unified tertiary approach where colleges and universities have the flexibility to share facilities and co-deliver courses.
 - b) Exploring credit transfer models between colleges and universities to allow students to flexibly design studies across multiple institutions.
 - c) Encouraging flexibility in module delivery to enable mature learners and those from non-traditional backgrounds to access modular education delivered by universities.
5. Strengthen the UK's research and innovation ecosystem, by:
- a) Increasing research budgets with inflation and moving towards multi-year funding settlements.
 - b) Quintupling proof of concept funding to £200 million across five years.
 - c) Creating a network of regional innovation centres across the UK, ensuring every nation and major English region can support university-industry collaboration with state-of-the-art research facilities.
 - d) Aiming to restore the 80 per cent commitment for full economic cost recovery of research.
6. Empower academics, students, and research teams to innovate and commercialise research, by:
- a) Introducing government-backed seed funding loans for companies borne from university research, and expanding the definition of commercialisation so university-derived SMEs and student startups are eligible.
 - b) Changing visa rules to allow PhD and MRes students to found startups during their studies and ensuring they are eligible for proof of concept funding.
 - c) Developing a standardised national framework for negotiating intellectual property between universities and staff, with the long-term ambition of enabling academics and researchers to hold full rights to the intellectual property arising from their research.
 - d) Require universities to work towards eliminating the underrepresentation of Black professors, certain other ethnicities and those with a disability, and to make regular reports on their progress.
7. Strengthen UK universities' global leadership by:

- a) Pushing for UK qualifications to be recognised in the EU on a semi-automatic basis, with the ambition to make this automatic in key sectors.
- b) Enhancing university teaching standards by expanding teacher training opportunities through HE Fellowships and other routes.
- c) Creating a single governmental contact point for universities concerned about foreign interference pressures, and developing guidance for universities to combat foreign interference on campus.

Applicability: Federal except for 1. , 3., 4., and 5. which are England only.

Background briefing:

This motion updates and develops policy on higher education and universities.

It builds on existing policy as set out in the 2024 General Election Manifesto, *For a Fair Deal*, Policy Paper 110, *Learning for Life Learning for Life: Education and Skills from Upper Secondary to Lifelong Learning (2013)*, and policy motion *Rebuilding our Cultural, Artistic and Educational Ties with Europe (2021)*.

Amendments

The FCC agreed to several drafting amendments to the language used in lines v), 1. c), 1 d), and 6. d) that recognised the underrepresentation of women, black, and ethnic minority professors, and that added calls from the accompanying policy paper. Conference passed three amendments. Amendment one added greater support for carers by inserting lines 1. f) to 1.f) ii). Amendment two added greater support for estranged students and care leavers by inserting lines vi) and vii). Amendment three altered the list of roles in 1. e).

Local Government Finance Emergency

Conference notes that:

- a) In England, local government grants from central government have been subject to deep cuts in recent years, leading to a significant overall reduction in funding per capita.
- b) Areas of greatest deprivation have tended to see the largest cuts in overall funding despite having the greatest need for the services that local government provides.
- c) Increasing pressure from adult and children's social services, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), home-to-school transport and temporary accommodation have meant cuts of up to 70 per cent in non-statutory spending.
- d) The cumulative deficits in Dedicated Schools Grants (DSG), where the statutory override is due to end in 2027-28; the LGA has estimated that the sector's deficit will reach £5.0 billion in 2025-26.
- e) Councils face increased cost pressures from inflation, rising pay, population growth and an ageing population.
- f) Many councils are now in financial survival mode, with reserves depleted, surplus assets already sold and non-statutory services slashed.
- g) Since 2018, seven councils have issued Section 114 notices, meaning that they are unable to meet their expenditure commitments; others are reported to be on the brink of issuing notices.
- h) In 2025-26, 30 councils required Exceptional Financial Support, with a danger that emergency bailout deals are becoming normalised.
- i) A major cause of the crisis is the rising cost of social care, which now accounts for more than two-thirds of all spending by local authorities, and the Labour Government has made this problem worse with the extra costs of its National Insurance hike.
- j) The Labour Government promised cross-party talks on social care in January 2025, but this has so far only amounted to a single meeting and no meaningful process.

Conference further notes that:

- I. Part of the rationale for local government reorganisation given by the Government was cost savings, but even the most optimistic savings projections from Local Government Reorganisation will not resolve the local government financial crisis.
- II. Savings are likely to be achieved only in the long term while reorganisation costs are short term, while the process has consumed considerable financial and human resources.
- III. Council Tax is a flawed taxation system, with taxation based on 30-year-old property valuations; the money raised is unrelated to actual local need or demand for services.

- IV. While the High Value Council Tax Surcharge seeks to tackle the under taxation of more valuable properties, the money raised will go to central government rather than local councils, with no guarantee that councils will see a net benefit.
- V. While the Fair Funding Review offers help to some councils, others face considerable transitional pressure.
- VI. The multi-year nature of the Local Government Financial Settlement is welcome.

Conference believes that:

- A. Local councils are a vital component in delivering both increased housing, including affordable and social housing, and economic growth.
- B. Local services, under democratic control, delivered close to those who need them, results in more effective services at a lower overall cost.
- C. Taxation for council expenditure must be fair and progressive, with the level set locally by democratically accountable councillors.

Conference recognises:

- i) The outstanding work done by Liberal Democrat councillors and council leaders in innovating and delivering services to their communities under increasingly difficult financial circumstances.
- ii) The value communities place in Liberal Democrat councillors, demonstrated by Liberal Democrats successfully defending far more of their seats in council byelections than any other party.

