



# **Conference Report**

## **Autumn 2025**

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# Policy Motions

## A Liberal Vision for Digital Rights

Conference notes:

I. The recent rollout on 25 July 2025 of Ofcom's Protection of Children Codes of Practice under the Online Safety Act 2023.

II. The aims of that Act to provide vital safeguards against harmful online content, including child sexual abuse material, intimate image abuse, and sexual exploitation.

III. The clear evidence of the extensive harm posed to children by exposure to pornography, suicide promotion, and other damaging online content.

IV. The concerning reports that have been raised regarding the implementation of the Act, including that:

A. Political, educational or wellbeing-related content and forums are being inappropriately age-gated.

B. Third party age-assurance systems may pose data protection and privacy risks to users.

C. Age-assurance measures could be ineffective, due to circumvention by children and young people using VPNs.

D. End-to-end encryption could be undermined by certain powers within the Act.

V. The number of civil society organisations and political figures that have raised these concerns, including:

A. The Government of Jersey, who have refused to implement the legislation

B. Wikipedia, who have challenged the legislation in court.

C. The Young Liberals, who have passed a motion at their conference opposing the implementation of the legislation.

D. Liberal Democrat Science, Innovation and Technology spokespeople Victoria Collins MP and Lord Clement-Jones who have written to the Secretary of State detailing these concerns and calling for further parliamentary scrutiny of the Act and its legislation.

VI. That women are disproportionately the targets of deepfakes, harassment and other harmful behaviours online. Conference believes that:

i) Protecting children and vulnerable groups online is imperative and online safety legislation must hold the tech sector accountable for harms they have failed to police.

ii) The current rollout of regulations under the Online Safety Act by Ofcom risks ineffective, disproportionate implementation.

iii) It is critical that when introducing regulation on use of the internet, that we do so with a mind on the disproportionate impact on privacy and digital rights, and on groups such as the LGBT+ community where online support networks exist.

Conference therefore calls for:

1. A full and urgent Parliamentary review, to report within 6 months, examining:

- a) Whether the Online Safety Act is meeting its stated aims of keeping children and other vulnerable groups safe online,
- b) Whether it is fit for purpose, and
- c) What further legislation may be required to ensure that the aims of keeping children and other vulnerable groups safe online are achieved in an effective, proportionate way that preserves privacy.

2. Further Parliamentary scrutiny of Ofcom's implementation of regulations under the Act, ensuring that it focuses squarely on protecting children and other vulnerable groups from online harms, rather than impeding access to political content, educational resources, or support services.

3. The introduction of a Digital Bill of Rights

**Applicability:** Federal.

**Background briefing:** This motion updated and developed policy on technology and online safety legislation.

It built on previous policy as set out in the 2024 General Election Manifesto, *For a Fair Deal*, Policy Paper 158, *Science, Innovation & Technology* (2025), and motion *Democracy and Public Debate* (2022),

# A New Hope for the Space Sector

Conference notes:

- I. The importance of the UK space industry to the economy, security, science, technology, exploration, and culture.
- II. The importance of the UK's universities, which leverage and extend the impact of research and innovation in the space industry ensuring a skilled workforce fit for the future.
- III. That space infrastructure underpins essential services such as navigation, communication, weather, climate monitoring, secure assets, and defence.
- IV. The role that the UK plays in both the research and development of new technologies and the supply chain within the global space industry
- V. Public investment in space yields high economic returns, supporting advanced manufacturing and delivering a strong multiplier effect.
- VI. Space technologies, particularly Earth Observation, are crucial in addressing the climate emergency.
- VII. The space sector aligns with the Liberal Democrat manifesto commitment to harnessing new technologies for the public good.
- VIII. UK investments in spaceports in Scotland and Cornwall position the nation as Europe's leading destination for commercial space launches, with significant global potential.
- IX. The global leadership of UK universities like the University of Surrey's Space Centre, in the development and commercialisation of small satellite technology.
- X. The positive impact of industry-academic clusters, such as Space South Central – led by the universities of Portsmouth, Southampton and Surrey, supporting regional growth and innovation in the UK's space sector.
- XI. Space technology bolsters UK leadership in science, communications, and cyber security, ensuring protection of critical assets, infrastructure, and data.

Conference believes that:

- A. The UK risks falling behind global competitors such as the US, China, and Russia, as well as European nations, in space capabilities. Brexit has heightened the need for independent satellite infrastructure, given exclusion from EU initiatives like Galileo. The potential economic loss from GNSS failure is estimated at £5.2 billion over five days.

- B. Independent UK launch capabilities are vital for fulfilling security and defence needs.
- C. SKYNET, a UK Ministry of Defence program providing strategic satellite communication services to the UK Armed Forces and allies, is crucial to national security.
- D. The UK's strengths in advanced technologies such as 5G, AI, IoT, and quantum computing are synergistic with space investment, benefiting businesses and citizens.
- E. Cleaning up 'Space Junk', or Active Debris Removal (ADR), is of growing importance to the space industry, and UK-based companies should play a leading role in supporting ADR.
- F. International collaboration in space, particularly through the European Space Agency (ESA), is an invaluable platform for shared missions and innovation.
- G. Public engagement, exemplified by Tim Peake's mission, inspires the next generation in STEM, enhancing the UK's science and technology workforce.
- H. Government, universities, colleges, schools and industry have a key role in collaborating to address current and future skills needs and enthuse the next generation of space engineers, entrepreneurs and explorers.

Conference calls for:

1. The UK Government to immediately review and renew the 2021 National Space Strategy, with the central focus of incentivising international investment, fostering industry growth and academic collaboration, and people-centred, efficient regulation.
2. Government to conduct a review of private spaceport initiatives in Scotland, Cornwall, hubs like the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus and other locations, leveraging regional clusters such as Space South Central to ensure continued attention is paid to establishing the UK as a global space hub.
3. The UK Government to designate the space industry as a 'strategic industry' for the purpose of the National Wealth Fund's investment, paving the way for productive investment in areas including:
  - a) Pooled sovereign satellite navigation capacity by rejoining fully the Galileo system, confirm IRIS2 participation, and explore associated EU security programmes and initiatives.

- b) Quantum communications, satellites, advanced materials, optical infrastructure, and computing to secure UK leadership in emerging technologies.
- 4. Efforts to establish guidance and schemes for industry to better support inclusion for underrepresented groups, in particular people with disabilities, women and ethnic minorities, mimicking and building on schemes like the Women in Finance Charter (HM Treasury) and the Business in the Community Race at Work Charter (Department for Business and Trade).
- 5. The UK Government to reverse its decision to absorb the UK Space Agency into the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology by April 2026, and maintain the independent status of UKSA which was designed to present a unified interface with ESA and other national space agencies and which provides the specialised focus, technical expertise, and international credibility essential for competing in the global space economy.
- 6. Further consolidating all government space activity in a single body, especially space functions currently sitting in other government departments; and confirmation that this body will be responsible for delivery, policy, strategy and regulation.

**Applicability:** Federal.

**Background briefing:** This motion updated and developed policy on the UK's space industry, and research and development.

It built on previous policy as set out in the 2024 General Election Manifesto, *For a Fair Deal*, Policy Paper 158, *Science, Innovation & Technology* (2025) and motion *Bring Back the Industrial Strategy* (2023).

**Amendments:** Conference passed two amendments. Amendment one added greater support for universities (II., VIII., IX., H.). Amendment two added calls related to the restructuring of the UK Space Agency and international cooperation (3.a), 5., 6.).

## Backing Hospitality for Growth and Jobs

Conference recognises that:

- A. Hospitality businesses such as pubs, restaurants, cafes and hotels make a hugely significant contribution to our national economy, local economies, and the night-time economy alike.
- B. Beyond their economic significance, hospitality businesses make invaluable social and cultural contributions to our communities, breathing life into our high streets and town centres.
- C. A thriving hospitality sector is vital for boosting economic growth, job creation and people's wellbeing.

Conference notes with concern that:

- i) For years, hospitality businesses have been facing monumental challenges, including workforce shortages, the Coronavirus pandemic, a broken business rates system, the energy crisis and the economic mismanagement of the previous Conservative Government.
- ii) The current Government has added to these challenges by introducing an unfair increase to Employer's National Insurance Contributions (NICs), which disproportionately impacts hospitality by raising the NICs rate while also reducing the salary threshold on which it is levied, significantly raising the cost of employing part-time workers.
- iii) According to a survey by UK Hospitality, as of June 2025, one-third of responding hospitality businesses are operating at a loss, six in ten have had to cut jobs, while 63% have had to reduce the hours available to staff.
- iv) The UK Government's business rates changes, which lower the rate of relief for Retail, Hospitality and Leisure firms from 75% to 40% while abolishing the cap limiting support to £110,000 per firm, will effectively see small independent bricks-and-mortar businesses subsidise the profits of large corporate chains, who can claim relief across multiple sites.
- v) In 2016, the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) found that ineffective competition in the energy market was adding £500 million a year to SME energy bills, and a lack of effective competition was again confirmed by Ofgem in 2023 – yet this did not result in a market investigation by the CMA.
- vi) Hospitality jobs often require staff members to leave during evenings and night hours, while a recent YouGov poll found that 66% of women feel at least sometimes unsafe walking home at night.



- vii) According to UK Hospitality, despite more than 54% of hospitality employees being women, they make up just 30% of leadership positions.
- viii) A recent survey by the Bristol food union found that 71% of Women in hospitality were considering leaving the industry due to lack of progression and pay.

Conference reaffirms Liberal Democrat commitments to:

- a) Boost small businesses and empower them to create new local jobs, including by abolishing business rates and replacing them with a Commercial Landowner Levy.
- b) Encouraging businesses, especially SMEs, to invest in training, take up digital technologies and become more energy efficient.

Conference therefore calls on the Government to recognise the importance of hospitality in boosting our economy, creating jobs and supporting local high streets and communities by:

1. Exempting hospitality SMEs from the employer's National Insurance increase.
2. Consulting on the creation of a new employer's National Insurance Contributions band from £5,000 to £9,100 with a lower rate, to lower the cost of employing part-time staff.
3. Ensuring that the upcoming Review of Electricity Market Arrangements (REMA) includes concrete measures to give hospitality businesses access to better and cheaper energy deals.
4. Instructing the CMA to open an investigation into the non-domestic energy market and recommend any appropriate remedies.
5. Urgently correcting the anomaly in its business rates changes to ensure that large chains will not benefit at the expense of small and independent hospitality businesses.
6. Tackling skills shortages in the hospitality sector by speeding up reform of the broken apprenticeship system and empowering Skills England to act as a properly independent body, with employers at its heart.
7. Backing initiatives that aim to increase women's representation in hospitality leadership positions, such as mentorship networks and leadership programs.
8. Introducing greater support for individuals with childcare responsibilities, including those who work in the hospitality industry.
9. Introducing greater protections for women who report sexual harassment in the workplace, and to educate workers and young people on their rights to report sexual harassment in the workplace. Conference further calls for Liberal Democrats to advocate for greater protections for women and girls working in hospitality travelling home late at night.

**Applicability:** Federal except for a. , 5. and 6. which are England only.

**Background briefing:** This motion updated and developed policy on the hospitality sector and small businesses. It built on previous policy as set out in the 2024 General Election Manifesto, *For a Fair Deal*, motion, *Supporting Hospitality, Retail and Leisure in the Face of Omicron* (2022).

**Amendments:** Conference passed one amendment, which added greater support for women in the hospitality industry (vi, vii, viii, 7., 8., 9.).

# Building a Fair Asylum System

Conference notes:

- A. The August 2025 surge in protests over the use of hotels to house asylum seekers, which according to a senior police chief have placed police forces under 'chronic pressure'.
- B. The rhetoric of Reform and the Conservatives, such as:
  - i) Repeated calls for the UK to withdraw from the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).
  - ii) Nigel Farage's proposal, on 26th August, to deport people who have fled the Taliban to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan.
- C. Shabana Mahmood's appointment as Home Secretary on 5th September, reportedly to take a more "uncompromising" stance on immigration.

Conference further notes with disappointment that the Labour Government has responded to this rhetoric with counterproductive policies like immediate suspension of family reunion pathways and reducing the move-on period for new refugees rather than properly challenging Reform and the Conservatives.

Conference believes:

- I. All asylum seekers must be treated with dignity and respect, and the UK must uphold a fair, compassionate and efficient asylum system - not one built on delay and distrust.
- II. The Conservatives trashed the asylum system, triggering spiralling backlogs and the costly legacy of asylum hotels, while Labour has so far failed to get a grip on the crisis.
- III. The ECHR is a largely British creation that underpins our fundamental rights and freedoms, and must be upheld.
- IV. The right to peaceful protest is a cornerstone of a liberal democracy which must be protected, but no one has the right to intimidate or incite fear.

Conference accordingly calls on the UK Government to reject the division offered by Reform and the Conservatives and instead:

- 1. End the use of asylum hotels by speeding up application processing so thousands aren't stuck in limbo and those with valid claims can work, integrate and contribute, while those without a right to remain can be returned swiftly.
- 2. Lift the ban on employment for asylum seekers who've waited over three months for a decision.
- 3. Immediately restore family reunification pathways for refugees.
- 4. Increase cross-border cooperation, including through a leadership role for the UK in Europol, to tackle criminal gangs and stop dangerous Channel crossings at their

source.

5. Publicly and unequivocally reaffirm the UK's commitment to the ECHR - and reject any attempt to undermine the legal protections it provides.

**Applicability:** Federal.

**Background briefing:** This motion updated and developed policy on the asylum system.

It built on previous policy as set out in the 2024 General Election Manifesto, *For a Fair Deal*, motion *Beyond Rwanda: A Fairer Way Forward on Asylum* (2024), motion *Safe and Legal Routes to Save Lives* (2021), and Policy Paper 131, *A Fair Deal for Everyone: Prosperity and Dignity in Migration* (2016).

# Certainty for Ukrainian Children Living in the UK

Conference notes:

- A. That the Ukrainian people continue to resist Russia's war of aggression, despite waning support from the USA.
- B. Since the start of the full-scale invasion in 2022, many Ukrainian families have decided to seek refuge in the UK.
- C. The Children's Commissioner for England has supported calls to re-introduce a GCSE in the Ukrainian language.

Conference further notes with concern:

- i) That many Ukrainians have faced uncertainty and instability due to the UK Government's decision not to automatically extend their visa status.
- ii) Due to uncertainty over their status in the UK, many Ukrainians have been unable to accept offers of employment or agree rental leases and many Ukrainian parents have expressed concerns over their children being uprooted in the middle of their education.
- iii) Research has shown that many Ukrainian children are facing delays and disruption to their education due to the long waits to enrol in local schools.
- iv) The almost 20,000 Ukrainian children abducted, forcibly transferred and adopted by Russia since 2014, an act that the United Nations has called a war crime and for which the International Criminal Court has issued an arrest warrant.

Conference believes that:

- a) The UK has a proud history of welcoming both immigrants and refugees.
- b) The UK must not waver in its support for Ukraine and the Ukrainian people in their fight against Russian aggression, their resistance to the full-scale invasion, and their right to self-determination and sovereignty.
- c) Certainty of status is essential for Ukrainians who have come to the UK under the Ukraine Scheme to be able to rebuild their lives, help them to integrate into British society and contribute to our economy and local communities.
- d) Certainty of status is essential for Ukrainian children who have come to the UK under the Ukraine Scheme to have the opportunity to flourish and achieve their full potential in education and examinations.
- e) The re-establishment of academic qualifications in Ukrainian language would support academic attainment amongst displaced Ukrainians and help sustain links to linguistic and cultural heritage.
- f) The creation of accessible and legal routes to asylum for all refugees and asylum seekers must be a priority.
- g) No family should face the prospect of being separated due to the UK's asylum policies.

Conference calls for:

1. The UK Government to automatically extend visas for Ukrainians already granted status and residing in the UK.
2. The UK Government to establish a pathway to indefinite leave to remain for Ukrainians who have integrated into life in the UK and wish to remain long-term.
3. The Government to work to ensure that Ukrainian pupils and other children with experience of forced displacement do not face delays in school enrolment and have access to trauma-informed support.
4. The re-establishment of GCSEs and A-levels in Ukrainian language.
5. Ukrainian-language books and educational materials to be available in schools and libraries.
6. The Government to support Ukrainian cultural, educational, and linguistic initiatives for Ukrainian children whilst they reside in the UK.
7. The Government to provide guidance and support for Ukrainians living in the UK to access further and higher education, including apprenticeships.
8. The UK Government to provide support to displaced Ukrainians residing in the UK who wish to voluntarily resettle in safe areas of Ukraine.
9. The UK Government to use every power available to it to support the return of those abducted Ukrainian children to their families and provide training and capability to the Ukrainian state for those returned to receive appropriate psychological healthcare.

**Applicability:** Federal except for 3.–7. which are England only.

**Background briefing:** This motion updated and developed policy on visas and pathways for indefinite leave for Ukrainians, and access to education and linguistic initiatives. It built on previous policy as set out in the 2024 General Election Manifesto, *For a Fair Deal*, motion *Standing with Ukraine* (2023), and motion *A Sovereign Ukraine* (2022).

**Amendments:** Conference passed one amendment, which strengthened the language used in the motion to condemn Russia, and added a call for the government to provide training and capability to the Ukrainian state (iv)., and 9.).

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

Conference notes that:

- I. Rail fares rose by 3.8% in 2022, 5.9% in 2023, 4.9% in 2024 and 4.6% in 2025.
- II. The Government has begun to bring rail operators into public ownership, with Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander saying she “would love to be able” to guarantee lower fares.
- III. Rail electrification is at a standstill and proposed new lines such as East–West Rail are not planned to be fully electrified.
- IV. The Conservatives in Government promised but failed to establish Great British Railway (GBR) – and the Labour Government expects GBR to be operational in 2027 at the earliest.
- V. The Conservatives’ cancellation of the second phase of High Speed 2 (HS2) significantly undermined public confidence in the UK’s ability to deliver such projects on time and on budget.
- VI. The Labour Government cancelled the Restoring Your Railway programme, which sought to reverse the devastating impacts of the Beeching cuts.
- VII. Liberal Democrats champion passenger standards and successfully worked to ensure that an independent body will be established to monitor the impact of the Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Act 2024 on passenger standards.
- VIII. Women often face heightened risks and anxiety when travelling alone on trains at night, particularly when services are infrequent and or stations are unstaffed.
- IX. The Network Railcard is currently limited to the London and South East Network area, leaving much of England without an equivalent offer and creating a clear regional disparity in rail affordability and access.

Conference believes that:

- A. Getting rail back on track as a reliable, affordable and convenient form of transport, is critical to a thriving economy, healthier living and equality.
- B. There is still a place for the private sector in the operation of rail services; renationalising the railways will not automatically make fares cheaper or improve passenger experience and the Government has no clear plan to improve reliability or make fares more affordable.
- C. Trains are not working properly for passengers; people are paying more for poorer services, and our rail ticketing system is over-complicated.

- D. Rail freight is the most carbon-friendly way to move goods and helps to make air cleaner.
- E. The UK should learn from our European neighbours, embracing on-rail competition between operators and competitive tendering to increase services, deliver newer trains, grow passenger numbers, and reduce subsidies.
- F. Tackling safety concerns on rail, particularly at night, is essential to ensuring women and other passengers who may feel vulnerable can travel confidently and safely.
- G. The regional restriction of Network Railcard discounts is unfair and contributes to perceived regional disparities in rail affordability within England.

