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# 1 Foreword

This election is our chance to win the change our country desperately needs.

Everywhere we go across our great United Kingdom, we see people from all backgrounds and all walks of life, working hard, raising families, helping others and playing by the rules. But they have been let down and taken for granted for far too long by this out-of-touch Conservative Government. Families and pensioners are struggling with sky-high energy bills, food prices and housing costs – and the Conservatives have only added to the pain, because they just don't care.

In Scotland, the SNP have plunged the NHS into crisis, caused our schools to slip down the international rankings and repeatedly missed climate change targets. They are letting the government-owned water company get away with pumping filthy sewage into our rivers and lochs and onto our beaches.

It's time for a change.

The Conservatives and SNP have both got to go. They've both been in power for far too long, breaking rules and taking you for granted. And in so many parts of the country, we have shown that it is the Liberal Democrats who can get them out.

But this election is about more than a change of government. We must transform the very nature of British politics itself, so that we can fix the health and care crisis, get our economy back on track, end the appalling sewage scandal, and give people the fair deal they deserve.

Every vote for the Liberal Democrats is a vote to elect a strong local champion who will fight for a fair deal for you and your community. A fair deal where everyone can afford a decent home somewhere safe and clean – with a comfortable retirement when the time comes. A fair deal where every child can go to a good school and have real opportunities to fulfil their potential. A fair deal where everyone can get the high-quality healthcare they need, when they need it and where they need it.

That is the fair deal the Liberal Democrats are fighting for. We know we can achieve it. So join us, and let's make it happen!

Ed Davey

Alex Cole-Hamilton

## 2 Our Fair Deal

In so many ways, things in our country are broken. The economy, the National Health Service, the climate, the housing market – all are in crisis after years of Conservative and SNP neglect. Schools are crumbling and clean rivers seem a thing of the past. The Conservatives have wrecked our relationship with our nearest neighbours in Europe, and our political system is simply not fit for purpose. Millions of people feel powerless and excluded.

It doesn't have to be this way. Britain has overcome big challenges before and we can do it again now.

For more than 150 years, Liberals and Liberal Democrats have led the fight for a fair, free and open society: championing free trade, introducing the state pension and free school meals, laying the foundations of the welfare state and the NHS, legalising same-sex marriage, and taking urgent action to tackle the climate emergency.

Today, our fair deal would give everyone the power to make the most of their potential, and real freedom to decide how they live their lives. It would call the over-powerful to account. It has five key themes.

### **1. A fair deal on the economy**

Everyone deserves the chance to get on in life, see their hard work properly rewarded and realise their hopes for the future. Businesses and entrepreneurs should be supported to create worthwhile jobs in every part of the UK.

**Liberal Democrats will invest in renewable power and home insulation to drive a strong economic recovery, bring down energy bills and create clean, secure, well-paid new jobs.**

We will put people first, overhauling parental leave to give families more choice and flexibility over how to juggle work and home life. We will support entrepreneurs and back small businesses. We will make Britain a world leader in the new infrastructure, businesses and technologies needed to tackle climate change. We will manage the public finances with the utmost care and responsibility. We will fix the UK's broken relationship with Europe and tear down the Conservatives' damaging barriers to trade.

## **2. A fair deal on public services**

Everyone should receive the care they need when they are ill or frail, and a helping hand when they fall on tough times. A strong NHS – open to all, regardless of wealth – gives people the freedom they need to live their lives as they choose. Every child deserves the best possible start in life. We know that education is the best possible investment in our country's future.

**Liberal Democrats will get everyone fast access to an NHS dentist and GP, and transform mental health services by taxing the social media giants who cause so much harm.**

We will invest in improving public health, expanding early access to health services, and fixing social care. We will give every child the support they need with more in-class support and fast access to mental health professionals at every stage of education. We will repair the broken safety net that currently consigns so many to poverty. And we will fund public services through fair taxes, such as reversing the Conservatives' tax cuts for big banks.

### **3. A fair deal on the environment**

Everyone should be able to enjoy the benefits of our wonderful natural environment, and our children should inherit the future they deserve. We must act now – locally, nationally and globally. The UK can lead the world with innovation and ingenuity, while boosting the economy and enhancing everyone's quality of life.

**Liberal Democrats will hold big companies to account by giving them a duty to protect the environment, and end the scandal of the Scottish Government-owned water company routinely dumping sewage into rivers, lochs and coastal areas.**

We will put tackling climate change at the heart of a new industrial strategy. We will cut emissions and bills with an emergency Home Energy Upgrade programme. We will drive a rooftop solar revolution and invest in clean energy, transport and industry. We will restore nature and tackle toxic air pollution. And we will ensure skills training, incentives and advice are available to help families and businesses with the transition to net zero.