Conference further believes that:

- a) Any council having reduced funding because of the fair funding review must receive adequate transitional funding.
- b) Government must deliver a long-term, sustainable solution to the DSG cumulative deficits and SEND funding it has promised.
- c) A long-term solution must be based on a review of all the components of the funding system.
- d) The overall level of funding for local government must be increased.

Conference therefore calls on the Government to:

1. Provide a sustained real-term increase in core funding for local government.
2. Implement a needs-based funding distribution through the Fair Funding Review with fully funded transitional protections so that no council faces destabilising year-on-year losses.
3. Deliver a long-term funding solution for SEND and DSG high-needs deficits.
4. Implement a comprehensive review of the local government funding system, with the objective of delivering a fair, sustainable, multi-year settlement that matches funding to need and reduces reliance on crisis measures.

5. Urgently convene cross-party talks – led by the Prime Minister – to agree and implement a long-term solution for social care, to end the funding black hole for councils and make sure everyone gets the high-quality care they need.

Conference further calls on the Federal Policy Committee to ensure local government funding is within the scope of the policy work on empowering local communities set out in policy paper 161, *Leading the Way*.

Applicability: England only.

Background briefing

This motion updates and develops policy on local government finances and funding.

It builds on existing policy as set out in the 2024 General Election Manifesto, *For a Fair Deal* and policy motion *The Funding Crisis in Local Government (2024)*.

Amendments

Conference passed one amendment, which strengthened the motion's calls on social care by inserting lines i), j), and 5..

Preserving Trial by Jury

Conference notes:

- i) The complacency of the former Conservative Government, which drove the criminal justice system into dysfunction and left victims and survivors facing years-long waits for justice.
- ii) The Crown Court backlog, with around 78,000 cases waiting to be completed, meaning that defendants charged with serious offences today may not face trial until late 2029 or early 2030.
- iii) The 20 per cent fall in Crown Court productivity since 2016.
- iv) Part II of the Leveson Report, which found that the time spent hearing cases in Crown Courts each sitting day has now fallen to just three hours and 14 minutes, despite the five hours allocated.
- v) Modelling by the Institute for Government which showed that the Justice Secretary's plans to curtail trial by jury would save only 2 per cent of total courtroom time.
- vi) The often extreme delays in the prosecution of Rape and Serious Sexual Offences (RASSO), with rape cases facing the longest delays of any offence, over 4,000 adult rape cases in the backlog as of September 2025 – up 70% in two years – and many victims withdrawing due to prolonged delays and trauma.
- vii) The disproportionate effect of RASSO on women and girls, with data recorded by police showing around 90% of rape victims and 80% of other sexual offence victims are female.
- viii) Proposals announced by the Labour Government on 2 December 2025 to remove jury trials for offences likely to result in custodial sentences of less than three years, replacing them with trials by a judge sitting alone.
- ix) Evidence that public confidence in juries is significantly higher than confidence in the justice system as a whole, with around six in ten people expressing 'a fair amount' or 'a great deal' of confidence in juries delivering the right verdict, compared with around four in ten for courts and judges more generally.
- x) The 2017 Lammy Review, chaired by the current Justice Secretary, which found that Black, Asian, Mixed ethnic and Chinese/Other women are convicted at higher rates than White women in magistrates' courts, but not by juries; and that many ethnic minority defendants believe they will not receive a fair hearing from magistrates – as shown by the higher rate at which these defendants choose trial by jury.
- xi) The current Justice Secretary's comments in 2020 that jury trials are a cornerstone of democracy and that their removal would be a mistake.
- xii) Real-terms cuts of approximately 3 per cent annually to the Ministry of Justice capital budget until 2028-29.
- xiii) Reoffending is estimated to cost the taxpayer £20.9bn per annum.

Conference believes that:

- a) Victims and survivors deserve swift justice and should not be left waiting for years while evidence deteriorates and cases collapse.
- b) Urgent action is required to reduce court backlogs and ensure the justice system functions effectively and fairly.
- c) Trial by jury has been a cornerstone of the justice system for over 800 years and restricting it for a large category of offences is a counterproductive and short-sighted response to court delays.
- d) There is no evidence that jury trials are a primary driver of court backlogs, which are instead caused by inefficiencies, mismanagement, staff shortages and estate failure.
- e) Removing juries risks reducing public trust in the justice system and may lead to unfair and disproportionate outcomes for ethnic minority defendants, particularly women..
- f) Restricting jury trials would be particularly detrimental to victims of RASSO, risking reduced trust in the justice system, increased victim attrition, and worse outcomes in cases that already experience the longest delays.

Conference calls on the Government to:

1. Abandon plans to remove jury trials for all but the most serious offences and to expand the use of judge-only trials.
2. Urgently implement evidence-based reforms to target inefficiencies, including renegotiating failing private contracts to ensure defendants are delivered to court on time; making effective use of underused court buildings; introducing victim-led intensive case management; and investing in rehabilitation and prevention to reduce reoffending.
3. Reduce the court backlog by running two trials a day in select Crown courtrooms instead of one, making more efficient use of time by nearly doubling their hearing time per sitting day and accelerating the throughput of cases.
4. Require the judiciary to adopt ambitious targets for improving diversity and make regular reports on their progress to Parliament, and implement in full the recommendations of the Lammy Review without further delay.
5. Develop and implement a substantially more ambitious strategy to reduce delays in RASSO cases.
6. Cancel planned real-terms cuts to the Ministry of Justice capital budget and make the necessary repairs and improvements to Crown Court infrastructure.