Conference reaffirms pledges to:

- i) Freeze rail fares this year and overhaul rail fares to offer passengers the best value for their journey.
- ii) Deliver Northern Powerhouse Rail to connect cities across the North of England.
- iii) Review the Conservative Government's cancellation of HS2's leg to Manchester with a view to reversal or alternative delivery in whatever way provides value for money: by encouraging private investment, and ensuring work on the station at Euston resumes without further delays, with level boarding for all platforms.
- iv) Re-invigorate the Access for All (AfA) programme.
- v) Implement light rail schemes for trams and tram-trains.
- vi) Introduce a national freight strategy which includes the electrification of freight routes.
- vii) Introduce an international rail strategy to support new routes and operators, and permitting other operators to use the Channel Tunnel and HS1.

Conference resolves to put passengers first and:

- a) Establish nationwide tap-in tap-out ticketing.
- b) Introduce automatic compensation for cancellations and delays across all operators and ticketing systems.
- c) Establish digital connectivity standards on rail routes.
- d) Extend the planned 'Best Price Guarantee' across all digital and physical sales channels to ensure passengers are offered the most cost-effective ticket.
- e) Create a statutory duty on accessibility for the railway.
- f) Ensure new rail lines are electrified as standard and set clear targets to accelerate the electrification of track alongside the use of battery and hydrogen in appropriate parts of the network.
- g) Work with national and local government on a new Liverpool to Manchester rail connection.
- h) Ensure the frequency of late night rail services return to pre-covid levels.



- i) Mandate that public rights of way for walking, wheeling and cycling are built alongside new railway lines, as well as improving existing railway active travel routes and transforming more disused railway lines into public rights of way.
- j) Reverse the cuts to Restoring Your Railway.
- k) Ensure staff are available at railway stations for late night services, that waiting areas are well lit and help points accessible.
- l) Expand CCTV coverage and enhance real-time reporting tools for harassment or unsafe situations, for example by improving awareness of existing channels such as the British Transport Police text facility, or by developing a dedicated reporting app, with clear rapid response protocols in place.
- m) Ensure safe and reliable onward travel options from stations at night through coordination between rail operators, local transport providers and licensed taxi services.
- n) Introduce an UK-wide Network Railcard to address regional inequalities and simplify the rail system for consumers.

Conference commits to hold the Government to account by making sure:

1. The Office of Rail and Road (ORR) maintains control of a transparent and fair access regime to encourage the growth of open access and rail freight. In addition, the ORR should be given powers to hold GBR to account for infrastructure and train company performance, including cancellations and punctuality.
2. The Passenger Standards Authority is established quickly to monitor standards.

**Applicability:** Federal, except for i)–ii), v), and g)–j), which are England only.

**Background briefing:** This motion updated and developed policy on rail services and the rail network.

It built on previous policy as set out in the 2024 General Election Manifesto, *For a Fair Deal*, motion, *Connecting Communities – Building a Transport Network Fit for the 21st Century* (2023), and Policy Paper 85, *Fast Track Britain: Building a Transport System for the 21st Century* (2008).

**Amendments:** Conference passed two amendments, and a third amendment was defeated. Amendment one added calls to the motion about passenger safety (VIII., F., k) and l). Amendment two added a call to the motion to end regional inequalities in the Network Railcard system (IX., G., and n)). Amendment three sought to alter the motion's position on rail nationalisation.

# Defending Women's Rights Across the Globe

Conference notes that:

- i) Progress on women's rights is being eroded, and women across the world, particularly women with intersecting marginalised identities including women of colour, disabled women, and LGBT+ women, are facing violence, abuse, and vulnerability at horrifying levels.
- ii) In February 2025, Starmer announced a cut to Official Development Assistance (ODA) to 0.3% of Gross National Income (GNI), following ODA cuts by the previous Government. Aid cuts have disproportionately impacted programmes focusing on women and girls, and 90% of women-led and women's rights organisations surveyed by UN Women have been affected by global foreign aid cuts.
- iii) Misogyny is rising on social media and there is global backlash to women's rights, with nearly a quarter of countries reporting backlash on gender equality in 2024.
- iv) Opposition to abortion rights from the Trump administration threatens women worldwide, and the funding freeze to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) will deprive women and girls of access to essential, life-saving reproductive healthcare.
- v) Violence against women is epidemic. one in three women have experienced sexual violence or physical violence, 640 million women over the age of 15 have experienced intimate partner violence, and 230 million women and girls have experienced Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).
- vi) Women and girls are among those most at risk of living in poverty, with one in ten women living in extreme poverty, and women – particularly those who are young, from a migrant background, and with low educational attainment – disproportionately engage in low-paid and precarious work, such as the garment industry.
- vii) The gender pay gap and economic inequality persists: 2.4 billion women of working age do not have equal economic opportunities to men, 708 million women are outside the labour force due to unpaid caring responsibilities, and 119 million girls are not in school.
- viii) In 2023, the United Nations reported that the proportion of women killed in armed conflicts doubled and cases of conflict-related sexual violence increased by 50% from 2022, and just 29% of rape survivors could access the support they needed within 72 hours due to insufficient funding for gender-based violence response programmes.
- ix) Afghanistan merits specific attention, being the most extreme example of state-enforced oppression of women in the world. Banned from secondary schooling, university education, and most paid work, the vast majority of women live in poverty and isolation.

- x) Women are vastly underrepresented in political leadership: three quarters of parliamentarians across the world are men and despite being essential to peace processes, women made up less than 10% of peace negotiators in 2023.
- xi) Women are disproportionately affected by environmental degradation, with worst-case scenario estimates that 236 million more women and girls could face food insecurity by 2050.
- xii) The British public lack confidence in the Government's current approach, with only 37% (YouGov, May 2025) believing that the UK Government cares about the rights of women and girls.

Conference believes:

- A. The UK should strive to be a global leader in defending women's rights and fighting against the growing backlash to gender equality, especially amongst some young men.
- B. All women and girls deserve safety, equal rights and access to opportunities, and bodily autonomy.
- C. Gender equality is essential for peace, security, and economic prosperity, alongside upholding human rights.
- D. Women-led and women's rights organisations must be at the centre of responses to humanitarian crises and efforts to strive for global gender equality.

Conference calls on the UK Government to:

1. Unreservedly condemn the global backlash to gender equality and rising misogyny and gender-based violence, striving to become a world leader in standing up for the rights of women and marginalised communities and opposing all forms of injustice and oppression.
2. Provide an annual report to Parliament on the work of the UK Special Envoy for Women and Girls, highlighting progress and persistent challenges in promoting the UK's role as a leader on women's rights.
3. Develop a roadmap to restore UK aid spending at 0.7% of GNI, targeting at least 20% of UK aid on striving for gender equality and considering how aid spending decisions affect marginalised communities, including long-term funding commitments for gender equality programmes, women's rights organisations, and women-led organisations.
4. Centre the need to achieve gender equality in all humanitarian action, crisis response and diplomacy, acknowledging the need for an intersectional and cross-departmental response to gender injustice.
5. Hold social media companies to account on tackling misogyny online, putting pressure on these companies to implement stronger content moderation and address how their algorithms promote misogynistic content, and prioritise efforts to improve young people's digital literacy and awareness of their digital diets.

6. Advocate for the right to abortion and access to reproductive healthcare, condemning the attacks on the right to choose from the Trump administration and the USAID funding freeze.
7. Act to be a global leader in ending violence against women and girls, including by:
  - a) Actively encourage more countries to ratify the Istanbul Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.
  - b) Increasing the proportion of ODA spent on efforts to reduce violence against women and girls and support survivors, ensuring that initiatives are expert-led, centring women-led and women's rights organisations.
  - c) Supporting education and community initiatives which help to reduce violence against women and girls and empower young girls, such as Girls' Clubs.
  - d) Prioritising the Government's Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative, by increasing funding, especially for women-led and women's rights organisations, fostering survivor-led global collaboration, and ensuring addressing sexual violence is a priority in conflict.
  - e) Working to eradicate FGM by implementing health education interventions, engaging with communities including religious and community leaders to drive social change, and committing sufficient funding to relevant grassroots organisations.
8. Continue its pressure on the Taliban regime by not recognising it as Afghanistan's legitimate government, working with partners to use leverage such as the unfreezing of Afghan assets and the lifting of sanctions on Taliban leaders, to improve Afghan women's rights, while investing in women's projects, particularly in small and medium enterprises in places where they are still permitted a role, and online education.
9. Champion women's economic empowerment by advocating for recognition of the value of unpaid care work, promoting equal economic rights and opportunities for women, and supporting efforts to improve women's access to finance and resources
10. Promote women's political representation, using soft power to promote gender quotas while working with organisations to address the barriers to women's political participation, such as access to finance and online harassment
11. Leverage diplomatic efforts to ensure that both global and local woman leaders, as well as women-led and women's rights organisations, are empowered to participate in humanitarian action, peacebuilding, and conflict resolution
12. Advocate for gender justice to be embedded in approaches to global green energy transitions, leading by example domestically, and fostering international cooperation towards this aim.

**Applicability:** Federal.

**Background briefing:** This motion updated and developed policy on the rights of women, global gender equality, and international development.

It built on previous policy as set out in the 2024 General Election Manifesto, *For a Fair Deal*, motion *International Development - Restoring the UK's Role* (2024), motion *Ending Violence Against Women and Girls* (2021), and motion *Britain at the Heart of a Changing World* (2018).

**Amendments:** Conference passed two amendments. Amendment one added a direct recognition of the challenges that women are facing in Afghanistan to the motion (ix., 7.a., and 8.). Amendment two added a call related to monitoring the work of the UK Special Envoy for Women and Girls to the motion (xii) and 2.) .

# Ending Fleecehold and the Great Property Rip-Off

Conference notes that:

- i) Liberal Democrats and Liberals have long called for leasehold reform, since Lloyd George introduced the People's Budget in 1909.
- ii) England, Wales and Australia are the only countries still operating leaseholds.
- iii) A fifth of England's housing stock is leasehold – 4.8 million properties.
- iv) The Conservatives' Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act has failed to deliver meaningful change in the housing sector.
- v) Labour's delayed leasehold reforms will ban new leaseholds while offering no way out for the millions of existing leaseholders.
- vi) A YouGov survey in 2017 showed 51% of new homeowners reporting major defects.
- vii) Research in 2022 showed the average new-build home comes with 157 defects, up 96% since 2005, and with 94% reporting at least one defect.
- viii) The Financial Ombudsman reported in 2024 that complaints about Building Insurance claims had increased over 10 years to a record high.
- ix) Despite Government promises to legislate, there are still no proposals to regulate the property management sector.
- x) It has been more than eight years since the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower and many high-rise buildings remain without safe cladding.
- xi) The Building Safety Regulator has been mired in delays in doing its proper work.

Conference believes that:

- A. The cladding scandal proves that the leasehold model demonstrably fails to ensure tenant safety.
- B. Many existing leaseholders still pay soaring ground rents and need to be freed from them, and from unfair service charges levied by unregulated property agents.
- C. A national oversight body is required to ensure implementation of the Grenfell Inquiry Report recommendations.
- D. The scandal of developers leaving serious defects unresolved must be urgently confronted.
- E. Building Safety Regulator delays must be addressed.
- F. Too many rogue developers and unregulated estate management companies force residents to pay over the odds to maintain shared roadways and public spaces within developments.

G. The property management sector should be professionalised and regulated.

Conference reaffirms our commitment to:

- I. Abolish leasehold tenures for all properties, including flats.
- II. Cap all ground rents on commonhold and commercial leaseholds to a nominal fee.
- III. Remove dangerous cladding from all buildings, while ensuring that leaseholders do not have to pay a penny towards it.

Conference resolves to:

- 1. Regulate the construction industry by:
  - a) Establishing rights for homebuyers, to ensure there is no way for developers or building insurers to avoid accountability for rectifying defects.
  - b) Strengthening accountability to prevent reckless sign-off by building inspectors.
- 2. Regulate the property management sector by:
  - a) Taking forward recommendations from the independent Lord Best report, including a new property regulator responsible for establishing:
    - i) A code of practice for and licensing of property managers and agents.
    - ii) Minimum qualifications for property agencies, managers and agents.
    - iii) Standard industry cost codes for leaseholders and freeholders, and the power to block a landlord's chosen managing agent where the leaseholders have reasonably exercised a veto.
    - iv) Standardised guidance to improve transparency about what charges cover.
  - b) Capping unreasonable service and estate management charges paid by residents and urgently abolishing ground rents for existing residential leases.
  - c) Enabling leaseholders to request alternative quotes for maintenance, where the freeholder is a local authority.
  - d) Giving residents the power to act in common to take on ownership of management companies and common areas.
  - e) Mandating management companies to hold AGMs and respond to residents' correspondence in a timely way.
- 3. Strengthen local authorities' power to:
  - a) Adopt shared roadways and public spaces to prevent residents paying for the upkeep of expensive assets through estate management fees, recouping the cost of their completion from the developer or landowner.
  - b) Sanction developers who fail to complete roads and other infrastructure.

- c) Enforce private landlords' and management companies' obligations to remediate.

**Applicability:** England

**Background briefing:** This motion updated and developed policy on leasehold reform and building safety.

It built on previous policy as set out in the 2024 General Election Manifesto, *For a Fair Deal*, motion *Implementing the Recommendations of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 2 Report* (2024), and Policy Paper 155, *Tackling the Housing Crisis* (2023).



## **For People, For Planet (Climate Change Policy Paper)**

Conference recognises that:

- a) The world is facing climate and nature emergencies which are not under control.
- b) Soaring temperatures leading to floods, droughts, wildfires and rising sea levels are already affecting millions of people directly, and billions more through falling food production and rising prices. In the UK, flooding, heatwaves, wildfires and droughts are all becoming more frequent and more severe.
- c) Despite reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 54% since 1990, the UK is not on track to meet its target of net zero emissions by 2050, and both Conservative and Labour Governments have failed adequately to prepare the UK for the impacts of climate change.
- d) Opinion polls consistently show that a clear majority of people across the UK are worried about climate change and want the Government to do more to tackle it.

Conference reaffirms the Liberal Democrat belief that that each generation is responsible for the fate of our planet and, by safeguarding the balance of nature and the environment, for the long term continuity of life in all its forms.

Conference believes that:

- A. Urgent action is needed – in the UK and globally – to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero and avert catastrophe.
- B. Bold climate action can also deliver jobs and prosperity across the UK, improve energy security and help to cut energy bills.
- C. It is vitally important that climate action has the full support of the public, that they are fully engaged in its development, and that their concerns are fully addressed.
- D. Effective action must be embedded across every level of Government, with climate, nature and resilience treated as core priorities for decision-making, spending and legislation.
- E. Local authorities are best placed to lead on community-based solutions, from retrofitting homes to building public transport infrastructure and supporting sustainable land use.

Conference therefore endorses policy paper 160 *For People, For Planet*, with its approach based on three key themes:

- I. Putting people first: the transition must be equitable, fair and affordable, working with people rather than imposing solutions on them, and ensuring that no communities or workers are unfairly affected or left behind.
- II. Tackling climate, nature and resilience together rather than treating them as unconnected issues.
- III. Leading on the world stage to mobilise international cooperation, especially with the EU, to tackle these global challenges.

In particular, Conference welcomes its proposals to:

1. Cut energy bills by half within a decade and protect people from future energy shocks by:
  - a) Strengthening energy security through investing in cheap, clean renewables.
  - b) Making homes warmer and cheaper to heat with a ten-year emergency upgrade programme, starting with free home energy improvements for those on low incomes, improving grants and offering stamp duty rebates to encourage the decarbonisation of heat and transport and introducing an energy social tariff.
  - c) Decoupling electricity prices from the wholesale gas price, moving older renewable projects off expensive Renewable Obligation Certificates and on to cheaper Contracts for Difference, and extending the life of new Contracts for Difference from 15 to 25 years.
  - d) Supporting the installation of new technologies to help people use energy more flexibly, at times when it is cheaper – and pay less as a result.
  - e) Working together with the EU to trade energy more efficiently, cutting costs and reducing reliance on gas.
2. Ensure that no communities are left behind by:
  - a) Establishing an independent Just Transition Commission to develop just transition plans and provide funding support for vulnerable communities.
  - b) Providing particular just transition support to North Sea oil and gas workers to support the sector's transition to clean energy.
3. Make sure people's voices are heard, and support local action, by:
  - a) Establishing an independent National Climate Assembly and models of local engagement.
  - b) Decentralising powers and resources to local councils to enable local action, including a statutory duty to develop Climate, Nature and Resilience strategies, both for their own council's activities and procurement and for the area they cover.
4. Prioritise climate, nature and resilience in Government by:
  - a) Supplementing the current net zero framework and 2050 target by limiting consumption emissions in key sectors.
  - b) Creating a clear voice and leadership on climate by appointing a Cabinet-level Chief Secretary for Sustainability in the Treasury and drawing up a Climate, Nature and Resilience Roadmap.
  - c) Reforming the planning system to align with climate, nature, and resilience goals.
5. Lead global action on climate change by:

- a) Working closely with the UK's European neighbours through a new UK-EU Climate Security Pact, including linking the UK and EU emissions trading schemes and carbon border adjustment mechanisms.
  - b) Organising international coalitions of the willing, working with like-minded countries on both global goals and focussed, targeted activities.
  - c) Using trade policy to prioritise low-carbon goods and increase development assistance for climate action.
6. Deliver prosperity by:
- a) Placing decarbonisation at the heart of the UK's industrial strategy
  - b) Using the National Wealth Fund to crowd in private investment and support green projects at local level.
  - c) Reforming procurement rules to prioritise low-carbon goods and services, and strengthen corporate responsibility for climate and nature outcomes.
  - d) Implementing a zero-carbon skills strategy, including Lifelong Training Grants and new green apprenticeships.
7. Protect communities from climate impacts by:
- a) Developing a coherent and comprehensive adaptation strategy with clear targets and monitoring, including for flooding, drought, heat and resilient infrastructure.
  - b) Increasing funding for local communities, developing resilience standards for the key sectors, and supporting home-owners to install adaptation measures.
  - c) Ensuring that the priority for resilience and adaptation is targeted firstly at the most vulnerable sectors of society.
  - d) Ensuring the resilience and adaptation of all public service provision to enhance protection against threats from vectors directly or indirectly attributed to the changing climate, whether flood-borne, air-borne or associated with extremes of temperature or weather patterns, including in particular:
    - i) Introducing a legal duty for every care home to have cooling systems.
    - ii) 'Heatproofing' the NHS, including through a taskforce which coordinates hospitals to cut the costs of cooling systems and ensures that every hospital has guaranteed 'cool wards'.
    - iii) Bringing forward new minimum resilience standards for NHS hospitals for flooding, extreme heat and drought, and allocating ring-fenced multi-year funding for climate adaptation initiatives within the NHS budget.
  - e) Guaranteeing access to:
    - i) Community 'cool hubs' in public spaces to provide relief for vulnerable people and reduce the numbers presenting in hospital with heat exhaustion.