#### **4. A strong United Kingdom and a fair international order**

Liberal Democrats are proud internationalists. We believe that our country and our people thrive when we are open and outward-looking. The UK can be an incredible force for good when it stands tall on the world stage, and both the Covid pandemic and Vladimir Putin's illegal war in Ukraine show that events beyond Britain's borders inevitably become our concern.

**Liberal Democrats will immediately fix our broken relationship with Europe, forge a new partnership built on cooperation, not confrontation, and move to conclude a new comprehensive agreement that removes as many barriers to trade as possible.**

We will stand up to authoritarianism by championing the liberal, rules-based international order. We will reverse the Conservatives' damaging cuts to the Army and international development. We will work across borders to provide safe and legal



routes to sanctuary for refugees and tackle common threats such as human trafficking, cybercrime and terrorism.

## **5. A truly fair democracy**

Every person matters. Liberal Democrats believe that basic rights and dignity are the birthright of every individual, to be respected, cherished and enhanced. Everyone should have equal power in our democracy, and be able to hold all Members of Parliament properly to account.

### **Liberal Democrats will introduce proportional representation for electing MPs and cap donations to political parties.**

We will shift power out of the centre in Westminster and Whitehall, so local decisions are made by and for the people and communities they affect. We will demand higher standards of behaviour from Government Ministers by enshrining the Ministerial Code in law. We will champion the UK's Human Rights Act and resist any attempts to weaken or repeal it.

Our goal is to transform the nature of British politics itself – to make it relevant, engaging and responsive to people's needs and dreams.

## 3 The Economy

Liberal Democrats will build a strong, fair economy that benefits everyone in the UK, by helping people back to work, supporting small businesses, improving long-term productivity, and delivering much greater stability for long-term investment, especially for the industries of the future.

Core to our economic policy for improving stability and growth will be responsible management of the public finances, fixing the broken trading relationship with Europe, and an industrial strategy focused on the skills the future UK economy will need, from the renewables industry to the digital and bioscience sectors.

The Conservatives have badly mismanaged the economy and recklessly damaged the public finances, grinding economic growth to a halt and adding billions to the cost of servicing our debt. Their botched Brexit deal has badly damaged the economy, leaving everyone worse off. By abandoning climate commitments, they have undermined industry's confidence in investment in the green products and technologies vital to both economic recovery and tackling the climate emergency.

And they have taken people for granted, failing to deliver the investment needed to bring prosperity to all nations and regions of the UK. They left families and businesses to suffer the effects of their cost-of-living crisis without enough support, hit people with years of unfair tax rises, and their promises to 'level up' have proved hollow.

The SNP Government has shown that it cannot be trusted to spend your money wisely and its costly blunders have resulted in less funding for Scotland's overwhelmed public services. The SNP want to erect new economic barriers and their erratic tax policy shows that they are out of ideas on how to spark growth and drive innovation.

We will empower people and support businesses to thrive by encouraging investment and boosting productivity.

**We will:**

- 1 Provide long-term help with the cost of living by cutting energy bills through an emergency Home Energy Upgrade programme, tackling rising food prices through a National Food Strategy, and getting mortgage rates under control through careful economic management.**
- Invest in green infrastructure, innovation and skills to boost economic growth and create good jobs and prosperity in every nation and region of the UK, while tackling the climate crisis.**
- Repair the broken relationship with Europe, which acts as a brake on the economy and costs the UK investment, jobs and tax revenue.**

- **Foster stability, certainty and confidence by managing the public finances responsibly to get the national debt falling as a share of the economy and ensure that day-to-day spending does not exceed the amount raised in taxes, while making the investments our country needs.**
- **Put an end to Conservative waste and give taxpayers real value for money, giving HMRC the resources it needs to properly tackle tax avoidance and evasion.**
- **Implement a tax policy that recognises how high the Conservatives and SNP have raised personal taxes, making the cost-of-living crisis worse, by instead focusing tax changes on reversing the Conservatives' tax cuts for big banks and imposing a proper, one-off windfall tax on the super-profits of oil and gas producers and traders.**

In addition, we will:

- Create good jobs and prosperity in every nation and region of the UK by:
  - Launching an ambitious industrial strategy to incentivise businesses to invest and create good jobs across the UK, as set out in chapter 4.
  - Supporting local and regional economic partnerships to coordinate development projects and boost growth in their areas.

- Working with the devolved administrations to develop joint policies and partnerships to boost growth across the whole UK.
- Ensuring that gigabit broadband is available to every home and business, including in rural and remote communities, as set out in chapter 15.
- Foster the stability, certainty and confidence that are vital for economic growth and investment by:
  - Protecting the independence of the Bank of England and keeping the inflation target of 2%.
  - Ensuring that all fiscal events are accompanied by independent forecasts from the Office for Budget Responsibility.
- Increase investment in green infrastructure, including renewable energy and zero-carbon transport, industry and housing, as set out in chapters 4, 5, 14 and 16, and give a clearer zero-carbon remit to the UK Infrastructure Bank.
- Remain committed to delivering the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in the UK and around the world.