Applicability: England and Wales.

Background briefing

This motion updated and developed policy on the criminal justice system.

It built on existing policy as set out in the 2024 General Election Manifesto, *For a Fair Deal*, Policy Paper 118, *Doing What Works to Cut Crime* (2014), and policy motions *Improving Access to Justice* (2025) and *Swift Justice for Victims and Offenders* (2022).

Amendments

The FCC agreed to make several drafting amendments to the motion, including to the language related to ethnic minorities used in x) and e). and by inserting lines xiii) and 4..

Conference passed two amendments. Amendment one strengthened calls to increase courtroom efficiency by inserting lines iv), v), 2., and 3., and amendment two added greater support for women and girls, and rape victims by inserting lines vi), vii), f), and 5..

Revitalising Town Centres and High Streets (*Town Centres and High Streets Policy Paper*)

Conference understands that town centres and high streets are the beating heart of communities up and down the country, places that people love and become attached to, places that give a sense of local pride and places that can support local economic, social and environmental needs.

Conference recognises that many town centres and high streets have been allowed to go into disrepair, with empty shops, cracked pavements, traffic jams and waste strewn across the streets.

Conference believes that, to create a successful town centre, it must be:

- A. Fair: Welcoming spaces that are socially inclusive and accessible to everyone.
- B. Economically Successful: Places that feel alive with opportunity, where independent businesses thrive day and night, weekday and weekend and resilience is built through a diversity of uses.
- C. Social: An opportunity to connect, for all ages and backgrounds, with activities and infrastructure that supports health, wellbeing and community pride.
- D. Local: Rooted in the needs of local people, supporting local businesses, and creating meaningful jobs, especially for young people building their futures.
- E. Sustainable: Designed for the future, with clean transport options, green spaces and inbuilt climate resilience.
- F. Clean and Safe: Environments where people feel secure and comfortable spending time and where businesses have the confidence to locate.

Conference wishes to reimagine town centres, not as relics of the past but as places for everyone to live, connect and belong, places that inspire local pride today and for generations to come.

Conference therefore endorses the policies set out in policy paper 162, Revitalising Town Centres and High Streets, and in particular welcomes its proposals to:

1. Reduce vacancy rates by:
 - a) A temporary, emergency cut to VAT for hospitality, accommodation and attractions.
 - b) A review of the cumulative effects of taxation on the High Street.
 - c) Improving access to competitive energy deals.
 - d) Reforming business rates to reward occupancy and community value.
 - e) Requiring landlords, especially these from overseas, to publish contact details and a named contact in the UK.
 - f) Strengthening the 'Town Centre First' principle in national planning policy, including an 'Out of Town Levy'.
 - g) Launching a national strategy to bring empty homes back into use and encouraging homes above shops.

2. Create the spaces the community wants on- and offline by:
 - a) Making it easier to convert vacant units into community hubs, without full planning change of use.
 - b) Introducing short-term, low-cost residency agreements that would allow:
 - i) Charitable organisations to set up walk-in, in-person support and advisory hubs.
 - ii) Local arts and culture groups to host 'pop-up' events, courses and exhibitions.
 - c) Creating a national digital infrastructure designed to support local enterprise, a platform that can be available for local adaptations and branding.
 - d) Giving councils powers to designate Independent Shop Zones within their local plan, locally defined areas that protect and champion small, locally-owned businesses.
 - e) Closing loopholes that incentivise landlords to lease property to shell companies or businesses with no credible trading activity, and tighten anti-money laundering (AML) duties for commercial lettings, requiring landlords and agents to carry out proportional, risk-based AML checks.

3. Create distinctive design and better accessibility by:
 - a) Promoting public transport and active travel options.
 - b) Reviewing the impact of parking charges to provide guidance for councils to support more flexible, targeted approaches that can support footfall, in particular during evenings and weekends.
 - c) Making dedicated funds available for local authorities that want to deliver high-quality high street pedestrianisation projects.
 - d) Establishing a National Centre for Design and Placemaking to support local authorities through providing design support, guidance and training for local authorities, championing good design and sustainability across all regions.
 - e) Initiating an annual national 'Amazing High Streets' competition to celebrate the outstanding design of public spaces.
 - f) Encouraging the provision of blue badge spaces, with a minimum requirement of 5 per cent of car parking spaces or one space being blue badge designated as per the British Standards Institution.
 - g) Encouraging the provision of family and child car parking spaces.
 - h) Re-establishing public toilets in town centres.

4. Drive footfall and bring high streets to life by:
 - a) Establishing a High Street Culture and Community Fund delivered in partnership with the Arts Council and local authorities to give ongoing support to community-led cultural initiatives and local events.

- b) Establishing a national Incubator Fund to support the creation and early-stage development of locally designed festivals.
 - c) Backing creative start-ups and cultural enterprises.
5. Tackle the lack of sustainable investment by:
- a) Establishing High Street Improvement Districts (HSIDs) led by a locally-agreed board representing the cross section of interests, including representation from the local council, which would be charged with creating a long term vision for the town centre, supported with a joined-up roadmap, curator and communication plan.
 - b) Creating a 'High Streets Back Home' scheme as a defined and accessible route for people to give back, to invest in the future of their community, whether by supporting community asset purchases, restoring heritage buildings or backing local enterprise space.
6. Tackle safety, anti-social behaviour and shop theft by:
- a) Building features that discourage anti-social behaviour (such as strategic lighting) into the design of town centres.
 - b) Supporting small businesses to invest in CCTV and understand their legal obligations regarding storage and publication of CCTV images.
 - c) Offering digital tools as collective procurement bundles, making them accessible for small businesses, such as a WhatsApp instant alert system for businesses, Business Improvement District teams, and community wardens that flags offenders, patterns and risks in real time.
 - d) Calling on the National Crime Agency to establish a dedicated unit to liaise with local authorities and police forces to take on organised shoplifting gangs.