- ii) Community 'warm hubs' in public spaces in the winter, to prevent ill-health due to cold and damp.
  - f) Developing a dedicated strategy for protecting Britain's respiratory health from increased rainfall and humidity and treating rising levels of damp and mould as a public health crisis.
8. Decarbonise energy use by:
- a) Investing in renewables to achieve 95% decarbonisation of power by 2030.
  - b) Supporting the roll-out of small modular nuclear reactors if they can provide a cost-effective and safe part of a decarbonised generation mix.
  - c) Expanding grid capacity and support local communities affected by major new energy infrastructure.
  - d) Supporting community energy in delivering net zero, building local support for climate action and sharing economic benefits.
  - e) Supporting major home insulation upgrades, the widespread deployment of heat pumps and similar technologies, and zero-carbon standards for new builds.
  - f) Accelerating the transition to electric vehicles, including expanding charging infrastructure and reforming planning rules.
  - g) Promoting walking, cycling, public transport, and electrification of buses.
  - h) Supporting innovation, research and development in zero-carbon flight; but unless progress is more rapid than projected, reduce emissions by reforming air passenger duty for international flights to target the most frequent flyers and limiting airport expansion.
  - i) Expanding incentives for electrification and carbon capture in industry and supporting energy and resource efficiency.
9. Ensure the agriculture, land use and forestry sector becomes a collective net carbon sink by 2050 by:
- a) Properly funding the Environmental Land Management Schemes, with an extra £1 billion a year to support profitable, sustainable and nature-friendly farming resilient to the impacts of climate change.
  - b) Supporting research and innovation, in particular on alternative proteins, with a new Farming and Land Use Catapult innovation centre and a new Food and Farming Research and Innovation fund.
  - c) Taking steps to reduce food waste, and requiring public sector food and catering to meet high sustainability standards.
10. Support carbon dioxide removal measures, giving top priority to nature-based solutions for carbon removal, including expanding woodland and restoring peatlands.

**Applicability:** Federal except 3. b., 4. c), 6. d) , 8. d-h) , 9. , and 10., which are England only.

**Background briefing:** This motion and the accompanying policy paper updated and developed policy on climate change, nature, resilience, and energy security,

It built on previous policy as set out in the 2024 General Election Manifesto, *For a Fair Deal*, Policy Paper 156, *Tackling the Nature Crisis* (2023), and Policy Paper 139, *Tackling the Climate Emergency* (2019).

**Amendments:** Conference passed two amendments, and a third amendment was defeated. Amendment one added calls to the motion about energy prices and insulation (1.). Amendment two strengthened the motion's calls on resilience and adaptation (7.c to 7.f). Amendment three sought to change the motion's position on nuclear power.

## Improving Access to Justice

Conference believes that:

- I. Equal access to justice for all is a fundamental right in any democratic society.
- II. Legal aid is a proud cornerstone of the British criminal justice system and should be available to everyone who needs it.
- III. Being denied access to justice can further exacerbate inequalities facing the most vulnerable in our society.
- IV. Reaching a fair resolution at the earliest possible stage of any legal dispute is in the best interests of all.

Conference notes with grave concern that under the former Conservative Government, years of cuts and mismanagement has damaged communities' access to both civil and criminal legal aid.

Conference further notes that:

- A. Cuts to legal aid have damaged access to justice and increased the number of unrepresented litigants.
- B. The number of legal aid deserts – areas with no access to legal aid providers – across the country are on the rise, with rural and coastal communities particularly impacted.
- C. More than 42 million people in England and Wales are denied access to a community care legal aid provider in their area, accounting for nearly 70% of the population.
- D. Legal aid providers are increasingly forced to close as legal aid fees are not sufficient to meet their working costs, with 82% of housing and family legal aid providers reporting that civil legal aid work is loss-making.
- E. The legal aid means test has not been uprated in line with inflation since 2009, despite the cost of living crisis – leaving thousands without affordable access to justice.
- F. In 2022, the Legal Aid Means Test Review recommended to significantly increase thresholds for legal aid eligibility and remove the means test entirely for some civil cases to improve equal access to justice – but the Government has delayed its implementation until 2026.
- G. A lack of legal aid is further exacerbating court backlogs, with estimates showing that hearings involving unrepresented litigants last 50% longer.

- H. Despite the role that early legal advice can play in diverting cases away from the courts, saving public money and improving outcomes, its availability through legal aid is plummeting.
- I. Since 2015, 94 courts and tribunals have been closed throughout England and Wales.
- J. A long-awaited fee increase was secured for criminal legal aid last year, following the 2021 Bellamy Report which recommended an immediate funding uplift as “the minimum necessary... first step in nursing the system of criminal legal aid back to health after years of neglect”.
- K. In April 2025, the Legal Aid Agency suffered a serious cyber attack that compromised both providers’ financial data and hundreds of thousands of applicants’ personal information - putting highly vulnerable people at risk of identity theft, fraud and even blackmail.
- L. Too many survivors and victims of domestic abuse are being left without the support they need in the justice system, with 29% of survivors representing themselves in 2023 compared to 15% in 2011.
- M. As the Hillsborough disaster revealed, victims of state cover-ups and scandals are often forced to navigate complex legal systems alone, compounding their trauma and delaying justice.
- N. Despite pledging to guarantee legal representation parity by April 2025, via a full Hillsborough Law, the Government has failed to deliver this vital reform.

Conference acknowledges that increasing spending on legal aid will ultimately save money, with numerous studies showing that early access to legal advice can help tackle problems before they escalate, improve outcomes and prevent cases from going to court unnecessarily.

Conference therefore calls on the Government to:

1. Establish a new right to affordable, reasonable legal assistance with a new, independent Justice Commission to monitor and enforce it.
2. Make the legal aid system simpler and more generous for both civil and criminal cases by:
  - a) Immediately implementing the recommendations of the Legal Aid Means Test Review.
  - b) Placing a duty on ministers to ensure equal access to justice for all regardless of their community’s location, addressing legal aid deserts as a priority.
3. Prioritise solving legal problems before they escalate – improving outcomes and saving public money in the long-run by:

- a) Reintroducing legal aid for early legal advice for both civil and criminal cases, with a particular focus on family and housing cases.
  - b) Improving access to mediation through legal aid, especially for family cases.
  - c) Providing funding to local authorities and the Legal Aid Agency to roll out 'Law Start Centres' in every community that bring together early legal advice and signposting services for other local legal aid providers to ensure people get the early support they deserve.
- 4. Develop and implement an access to justice data strategy to allow for a better assessment of legal aid schemes' efficiencies and effectiveness.
- 5. Work with legal aid providers and the Legal Aid Agency to determine what administrative tasks are using disproportionate amounts of providers' time and how those processes could be streamlined to improve efficiency, including by exploring the potential benefits of incorporating the use of new technologies.
- 6. Publish a full post-incident review of the Legal Aid Agency data breach, including steps being taken to prevent a future breach and ensure that, where appropriate, compensation to victims is paid in a swift and timely manner.
- 7. Reform the Exceptional Case Funding scheme for legal aid, including simplifying the application process, to ensure that no one is prevented from enforcing their human rights by a lack of funds.
- 8. Immediately introduce the Hillsborough law in full to impose a proper statutory duty of candour on all public officials and guarantee parity of legal representation against public authorities for bereaved families.
- 9. Bring forward a plan to increase access to community court buildings, including by restoring existing ones where possible.

**Applicability:** England and Wales.

**Background briefing:** This motion updated and developed policy on legal assistance and court backlogs. It built on previous policy as set out in the 2024 General Election Manifesto, *For a Fair Deal*, motion *Swift Justice for Victims and Offenders* (2022), and motion *Restoring Access to Justice* (2016).

**Amendments:** Conference passed two amendments. Amendment one added calls regarding the Legal Aid Agency data breach (K. and 6.). Amendment two added calls regarding the Hillsborough law (M. and N.).



## Leading the Way (Policy Review Paper)

Conference reaffirms that the Liberal Democrats exist to build and safeguard a fair, free and open society, in which we seek to balance the fundamental values of liberty, equality and community, and in which no one shall be enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity.

Conference notes the many great strengths of the United Kingdom, from the people working in the NHS to our world-leading creative industries, from great British farmers to our soft power on the world stage.

However, Conference also notes the enormous challenges facing the UK today, including:

- A. A cost of living crisis, high and rising levels of poverty, and anaemic economic growth.
- B. The crisis in the NHS and social care, including a lack of access to GPs and dentists, ambulance delays, long hospital waiting lists, and millions of people missing out on care.
- C. The twin climate and nature crises, with the UK off track on its emissions targets, one in six species threatened with extinction from Britain, and air pollution claiming tens of thousands of lives every year.
- D. Water companies getting away with pumping filthy sewage into our rivers and lakes and onto our beaches.
- E. A housing crisis, with a shortage of affordable and social housing and shamefully high levels of homelessness.
- F. Prejudice, discrimination and entrenched inequalities blighting too many people's lives – including women, LGBT+ people, people of ethnic and religious minorities, and disabled people.
- G. Communities plagued by burglaries, fraud, anti-social behaviour, serious youth violence and violence against women and girls, while far too many criminals evade justice and go on to reoffend.
- H. Rural communities let down by a lack of access to local public services, decent public transport, affordable housing, adequate broadband connectivity, or protection from crime; and family farmers undermined by both Conservative and Labour Governments.
- I. A badly broken immigration system, an enormous asylum backlog, dangerous Channel crossings, a lack of safe and legal routes to sanctuary, and no public confidence.

- J. A political system that has been fundamentally broken for generations, leaving millions feeling powerless and excluded.
- K. Strong global headwinds, including instability and conflict, climate change, the risks and challenges of social media and artificial intelligence, threats from Putin's Russia and Xi's China, and Donald Trump's erratic and unpredictable presidency.
- L. Stark and persistent regional inequalities in productivity, incomes, health and educational opportunity.

Conference believes that things can get better – the UK has overcome big challenges before and can do it again now. Liberal Democrats have led the way before, from investing in education to legalising same-sex marriage, tackling climate change to promoting human rights.

Conference further believes that the Liberal Democrats must again lead the way to a fair, free and open society where:

- i) Everyone has the chance to succeed and see their hard work and aspiration properly rewarded, and extremes of inequality are eliminated.
- ii) Everyone's rights are respected, and individuals and communities are properly empowered.
- iii) Every child gets a good education and has real opportunities to flourish.
- iv) Businesses and entrepreneurs are supported to create growth and jobs in every part of the UK.
- v) Everyone receives the care they need when they are ill or frail, and a helping hand when they fall on tough times.
- vi) Everyone can afford to live in a decent home somewhere safe and clean, with a comfortable retirement when the time comes.
- vii) Everyone can enjoy the benefits of our wonderful natural environment, and our children inherit the healthy planet they deserve.
- viii) The UK stands tall in a safer world, working with our neighbours, allies and partners to champion the values of equality, democracy, human rights and the rule of law.
- ix) Every region can thrive, with fair access to investment, skills and infrastructure so that opportunity is not determined by postcode.
- x) Public investment decisions work to close regional gaps in pay, productivity, health and connectivity.

Conference reaffirms that the Liberal Democrat response to the challenges we face will always be rooted in the values we share: freedom, equality, community, internationalism, human rights, environmentalism and democracy.

While recognising that there is still more to do, Conference further notes that the party already has bold, comprehensive policies to:

- a) Fix the crisis in social care and support unpaid carers.
- b) Tackle the climate and nature crises, and stop the sewage scandal.
- c) Tackle the housing crisis so that everyone, in every part of the country, can afford to live in a good-quality home.
- d) End deep poverty within a decade.
- e) Support families, protect children's rights and wellbeing, and invest in education.
- f) Tackle the skills shortage and support universities in the face of extreme financial pressure.
- g) Respect and defend the rights of people of all races, religions or beliefs, sexes, sexual orientations and gender identities, disabled people, carers and care experienced individuals.
- h) Build a fair, effective immigration system that treats everyone with dignity and respect, while preventing dangerous Channel crossings and combating people smuggling, human trafficking and modern slavery.
- i) Fix the UK's broken relationship with Europe with a four-step roadmap towards membership of the Single Market, including negotiating a new UK-EU customs union by 2030 at the latest.

Conference therefore endorses policy paper 161, *Leading the Way*, as a strategic, focussed and ambitious programme for renewing our policy in the years ahead, including the following areas as priorities for further policy development in this Parliament:

1. Turning the economy around and making sure everyone feels the benefits of growth equitably.
2. Supporting start-ups and scale-ups, small and growing businesses, entrepreneurs and the self-employed.
3. Improving primary healthcare, with a focus on early access and shifting more healthcare out of hospitals and into communities.
4. Taking a strategic approach to improving health and care more broadly.
5. Making sure policing, the justice system and other public services work better for victims of crime.
6. Empowering consumers in relation to public services, utility companies, arms-length Government bodies, and businesses.
7. Defending and strengthening British democracy.

8. Empowering local communities so that residents and community groups have far more control over the decisions that affect their local areas.
9. Helping rural communities to thrive by tackling the distinctive challenges they face.
10. Reviewing and updating the party's international security strategy in light of the world as it is today.
11. Closing regional gaps in productivity, incomes, health and connectivity.
12. Reducing racial inequality throughout the economy and society.
13. Continue building on the work already undertaken to raise standards in education, giving young people a fighting chance in life.

Conference believes that policy development should always put our Liberal Democrat values into practice, and take forward our distinctive commitment to put real power in people's hands and hold the already powerful properly to account.

**Applicability:** Applicability: Federal, except for 3.–5., and 8.–9. which are England only.

**Background briefing:** This motion and the accompanying policy paper develop a programme for renewing our policy in the years ahead.

**Amendments:** Conference passed four amendments. Amendment one strengthened the motions calls regarding regional inequalities (L., ix. and x.). Amendment two added a call regarding deep poverty (d.). Amendment three added a call regarding racial inequality (12.). Amendment four strengthened the motions call on education (13.).

# Never Again: Justice for Contaminated Blood Victims

Conference notes that:

- A. Over 30,000 individuals were infected with HIV and hepatitis C through contaminated NHS blood products during the 1970s and 1980s, resulting in more than 3,000 deaths and causing immeasurable suffering to victims and their families.
- B. The subsequent inquiry found that the disaster was largely avoidable and was exacerbated by a “subtle, pervasive and chilling” cover-up by the NHS and successive Governments.
- C. In February 2025, the Government expanded the Infected Blood Compensation Scheme to include more relatives and carers, but concerns remain over delays and lack of transparency, with many still awaiting proper acknowledgement and redress.
- D. Despite promising to extend the duty of candour to all public officials under the Hillsborough law by April 2025, the Government is yet to deliver this vital reform.
- E. The Infected Blood Scandal is one of many scandals involving medical negligence which, taken together, have caused thousands of avoidable deaths and left tens of thousands living with painful and damaging lifelong impacts.
- F. Medical scandals come at a huge financial cost for the taxpayer, with £11.8 billion allocated to compensate infected blood victims and annual NHS compensation payouts reaching nearly £3 billion last year.
- G. Medical scandals often disproportionately affect vulnerable and marginalised populations, compounding health inequalities.

Conference believes that:

- I. Victims and families of the Infected Blood Scandal deserve full justice, recognition, and timely compensation.
- II. The Government’s apology and creation of a compensation scheme were welcome steps, but ongoing delays and lack of transparency are undermining victims’ trust and prolonging their suffering.
- III. The Government’s choice to drag its feet over implementing the Inquiry’s recommendations means that vital actions needed to prevent future scandals are not being taken.
- IV. It is not only the victims of the Infected Blood Scandal that have suffered at the hands of medical negligence, but also victims of the multiple maternity care scandals, the vaginal mesh scandal, the sodium valproate scandal and the

Primodos scandal among many others – each of which we must learn from to prevent future harm.

Conference calls on the Government to:

1. Deliver justice for those affected by the Infected Blood Scandal by:
  - a) Immediately and efficiently processing all compensation claims under the Infected Blood Compensation Scheme, ensuring that no eligible individual is left behind.
  - b) Implementing all the inquiry's recommendations and reporting annually to Parliament on progress in an oral statement delivered by the Minister.
  - c) Delivering a permanent memorial to ensure "the worst treatment disaster in the history of the NHS" is not forgotten.
2. Provide ongoing support for victims of all medical scandals and their families, including access to healthcare, psychological services, and social support to address long-term impacts and tackle compounded health inequalities.
3. End the culture of cover-up exposed by the Infected Blood Inquiry and other scandal inquiries and prevent future medical scandals by:
  - a) Immediately introducing legislation to impose a statutory duty of candour on all public officials to promote transparency.
  - b) Immediately reversing the hasty and reckless decision to scrap key patient safety organisations like the Health Services Safety Investigations Body; whistleblowing and 'speak up' programmes and bodies such as the National Guardian; and organisations that promote the views, concerns and voice of patients like Healthwatch England and local Healthwatch organisations.
  - c) Establishing a Patient Safety Taskforce, overseen by the Patient Safety Agency, to improve data sharing across NHS bodies, analyse patient risk, and coordinate safety responsibilities effectively.
  - d) Mandating Integrated Care Boards to include patient voices at board level, through organisations like Healthwatch, ensuring patient experiences shape healthcare delivery.
  - e) Incorporating an 'Ending Medical Negligence' curriculum into clinician training, featuring testimonies from victims of medical scandals to ensure mistakes are not repeated.
4. Commit to investing any future savings from the almost £3 billion in NHS annual compensation payouts into frontline services, to deliver better quality care to all.

**Applicability:** Federal, except for 2., 3. b-d), and 4., which are England only.

**Background briefing:** This motion updated and developed policy on medical scandals and compensation schemes. It built on previous policy as set out in the 2024 General Election Manifesto, *For a Fair Deal*, and Policy Paper 68, *Healthy Communities, Healthy People* (2004).

**Amendments:** Conference passed one amendment, which added a call regarding whistleblowing and patient-voice organisations (b.).

# Making the UK-EU Reset Summit Count

Conference notes that:

1. Liberal Democrats have been the only voices in Parliament consistently and unashamedly championing closer economic, defence and cultural ties with Europe, following the Conservatives botched deal with the EU.
2. Liberal Democrats have been pushing for the Labour Government to be much more ambitious in rebuilding our links with the EU, including through:
  - a) Calling for a new, bespoke UK-EU Customs Unions by 2030 which would boost UK growth and cut red tape for our businesses.
  - b) Campaigning for new opportunities for our young people to enable them to live, work, and study more easily across Europe.
  - c) Pushing for a new Rearmament Bank with the EU – backing the proposal from Liberal Democrats Edward Lucas and Guy de Selliars – which would support enhanced financing for defence programmes across the UK and Europe.
3. Deepening UK-EU economic ties even short of a Customs Union could generate £25 billion a year for the Exchequer, allowing the Government to invest in fixing our NHS, schools and other public services.
4. After consistent Liberal Democrat pressure, the Government took initial, limited steps to rebuild ties with the EU at May's 'Reset' Summit, enacting Liberal Democrat calls including:
  - a) Agreeing to begin talks on youth mobility.
  - b) Establishing a new Security and Defence Partnership.
  - c) Securing a mandate to negotiate a Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) agreement.

Conference regrets that the Government failed to show real ambition to renew the UK's relations with the EU – as it continues to refuse to entertain the prospect of membership of the Single Market or the Customs Union – and that so little was achieved on other vital issues, including:

- I. A lack of concrete progress on securing an agreement for UK touring artists.
- II. The failure to agree mutual recognition of professional qualifications.
- III. No substantial progress on agreeing UK associate membership of the European Defence Agency (EDA).
- IV. Failing to secure guaranteed UK access to the EU's Security Action for Europe (SAFE) fund.



V. The lack of clarity about how the introduction of the EU's Entry/Exit Scheme could lead to severe disruption for UK travellers.

VI. No clear plan for quickly moving towards negotiating, agreeing and implementing a SPS deal, despite the benefits this would deliver for British businesses.

Conference believes the best way to secure closer cooperation with Europe is to ensure that even more Liberal Democrat MPs and Councillors are elected across the country.

Conference further believes that:

- i) Strengthening our economic ties with Europe will not only boost growth at home, but also insulate us from President Trump's irrational trade war.
- ii) Strengthening our security ties with Europe will allow us to reduce our strategic dependence on an unpredictable President Trump and enable us to meet our commitments to NATO, support Ukraine and deter Putin.

Conference reaffirms:

- A. The policy recommendations proposed in conference motions The UK's Response to Trump (March 2025) and Rebuilding Trade and Cooperation with Europe (2022).
- B. Our four-stage approach to rebuilding our relationship with Europe, and our longer-term objective of UK membership of the EU.

Conference calls on the Government to build on the positive but limited steps taken at the 'Reset Summit', including by:

1. Accelerating the timeline for securing and implementing a SPS agreement with the EU to 2026, providing greater certainty for UK exporters.
2. Launching a national campaign outlining the requirements for UK citizens travelling to Europe after the introduction of the Entry/Exit Scheme, and providing them with greater clarity on when they will be able to use airport e-gates across the EU.
2. Immediately beginning talks on agreeing a new, bespoke UK-EU Customs Union, which would cut red tape for businesses across our country and act as an antidote to anaemic economic growth.
3. Moving rapidly to agree a Youth Mobility Scheme, creating vital new opportunities for our young people.
4. Securing association with EU regulatory framework agencies such as the European Chemicals Agency, European Aviation Safety Agency and European Medicines Agency.
5. Agreeing the UK's associate membership of EDA and expanding our engagement with PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation) projects.
6. Expanding cooperation over defence-industrial issues between the UK and member states of the EU, NATO and the Joint Expeditionary Force.

7. Committing the UK to join the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Operation Althea, recognising the importance of promoting stability in the Balkans and following the political decision by the Conservatives to withdraw the UK from this mission.
8. Urgently securing the UK's access to the EU's SAFE fund, enabling the UK defence industry to better support collective European rearmament efforts.

**Applicability:** Federal.

**Background briefing:** This motion updated and developed policy on EU-UK regulation and cooperation, and the Youth Mobility Scheme.

It built on previous policy as set out in the 2024 General Election Manifesto, *For a Fair Deal*, Policy Paper 144, *Rebuilding Trade and Cooperation with Europe* (2022), and motion *The EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement and the Future of the UK-EU Relationship* (2021).

**Amendments:** Conference passed two amendments. Amendment one added calls regarding the EU's Security Action for Europe (SAFE) fund (IV. and 9.). Amendment two strengthened SPS (Sanitary and Phytosanitary) agreement calls (VI., 1. and 2.).

# Protecting the Rights of Hong Kongers

Conference notes that:

- A. Since the 2020 National Security Law was imposed, which violates the principle of the Joint Declaration, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has taken further steps to crack down on civil liberties in Hong Kong, including by broadening the scope and definition of political crimes through the passage of the Safeguarding National Security Bill in March 2024.
- B. The arbitrary denial of entry to Hong Kong for Liberal Democrat MP Wera Hobhouse – the first time a British Parliamentarian has been blocked since the 1997 handover – further illustrates the increasing authoritarianism of the Hong Kong authorities.
- C. The growth of an insidious campaign of transnational repression, sponsored by the CCP and implemented by the Chinese intelligence services, which is targeting pro-democracy Chinese and Hong Kong activists, including those based in the UK, who aim to shine a spotlight on the abuses of the Chinese state and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR).
- D. The offering of bounties by the HKSAR of up to HK\$1,000,000 (circa £94,000) for the arrest of Hong Kong and Chinese pro-democracy activists living abroad, including in the UK, and the anonymous delivery of letters to neighbours of pro-democracy activists urging them to bring activists to the Chinese Embassy in London.
- E. The alarming proposals for a Chinese ‘mega-embassy’ in the heart of London which, if greenlighted, would pose serious risks to the UK’s national and cyber security, and which have been opposed by nearly 30 human rights and civil society organisations – including the Hong Kong Democracy Council and Safeguard Defenders.
- F. The Government’s failure to place China (including HKSAR) on the enhanced tier of the Foreign Influence Registration Scheme (FIRS), despite the risks posed by the CCP to British interests and values.
- G. As Beijing ramps up its efforts to intimidate these courageous activists, the Government’s Immigration White Paper has cast doubt on the future of the British National Overseas (BNO) pathway – including whether the proposed increase to the general residence requirement for settlement from five to ten years will apply to the BNO scheme.
- H. The increasing influence by the CCP on the content and framing of Chinese language education in the United Kingdom through both the increasing number of Confucius Institutes and known links between publishers of educational material and the CCP.

Conference expresses its grave disappointment and concern that UK Government Ministers are continuing to travel to China for trade talks - including the Business Secretary in September 2025 - even as Beijing expands its campaign of transnational repression.

Conference believes that:

- I. The UK owes a unique and historic obligation to Hong Kongers, including those who have travelled to the UK already and those still living in Hong Kong who wish to leave the city.
- II. Efforts to intimidate pro-democracy Chinese and Hong Kong activists living in the UK are abhorrent and constitute an attack on British sovereignty which must be rigorously and consistently opposed.
- III. Hong Kongers wishing to travel and settle in the UK under the BNO scheme must be provided with clarity on the pathway's requirements and timeline.
- IV. Hong Kongers have a distinct cultural and linguistic history and identity which should be celebrated and protected but is at risk of erasure.

Conference reaffirms:

- a) The policy recommendations proposed in conference motion Hong Kong's Future (2020).
- b) The Liberal Democrats' commitment to ensuring Hong Kongers have a life raft should they need it – as pioneered by the late Paddy Ashdown – in light of China reneging on the promises enshrined in the Handover Declaration.

Conference calls on the UK Government to:

1. Block the application for the Chinese 'mega embassy' and take measures to ensure that there is the right to peacefully and safely protest outside the proposed construction site.
2. Establish a bespoke Police hotline for reporting incidents of political intimidation, and reaffirm the illegality of bounty hunting in the UK – sending a clear message that the UK will not tolerate CCP-sponsored attempts at extraterritorial repression.
3. Suspend all further Ministerial visits to China until the bounties currently targeting Hong Kongers living in the UK are lifted, and Beijing provides reassurances that no more will be authorised.
4. Retain the five-year pathway to settlement for all BNO visa holders, reflecting our unique and historic obligation to the people of Hong Kong and providing the certainty that Hong Kongers deserve.
5. Include all Chinese Communist Party and HKSAR officials, as well as Chinese Communist Party-linked organisations, on the 'enhanced tier' of the FIRS.
6. Implement targeted sanctions against those officials in the HKSAR and the Chinese Communist Party identified as responsible for raising bounties on the heads of pro-democracy Hong Kong and Chinese activists living in the UK.
7. Appoint a Home Office Departmental Tsar for the 'Protection of pro-democracy activists' – with responsibility for laying an annual report before Parliament outlining the Government's progress in strengthening protection for activists against foreign

intimidation, and oversee the tackling of disinformation campaigns aimed at inciting violence against pro-democracy Hong Kong and Chinese activists.

8. Commission an independent review into Chinese language public education to ensure inclusivity and editorial independence.
9. Establish separate and distinct Mandarin and Cantonese strands within the Chinese language education framework across both GCSEs and A-Levels, following the example set by SQA in Scotland.

**Applicability:** Federal; except 8. and 9., which are England only.

**Background briefing:** This motion updated and developed policy on China-UK relations, pathways to UK citizenship for people of Hong Kong, and defending British democracy.

It built on previous policy as set out in the 2024 General Election Manifesto, *For a Fair Deal*, motion *China: A Strategy for the UK* (2022), motion *The Uyghur Genocide* (2021), and motion *Hong Kong's Future* (2020).

**Amendments:** Conference passed two amendments. Amendment one added calls regarding Ministerial visits to China (3.). Amendment two added calls regarding Chinese language public education (H., IV., 7. and 8.).

# **This Land is Your Land - Restoring Public Paths Through Nature**

Conference notes that:

- I. Outdoor exercise and recreation leads to healthier lives and saves the NHS billions.
- II. Active travel tourism contributes billions to the UK economy and supports millions of jobs.
- III. 2024 marked the 75th anniversary of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 which led to the creation of Britain's 15 national parks and public rights of way; the basis for this legislation was put together by a Liberal MP, Arthur Hobhouse, who chaired the National Parks Committee.
- IV. Access to nature is declining whilst inequality of access is increasing, with far fewer public paths in the most deprived areas.
- V. Walking, wheeling and cycling improve public health, the environment and our economy.
- VI. Voie Verte have created tens of thousands of miles worth of public rights of way across Europe from disused railways, canal and river towpaths, utility company rights of way and derelict industrial land.
- VII. Over 2,300 railway stations, 5,000 miles of track, were closed in the Beeching cuts during the 1960s.
- VIII. Almost 32,000 public rights of way are obstructed and the number of path blockages is increasing year on year, according to a BBC investigation.
- IX. The UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world, one of the least densely forested countries in Europe and in Britain one in six species are threatened with extinction.
- X. Waiting lists for allotments in the UK have risen steeply, with the average wait time at over three years, and up to 15 year waits in some cases.
- XI. The actions of the Conservatives in Government fell 'far short' of what was required to leave the environment in a better state than they found it, according to the Office for Environmental Protection.
- XII. The Conservative Government cut the active travel budget; the Labour Government has not fully reversed these cuts.
- XIII. Public bodies, local authorities, farmers and community groups do not have sufficient resources to improve access to nature and public rights of way.

Conference believes that:

- i) Everybody should have access to a healthy environment; the beauty of Britain's coastlines, rivers, lakes, woodlands and open green spaces.

- ii) Thousands of miles worth of public rights of way could be:
  - a) Created with the transformation of disused railways, canal routes, airfields and disused industrial land.
  - b) Recovered with more support for local and public authorities and community groups.
- iii) Local authorities and national park authorities have a critical role in unlocking the potential of protected landscapes for public access, health and education, along with nature's recovery but require adequate funding to maximise these benefits.
- iv) Our protected landscapes are key to the restoration of our natural environment.
- v) We must support farmers to develop world-leading practices for sustainable land management, nature restoration and tackling climate change while continuing their primary function to boost Britain's food security.

Conference reaffirms Liberal Democrat pledges to:

- A. Create new walking, wheeling and cycling networks with a new nationwide active travel strategy.
- B. Complete the King Charles III England Coast Path and designate 16 new National Trails, thereby doubling the current total.
- C. Create a new designation of National Nature Parks, working with existing National Parks and National Landscapes to improve nature recovery and transform them into National Nature Parks, with stronger duties on National Park Authorities to create and protect carbon sinks.
- D. Double woodland cover by 2050 in England to improve air quality and enrich habitats and public spaces and empower Local Nature Recovery Strategies to identify a new Wild Belt for nature's recovery.
- E. Strengthen the Office for Environmental Protection and provide more funding to the Environment Agency and Natural England to help protect our environment and enforce environmental laws.
- F. Properly fund Environmental Land Management schemes (ELMs) with £1 billion extra a year to support farmers with the restoration of woodlands, peatlands and waterways, the creation of natural flood protections and the management of land to recover species and store carbon while also recognising food production as a vital public good.
- G. Create a legal guarantee for fair and equitable access to nature and pass a Clean Air Act.
- H. Ensure local authorities can maintain and more easily upgrade existing rights of way and process requests for new rights of way which provide legal protections for public use of paths.

- I. Integrate nature and active and public travel in planning so that new development connects people, promotes healthier living, restores nature and boosts the economy.
- J. Work with our European neighbours to tackle the nature crisis, including applying to join the European Environment Agency (EEA).

Conference resolves to:

1. Create thousands of miles worth of new public rights of way by turning former railway lines into paths for walkers, cyclists and horse riders by:
  - a) Introducing a national legal framework to make grassroots campaigns for new trails more successful, speedy and easy, whilst making sure landowners are fairly compensated.
  - b) Learning lessons from the creation of Voie Verte across Europe, ensuring that benches are provided regularly along pathways.
2. Provide incentives, including a long-term fund, to encourage local authorities, public bodies and Government to turn over disused land (including railway sidings, disused airfields and derelict industrial land) to local communities for public use, including walking, wheeling and cycling routes, community gardens, allotments, ponds and green spaces.
3. Promote outdoor education, with the aim of ensuring every child is offered at least one outdoor education experience during primary school years and at least one such experience during secondary school years so that residential outdoor learning is part of the school curriculum and central to the Government's Youth Strategy.
4. Improve the surface of canal and river towpaths for habitats and public use, working with the Canal and River Trust and building on the success of fibreways.
5. Refresh, update and popularise the Countryside Code to improve public awareness about how to treat the countryside with respect.

**Applicability:** England except for J. which is Federal.

**Background briefing:** This motion updated and developed policy on public rights of way, active travel, and nature.

It built on previous policy as set out in the 2024 General Election Manifesto, *For a Fair Deal*, motion, *National Nature Parks* (2024), and Policy Paper 156, *Tackling the Nature Crisis* (2023).

**Amendments:** Conference passed one amendment, which added a call regarding benches (1.c.).



# **Towards a Ceasefire and Political Resolution in Sudan**

Conference notes:

- i) The brutal conflict in Sudan is a disaster for innocent Sudanese civilians.
- ii) Sudan faces a humanitarian crisis: 30 million Sudanese urgently need assistance; over 14 million have been displaced; 7 million are facing acute food insecurity; and there has been horrific sexual violence against women and mass killings.
- iii) The deliberate targeting and killing of humanitarian workers in the conflict, including attacks on UN aid convoys - reflecting a culture of impunity in the civil war.
- iv) UN reporting from August 2025, highlighting the size of the healthcare catastrophe in the country - with more than 80% of health facilities in Sudan's conflict zones no longer operational.
- v) The outcome of the London Summit, held on 15 April, which included a welcome joint commitment of a further £813 million of funding for Sudan and its neighbours in 2025 – though which represents only a drop in the ocean compared with the scale of the humanitarian catastrophe.
- vi) A UK-sponsored motion at the UN Security Council (UNSC) in November 2024 to bring about a ceasefire was shamefully vetoed by Russia.
- vii) The alleged role of external actors in supplying arms to the warring parties, including Russia, China, Iran, Türkiye, Serbia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).
- viii) The illicit trade of Sudan's gold is funding the war, enriching foreign actors.
- ix) The Biden Administration's declaration that the Rapid Support Forces have committed genocide in Darfur, and its implementation of sanctions against the Sudanese Government for alleged chemical weapons use.
- x) The grievous impact which President Trump's USAID cuts will have on Sudan's humanitarian situation.
- xi) In the absence of a political settlement, the instability in Sudan will only contribute to higher levels of migration, creating additional pressures on the UK.
- xii) The conflict has received limited coverage in the UK or focus in Parliament, and that the Prime Minister, when asked by Ed Davey MP about Sudan, agreed that he did not think "we discuss it enough in this House".

Conference believes that:

- A. As penholder at the UNSC on Sudan, the UK has a central role to play to ensure that civilians are protected and that this conflict comes to an end.
- B. Our ability to make a difference has been undermined by decisions to reduce the international development budget from 0.7% of national income, first by the Conservatives while in Government and then, in February 2025, by a Labour Prime Minister.

- C. In the face of competing claims to sovereignty, it is vital not to bestow legitimacy on the warring parties, and a division of Sudan would be a disaster for civilians and should not be entertained as a prospect.
- D. The continuing flow of arms into Sudan will only perpetuate the conflict.
- E. This conflict has been ignored in the UK and it is up to the Liberal Democrats to ensure that Sudan becomes a diplomatic priority for the Government.

Conference calls on the UK Government to:

1. Use our role as penholder at the UNSC to advance all diplomatic efforts to secure a ceasefire and an agreement on safe zones for civilians.
2. Lead action to set up a Sudan-wide arms embargo to prevent the supply of weapons to the conflict by other countries.
3. Redouble efforts to create a multilateral Contact Group for the crisis.
4. Build consensus amongst international partners to resist attempts to confer legitimacy on the warring parties, and to ensure that those responsible for perpetrating war crimes in the conflict face justice.
5. Affirm that the future governance of Sudan must be under civilian leadership.
6. Work with international and regional partners to secure guarantees for the protection of humanitarian relief workers who continue to be targeted even while trying to provide lifesaving aid.
7. Raise the public profile of the conflict, including making representations to the Disasters Emergency Committee to start a UK-wide appeal.
8. Secure a commitment from actors in the conflict to allow unrestricted humanitarian access and aid into Sudan and across conflict lines throughout the country.
9. Work with partners to strengthen due diligence in the global gold trade to crack down on smuggling.
10. Alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Sudan by:
  - a) Properly funding the UN Appeal and the regional refugee response.
  - b) Reversing the planned ODA budget cuts to 0.3% of national income and providing a timeline for restoring the budget to 0.7%, and using it to fund the UK's response to this crisis.
  - c) Providing targeted support for Sudanese children who have been disproportionately impacted and continue to be denied education, health and safety - including enhancing and protecting their access to education.

**Applicability:** Federal.

**Background briefing:** This motion updated and developed policy on the humanitarian crisis in Sudan and international development.

It built on previous policy as set out in the 2024 General Election Manifesto, *For a Fair Deal*, motion *International Development - Restoring the UK's Role* (2024), and Policy Paper 157, *Liberal Values in a Dangerous World* (2024).

**Amendments:** Conference passed one amendment, which added a call regarding humanitarian workers (iii), iv), 6., and 7).

# Backing Youth Work to Build Communities

Conference notes:

- i. Access to high-quality youth work, whether delivered through open-access youth centres, targeted providers tackling disadvantage, uniformed services like scouts or guides, or programmes like the Duke of Edinburgh Award, can change the lives of young people.
- ii. Investment in youth work yields a significant social return on investment, with between £3.20 to £6.40 in savings for every pound spent, by reducing demand for more expensive acute services in the NHS and criminal justice system.
- iii. Persistent under-investment in youth work in recent years has seen many youth centres close, and many youth workers leave the sector.
- iv. Youth service closures have been linked by studies to increases in crimes among 10–18 year olds living nearby, while another study showed teenagers in areas affected by such closures suffered ‘large decreases in performance’ in their GCSEs.
- v. Severe pressures on the youth sector workforce are negatively impacting the reach and availability of youth provision across the country.
- vi. A 2024 survey by OnSide found a clear desire amongst young people for more affordable leisure activities and safe, fun places to socialise and learn new skills.
- vii. Rural young people face disproportionate challenges, and are often isolated and lack ability to participate in youth activities in larger towns and cities.
- viii. The same survey found that smartphones are the most time-consuming activity for children, that 48% of young people spend most of their free time in their bedroom and that high levels of young people struggle with feelings of anxiety and loneliness.

Conference welcomes the Government’s commitment to bringing forward a National Youth Strategy during 2025 and to use Dormant Assets Scheme funding to support youth services provision, but recognises that for any such strategy to be successful will require strong, measurable commitment to delivery from Government.

Conference believes that:

- I. Youth work can be a key tool in helping every young person to achieve their potential.
- II. High-quality youth work can act as a preventative service, helping young people to avoid negative outcomes like involvement in crime or anti-social behaviour, or being Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET).
- III. Youth work provision can lead to improved mental and physical health, strengthened life skills, and a heightened sense of belonging for young people that supports social cohesion.
- IV. To be effective, a National Youth Strategy must recognise the vital importance of both targeted and open-access youth work, and must put in place clear, measurable steps to:
  - a. Improve local access to youth services throughout the country.

- b. Improve facilities and infrastructure at youth centres.
  - c. Boost recruitment and retention to ensure that enough youth workers are active in the sector and able to continue a long-term career in the sector.
- V. Youth services can often be ideally placed to deliver vital opportunities for outdoor education for the benefit of young people.
- VI. In making decisions about young people's lives and the services available to them, it is crucial to ensure the voices of those young people are heard.
- VII. Urban and Rural young people should have the same access to youth services.