Applicability: England only, except for 1. a) and b) which are Federal.

Background briefing

This policy paper and accompanying policy motion updated and developed policy on town centres and high streets.

It built on existing policy as set out in the 2024 General Election Manifesto, *For a Fair Deal*, and Policy Paper 77, *Green and Prosperous Communities: Local Regeneration for the 21st Century* (2007).

Amendments

The FCC agreed to a drafting amendment that inserted a clarification at the end of 6. b) about legal obligations surrounding the storing and publication of CCTV images. Conference passed three amendments. Amendment one added a call for a national

empty homes strategy in line g), amendment two added a call for short-term, low-cost residency agreements by inserting line 2. b), and amendment three added language supporting blue badge and family and child parking spaces and public toilets by inserting lines 3. f) to 3. h).

Trump and the Wider World

Conference is deeply alarmed by President Trump's systematic violations of the rules-based international order and ongoing interference in British and European politics, exemplified by:

- i) His insistence that Greenland – an autonomous Danish territory – becomes part of the US, alongside his threats of tariffs and initial refusal to rule out military action against NATO allies expressing support for the sovereignty of Denmark and Greenland, including the UK.
- ii) His brazen and illegal attack on Venezuela in January, including the kidnapping of Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro – who, while being an illegitimate leader, should have been made to relinquish power through economic and diplomatic pressure rather than unilateral military action.
- iii) His unilateral military action against Iran in February – in contravention of international law – and ambitions for regime change, without any plan for 'the day after' or the protection of Iranian citizens.
- iv) His reckless response to the US Supreme Court's decision to strike down his global tariff regime, threatening to upend trade deals with the UK and EU by setting a new 15 per cent tariff.
- v) His administration's National Security Strategy, which calls for active interference in European politics to promote populist parties which share a Trumpian worldview.
- vi) His withdrawal of the US from 66 international agreements and agencies, including in particular the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement, and the US' blatant disruption of the International Maritime Organisation's attempts to introduce a global shipping carbon tax, gravely undermining global efforts to combat climate change.
- vii) His invitation to dictators like Vladimir Putin and Alexander Lukashenko to join his 'pay-to-play' Board of Peace for Gaza.
- viii) The remarks made by Trump's US Ambassador to Israel, Mike Huckabee, indicating his view that it would be acceptable for Israel to exercise full control over the occupied West Bank.

Conference believes that:

- a) Trump's illegal attacks on Venezuela and Iran, as well as his threats against Greenland and NATO allies, send a terrible signal to dictators like Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping, encouraging them to act with even greater impunity and conduct further acts of aggression against their neighbours.
- b) Trump's actions have further eroded the rules-based international order and advanced the view that 'might is right' in international relations.
- c) The UK's interests and values are best served by defending national sovereignty and upholding international law against all those – including Donald Trump – who seek to undermine them.

- d) The UK must therefore work to rapidly boost defence spending in light of President Trump's threats and Vladimir Putin's continuing barbarism in Ukraine, reducing our strategic dependence on the US to ensure we can independently uphold our interests and values.
- e) In its current form, Trump's 'Board of Peace' is inappropriate and illegitimate as a vehicle for advancing the rebuilding of Gaza and securing progress towards a two-state solution.
- f) A two-state solution remains the only viable political pathway to ensuring peace and security for Israelis and Palestinians alike.
- g) A state visit from His Majesty the King would be seen as yet another huge diplomatic coup for President Trump, and it should not be given to someone who repeatedly insults and damages our country.
- h) British businesses deserve to be refunded by the Trump administration for the legally-void tariffs that harmed their exports under his unconstitutional tariff regime.

Conference reaffirms the policy recommendations proposed in conference motions *The UK's Response to Trump* (Spring 2025) and *The Israel-Gaza Conflict - an immediate bilateral ceasefire and securing two states* (Autumn 2024), and calls on the UK Government to:

1. Hold cross-party talks to agree a consensus on how to reach 3 per cent of GDP spent on defence by 2030, and outline a roadmap for how to get there.
2. Rapidly implement a £20 billion 'Defence Bonds' programme, enabling members of the public and institutional investors to support the UK's defence, inject much needed finance into bolstering the UK's security, and stimulate the economy through investment in defence-related research and development.
3. Affirm that President Trump's actions in Venezuela and Iran have breached international law, and rule out the use of UK bases to facilitate any future unilateral and illegal military action he undertakes.
4. Advise King Charles that the state visit to the US scheduled for April should be called off, to ensure that his Majesty is not put in an embarrassing situation, given Trump's unilateral and illegal war in Iran.
5. Conduct a stand-alone review into the extent of US interference in British politics, including the extent to which extremists like Tommy Robinson are being actively supported by the Trump White House.
6. Join Canada and France in establishing a formal consulate in Greenland's capital, Nuuk, bolstering the UK's diplomatic engagement and partnership with Greenland.
7. Commit to working in unison with the UK's European and Commonwealth partners to ensure President Trump backs down in any future attempts to threaten NATO allies, reassert his claims to other countries' sovereign territory, or bully America's trading partners with new tariffs.
8. Explore legal options to secure compensation from the US administration for UK exporters who have been hit by Trump's unconstitutional tariffs.