Conference reaffirms Liberal Democrat calls for:

- A. A Cabinet Minister for Children and Young People.
- B. Investment in youth services that are genuinely engaging and reach more young people.

Conference therefore calls on the Government to:

1. Commit to a fair, long-term funding settlement to support youth work, resources and infrastructure.
2. Ensure the National Youth Strategy prioritises high-quality targeted and open-access work, with clear metrics for delivery.
3. Support charity-run youth services to leverage non-governmental funding, building on the model of Regional Youth Work Units to share best practice, build partnerships.
4. Clarify the statutory duty for local authorities to provide sufficient youth services, defining what 'sufficient' means, and ensure adequate funding for these requirements.
5. Develop a comprehensive Workforce and Training Strategy for the Youth Sector, to ensure a sustainable pipeline of skilled practitioners.
6. Ensure youth voices shape all policy development by introducing a statutory duty for Local Authority Youth Councils and maintaining a 'feedback loop' to keep young people informed.
7. Strengthen partnerships between youth services and schools, employers, mental health professionals, youth justice and outdoor education providers through statutory guidance.
8. Support schools and youth organisations to deliver outdoor education, aiming for every young person to have at least one such experience in primary and one in secondary school.
9. Commit to conducting trials of mobile youth work teams, which either use existing local hubs or mobile facilities, as decided by the relevant local authority.

**Applicability:** England.

**Background briefing:** This motion updated and developed policy on youth work provision and youth services.

It built on existing policy as set out in the 2024 General Election Manifesto, *For a Fair Deal*, and Policy Paper 96, *Free to be Young* (2010).

**Amendments:** Conference passed one amendment, which added language on rural young people and a call for mobile youth work teams.

# Standing Order Amendments

## Threshold for Submitting Amendments to the Constitution and Standing Orders

Conference notes that:

1. An amendment to change either the Constitution or Conference Standing Orders requires a two-thirds majority to pass, a higher threshold than the simple majority required for business motions.
2. The rules on submitting Constitutional or Standing Order amendments are the same as for business motions, including a provision that they can be submitted by 10 party members.
3. Conference Standing Orders require all validly submitted constitutional amendments and amendments to Standing Orders to be accepted for debate, save for the limited exceptions listed in standing order 4.3, whereas Federal Conference Committee has the ability to determine which business motions are selected for debate.

Conference therefore agrees to insert at the end of Standing Order 1.3 b):

‘...save that constitutional amendments and secondary constitutional amendments, and standing order amendments and secondary standing order amendments, submitted by party members shall need to be submitted by 30 members from at least three local parties.’

**Applicability:** Federal.

**Background briefing:** This amendment updated and developed the standing order’s wording on the number of supporters an amendment to the constitution and standing orders need.

**Amendments:** The FCC agreed to a drafting amendment that changed “signatures” to “submitted” in lines 19-21.

# Constitutional Amendments

## Constitutional tidy-up

Conference notes the section of the Federal Board's report to Conference that explains the rationale for each part of this motion.

Following previous changes made to the Federal Constitution and other party procedures and organisational policies, Conference agrees to:

1. *In Article 3.6, insert ' , Mayor candidate' before 'member of a local authority';*
2. *Add at end of Article 8.5, 'd. For those party members who the Board appoints to other committees, the Board may make a temporary new appointment where the previously appointed person wishes to take caring or compassionate leave or where the person has been suspended from the party.';*
3. *In Article 8.6, delete: 'The Federal Board shall also have regard to the desirability of establishing a subcommittee responsible for the co-ordination of the Party's activities.';*
4. *Add new Article 20.2: 'Where this constitution makes the President a member of a Committee of the Federal Party other than the Federal Board, the President may nominate from among other Board members a substitute if they are unable to attend a meeting. The substitute shall have the same voting rights at the meeting as the President would otherwise have.';*
5. *Delete Article 21.7(c) and remove ' ; and' from (b), replacing with a full stop.*
6. *Delete the Annexe to the Constitution.*

To provide greater clarity to parts of the Constitution, Conference agrees to:

1. *In Article 3.2(d), replace 'that the Federal Board considers ought to be entitled' with 'to which the Federal Board has granted the power';*
2. *In Article 8.4, replace 'other than those individually specified in the constitution' with 'other than those required to be a member of it because they are the sole holder of a post listed in the Constitution as a member of the committee'.*
3. *In Article 9.9(c), insert 'non-casual' before 'vacancy'.*

To ensure the party's finances can continue in an orderly manner if an Autumn Conference has to be cancelled or postponed, Conference agrees to:

1. *In Article 12.6, replace 'FB' with 'Federal Board' in both places, and delete both 'each year' and 'for the ensuing year'.*

In addition, to clarify various rules around holding posts in the party, and to allow the Federal Board to discharge its existing responsibilities to fill posts by using more widely



an appointment process involving interviews followed by a Board decision, rather than Board members simply voting between names without information from interviews, Conference agrees to:

1. *In Article 2.8, renumber existing text as (a), replace the full stop at the end with ';' and, and add at the end '(b) Where this Constitution requires an individual to hold a particular post or type of post (either within or outside the party) in order to qualify for election or appointment to a role, and after their appointment or election they cease to hold that post or type of post, they shall be considered to have resigned from that role unless the Constitution expressly states otherwise.'*
2. *In Article 8.5(c), replace 'elects' with 'appoints' and 'elected' with 'appointed';*
3. *In Article 12.2(h) and 14.3(d), replace 'elected' with 'appointed' and replace second sentence with 'Casual vacancies amongst this group shall be filled in the same way';*
4. *In Article 13.2(i)(a), replace 'elected' with 'appointed';*
5. *In Article 16.3(a) delete the second sentence and insert: 'Members appointed under this clause may not hold or have held Federal Party office or be or have been a member of any other Federal Committee, or a member of Federal Party staff, during the two years preceding their nomination to the Committee or during their term as a member of the FASC.'*
6. *In Article 20.5, replace 'elected' with 'appointed' and 'election' with 'appointment'.*

Conference recognises that the Leader of the Party and the Leaders of the Party in Scotland and Wales are in practice the main public spokespeople for the party, and therefore agrees to:

1. *In Article 20.1, replace 'shall be the principal public representative of the Party and' with 'shall be the voice of party members and'.*

Following Britain's departure from the European Union, Conference also agrees to:

1. *In Article 1.2(c) and 4.5(a), replace 'UK Members of the European Parliament' with 'members of devolved bodies';*
2. *In Article 2.3(c), delete 'and European Parliamentary';*
3. *In Article 3.6, delete 'MEP,' and 'or European parliamentary';*
4. *In Article 6.5, delete 'the Parliamentary Party in the European Parliament,';*
5. *In Article 9.6, delete 'the European Parliament and';*
6. *In Article 10.1(a), replace 'the European community' with 'Europe';*
7. *In Article 10.3, delete 'and its manifesto for elections to the European Parliament' and 'and with the Parliamentary Party in the European Parliament';*
8. *In Article 13.3, delete 'and the European Parliament';*

9. *In Article 13.5, change 'Westminster and European Parliaments' to 'House of Commons';*
10. *In Article 15.1(d), delete 'campaigning for European Parliament elections and';*
11. *Delete Article 15.2(i)(e);*
12. *Delete Article 17.4;*
13. *In Article 19.1, change 'Westminster and European Parliaments' to 'House of Commons';*
14. *Delete Article 19.8.*

Conference further believes in neatness and tidiness and therefore agrees to:

1. *In Articles 2.7, 4.6(c) and 18.1, change 'election rules' to 'election regulations';*
2. *In Article 6.1, change 'but others may be invited to attend in a non-voting role, including Registered Supporters' to 'but others, including Registered Supporters, may be invited to attend in a non-voting role';*
3. *In Article 6.2, – add 's' at the end of the last word;*
4. *Reformat Article 8.1 as a list;*
5. *In Articles 8.8c, 9.3 and 13.2(ii)(a), insert 'Federal' before 'Chief Executive';*
6. *In Article 13.1, replace 'accountable' with 'responsible' and delete 'and shall report to each ordinary meeting of the Board', and in Article 14.1, replace 'accountable' with 'responsible' and delete 'and shall report regularly to it';*
7. *Renumber the Constitution and cross-references as otherwise required by the changes in this motion.*

**Applicability:** Federal.

**Background briefing:** This amendment updated and developed the constitution's wording.

**Amendments:** Conference passed one amendment that updated the motion's language.

## Federal Council Decision-Making

*In Article 9.16, delete the final sentence and insert:*

Any decision of the Federal Board called in can be overturned by a vote in favour by a majority of the Federal Council members present at the meeting and provided the number voting in favour is at least 13.

*The relevant part of the existing constitution is as follows:*

9.16 The members of the Federal Council shall be sent the Board agenda, decisions and relevant papers. Within five working days of the publication of the decisions any 13 members can request that the Chair of the Federal Council call in any decision by the Federal Board to a meeting of the full Federal Council.

The President of the Party will be required to attend this meeting and can bring any others they feel relevant in order to speak in favour of the decision. Any decision of the Federal Board called in can be overturned by a vote in favour by at least 27 members of the Federal Council.

**Applicability:** Federal.

**Background briefing:** This amendment updated and developed the constitution's wording on the threshold required for the Federal Council to overturn a Federal Board decision.

**Amendments:** One amendment was defeated.

## Reporting to conference

Conference believes that maintaining the accountability of federal committees to federal conference, through written reports, opportunities for members to question the committees and votes to accept or reject each report, is an essential element of party democracy.

Conference notes, however, that:

- i) Report sessions in the auditorium can allow only a limited time for questions to each committee.
- ii) Many questions to committees, particularly those simply asking for information, do not necessarily have to be asked at conference.
- iii) The treatment of the reporting function in the constitution is incoherent and in places contradictory.

Conference therefore resolves to reform the system of reporting to conference, in order to:

- A. Retain accountability to conference for those bodies which include a component directly elected by the party membership (Federal Board, Federal Conference Committee, Federal Council, Federal International Relations Committee, Federal Policy Committee and Vice President responsible for working with ethnic minorities), plus the parliamentary parties in the Commons and Lords.
- B. Ensure that committees elected by and accountable to the Federal Board (Federal Audit and Scrutiny Committee, Federal Campaigns and Elections Committee, Federal Finance and Resources Committee, Federal People Development Committee, Joint States Candidates Committee), plus the Campaign for Gender Balance and the Racial Diversity Campaign, report through the Federal Board.
- C. Allow for additional opportunities to put questions to all the bodies listed in paragraphs A and B away from the conference auditorium.
- D. Increase the time available for debates on policy motions at spring conference.
- E. Rationalise the treatment of reporting in the constitution.

Accordingly, Conference:

- 1. Agrees to adopt the amendments to the constitution and standing orders set out below.
- 2. Instructs the Federal Conference Committee to organise additional question-and-answer sessions, without the need for a formal report or vote, including for the two parliamentary parties at spring conference in the auditorium (in addition to their formal report to autumn conference) and for all committees

and sub-committees, on a rolling basis, away from the auditorium (to allow for greater interaction with members).

3. Instructs the Federal Board to review and improve mechanisms to allow party members to interact with committees throughout the year outside conference.
4. Instructs the Federal Conference Committee to review the impacts of these changes after two years.

*In Article 3.3, after 'Federal People Development Committee....' delete: ', notified to the Conference'*

*Delete Article 6.5 and insert:*

6.5 There shall be a business session or sessions at each Conference, to which the committees listed in Article 8.7 shall report. The business session at each autumn Conference shall additionally include reports from the Parliamentary Party in the House of Commons, the Parliamentary Party in the House of Lords and the Vice President responsible for working with ethnic minorities. The business session at the autumn meeting shall constitute the Annual General Meeting of the Party, before which the Annual Report and Accounts shall be laid as part of the report of the Federal Board. The Conference shall have the right to approve or reject each such report, or to refer it back with recommendations. Other reports may be circulated for information.

6.6 Business motions may be submitted to the Federal Conference by the Federal Board, the Federal Conference Committee or any other persons or bodies entitled to submit motions or amendments under Article 7.6.

*Delete Article 8.7 and insert:*

8.7 The Federal Board, the Federal Conference Committee and the Federal Policy Committee shall each table a written report at each meeting of the Conference. The Federal International Relations Committee and the Federal Council shall each table a written report at each autumn meeting of the Conference. Time will be given at the Conference to debate each report. All other Committees shall report to the Conference as part of the Federal Board's report. In exceptional circumstances any Committee may request the Federal Conference Committee to permit it to submit a written report and allocate time to debate it.

*In Article 9.6, delete first sentence and insert:*

Following each election for the House of Commons, the Federal Board shall commission a report on the Party's work in that election and shall report to the Party on the outcomes of that review as part of its report to the Conference.

*In Article 9.17, after '8.5' insert: '8.7, '*

*In Article 10.1, delete the last sentence and insert:*

The FPC shall include its proposed programme of policy development in its report to the Conference.

*In Article 20.1, delete the sentence: ' ... The President shall report to the annual meeting of the Conference and may make reports to any other meetings of Conference. ...'*

*Delete Article 23.3 and insert:*

23.3 The Federal Board shall have power, after appropriate consultations with party members, to make and from time to time vary procedures for the handling of complaints (the "Complaints Procedures"). These Complaints Procedures shall include an appeals process and also a requirement for an annual report to be published on the party website on the performance of the Procedures along with an explanation of any changes made to the Procedures in the preceding year.

*In Standing Order 1.1, delete 1.1 b) and insert:*

- b) A business session or sessions for the consideration of reports from the bodies listed in Article 6.5 of the Constitution, together with, when appropriate, reports from, or question and answer sessions with, any other body the Committee considers appropriate, accounts and the annual report;
- c) business motions, including a motion accompanying the proposed strategy of the party;
- d) constitutional amendments and standing order amendments;

**Applicability:** Federal.

**Background briefing:** This amendment updated and developed the constitution's and the standing order's wording on which bodies will report to Conference.

# Business Motions

## Membership Subscription and Federal Levy

Conference agrees:

1. To continue to freeze the existing minimum membership rate of £15, except for members from before 2022 for whom it shall remain £12.
2. To continue to freeze the £6 minimum for those in receipt of or entitled to state benefits, and the £6 minimum for members of the Young Liberals.
3. To continue to freeze the £3 minimum one-year introductory rate for members directly recruited by the Young Liberals.
4. That nothing in this motion shall prevent a State Party from setting via their internal procedures higher recommended or minimum subscription rates or from introducing additional concessionary rates.
5. That nothing in this motion shall prevent the Federal Party from running membership recruitment pilots that involve different minimum membership rates, provided that any individual pilot is for a period of one year or less and that the pilots take into account any knock-on financial impacts on other parts of the party.
6. That the Federal Levy shall remain 50 per cent.

**Applicability:** Federal.

**Vote on motion:** Conference passed the motion.

**Background briefing:** This motion set the Federal subscription levy for the coming year.

# Report Questions and Answers

## Campaign for Gender Balance report

### **Q1. Cllr Donna Harris**

Women's representation on local councils remains stubbornly low at just over 1/3. How can the party replicate the improved representation we have seen at the parliamentary level across local government?

### **Answer by Julia Cambridge**

Thank you Donna and an additional thank you for all you do in your Leadership of Lib Dem Women. We're both sitting Councillors and can see first hand that women's representation at Local Government level needs improving. I will say that although CGB do not directly deliver training or mentoring to 'would be' Councillors it remains an area we recognise as an important bridge to the Scottish Parliament, the Senedd and Westminster.

ALDC with their Kickstart and Activate training would be the place to find out more. But organisations like CGB, and indeed Lib Dem Women, have a role in capturing and encouraging council candidates. My call to sitting councillors would be to recruit, inspire and encourage women in their communities, for council groups and local parties to make it their business to lay on inspiration events and to be mindful of filling ward teams with two or three men instead look to provide diversity.

### **Supplementary question from Donna Harris**

Do you think there is something we could look at that could almost replicate CGB for councillors, to give women that confidence to come forward?

### **Answer by Julia Cambridge**

It's an excellent point, and as a councillor of six years, I can absolutely see the gap that needs filling. CGB is a safe space for women to talk about issues and what they'd like to do about them. What I would say is that we need more resources. We've lost resources over the years. When I started here, we had a part-time dedicated person in LDHQ. That has been stripped away, and if we're serious about this, we have got to get the resources back. We will keep looking at this.

### **Q2. Tara Foster**



Do you plan to remain trans-inclusive in your support for prospective women candidates?

**Answer by Julia Cambridge**

Wholeheartedly yes.

**Supplementary question from Tara Foster**

Thank you.

**Answer by Julia Cambridge**

Thank you.

**Q3. Hina Bokhari**

In your report, you mention collaborating with the Racial Diversity Campaign (RDC). Can you elaborate on how you have collaborated so far and how you plan to work together further?

**Answer by Julia Cambridge**

Thank you Hina. In the report I mentioned the Future Women MP Weekend that happened in August. Chris French, Chair of RDC, was one of our trainers. I co-trained a section alongside him and he was with us for the entire weekend. That was an important link up. Diverse women attendees could see the important emphasis on diversity and that the sister organisations were working together with joint aims. More joint working is planned.

**Supplementary question from Hina Bokhari**

Thank you for all the support that you have given me, CGB has been amazing. With the increase in hate crimes at the moment, will you be including Islamophobia awareness training for your candidates?

**Answer by Julia Cambridge**

It isn't exclusively for women, but we do provide unconscious bias training, when time allows. You're quite right, and we'll take that away and see how we can formulate that into a module.

**Q4. Cllr Alison Jenner**

In Jo Swinson's speech at the Lib Dem Women International Women's Day event, she mentioned that the percentage of female candidates and councillors has not improved since she was looking at this over a decade ago. Why does Campaign for Gender Balance think they haven't been able to meaningfully improve the balance between men and women standing for public office in the Party and what more do they think needs to be done?

**Answer by Julia Cambridge**

Firstly as you mention Jo Swinson. Jo is a trail blazer not just for woman's representation but as an inspiration for the change you can make in elected office.

CGB is committed to improving the balance of women representing the Liberal Democrats. We look to organisations like ALDC to promote training and mentoring for Councillors that is not in the remit of CGB.

There have been very meaningful advances at Parliamentary level with 32 women elected and in 2019/20 the MEPs group was dominated by women and led through the leadership of Catherine Bearder, later Caroline Vodden and Deputy Luisa Porritt.

**Q5. Rebecca Jones**

What can members and activists do to encourage and enable women to stand at every level of government?

**Answer by Julia Cambridge**

1. Be the inspiration women need to believe they can do it.
2. Find out and explore what the barriers are.
3. If those include social media trolls look to changing and challenging cultures and legislation.
4. If a barrier is child care how can the Liberal Democrats change that.
5. Challenge the misogyny and old boys culture which turns off so many women.

**Q6. Bex Foulsham**

What steps are you taking to support trans women and non-binary people in standing for parliamentary selection?

**Answer by Julia Cambridge**

CGB is an inclusive organisation. We understand and recognise the added challenges that intersectionality brings and strive to ensure tailored support should it be requested or needed.

**Q7. Christopher Johnson**

Since the last Federal internal party elections in 2022, what has been your biggest success and what advice would you give to those who are elected in the upcoming election?

**Answer by Julia Cambridge**

Thank you Christopher. Congratulations to all who have served on the various internal boards since 2022 and good luck to those seeking re-election or election this time around. CGB officers, of which there are three, are not appointed through the party election system.

We are though enormously proud that 18 of the 22 new women MP's have been in contact, mentored, trained or helped by CGB during their journey towards Westminster. My advice would be to new or returning board members to continue to put diversity and inclusion as a benchmark for the delivery of your aims.

**Q8. Sam Bateman**

How will you ensure that there is no bias against gender critical women?

**Answer by Julia Cambridge**

No bias has been formally directed, to my knowledge, against CGB. We are an inclusive organisation and at any group training or forums we would expect people to behave respectfully.

**Q9. Zoe Hollowood**

There are exceptions in the Equality Act which allow for positive action to address disadvantages and underrepresentation experienced by specific groups of people that share a protected characteristic. The work of Campaign for Gender Balance, in providing training and mentoring for women only falls under such positive action measures. Given the Supreme Court ruling in the For Women Scotland case, can Campaign for Gender Balance define what they mean by a woman?

**Answer by Julia Cambridge**

Campaign for Gender Balance has no business deciding who is a woman if someone identifies as a woman. We are a trans inclusive training and mentoring body whose remit is to improve gender balance. With that remit in mind, and at the heart of what we deliver, we are an inclusive organisation.

## Federal Board report

### **Q1. Submitted by Christopher Johnson**

In this three year term, what has been your biggest success and what advice would you give to those who are elected in the upcoming election?

and

### **Q2. Submitted by John Grout**

As we approach the end of the current term for internal party bodies, what has been your proudest achievement of this term, in your view, and what do you think is the most important matter for the next one?

### **Answer by Mark Pack**

The biggest success is the one we've all contributed to in different ways, which is our best general election result for a century, and the fact that we made gains at every round of local elections during the last Parliament.

What underpinned that in many ways, especially for the Board, was taking the 2019 General Election Review seriously. It had a lot of criticisms to make - including of the Board and party governance structures - and the Board absolutely took that on the chin and decided there needed to be changes to how we operate, following which Conference voted for significant reforms to the Board.

In terms of the lessons I'd draw from that, I think there are three. One is the importance of understanding how to bring about change to the Party. People like me love making changes to our rulebooks, our constitutions, and formal procedures, but there is a much broader way of bringing about change too. Many of the successes in implementing the 2019 Thornhill Review come from those softer things including improving communications and changing the culture in the Party.

The second lesson I would highlight would be that we are at our best making changes to how we operate when we manage to align that with the core task of winning elections. When we are trying to change something, and it feels like a distraction from the core task of winning elections, that's when we make the least progress. That's why I'm very hopeful about the long-term impact of the changes we've made to our diversity work. We've very clearly worked to align it with our values, but we've also looked at how it helps us win elections.

Thirdly, we are very good in the Party at coming up with reasons why something might be a bad idea. That is really valuable, but the important thing is to not let that blizzard of points put us off being willing to change.

When we were discussing the badges for the people that had done the most canvassing, I sat through three different committee meetings at which people came up with a huge number of reasons why it might be a bad idea or why it might not work. Of course, when we actually did it and sent out the badges, the only complaints were from people who hadn't received their badges yet.

This was a really good example of why it's right to listen to, and respect, people's concerns, but also that we have to be willing to change.

### **Supplementary question by Christopher Johnson**

Do you think you've left the Party in a better state than you found it, and are you optimistic for the next general election campaign?

### **Answer by Mark Pack**

The first question is up to others to judge, but I'm moderately optimistic as to what answer they might come up with!

I am optimistic about the future, because despite the clear challenges for our country and the state of politics, there are very clear political opportunities for us. For example, we see in council by-elections that we are the only party that is consistently beating Reform.

### **Q3. Submitted by Cllr Gareth Epps**

Your report talks about canvassing in areas with large BAME populations. What support is there for relevant local parties?

### **Answer by Mark Pack**

In the written Board report, I wrote that one of our diversity priorities now is to get more canvassing going in areas with large ethnic minority populations. This is partly because it is important in its own right, but also because canvassing data is the first step in allowing us to diversify in all areas of the Party. For example recruiting members is often driven by canvass data.

There are multiple things being done to support that ambition. The Federal Party now co-funds a network of regional development officers across England, and this is a key part of their role. Secondly, there is great work being done by LDCRE, working with LDHQ, to run a series of action days in different locations around the country. There is also a range of resources and training available through the campaign hub and Conference sessions.

**Supplementary question by Gareth Epps**

Can I get you to commit to sharing resources and support with campaigners up and down the country to try and prioritise this, because given the position that the Labour Party are in, this strikes me as a huge opportunity for us.

**Answer by Mark Pack**

Absolutely. I am very happy to commit to communicating these resources before my term comes to an end.

**Q4. Submitted by Caron Lindsay**

How can Federal Board ensure that communications to Scottish members are relevant and enhance their experience of the party?

and

**Q5. Submitted by Caron Lindsay**

How can the Federal Board best support the campaigns for the Scottish and Welsh elections to achieve great results which benefit the whole party?

**Answer by Mark Pack**

I believe that at least one of these questions relates to an email that went out to members in Scotland that wasn't worded correctly. The member of staff promptly apologised, and I join them in being sorry this has happened. Thank you for highlighting it so quickly yourself, which also meant that the problem could be avoided in subsequent messages.

More broadly, continuing our approach of having a relatively small physical HQ in London, but having a large proportion of Federal Party staff working from home or offices around the country means that we have a geographically much more diverse staff team than ten years ago. That instinctively brings a better understanding of these different perspectives.

The other main thing that we can do, especially with helping Scotland and Wales with their elections next year, is the financial strategy that we've set during this Westminster Parliamentary cycle, which means we have a fully staffed campaigns team right from the beginning of the Parliament.

In the old pattern, we would ramp up the staff team ahead of a general election, then massively shrink it in size afterwards. The downside was that if you had an election in the first half of that Parliament, we did not have a full team to support you.

This model will benefit areas in England with mayoral and other elections, but it will also be particularly beneficial for Scotland and Wales.

**Q6. Submitted by Donna Harris**

Women make up 1 in 3 councillors in the Liberal Democrats and in the last General Election, women made up 28% of Parliamentary candidates. What work is the Federal Board doing to ensure the Party is taking action to improve the representation of women among our councillors and candidates?

**Answer by Mark Pack**

The Federal Board recognises that women continue to be under-represented both in local government and among our Parliamentary candidates, and we are committed to taking action to change this.

We are working across the Party to improve both our culture and processes. Within HQ, the aim has consistently been to reach 50/50 representation among staff, and this principle is now firmly embedded in recruitment and organisational planning, last year, we had 51% female representation within our staff.

Important work is also done by both the Campaign for Gender Balance (CGB) and by Liberal Democrat Women (LDW), one of the party's official Affiliated Organisations.

Improving gender balance is also integrated into our wider diversity work. For example, at events, such as those run by the Racial Diversity Campaign (RDC) we ensure that women are represented both as speakers and as guests. For the Stellar Programme, designed to support aspiring parliamentary candidates, RDC is committed to achieving as close to 50/50 gender representation as possible when the next cohort is launched.



Despite the progress made, we must go further. Our long-term ambition is equal representation of women at every level of the Party.

**Q7. Submitted by Rebecca Jones**

How is the Federal Board making sure that intersectionality is embedded in the Party's work on diversity?

**Answer by Mark Pack**

The Federal Board is committed to ensuring intersectionality at the heart of the Party's work on diversity and inclusion. This means recognising that people experience discrimination and disadvantage in different and overlapping ways, and that our policies, practices and culture must respond to those complexities.

In recent years, we have embedded intersectional approaches in our equalities strategy, in candidate development and support programmes, and in training for members and staff. We are also working closely with our Affiliated Organisations (AOs) and diversity champions across the Party to make sure lived experience informs decision-making at every level.

**Q8. 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 Mark Pack**

Socio-economic background is a major driver of inequality in society, and it is an area the Party is increasingly addressing in its diversity work.

The Party is currently reviewing how we can better reflect class and economic disadvantage in our data collection, outreach, candidate support and member engagement. This includes strengthening efforts to remove financial barriers to participation. This would build on existing work such as the [Access Fund](#) to help widen participation at Federal Conference.

We are widening access to training and development opportunities offering sessions across the country to limit travel expenses, offering Zoom calls instead of face to face, and allowing the attendance of children to training or HQ events. It is vital that voices from working class and low income backgrounds are heard.

**Q9. Submitted by John Grout**

Trans people have repeatedly said that it will not be possible to both follow the proposed EHRC guidance and retain trans people's dignity. Can you reassure them that the Board sees their dignity as a higher priority than pandering to weaponised institutional bigotry?

**Answer by Mark Pack**

I recognise that many trans, nonbinary, and intersex people, including party members, are deeply concerned about the potential impact of the proposed EHRC guidance. We believe everyone deserves to feel safe, respected and free to be who they are within our party.

The Supreme Court reaffirmed that trans people remain protected under the Equality Act. However, the Government has failed to set out clearly how these protections will work in practice.

At the time of writing the guidance has not been published, but our party spokespersons have been urging the Government to commit to full Parliamentary scrutiny of the guidance, including a full debate and a free vote. It is vital that any guidance protects everyone's rights and is grounded in dignity, evidence and respect.

When the final guidance is published, the party will be able to scrutinise the details to understand the legal implications. Until then, the party will continue to push the Government to provide clear reassurance that any guidance will protect the dignity, safety, and rights of all and ensure that trans people aren't prevented from participating in parts of public life because there aren't facilities they can safely use.

**Q10. Submitted by Candy Piercy**

What should the Federal Board do to support individuals within the Party who have protected characteristics now that Reform and the Right are attacking them all?

**Answer by Mark Pack**

The Federal Board sees tackling discrimination and protecting those with protected characteristics as an important task. We know that many individuals within the Party who have protected characteristics feel worried in the current political climate. We have no tolerance for harm or abuse of any kind within our party, and it is important that our independent complaints process takes action where necessary. The Federal People and Development Committee (FPDC) has also been working with staff on our safeguarding plans.

In addition, the Board makes significant efforts to increase the diversity of those we appoint or elect to various party positions, such as making the party's different diversity groups aware of each advertisement that goes out and ensuring our advertisements and appointments process follow best practice. Creating a more diverse pool of volunteer post holders is part of the longer-term culture change needed to best tackle these issues.

We acknowledge that there is still more to do and are determined to keep working towards this goal. The Board is always keen to hear suggestions for what more can be done, and please do get in touch with any specific ideas or concerns.

**Q11. Submitted by Cllr Gareth Epps**

For many English local parties, Mayoral elections present a significant opportunity. The Board report does not mention them. Why is this?

**Answer by Mark Pack**

The Board's report includes reference to the work we have done, and are continuing to do, to improve our grassroots campaigning strength and to perform well in local elections. Both of those very much do include Mayor contests too. For both Mayors and Police and Crime Commissioner elections, there are new opportunities coming up to win them in a way that have mostly not been present in previous cycles - and it is important that we seize that opportunity.

**Q12. Submitted by Tony Vickers**

When will AOs be given the necessary access and support for using essential IT , in particular access to all Party member records in Lighthouse?

**Answer by Mark Pack**

years which have significantly improved our ability to campaign online and gather better quality data in our systems.

We know there is more to be done to improve our tools for everyone across the party including Affiliated Organisations (AOs). However, we have limited resources and a small team so we need to prioritise the work we do very carefully.

We have gathered all issues and requests received by HQ from across the party and added them to a Lighthouse backlog which we are working through with Prater Raines. Currently we are focusing on high priority development items which relate to critical

business processes (finance and compliance) as well as improvements to the data in our systems.

We appreciate everyone's patience and understanding, and in the meantime it is worth mentioning that there are AOs making use of Lighthouse to manage their records. I would therefore encourage you to make full use of the advice and support that the HQ technology team and volunteers have offered.

**Q13. Submitted by Natalie Bird**

On April 16, 2025, the UK Supreme Court delivered its unanimous judgment in the case of *For Women Scotland Ltd v The Scottish Ministers* [2025] UKSC 16, allowing the appeal and addressing the interpretation of the Equality Act 2010 (EA 2010) in relation to gender reassignment and sex discrimination. I would like to know if the board agrees with the judgement and what actions have been taken by the board to ensure compliance with the judgement.

**Answer by Mark Pack**

The party's overall view on the judgement and its implications is a matter of policy rather than for the Board. However, the Board continues to oversee the work of the Federal Party Chief Executive to ensure that action taken by the Federal Party is legal, and to seek professional advice on specific issues as and when required.

**Q14. Submitted by Mark Johnston**

The Complaints report states 84 complaints were "sent to a panel". How many of these were upheld by the panel concerned? How many of these were dismissed by the panel concerned?

**Answer by Mark Pack**

Just under 30% of cases sent to a panel were upheld and just over 45% were dismissed. The remainder fall into categories such as a case being paused or the respondent resigning. (Note: due to the way the data has been analysed, these percentages are for a slightly different date range from the original answer.)

**Q15. Submitted by Mark Johnston**

The Complaints report states 146 complaints were "dismissed". How many of the 146 were not accepted into the scheme by a senior adjudicator? How many of the 146 were dismissed by a panel of three adjudicators?

### **Answer by Mark Pack**

The complaints process does not hold data in a way that allows this to be calculated without it taking up an unreasonable amount of time.

### **Q16. Submitted by Zoe Hollowood**

In 2024 I shared legal advice with the President and other senior leaders in the Party that showed there were a number of issues with our current bullying and harassment policy. In particular legal counsel highlighted the policy does not mention sexual harassment, nor is there a separate policy that covers this. Why has the Board done nothing to address this omission?

### **Answer by Mark Pack**

The party's guidance on Bullying and Harassment is [available on our website](#). It follows the provisions set out in the Equality Act 2010, and explicitly states that this can be on the basis of protected characteristics including sex or sexual orientation.

### **Q17. Submitted by Zoe Hollowood**

What amounts in grants did the Federal Party give to which Affiliated Organisations in 2024? What amounts are committed to which AOs for 2025?

**and**

### **Q18. Submitted by Zoe Hollowood**

What budget allocations did the Federal Party give to (i) the Campaign for Gender Balance, and (ii) Racial Diversity Campaign in (a) 2024 and (b) 2025?

### **Answer by Mark Pack**

The cash grants given to Affiliated Organisations for 2025 (excluding the Policy Development Grants received in public funding) were ALDC £46,000, Young Liberals £16,000, the Lib Dem Campaign for Race Equality £5,000 and Lib Dem Women £5,000. In addition, the Lib Dem Racial Diversity Campaign was also allocated £5,000. The same figures applied in 2024.

Alongside the cash grants, the Federal Party provides significant other support, including staff time (from several members of staff, including the party's Diversity Officer) and the use of party internal communications channels. Diversity support is also

part of the job description of several staff roles which the Federal Party co-funds with other parts of the party.

**Q19. Submitted by Sarah Hearne**

Transphobic behaviour is a breach of our Members' Code of Conduct. Why haven't those who misgender and disrespect trans people been expelled from the party?

**Answer by Mark Pack**

We have an independent complaints process to deal with such cases, and its powers include the ability to expel someone from the party. We have formal definitions of transphobia, antisemitism and Islamophobia, and it is important that these are always properly adhered to and that our independent complaints process takes action when complaints are made and upheld about any breaches.

**Q20. Submitted by Juliet Line**

In Spring 2024 I asked a question of Federal Board about progress on a whistleblowing policy. The President confirmed this was important work but may be delayed by a general election. Could the Board now commit to finishing the work on a whistleblowing policy and tell members when it will be Published?

**Answer by Mark Pack**

The work is being carried out by the Federal People Development Committee (FPDC) and is scheduled to be completed by the end of this year.

# **Federal Communications and Elections Committee report**

## **Q1. Submitted by Christopher Johnson**

In this three year term, what has been your biggest success and what advice would you give to those who are elected in the upcoming election?

### **Answer by Kath Pinnock**

We have overseen the strategy of the HQ campaign team that has been led so brilliantly by Dave McCobb to ensure that all our campaigns adhere to the ever stricter rules set by the Electoral Commission, and we also check that the communication team's strategy is effective in supporting the growth of our party. I cannot claim credit for the electoral success, as that was down to the dedicated teams across the country who have worked so hard to get people elected, and the strategic brains in HQ who put together a plan that worked very well for the party. I was in the right place at the right time during our best election ever, and I tried my best to support that.

## **Q2. Submitted by Bex Foulsham**

How could party communications be improved to more clearly demonstrate our party's allyship to the trans community?

### **Answer by Kath Pinnock**

FCEC's remit doesn't include internal communications from the party, so perhaps this question would be better directed to Mark Pack as President of the Federal Board.

## **Supplementary question by Bex Foulsham**

My question was intended to be about the Party's external communications. We have had a distinct failure recently because the trans community need a form of allyship, and our current communications that are going out into the wider community are not reflecting that. When I tell people outside the Party that the Liberal Democrats are progressive on trans rights, they often question it, because they haven't heard anything about it. As a result, I'm concerned that our policy is not being adequately promoted.

### **Answer by Kath Pinnock**

I hope as a progressive liberal party that we will always support all minorities from any background, and I support and encourage members of the trans community to join the party, and to help ensure that we are inclusive of all diverse communities.

**Q3. Submitted by Artie Khovanov**

How are you ensuring that our communications spread our liberal values, such as support for civil liberties and human rights?

**Answer by Kath Pinnock**

The Party does need to always keep its liberal values in mind, even when it needs to be balanced against the need and desire to win elections. If we don't win elections, we will become a lobbying group. However, when we win elections, it must be with a progressive liberal foundation. When FCEC receives reports from the communications team, we ask about the range and types of communications and ensure that, as far as possible, that we do support civil rights and human rights. It's at the basis of all we do. An example of this that I'm proud of is how the party has spoken up for the people of Gaza.

**Q4. Submitted by Janey Little**

Online abuse and safety concerns can often prevent women and other marginalised groups from standing as a candidate. What steps can the Party take at every level to prioritise candidate safety and safety while campaigning?

**Answer by Kath Pinnock**

This is an important question. As a Party, we are determined to increase the diversity of our candidates at all levels of governance. Women and other marginalised groups can be particularly targeted by those seeking to undermine their confidence and increase their anxiety. For those seeking election in Local Government, ALDC has advice on candidate safety on their website. For candidates in Parliamentary elections, there is a support pack and where to access to advice on the hub. However, it looks as if you have identified a gap in advice provided for all Parliamentary candidates. Thank you. I will raise it as a gap that needs to be filled.

**Q5. Submitted by Jacquie Bell**

Language is important. When Reform keep using the phrase illegal immigrant can we ensure that all our elected members, candidates and communications use the term irregular instead. No person seeking sanctuary is illegal. They need safe and legal routes.



**Answer by Kath Pinnock**

I completely agree. All candidates at all levels and all campaigners should, as Liberal Democrats, refer to immigrants taking the perilous journey across the Channel, as asylum seekers.

# Federal Conference Committee report

## Q1. Submitted by Leon Duveen

What work is FCC doing to make Conference really inclusive for those unable to attend for any reason? For example, allowing online attendees to contribute to debates & questions not just watch & vote.

## Answer by Nick da Costa

You're right that at the moment members can watch and vote online, and also submit questions to reports, the Leader, and panels such as Reform Watch. Where it gets more complicated is live participation in debates.

Technically it's still tricky, and financially it's a very big step – we'd be looking at extra costs in the tens of thousands of pounds, which would mean higher ticket prices across the board. Even during the COVID online conferences, when we had a full production team behind the scenes, there were still technical hiccups. And because of the delay in the livestream, we had to select speakers the day before debates to test connections, set up waiting rooms, and feed them into the session. That just isn't workable for short debates of 30 minutes or so.