9. Invest in expanding the UK's multilateral partnerships across defence and trade with partners whom Britain can rely on – particularly in Europe and the Commonwealth – and strengthening Britain's soft power.
10. Work with our allies to support multilateral, legal efforts to contain Iran's development of arms to threaten Israel and the region, and to support the aims of protestors to install a just, democratic government.
11. Make clear that any UK engagement with the 'Board of Peace' must be conditional on Palestinians being properly represented, invitations for dictators being withdrawn, and Trump's membership fee being abolished.
12. Empower the moderates in Israeli and Palestinian society – including by banning UK trade with illegal settlements in the West Bank, and pushing for vital democratic reforms within the Palestinian Authority.

Applicability: Federal.

Background briefing

This motion updated and developed policy on UK-US relations, international security, and President Donald Trump.

It built on existing policy as set out in the 2024 General Election Manifesto, *For a Fair Deal*, Policy Paper 157, *Liberal Values in a Dangerous World* (2024), and policy motion *The UK's Response to Trump* (2025).

Amendments

The FCC agreed to make three drafting amendments. The first inserted line vi), which added language that condemned President Trump's withdrawal from multilateral structures related to climate change. The second and third strengthened calls related to King Charles's upcoming state visit to the US with the insertion of lines g) and lines 4.. Conference passed two amendments. Amendment one added a call for British businesses to be refunded for the additional costs caused by President Trump's tariffs by inserting line h) and line 8.. Amendment two added an additional call for a stand-alone review into the extent of US interference in British politics by inserting line 4..

Whole-Person Mental Health: Care, Choice, Community, and Combatting Populism (*Mental Health Policy Paper*)

- A. Decades of Liberal Democrat campaigning have pushed Britain's mental health services forward and positively shaped how we as a nation think about mental health.
- B. There is a danger that the dismissive language of the far right has begun to undo the progress we made by reintroducing stigma and shame into conversations about mental health.
- C. Labour's recent record is particularly alarming, and their decision to scrap mental health targets reflects a dangerous retreat from treating mental health as a distinct and urgent policy area.
- D. Social media and AI chatbots can, where unrestricted, pose risks to young people's mental health including through extreme content, such as promotion of suicide and self harm, and addictive design.
- E. The pandemic has transformed both the scale and visibility of the crisis, and that it amplified loneliness, anxiety, and grief, and pushed NHS, local authority and school staff harder than ever before.

Conference believes that:

- i) Anyone can experience mental illness, through no fault of their own, so everyone must be able to access timely diagnosis, treatment and ongoing support.
- ii) Resources in our mental health services too often only kick in at the point of crisis.
- iii) An individual's mental health journey is deeply personal, so their treatment programme should be too.
- iv) Families and communities play a crucial role in the lives of people with mental illness, either as a source of resilience or stress. They also bear a lot of the burden of supporting them and helping them make sense of decisions on offer.
- v) Liberal Democrat policies are based on scientific evidence and lived experience, especially in a time of rising scepticism towards mental health and of new and developing treatments.
- vi) A healthier NHS workforce would have more time and capacity to diagnose and treat mental illness.
- vii) Services should be designed in a way that means anyone who needs them can access them, irrespective of age, class, gender, income, ethnicity, or postcode.
- viii) No-one should be treated in a decaying, unsuitable building and it is unacceptable that many mental health wards are currently unsafe for staff and patients.
- ix) While children's mental health should be protected from harmful social media, the crude outright ban proposed by the Conservatives would have serious unintended consequences and is the wrong approach.

Conference therefore endorses policy paper 163, *Whole-Person Mental Health: Care, Choice, Community, and Combatting Populism*, with its approach based on six key principles:

- I. Accessibility.
- II. Fairness and equity.
- III. Personal choice and autonomy.
- IV. Being community-centred.
- V. Being led by evidence.
- VI. Caring for the people that take care of us.

In particular, Conference welcomes its proposals to:

1. Ensure that as few people as possible develop mental ill-health by:
 - a) Offering regular mental health check-ups for people, and those supporting them, when they are most vulnerable to mental ill-health.
 - b) Ensuring that all mental health services are integrated with money advice, substance abuse, housing and employment advice services by default, and widening access to services that provide temporary protection from problem debt.
 - c) Introducing structural reforms to both the National Curriculum and Ofcom to empower children and parents to use social media in a way that is right for their family, whilst being protected from the risk of mental harm.
 - d) Requiring social media apps to introduce cigarette-style health warnings for under-18s.
 - e) Tripling the budget of the Farmer Welfare Fund, which would provide greater mental health support and services at livestock markets and county shows, and offering additional mental health support following Rural Payment Agency visits.
 - f) Restoring the £2 bus fare cap, and supporting local authorities to use powers to franchise services and simplify funding so that affordable bus routes can be restored or new routes added where there is local need, to reduce rural isolation and loneliness.
2. Make it easier to access mental health services, and quicker to receive a diagnosis and treatment, by:
 - a) Supporting digital-enabled therapies, if there is enough evidence for them, and if patients retain the choice to opt for more traditional treatments.
 - b) Making it easier for world-class experts to do essential mental health research in the UK, and for them to conduct crucial research that helps build our evidence base.

- c) Opening a walk-in Young People's Mental Health Hub in every community, with specific support for children that have fallen between school and CAMHS support.
 - d) Removing the arbitrary cliff edge at 18 for young people's mental health services.
 - e) Enshrining the 'no wrong door' principle into law across mental health and related services, to ensure that no one will be turned away or told to start again elsewhere.
 - f) Making mental health referral and support services available following every miscarriage, not just after three, and introducing annual reporting on waiting times for these patients.
3. Prevent people with mental illnesses, and those around them, from shouldering the unfair mental and financial costs associated with mental illness by:
- a) Making prescriptions for people with chronic mental health conditions free on the NHS.
 - b) Introducing a legal duty on health professionals to identify family members and unpaid carers, and to consider their own health and support needs as part of routine care.
 - c) Preventing insurers from discriminating against people with mental health conditions when the risk is unrelated, by requiring fairer underwriting and oversight from the Financial Conduct Authority.
4. Reform the Mental Health Act to protect individual liberties and ensure that mental health professionals have the support they need to deliver appropriate care by:
- a) Creating a statutory, independent Mental Health Commissioner to represent patients, their families and carers, and introduce a new Veterans' Mental Health Oversight Officer.
 - b) Working with healthcare regulators to provide additional, appropriate safeguards on the use of digital monitoring technologies, where needed.
 - c) Ensuring that all police forces have a mental health professional in the control room at all times.
 - d) Implement the recommendations of the Wessely Review appropriately to ensure that people of black African or Caribbean heritage are no longer more likely to be detained under the Mental Health Act than white people.

Conference additionally calls for patients to be protected from broken and inappropriate mental health facilities, including Victorian-era asylums and outdated emergency departments, through a ten-year capital investment programme that clears maintenance backlogs and delivers buildings fit for high quality care.

Conference further calls for mandatory national recording of the number of deaths in mental health in-patient settings.

Conference also calls for the level of regulation of user-to-user services to be based on the extent of harms they can cause, including harmful social media, AI chatbots, and unregulated emerging platforms with age restrictions based on the addictiveness of design features, and the risk to mental health through the prevalence of extreme content.

Conference also welcomes the Health and Social Care Select Committee Community Mental Health Services Report, and in particular its recommendations to:

- a) Roll out 24/7 Neighbourhood Mental Health Centres for adults to every community, so that everyone has access to walk-in, individualised, support, and that wider social needs such as housing, employment, financial support and benefit support are co-located in these 'one-stop shops'.
- b) Establish national access and waiting time standards for mental health.
- c) Reinstate the annual physical health check target for people with severe mental illness (SMI) in operational planning guidance.
- d) Move to multi-year contracts for voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) organisations supporting the delivery of CMHS, and embed them in the design and delivery of community mental health services.
- e) Put the Mental Health Investment Standard on a statutory footing, to ensure parity of esteem between mental health and physical health funding.

Applicability: England only.

Background briefing

This policy paper and accompanying policy motion updated and developed policy on public mental health services.

They built on existing policy as set out in the 2024 General Election Manifesto, *For a Fair Deal*, and Policy Paper 137, *Save the NHS and Stop Brexit* (2019), and policy motion *Investing in our Children's Future* (2023).

Amendments

The FCC agreed to two drafting amendments by inserting lines viii) and the lines following 4. d). Both added additional language surrounding unsuitability of mental health facilities, and the second added a call for mandatory national recording of the number of deaths in mental health in-patient settings. Conference passed two amendments. Amendment one inserted lines D., ix), and lines following 4. d) which strengthened calls related to social media and AI chatbots, including a call for proportionate regulation of user-to-user services based on the extent of harm they cause. Amendment two adopted recommendations from the recent Health and Social Care Select Committee Community Mental Health Services Report with lines following 4. d), and lines a. to e..

Business Motion

Diversity, Inclusion and Representation

Conference notes with regret that:

- i) The diversity quotas in Articles 2.5 and 2.6 (c) of the Federal Constitution - introduced in 2016 to improve the representation of women and LGBT+ members on Federal Committees - had to be suspended for the 2025 Federal elections, after the party received legal advice from two King's Counsels that applying them would be ruled unlawful by the courts, following the Supreme Court judgment in April 2025.
- ii) The process of suspending those quotas led to the count for Federal Committee elections being delayed by three weeks - a deeply unsatisfactory situation for candidates and all members.

Conference welcomes the fact that many brilliant women and LGBT+ members have nevertheless been elected to Federal Committees.

Conference resolves that before the next round of Federal elections in 2028, the party must ensure that it has clear, lawful rules in place to avoid a repeat of this predicament.

Conference reaffirms the constitutional principle that all members should have an equal opportunity of participating at every level of the party.

Conference believes that the party's rules should always be consistent with Liberal Democrat values and principles, as set out in the Federal Constitution and most recently affirmed at Spring Conference 2025 in conference motion 'Free to be Who You Are' and at Autumn Conference 2025 in policy paper 161, Leading the Way.

Conference therefore calls on the Federal Board to:

1. Conduct a review of diversity, inclusion and representation on Federal Committees (including Federal Council), including:
 - a) An analysis of the composition of the Federal Committees, and the impact of diversity quotas on representation since they were introduced in 2016.
 - b) An examination of the barriers to full and equal participation in Federal Committee elections particularly faced by members with protected characteristics.
 - c) Proposals for changes that are needed to remove or reduce barriers that may exist for members with particular protected characteristics on Federal Committees, with the aim of addressing under-representation of those characteristics on Federal Committees.