That said, I do think there's space to explore new ways of involving online members. That could mean pre-recorded contributions for topical debates, short interventions, or even trialling a hybrid Q&A format. But before we commit to doing this live in the main auditorium – where we also have thousands of people in the hall and the media broadcasting – we need to be absolutely sure it works smoothly, looks professional, and genuinely adds to the experience both online and in person.

So, in short: it's not something we can just switch on tomorrow, but it is something FCC is continuing to look at for the future.

## Supplementary question from Leon Duveen

It's good to hear that things are happening. This may well be my last in-person Conference due to my own mobility issues. I think it's really important that we try hard, not just for people with mobility issues, but for the many others with caring responsibilities, financial responsibilities, and all of the other reasons why people can't make it to Conference. Is it possible to try and arrange for fringe events to be broadcast as well?

**Answer by Nick da Costa**

I'll take the idea forward. Fringe-bookers are responsible for their own AV and for what they're offering. So we'd need to ask fringe-bookers to consider it, and they would have to shoulder the cost of it. But it's certainly something we can talk with fringe-bookers about and see what they might want to do in the future.

**Q2. Submitted by Gemma Roulston**

How many people were successful in getting help from the Access Fund? Is this number lower than before?

**Answer by Nick da Costa**

This year we were able to support five members through the Access Fund. That is slightly lower than in previous years, and it reflects a wider challenge we're facing: donations to the Fund have reduced over time. At the moment, a large share of the support we give is being topped up from central funds, which isn't a sustainable long-term solution.

That's why this is a real priority for me and for FCC. The Access Fund is one of the most practical ways we can make Conference more inclusive, and I don't want us to be in a position where people feel they can't take part because of financial barriers.

Looking ahead, we're exploring how to raise the profile of the Access Fund and encourage more donations. That could include targeted fundraising drives, highlighting stories of members who've benefitted, and making sure we're communicating clearly that even small donations can make a real difference. I'd like to see us build this back up so we can confidently support more people each year.

And finally, I do want to thank everyone who has donated in recent years. Your generosity has already helped members get to Conference who otherwise wouldn't have been able to — and with continued support, we can make that possible for many more in the future.

**Q3. Submitted by Lizzie Jewkes**

What support and accommodations does FCC offer to parents with young children at Conference?

**Answer by Nick da Costa**

We want Conference to be welcoming and accessible for parents. Through the [childcare.co.uk](http://childcare.co.uk) website, parents can book OFSTED-registered childminders, nannies, or carers local to our venues, with costs supported via the Access Fund. We also provide a free Conference pass for the childminder, allowing them to move freely in and out of the venue and take children to local activities. This offers far greater flexibility than a fixed crèche, as it allows parents to choose arrangements that best suit their family's needs.

In addition, children under 12 receive free passes, and carers or parents attending in a support role are not charged either. Children are welcome throughout the Conference Centre, ensuring families are not excluded from any part of the event.

While crèches have been offered in the past, uptake was very low compared to cost. Our focus should be more on providing flexible childcare solutions that adapt to the different routines, ages, and needs of children. By promoting these services more actively and making sure every parent knows what support is available, we can empower families to find arrangements that work for them. This will help make Conference genuinely more inclusive and welcoming for parents with young children.

**Q4. Submitted by Rebecca Jones**

With reference to the recent EHRC guidance, what steps is the committee taking to ensure trans people do not face harassment at conference for using spaces aligned to our gender?

**and**

**Q5. Submitted by Artie Khovanov**

How are you keeping our trans members safe from harassment at Conference?

**Answer by Nick da Costa**

Thank you very much for this question. I think it is imperatively important that all our members feel safe and supported at conference. We are all members of the same party, and there will be disagreements, but we need to remember to disagree well and that no one should be intimidated or harassed at conference. We need to respect our fellow members. If anyone has concerns, they need to speak to our Stewards (in the yellow t-shirts), a member of security or a FCC member. We are all here to support all of you, and at all times we should remember the party's code of code. Contravention of that may lead to formal complaints being made via the Complaints Process.

**Q6. Submitted by Laurence Cox**

For each of the Spring and Autumn 2025 conferences how many policy motions were rejected by FCC because of lack of available debating time?

**Answer by Nick da Costa**

At Autumn 2025, 4 motions were not selected due to time constraints. At Spring 2025, this number was higher at 8. It is worth noting that Spring Conference has significantly less debating time available – around 1.5 days compared with 4 days in the Autumn – and much of this is taken up with essential business which must be scheduled. Despite this, the number of motions submitted is often similar for both conferences, which makes selection particularly challenging. I hope that the constitutional amendment passed at Autumn Conference will help free up a little more debating time in future.

**Q7. Submitted by John Grout**

While welcome, introducing One Member One Vote for Conferences has inadvertently changed the makeup of attendees, with local parties taking less of an interest and funding fewer people to attend who otherwise couldn't, and fewer reports-back from attendees. What in your view can be done to restore the vital relationship between local parties and conferences?

**Answer by Nick da Costa**

This is a very interesting and important question. I want to see our link roles with regions strengthened, but it isn't realistic for FCC members to act as link roles with every local party as well. Some work has already been done here – for example, our Vice Chair, Cara Jenkinson, has run briefing sessions for local party chairs ahead of Conference, and I think we should look at expanding this further.

Many local parties also run their own briefing sessions to walk members through the agenda and key debates, and I would like to see more parties adopt this approach. FCC can also work with local parties to encourage more members to attend Conference, and to explore what financial or organisational support local parties might be able to provide to help members take part.

I think this is an area where the new committee should continue to develop ideas after the internal federal elections.

**Q8. Submitted by Caron Lindsay**

Would FCC consider trying out mini motions and pay what you can which have been successful in Scotland?

**Answer by Nick da Costa**

Mini-motions are an interesting idea, and I would welcome a paper setting out how they could work in practice, and how they would fit with the Party's formal policy process and the work of FPC. It is important that any innovation strengthens, rather than undermines, the way we make policy, but I think there is scope to explore this further.

On "pay what you can", however, I do not think this would be workable for Federal Conference. The scale, cost and complexity of running a federal conference are very different from Scotland, and it is essential that we maintain a sustainable financial model. While we are always looking for ways to widen access, this approach I fear is not realistic for Federal Conference.

**Q9. Submitted by Cllr Gareth Epps**

What steps are being taken to combat the geographical polarisation of our Conference venues and be inclusive to members?

**Answer by Nick da Costa**

In October 2024 I published a detailed paper, Federal Conference Venue Requirements, setting out how FCC selects venues and the challenges involved. We actively review more than 40 venues across the UK, including in Scotland and Wales, but the reality is that many are either prohibitively expensive, lack suitable facilities (fringe rooms, accessible hotels, media space), or are booked years in advance.

We do try to balance geography by holding Autumn Conference in the South (e.g. Brighton, Bournemouth) and Spring in the North (e.g. York, Harrogate). We recently secured subvention funding for Harrogate 2025, enabling us to return there for the first time since 2009, but such subsidies are now rare. When we explored options in Scotland for 2026, we found venues up to ten times more expensive than York Barbican.

FCC remains committed to widening access, but venue selection has to balance cost, accessibility, transport links, and financial sustainability. Members who want to help can lobby local councils and BIDs to offer financial support, since our conferences bring significant economic benefits to host cities.

**Q10. Submitted by Janey Little**

What can other federal committees learn from FCC's excellent use of social media?

**Answer by Nick da Costa**

First, I want to thank those who run our social media accounts: Susie Murray (Twitter), Jennie Rigg (Bluesky), Eleanor Kelly (Instagram), and FCC members who help manage the Federal Conference Facebook group. It is hard work, but it allows us to engage directly with members, answer questions quickly, and showcase what Conference offers.

It is perhaps easier for FCC, as we deliver two set-piece events each year which provide clear points of focus for communications. At other times our channels are quieter, whereas other committees may have a more continuous workload. That said, we would be delighted to share case studies and good practice from FCC's experience with other federal committees, to help them think about how social media can be used most effectively for their own needs.

**Q11. Submitted by John Grout**

As we approach the end of the current term for internal party bodies, what has been your proudest achievement of this term, in your view, and what do you think is the most important matter for the next one?

**and**

**Q12. Submitted by Christopher Johnson**

In this three-year term, what has been your biggest success and what advice would you give to those who are elected in the upcoming election?

**Answer by Nick da Costa**

My proudest achievement was the whole team getting the post-election Autumn Conference up and running in record time after GE24. Normally six months of preparation is needed, but we delivered the whole event in just 2-3 months. It was one of our largest conferences in terms of attendance, revenue, and external engagement from charities, exhibitors and observers – a real testament to the teamwork across FCC and Conference Office.

For the next term, the priority must be to keep making Conference as accessible as possible – whether through financial support, accessibility measures, or ensuring diversity in debates – while also engaging more members to attend. Conference is strongest when it is open, welcoming and representative of the whole party.

## **Federal Council report**

### **Q1. Submitted by Christopher Johnson**

In this three-year term, what has been your biggest success and what advice would you give to those who are elected in the upcoming election?

### **Answer by Antony Hook**

Our biggest success has been to get the Council established as part of the Party's governance going forward. We started effectively with a blank sheet of yellow paper, and have created a set of standing orders that include how often should the council meet, when it should meet in relation to the Board meetings, and what processes we should have managing input from forty members. We've gone from a cold start, and we now have a clear mode of operation established for the council. My one piece of advice for whoever comes next is that the relationship with the Board and with the President is very important. I've had a very good relationship with the President over the past three years, and have spoken to him regularly outside of meetings, and the relationship between the Board and the Council has been very constructive.

### **Q2. Submitted by Candy Piercy**

How should the Federal Council strengthen its capacity to scrutinise Federal Board decisions that impact on one or more Federal Committees?

### **Answer by Antony Hook**

Forty members is a lot, and three years is a long time. I think some members have found it easier than others to be very active. I think that, when the new Council is elected, it's very important that people contemplate how much they'll be able to be active and participate in the Council. Additionally, there is an option available to Conference tomorrow to change our voting system from needing two-thirds of the council to overturn a Board decision, to only needing a simple majority.



# Federal International Relations Committee report

## **Q1. Submitted by Christopher Johnson**

In this three year term, what has been your biggest success and what advice would you give to those who are elected in the upcoming election?

## **Answer by David Chalmers**

One of our greatest successes has been engaging with our sister parties, and the manifestation of that was having Baroness Brinton reelected as vice-president of ALDE last year in Estoril. It's also the motions that we've been able to bring, including on LGBTQ+ rights. We are now looking to bring a declaration on disability rights to the meeting in Brussels next month. I talked earlier about women's rights, and we want to actually be taking that forward, and rights of ethnic minorities. So actually impressing our liberal values on others is something that having the team, the delegations, and FIRC has enabled us to do. One other point that I would say has been our work on the manifesto. I think that, through our sister parties and engagement with the team that put together our manifesto, we helped craft our Europe policy, which was part of the real success in the last general election.

My advice to candidates standing in the Federal Elections is to be prepared to commit to whichever committee and role they are elected. Each role offers immense opportunities and speaking for FIRC we need people on board who want to get involved and are not spreading their time and themselves too thinly – taking on too many roles, or standing for more than one committee because in the end you will really don't fulfil your potential on any of the committees and would be better standing back to allow others who are prepared to commit to that committee to be elected. We work best as teams with everyone contributing and engaged.

## **Supplementary question from Christopher Johnson**

This is more of a point of clarification on something I've been wondering about for a while. We're members of both ALDE and Liberal International, and I'd like to know more about the policy-making process in the latter.

## **Answer by David Chalmers**

So, within ALDE, we bring motions to the meetings, the council, and the congress. Council meets twice a year, and the congress meets once a year. Motions are brought, and we work on making sure there's some sort of consensus for those motions. I will

add that it doesn't always work. We actually brought a motion forward last year on Israel and Gaza. We did push forward on that motion and there was no consensus. I feel that it is a huge shame and disappointment for liberal parties to come together and not be able to make a clear statement on that situation – as happened recently in Helsinki. Within Liberal International, it's a lot looser because you've got parties from all over the world. We also bring motions, but they're not necessarily seen as binding as they are in ALDE. As a result, the wording often is a little more vague, rather than going into detail on how laws can be changed. We want to see how we can take some of the things that we've been doing in ALDE, on women's rights, LGBTQ+ rights, disability rights, and take them forward to Liberal International. But it isn't as easy to get buy-in. You mentioned specifically Liberal International, which has sub-committees. Pippa Heylings MP sits on the climate justice committee, Bobby Dean MP sits on the fair trade committee, and Baroness Brinton now chairs the human rights committee, and those committees craft statements on things happening in the world a step towards policy. Hopefully that gives you a bit of an idea about how we're working to exert influence over these processes to deliver an end result that we can all be proud of.

## **Q2. Submitted by George Cunningham**

Why has the FIRC subcommittee on authoritarian states not met since February 2025 despite the huge threat posed by Trump, Putin, Xi and others to Europe's democracies?

## **Answer by David Chalmers**

All of us on FIRC are volunteers, and we set up a system of sub-committees to work with parliamentarians to have an influence on different areas of policy. I welcome this question because we don't have any more party support to help us prepare for delegations to ALDE or Liberal International or any of the work we do. This means we have to be very careful in choosing what work we're able to do. Up until around a year ago, we did have a part-time international officer. Almost every other party that I can think of in Europe has a paid team or member of staff who are preparing their delegations when they're going to international conferences and who help them with their work on policy. I sit on FPC, and I see the working groups, and that committee has dedicated members of staff helping them. We're the voice of party members, so it's important for us to engage with the party and see how we can put international issues more at the forefront of what our party is doing. Without more support from the party, we're not currently able to do that. There is a certain limit to what we are able to do as volunteers. We talk of ourselves as a party of internationalism, so we need to start putting some resources into enabling us to deliver what we want to do.

## **Supplementary question from George Cunningham**

I want to 100% support what David is saying about the total lack of resources. As a member of FIRC for the last three years, I've been impressed by David's work, and the good successes on and in Europe. There are a number of issues concerning subcommittee work, and I would like more emphasis on subcommittee work, so we can truly develop policy for the party and for FPC.

### **Answer by David Chalmers**

Thank you so much for all the work that you have done on FIRC. You were at the centre of crafting our policy on China. At that time we did have some admin support, which freed us up and enabled us to put more time into work beyond the delegations.

### **Q3. Submitted by Janey Little**

According to the UN, 1 in 4 countries reported a backlash on women's rights in 2024. What work has FIRC been doing to champion gender equality and women's rights internationally?

### **Answer by David Chalmers**

I am delighted to be asked this question. As I am sure you are aware we have made it a priority as a party to stand up for LGBT+ rights, and in recent years have supported ALDE's Rainbow Platform, which was designed to help political parties support and engage with LGBT+ members and candidates, and we were one of the first parties in ALDE to sign the Dublin Declaration, making LGBT+ rights a political priority for member parties across Europe in their national politics and their international work. At the Liberal International meeting in Santiago, Chile last December I attended a fringe debate on women's rights, which was being held in a side room instead of on the main stage and of the 10 men in the room – as the majority of the audience were women – 5 were from our party the Liberal Democrats. That rang alarm bells with me, that even in our international liberal family – women's rights were not being regarded as a priority. When one of the women politicians from Africa was asked about her countries' support for LGBT+ rights – she answered rather defensively – questioning why we were focused on a minority, whilst ignoring the plight of half the population. I carried on our conversation away from the debate and was horrified at the stories I was to hear of women and children being murdered, physically and sexually abused and that no one seemed to care.

I connected in a webinar, one of the women I had been speaking to – Lizzy Adundo from our sister party ODM in Kenya – with my colleagues on FIRC and Lib Dem Women. We

were all horrified at what we heard and we decided to bring a motion to Conference – which we debated and passed unanimously at this year’s Autumn Conference, which will act as a marker for us, from which to start in earnest our work in this country and internationally - speaking up for and fighting for women’s rights. We were honoured to have Lizzy travel from Kenya to speak in our debate – a recognition of how important this debate is to her and fellow women across Africa and the world – that she traveled all the way from her home in Africa to be part of the debate.

For too long we have been held back from standing up for women’s right internationally because of misguided fears that by doing so we might undermine our fight for LGBT+ rights - because some people are trying to make out that trans women are not women and therefore cannot be included in any efforts to protect international women’s rights. We proved by passing this motion that we as a party will stand up for all women- cis , trans, disabled, or not disabled, old, young and from any social background or ethnic background. I am excited as to how we can now take this work forward in unison with Lib Dem Women and other AOs - combining the fight for women’s rights with LGBT+ rights, and influence our sister parties and governments around the world.

#### **Q4. Submitted by Bex Foulsham**

What lessons could we take from our sister liberal parties in fighting against the rise of the far right?

#### **Answer by David Chalmers**

This is an issue which is very much on our minds whenever liberal politicians come together in ALDE and Liberal International - how do we respond to the rise of the far right?

It is interesting that you ask what we can learn from our sister parties, as since our success in last year’s General Election, many of our sister parties are looking towards us for guidance. We know that the threat from the populist far-right has not gone away in the UK and we are struggling to find ways to stand up to Reform – but one of the consistences that appears to be found in the liberal parties that have been more successful in recent elections – are the ones that have made liberal policies and messages relevant to the concerns of the electorate – rather than focus on issues of an intellectual nature- ie the cost of living, protecting the environment rather as opposed to constitutional theory, which whilst important to us liberals, are not a priority for the electorate as a whole.

We have become more ready to acknowledge that even our liberal parties can be infiltrated by the populist far right and used as instruments willing or unwilling to promote their politics and policies. A prime example was ANO in Czechia. We should have picked up and responded to the warning signs earlier, rather than waiting for the European elections to expose their anti immigration platform and other far right policies, before taking action to suspend or expel them from our liberal family. We have recently adopted a new process, which should alert and enable us to act sooner if we suspect a party has been infiltrated or taken over by far-right populists.

The Westminster Foundation for Democracy is supporting projects led by the Lib Dems to help parties globally rise to the challenge of populism and disinformation. You might have seen several members of our sister parties from South Africa, Kenya, Zambia, Ukraine and Taiwan at the Autumn Conference in Bournemouth, brought together to discuss these very issues.

One last point which is very much at the heart of these discussions is whether to engage and bring far right populists into government – to expose them to responsibility and their policies to greater scrutiny. Several of our sister parties have entered coalitions which included far right populist politicians or were propped up by those parties – most recently in the Netherlands and Finland. Whereas others argue it is better to isolate the far right populists, have nothing to do with them nationally or locally and in effect put a sanitary cordon around them. Which approach is more effective has yet to be determined. But there is a real danger for liberal parties to be seen to be flirting with the far right and certainly here in the UK we appear to be benefitting from keeping our distance and challenging Reform.

#### **Q5. Submitted by Christopher Johnson**

Much of the attention of the media and the party has (rightly) been on Ukraine and Gaza in recent years. While recognising the importance of continuing to address injustices in these conflicts, what can we do to raise awareness and seek to support victims of other conflicts, such as the Wars in the Maghreb and Sahel, the Myanmar conflicts and the Sudanese conflicts?