- d) Extensive consultation with the Federal People and Development Committee, all relevant Affiliated Organisations, and the party membership.
 - e) Advice from legal experts on the lawfulness of potential measures to remove or reduce barriers that may exist for members with particular protected characteristics, with the aim of addressing under-representation of those characteristics on Federal Committees.
2. Report the findings of its review to Conference in Spring 2027.
 3. Submit for debate at the same Conference any constitutional amendments that are necessary to implement its recommendations.

Report Questions and Answers

Federal Board Report

Q1: Submitted by Andrew Hudson

The greatest divisions in inequality are class related, when will the board address this when taking diversity into account?

Answer by Josh Babarinde MP

As a person from a working class community - Hampden Park, in Eastbourne, which has been home to the busiest food bank in the country - the cause of driving greater socioeconomic diversity in our party means a lot to me. Those of you that have read the recent report coming out of Queen Mary University by Professor Tim Bale on party membership, may have been concerned about diversity among our membership - particularly on socioeconomic diversity. By various different measures, it found that 90 per cent of our membership is middle class, and only 10 per cent are middle class. The Federal Board and I are very keen to make sure we are reaching all communities, and that our party looks more like, sounds more like, and relates more to the communities that we are ambitious to represent, and that means working class communities too. So here is one concrete action, in pursuit of that mission. We have the incredible Racial Diversity Campaign that does a lot of concrete work to support ethnic minority members across our party to stand for election and to get elected, particularly at a parliamentary level. The Campaign for Gender Balance does a similar thing for women in our party. We do not have an equivalent body for socioeconomic diversity, so we are working on a paper to take to the Board in May that will launch an equivalent by the end of my presidency at the latest. I am very personally committed to doing everything I can, so watch this space.

Q2: Submitted by Josh Lucas Mitte

What are the plans to (a) tackle a declining membership and (b) support local parties increasingly struggling and relying on a few super-activists?

Answer by Josh Babarinde MP

I want to make sure that our party grows with as many members as possible, and I want to stem that decline that we have seen. One of the ways we can do that is by learning from areas of our party where membership has been growing. In London for example, I know that the Executive and local parties have been banding together to launch a specific initiative dedicated to increasing membership and boosting retention. I have talked to the London chair and there are some exciting things that I would like to see across our party. We have just appointed members to the Federal People Development Committee, whose remit includes party membership, and I know they have ideas as well. The Federal Board is tasked with setting the strategy, which includes membership.

The last time Conference set the party strategy was in 2021 and we will set a new party strategy in this parliament. We embarked on the preparatory work for this process at the last Federal Board meeting, which will include extensive consultation across the party.

Q3: Submitted by Rebecca Jones

Between now and April last year the party has dropped roughly 2 per cent in the polls whilst the Greens have skyrocketed and overtaken us putting us in 5th place. What does the board think the party has done wrong to slip like this, and what does the party need to change to reverse this?

Answer by Josh Babarinde MP

I think there are a number of things that we can do, and are already doing, to help address this. One of these things is social media. When you look at the data on where people are getting their news, especially compared to this time in the last parliament, the channels that are now salient are very different. Social media is playing a greater role than ever, and so to that end, the Federal Party is making a significant investment in beefing up our social media game. You will see on the party website that we are recruiting five new social media roles in our digital team, which will be key to helping us cut through. Ed Davey is also turbo charging our messaging, and we are being bold and brave, including on Europe and on Trump. The polls give us an interesting indication, but, for now, our electoral system is First Past the Post. What matters is our position seat by seat. We need to make sure we are tactical about our ground game whilst we have First Past the Post.

Q4: Submitted by Fraser Graham

Following Ed Davey's email to all members, and the removal of the whip from Chris Rennard, what further steps are being taken to hold parliamentarians accountable for any misconduct?

Answer by Josh Babarinde MP

We cannot comment on any ongoing complaints. The Parliamentary Party takes conduct extremely seriously and has a large number of formal and informal routes available through Parliament and the whips office. This is not a direct matter for the Federal Board beyond the establishment and maintenance of an effective complaints system.

Q5. Submitted by Jennie Rigg

What assessment was done of the likely impact on an already stressed and stretched complaints department of Ed Davey's email on 6th Feb before it was sent?

Answer by Josh Babarinde MP

We value the work of the standards team highly. The volunteers and staff involved in this system are central to our success as a party and they do a highly skilled and diligent job.

This was a fast moving situation: the CEO conducted a rapid risk assessment and identified appropriate escalation procedures and gates for taking a different approach or bringing in additional resource. These were not required as volumes were in fact low.

Q6. Submitted by Mark Johnston

After several years of continuing delays, when will the new party-wide whistle-blower scheme finally take effect?

Answer by Josh Babarinde MP

The whistleblowing scheme has been signed off by the relevant committees and is in effect. Anyone interested in taking on the role of the relevant champion should get in touch with the Company Secretary.

Q7. Submitted by Zoe Hollowood

Has the Party reviewed its internal policies and processes following the Supreme Court ruling in For Women Scotland to ensure they are compliant with the ruling including that any positive action measures intended for women are consistent with the clarification that in the Equality Act 'woman' refers to biological woman?

Answer by Josh Babarinde MP

The party is confident it is compliant with the law.

Q8. Submitted by Josh Lucas Mitte

As the federal party now holds power of over selection of parliamentary seats, will MPs still be expected to pay tithes? If not, will there be mandatory fundraising targets?

Answer by Josh Babarinde MP

Tithing is not a matter for the Federal Party, notwithstanding the ratification of F10. MPs have always been expected to contribute to the financial performance of their seats.

Federal Conference Committee Report

Q1. Submitted by Fraser Graham

Will we ever see the likes of Conference in Scotland or Wales again?

Answer by Cllr Nick da Costa:

Yes, hopefully.

Q2. Submitted by Andrew Hudson

Will people submitting a question to a report that is printed in Conference Extra but not taken be guaranteed an answer be given this time?

Answer by Cllr Nick da Costa:

Yes, written responses to all questions are published in the Conference Final Report.

Q3. Submitted by Josh Lucas Mitte

Will there be strict deadlines for policy papers? If not, will flexibility be allowed for everyone else too?

Answer by Cllr Nick da Costa:

All motions to conference need to adhere to the deadlines published by the Federal Conference Committee.

Q4. Submitted by Fraser Graham

With the Deputy Leader recently making a huge announcement about abolishing the Treasury, seemingly without consulting the Federal Policy Committee or bringing a motion to Conference, is our current party policy-making process fit for purpose anymore?

Answer by Cllr Nick da Costa:

The part of this question relating to the FPC, I will leave to them to respond to.

Our constitution makes clear: party policy is set by conference through the motions and policy papers we debate here.

Of course, our spokespeople regularly make announcements and calls on the government that go beyond official party policy. That is their prerogative and a crucial way for the party to cut through in the media and with voters, as well as to do our job of holding the government to account. It's always been that way.

Like any members, spokespeople are welcome and encouraged to submit their proposals as policy motions for conference to debate. And I note that several of the motions we're debating this weekend are spokespeople doing exactly that.

But of course there isn't time for conference to debate every idea from every spokesperson – they have to prioritise, and so does FCC.

I do note that the FPC is planning to bring a policy paper on the economy to our next conference in Brighton, which may well provide an opportunity for us to debate Daisy's proposal.

Q5. Submitted by Fraser Graham

Since the internal elections, the composition of your committee has shifted, with more parliamentarians and fewer lay members. How has this affected the work of your committee as a whole?

Answer by Cllr Nick da Costa:

Whilst it was sad to lose previous members of the committee, I am looking forward to working with the new Committee on delivering an exceptional and enhanced Conference experience for our members. We've got a great selection of talent on the committee, and I look forward to people bringing their experience to the committee.

But as a reminder - both to members interested in standing for FCC in the future, and the current committee as well: FCC is one of the few committees in the party which is both strategic AND operational, and thus current and prospective committee members need to realise it's a lot of work.

Federal Policy Committee Report

Q1. Submitted by Fraser Graham

With the Deputy Leader recently making a huge announcement about abolishing the treasury, seemingly without consulting policy committee or bringing a policy motion to conference, is our current party policy making process fit for purpose anymore?

Answer by Cllr Lucy Nethsingha:

Yes, the policy making process is fit for purpose, but we are also aware it needs to be flexible enough to allow our Party to respond to changing circumstances. Some people may misunderstand the Federal Policy Committee's role as having control over the Party's policy but that is not and never has been the case. Conference is the ultimate decider of policy and policy can be brought to Conference through many different routes, including by FPC, spokespeople, affiliated organisations, and ordinary members. There is also a need to recognise that the Parliamentary team will need to respond to events in a timely way; they cannot wait for Conference before commenting on an issue. We did discuss the particular case you mention at the Federal Policy Committee away day in a session on how we work best with the Parliamentary Party, and the specific circumstances around that announcement.

Supplementary question from Fraser Graham

Thank you for that Lucy. I think there is a difference between responding to something and announcing we are abolishing the Treasury. What are the Federal Policy Committee doing to ensure that, even with a larger Parliamentary Party, our lay members have a strong voice in the policy making process?

Answer by Cllr Lucy Nethsingha:

We are at Conference, and we are the only party where members can make policy. We are incredibly proud of that, and later today I will be working with others to deliver training that will help members understand how they can contribute to this process. Our members are the ultimate arbiter of party policy, but we do need to recognise that the Parliamentary Party does need to make announcements on a different time scale to the Conference timescale and that will always be the case.

Q2. Submitted by Tony Vickers

Noting that Greens are attracting younger voters, when did we last review our policies across the board to deal with the growing generational divide?

Answer by Cllr Lucy Nethsingha:

We have reviewed our environmental policies regularly over the past few years and we are grateful to Green Liberal Democrats and to the new Liberals and Democrats for

Nature and Climate for their work. At the recent Federal Policy Committee away day we decided we would put a particular focus on the policy implications for young people and ethnic minorities through all our policy work this term.

Supplementary question from Tony Vickers

Thank you Lucy. Interestingly the President talked about when he joined the Party; I joined the Party in the 1960s as a member of the Radical Bulletin Group. There doesn't seem to be that much radicalism amongst the young voters now. They are flocking to the Green Party not because they are green, but because they are radical, and we are less radical. We just lost a by-election in Liverpool with a 30% swing against us, so don't we need to treat the generational gap as a part of our equalities agenda, and make that a formal spokespersonship?

Answer by Cllr Lucy Nethsingha:

I very much agree that we need to treat the generational gap as a part of our agenda, and that is why at our recent away day we agreed that all of our policy making would focus on thinking about how our policies will impact younger voters. The Federal Policy Committee is taking this very seriously. I think it makes sense to consider this throughout all of our policy agenda, rather than separating it out, and that was the decision we made at the away day.

Q3. Submitted by Andrew Hudson

Could consultative papers and policy papers contain a glossary of acronyms and jargon in future?

Answer by Cllr Lucy Nethsingha:

Yes, we will try to ensure that any acronyms or jargon is explained in future papers, either in the text itself or with a glossary