#### **Answer by David Chalmers**

It is important that we as a party speak out on the big international issues of the day – both here in the UK and internationally. However, we must also find ways to raise the other major issues happening around the world that for some reason are not regarded as such a priority. Now that we have 72 MPs and separate spokespeople on Foreign Affairs, Europe, International Development and Defence and Ed Davey's regular questions at PM Question Time – it is much easier for us to raise issues in Parliament

and have our voice heard in Parliament and in the media. And of course we still have our fantastic and influential team in the Lords to raise questions and contribute to debates.

I was delighted that in Bournemouth we debated a motion on Sudan – the world's forgotten conflict – and we are bringing resolutions on this topic to the ALDE Congress in Brussels in late October and the Liberal International meeting in The Hague in November on Sudan. In the case of ALDE our motion was co-signed by 15 sister parties – a recognition of how important it is for us to raise this issue and make it better known. I have been told that often our international motions are adopted by our sister parties and form the basis of their country's foreign policy.

The new Sub Committee system on FIRC is designed for us to identify and debate these issues that are falling below the radar – for whatever reason – and bring them to the attention of our Parliamentarians – to see if we can raise awareness in Parliament and beyond. You have raised an important issue for which there is no simple solution, but we are trying to find ways to address it.

#### **Q6. Submitted by Christopher Johnson**

Freedom of religion is a key liberal value. With attacks on religious sites, individuals and groups up around the world (e.g. the recent rise, both in the Middle East and Africa and in the USA, of attacks on churches, and the persecution of the Druze in Syria), what can we do to protect freedom of religion?

#### **Answer by David Chalmers**

Projecting freedom of religion and belief is an important part of a liberal agenda and I believe that the Lib Dems have an opportunity to take a more distinctive line - in contrast to Labour and the Conservatives who treat it piecemeal. In the international context we could defend more robustly the Human Rights Act and our membership of the European Convention on Human Rights, both of which enshrine freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Working with our sister parties, Liberal International and FCDO, we champion international human rights and press our allies and trading partners to uphold freedom of religion and belief worldwide. We should also make the case for Britain to remain a place of sanctuary – offering protection to refugees fleeing persecution on grounds of religion or belief. However it is critical that freedom is balanced with equality, making sure that the right to practice religion does not undermine the rights of LGBT+ people, women or minorities.

# Federal Policy Committee Report

## **Q1. Submitted by Christopher Johnson**

In this three-year term, what has been your biggest success and what advice would you give to those who are elected in the upcoming election?

**and**

## **Q2. Submitted by John Grout**

As we approach the end of the current term for internal party bodies, what has been your proudest achievement of this term, in your view, and what do you think is the most important matter for the next one?

## **Answer by Jeremy Hargreaves MBE**

As a committee we are very proud to have led the development, with conference and many others, of a body of policies which led to a very successful manifesto at last year's General Election. It was very well received. YouGov polling said that of the most popular policies from any party, all of the top seven were from our manifesto. Care England explicitly welcomed our commitment to the social care sector, and Friends of the Earth gave us the second highest rating (after the Greens) for our range of environmental policies, well ahead of Labour. Remarkably, research from More in Common found that our policies on the NHS were a significantly more important reason for voting for us even than getting the Tories out, with three other policies also featuring in the top nine reasons for voting Liberal Democrat.

So we are very proud that the manifesto played a significant part in the party's most successful General Election campaign for more than a century. This didn't happen overnight. This was the backbone of much of our work in the last parliament. At the level of overall themes and direction we brought a record three pre-manifesto papers to conference for us all to debate here. On top of that 11,000 members contributed to our survey on its key themes, and 750 to a series of 7 subject-area consultation sessions.

At the level of specific policies we had many discussions with spokespeople and others, in many long meetings which went through the draft manifesto forensically, considering in detail literally hundreds of detailed amendments.

On advice on what's most important for the next committee – I think it's what underlay the success of the manifesto. Which for me is more than anything else, understanding what the party's broad strategic objectives are, and ensuring our policy platform works well with that. That sounds obvious and easy but in some ways is the hardest part, and is indeed the thing the party has really struggled with for much of the party's history. We all have our own specific policy interests, but if we're going to do anything about them, and actually help the party go forward, then we need to ensure our policy, strategy, campaigning and media work together.

### **Q3. Submitted by Caron Lindsay**

How does FPC make sure that the impact of our policy proposals on marginalised groups is evaluated and taken into consideration in the development of policy papers?

**and**

### **Q4. Submitted by Rebecca Jones**

What is FPC doing to ensure that diverse voices are included in policy working groups and in the policy process more broadly?

### **Answer by Jeremy Hargreaves MBE**

This is something FPC has spent quite a bit of time on recently, including basically the whole of our meeting in July. I'll start with the beginning of the process and your questions, Rebecca. At the very beginning, Conference, through the Constitution, has set some requirements for the diversity of FPC itself, across a range of demographic and other characteristics. We usually go beyond that, for example also co-opting the policy officer of LDCRE, and the voice of Young Liberals, for example, is often very powerful at the committee.

When we set up policy working groups, ensuring diverse representation is always without exception, the main focus of all the discussions. We go to considerable efforts to ensure that groups are as diverse as possible. When the field of applications we receive is not very diverse, sometimes dramatically not and I can think of some recent examples, this can be quite a challenge and we put a lot of work into fixing it. So although I definitely encourage everyone here to consider putting yourself forward for a working group, really definitely do if you think you are from an under-represented group. The weblinks in our written report can take you to some new information on our webpage about how working groups are chosen.



Beyond working groups themselves, they generally take a lot of evidence from bodies who speak on behalf of various different groups – plus of course as I said earlier we want as much input as possible from all party members.

So turning to Caron, I think this diverse input into working groups and other discussions is a key part of the answer to your question. And in addition we do also two other things. Firstly we try and make sure we particularly engage relevant groupings inside and also outside the party when developing policy in relevant areas. And secondly we do have an Equalities Impact Assessment group which as I mentioned is just refreshing its approach, to ensure we do get input on equalities impact, not just at the end of the process when a policy paper is largely written, but throughout the course of its work, as it's developing its ideas. They will now have a dialogue with working groups' chairs, and follow a structured process for feeding in. FPC certainly takes their input very seriously, and does make changes as a result – and indeed one of this weekend's policy papers definitely benefitted from this.

#### **Supplementary question from Caron Lindsay**

First of all, we may not agree with every decision made by your committee - or any committee - but I think it's important to say thank you, to all of you, for the hard work that you've done in terms of developing the manifesto and our policy. Thank you.

It's not just about engaging groups within the Party, like you say. It occurs to me that outside of the party, there are groups doing really good work, and it might be particularly relevant to the Town Centres and High Streets working group. We need to ensure issues impacted women and girls are taken into account.

#### **Answer by Jeremy Hargreaves MBE**

If there's anyone that you think that group should consult, please do contact me or Christian Moon. That invitation applies to everybody else as well. If you think there are people we should be talking to and listening to, please do tell us who they are so we can try and do that.

# Parliamentary Parties report

## **Q1. Submitted by Bex Foulsham**

How are peers held accountable to our membership, seeing as unlike MPs they have no constituents to hold them to account?

### **Answer by Jeremy Purvis**

We are proud to play a key role in both the legislative and campaigning life of the wider Party. Many of our colleagues in the Lords are deeply engaged with their local parties and frequently visit constituencies across the country, strengthening relationships and listening to members' views.

These ongoing connections are central to ensuring that we remain accountable — they allow us to listen, respond, and act, whether that means raising issues in legislation or supporting national and local campaigns.

We are committed to being accessible to party members. The section on the Party website about peers, including contact details, is a good starting point for anyone wishing to get in touch. The regular parliamentary news email sent to all members also includes updates on our work in the Lords, and we encourage feedback on any aspect of this.

Looking ahead, we will continue to build on these relationships through more sustained engagement with local and regional parties, and by communicating more clearly about our work in the Lords and the support we provide to our colleagues in the Commons.

Ultimately, our work — whether legislative or outreach — is guided by party policy as set by Conference. There is therefore a direct link between the work undertaken by members across the Party and the work of the Liberal Democrat group in the Lords. We take seriously our responsibility to reflect and respond to the membership that sustains us.

## **Supplementary question by Bex Foulsham**

The issue that we have right now is that MPs face consequences at the ballot box for their actions. If a regular member of the party, even if they're on a committee, we can file a complaint against them. However, the only accountability for peers is from within the Lords group itself. How can we justify this system, when we are against entrenched privilege?

### **Answer by Jeremy Purvis**

None of us in the Liberal Democrat Lords group agree with how it is constituted, but we are where we are. Our party mechanisms, including standing orders and weekly meetings, is a means by which we address the democratic deficit.

**Answer by Wendy Chamberlain**

In the House of Lords, we do have a whip, and the whip could be removed or managed accordingly. In the last parliament, when there were less of us, the Lords did most of the heavy-lifting, and I'm very grateful for that. The knowledge and expertise in the Lords was invaluable.

**Q2. Submitted by Christopher Johnson**

Since 2022, what has been your biggest success, and what advice would you give to those looking to get elected in internal elections?

**Answer by Wendy Chamberlain and Jeremy Purvis**

We are delighted to have continued our mentoring and development work for candidates, supporting them to grow in confidence and capability. This has strengthened the Party's depth of talent and prepared the next generation of Liberal Democrat leaders.

We intend to build on this success by extending the mentoring model to new candidates, ensuring continued development across all levels of the Party.

Our advice to those elected this time is simple: engage. Use your role to connect with members, listen carefully, and make those connections count. It is one of the most effective ways to ensure that our collective work reflects the priorities, energy and values of the Party.

**Q3. Submitted by Emily Tester**

What more is the Parliamentary Party doing to help our MPs, now a year in, be best prepared for the next General Election?

**Answer by Wendy Chamberlain and Jeremy Purvis**

There is strong collaboration between the parliamentary groups, with peers offering advice, support and experience to our colleagues in the Commons. We are fortunate to have many seasoned parliamentary campaigners who act as a sounding board for MPs preparing for the next General Election.

In turn, our colleagues in the Commons work closely with us to deliver on key campaigns and legislation. A Best Practice workstream has been established to identify priorities and ensure coordinated action.

Our MPs are already achieving great things: Danny Chambers is leading major work to improve animal welfare; Sarah Olney is delivering on justice reform; and Josh Babarinde has successfully secured government commitments to better protect victims of domestic abuse. This collaborative approach ensures the entire parliamentary team is ready for the challenges ahead.

**Q4. Submitted by Suzanne Fletcher**

Speaking on people seeking sanctuary in UK, could our policy on Humanitarian Visas be included as well as the importance of Safe and Legal Routes?

**Answer by Wendy Chamberlain and Jeremy Purvis**

Yes. Our policy on Humanitarian Visas sits alongside our long-standing commitment to Safe and Legal Routes.

In both Houses, our Home Affairs Spokespeople have submitted several amendments advancing this policy, most recently to the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill. We intend to continue pressing the government on this issue and to promote it actively in our media work. This remains a live and important part of our policy platform.

**Q5. Submitted by Cllr Gareth Epps**

Why did the Parliamentary Party in the Commons force a scenario whereby the Equalities spokesperson was forced to be sacked for voting on a point of principle?

**Answer by Wendy Chamberlain and Jeremy Purvis**

This is not an accurate representation of events. We all appreciate the invaluable work Christine carried out as Equalities spokesperson and we thank her for her contribution. Christine is a much valued member of our Parliamentary group.

**Q6. Submitted by Eleanor Kelly**

It's been a year since Wendy Chamberlain MP successfully tabled the amendment to ban those arrested for sexual offences from the parliamentary estate. Can you give us an update on the state of women's safety within parliament and what the Liberal

Democrats can and have been doing to improve protections for victims and whistleblowers?

**Answer by Wendy Chamberlain and Jeremy Purvis**

While there is always more to be done, we are proud of the progress achieved so far. Wendy Chamberlain's amendment has made Parliament a safer workplace, and Susan Kramer has continued to lead efforts to improve protections for whistleblowers. Josh Babarinde's successful campaign to recognise domestic abuse as an aggravating factor in assault cases is another major step forward.

**Q7. Submitted by Janey Little**

MPs recently voted to decriminalise abortion, supported by the overwhelming majority of Liberal Democrat MPs. What do you believe this means for women's rights in the UK and what are the next steps to ensure we protect and defend the right to choose?

**Answer by Wendy Chamberlain and Jeremy Purvis**

This vote marks a landmark moment for women's rights. Decriminalisation removes fear and stigma, particularly for vulnerable women.

The next steps are to ensure equal access to high-quality reproductive healthcare and to protect women from harassment at clinics. We continue to press for our manifesto commitment to enforce safe access zones around abortion clinics and hospitals. We will always stand up for choice, compassion, and bodily autonomy.

**Q8. Submitted by Zoe Hollowood**

There have been various warnings, including by unions, that Parliament is an unsafe workplace, especially for women, due to sexual misconduct by MPs. What work have the Lib Dems done to help make Parliament safer for women regarding sexual misconduct and what more needs to be done? Could you speak in particular about protections for victims/whistleblowers who come forward regarding such behaviour?

**Answer by Wendy Chamberlain and Jeremy Purvis**

We have consistently campaigned to make Parliament a safe environment for everyone. Wendy Chamberlain's amendment to ban those arrested for sexual offences from the parliamentary estate and Susan Kramer's work to strengthen protections for whistleblowers are key examples of progress.

We have also campaigned for the full implementation of the Hillsborough Law, including a duty of candour for all public officials, which will be laid before Parliament shortly.

We recognise there is still work to do, and we remain committed to creating an inclusive and respectful workplace for all.

**Q9. Submitted by Judith Bailey**

In our 2024 election manifesto we committed to upholding the Equality Act 2010. Now that the Act has been clarified by the Supreme Court so that we know that “sex” in the Act means - and has always been intended to mean - biological sex, can the Party confirm that commitment still stands?

**Answer by Wendy Chamberlain and Jeremy Purvis**

Yes. We remain firmly committed to upholding the Equality Act 2010.

The Supreme Court’s ruling reaffirmed that trans people continue to be protected from discrimination under the Act. The Liberal Democrats are committed to ensuring dignity, safety and inclusion for trans people while upholding women’s rights.

We await publication of the final Code of Practice and will scrutinise it closely to ensure that it protects all existing rights in both principle and practice.

**Q10. Submitted by Yonni Wilson**

Can the Parliamentary Party please clarify the national policy of the Liberal Democrats in relation to the recent Supreme Court ruling on the Equality Act 2010 — specifically, its interpretation that the terms ‘man’ and ‘woman’, ‘male’ and ‘female’ refer to biological sex and that this applies in the context of single-sex spaces like toilets and changing rooms? Do we, as a party, accept and abide by this ruling as binding law? Or is our policy to challenge or campaign against it — as has been claimed by some local party representatives? Party members and canvassers urgently need a clear, unequivocal statement from you on this matter, so we can respond accurately to voters and the media.'

**Answer by Wendy Chamberlain and Jeremy Purvis**

We are committed to protecting existing rights, including those of trans people. Everyone deserves to feel safe, respected, and able to participate fully in public life.

Many trans, non-binary and intersex people have expressed understandable concern about the implications of the Supreme Court ruling and the forthcoming EHRC Code of

Practice. While the ruling reaffirmed that trans people remain protected under the Equality Act, the government has not yet provided clarity on how this will be achieved in practice.

We have written to the Minister urging full parliamentary scrutiny, including a debate and a vote. The government must ensure that the final guidance protects the dignity, safety and rights of all

**Q11. Submitted by Suzanne Fletcher**

Can statements about those seeking sanctuary arriving in the UK ensure we make clear we deal with such issues with compassion and humanity?

**Answer by Wendy Chamberlain and Jeremy Purvis**

We always seek to approach these issues with compassion and humanity. Those seeking sanctuary are real people, often fleeing unimaginable circumstances.

We refuse to mirror the divisive and harmful rhetoric used by other parties and will continue to advocate for a fair, effective and humane asylum system.

In a recent debate, our Spokesperson Lisa Smart was the sole voice of compassion, reminding audiences of Britain's proud tradition of welcoming those escaping war and persecution — a tradition we are determined to uphold.

**Q12. Submitted by Suzanne Fletcher**

I can find no reference to a Lib Dem Parliamentarian being on Fairtrade APPG, can this be addressed and a member be encouraged to join?

**Answer by Wendy Chamberlain and Jeremy Purvis**

APPGs are an excellent way for parliamentarians to engage with key issues, and we recognise the importance of Fairtrade. While we cannot mandate participation, we will encourage colleagues to consider joining the APPG to ensure the Party's voice is represented in this important area.

**Q13. Submitted by Suzanne Fletcher**

Can you ensure that the word 'illegal' is not used to describe a person seeking sanctuary in the UK? Use 'irregular' instead.

**Answer by Wendy Chamberlain and Jeremy Purvis**

We always seek to approach these issues with compassion and humanity. Those seeking sanctuary are real people, often fleeing unimaginable circumstances.

We refuse to mirror the divisive and harmful rhetoric used by other parties and will continue to advocate for a fair, effective and humane asylum system.

In a recent debate, our Spokesperson Lisa Smart was the sole voice of compassion, reminding audiences of Britain's proud tradition of welcoming those escaping war and persecution — a tradition we are determined to uphold.

**Q14. Submitted by Toby Keynes**

Are you concerned about the potential for major reputational damage from parliamentarians who publicly abuse gender critical women or associate themselves with discredited trans activist organisations?

**Answer by Wendy Chamberlain and Jeremy Purvis**

Unfortunately, this whole debate has become far too toxic and nasty, especially on social media – and both women and trans people have suffered as a result.

Any form of abuse or harassment from parliamentarians is completely unacceptable. We are committed to taking appropriate measures whenever such behaviour occurs.

We are also committed to protecting existing rights, including those of trans people, as outlined in the motion Free To Be Who You Are, passed at the Spring Conference 2025. Everyone deserves to feel safe, respected, and able to participate fully in public life.

**Q15. Submitted by Toby Keynes**

Will the Party make a considered and public statement about the Cass Review, detailing any areas of disagreement with the recommendations made in the Review?

**Answer by Wendy Chamberlain and Jeremy Purvis**

Christine Jardine MP responded as party spokesperson, to the then Conservative Government's Statement on the Review in April 2024. She asked "at its heart, the Cass report sadly highlights the low standard of care for our young people who were caught up in a toxic debate. There were long waiting lists, and the debate seeped into the staffing of the medical profession. Does the Secretary of State agree that we have to look at the wellbeing of our children holistically? How will she overcome the recruitment and staffing problems that have been created by this toxic debate?"



In addition, the Liberal Democrats passed the Free To Be Who You Are Spokesperson's Paper on LGBTQ+ Equality, in Spring of this year. Please find here:

<https://www.libdems.org.uk/conference/papers/spring-2025/free-to-be-who-you-are>

## **Federal Appeals Panel report**

### **Q1. Submitted by Christopher Johnson**

Since the last federal internal party elections in 2022, what has been your biggest success and what advice would you give to those who are elected in the upcoming election?

### **Answer by David Graham**

The nature of what we do as a quasi-judicial body means that it would be wrong to point to individual decisions, but what we're most proud of is the way in which the process has been opened up during our five years. There's an overriding principle of transparency, and we've put guidance and information about the panel and its procedures on the website. Additionally, all of our decisions are now published, unless there is good reason not to. I hope that members can have confidence in the way that we decide individual cases, and that they can see how the panel works. In terms of advice, the success of the panel is contingent on personnel management and good communication between volunteers. My two pieces of advice are a) ensure that everyone gets involved and gets experience at managing cases that we handle and b) I'd encourage everyone to volunteer as much as they can, and where they are having difficulties, that they should communicate that to ensure the work is distributed efficiently. We will be running a training session for new members.