- Work with partners in international forums, including the OECD and the UN, to tackle international corporate tax avoidance for the benefit of all countries and make the case for increasing the global minimum rate of corporation tax to 21%.
- Our priority for tax cuts, when the public finances allow, will be to cut income tax by raising the tax-free personal allowance, benefitting the vast majority of families and taking more low-paid workers out of paying income tax altogether.
- Make the tax system fairer and raise the money needed for our investment plans by:
  - Reversing Conservative tax cuts for the big banks, restoring Bank Surcharge and Bank Levy revenues to 2016 levels in real terms.
  - Increasing the Digital Services Tax on social media firms and other tech giants from 2% to 6%.
  - Fairly reforming capital gains tax to close loopholes exploited by the super wealthy.
  - Introducing a 4% tax on the share buyback schemes of FTSE-100 listed companies, to incentivise productive investment, job creation and economic growth.
- End retrospective tax changes such as the loan charge brought in by the Conservatives, and review the Government's off-payroll working IR35 reforms to ensure self-employed people are treated fairly.

- Expand the British Business Bank to perform a more central role in the economy, to ensure that viable small and medium-sized businesses have access to capital, and enable it to help 'crowd-in' private investment, in particular in zero-carbon products and technologies.
- Empower consumers and ensure that everyone can enjoy the benefits of new technology, by setting a UK-wide target for digital literacy and requiring all products to provide a short, clear version of their terms and conditions, setting out the key facts as they relate to individuals' data and privacy.
- Introduce a national financial inclusion strategy and require both the Financial Conduct Authority and the Prudential Regulation Authority to have regard to financial inclusion, such as protecting access to cash, especially in remote areas, supporting banking hubs, expanding access to bank accounts, delivering Sharia-compliant student finance and supporting vulnerable consumers.

## 4 Business and Jobs

We aim to make Britain one of the most attractive places in the world for businesses to invest. Only in partnership with responsible, sustainable businesses can we tackle the cost-of-living and climate crises, and create the wealth to invest in healthcare, education and other essential public services.

Private enterprise is the principal engine of growth and prosperity in the UK. We will support it by creating a stable business environment with smart regulation and investing in skills, infrastructure, research and innovation. In return, we expect businesses to commit to promote skills, equality and good governance, and to support their local communities.

The Conservative Government has failed businesses and workers. Growth is minimal, productivity is slipping, and constant U-turns have badly damaged business confidence.

The Conservatives' botched deal with Europe has done enormous damage to British businesses, putting up new barriers to trade and creating reams of red tape. The UK has less clout in trade negotiations, the US is not interested, and the new trade deals the Conservatives have signed will undercut high environmental standards and hurt our farmers.



The SNP Government has squandered any reputation for business acumen after the ferries fiasco and the sale of Scotland's prize seabed on the cheap. Their disastrous partnership with the anti-growth and anti-business Scottish Greens led to the botching of its deposit return scheme which would have taken Scottish drinks off Scottish shelves.

We will work in partnership with business to offer stability and ensure that we maximise the opportunities for investment, growth and employment across the country. We will make the UK a world leader in ethical, inclusive new technology, including artificial intelligence, and a global centre for the development, manufacture and export of clean technologies. And we will prioritise the depth and quality of trade deals, ensuring they deliver benefits for the whole country.

**We will:**

- **Develop an industrial strategy that will give businesses certainty and incentivise them to invest in new technologies to grow the economy, create good jobs and tackle the climate crisis.**
- **Unlock British businesses' global potential by bringing down trade barriers and building stronger future relationships with our closest trading partners, including by fixing our broken relationship with Europe as set out in chapter 22.**

- **Boost productivity and empower more people to enter the job market – such as parents, carers and disabled people – by making the most of technology and new ways of working.**
- **Introduce a general duty of care for the environment and human rights in business operations and supply chains.**

In addition, we will:

- Re-establish the Industrial Strategy Council and put it on a statutory footing, to ensure vital oversight, monitoring and evaluation of the industrial strategy for the long term.
- Support British industry to cut emissions while holding businesses to account for their role in tackling climate change, as set out in chapter 5.
- Support science, research and innovation, particularly among small businesses and startups, in universities and in zero-carbon, environmental and medical technologies, including by:
  - Continuing to participate in Horizon Europe and joining the European Innovation Council.

- Aiming for at least 3% of GDP to be invested in research and development by 2030, rising to 3.5% by 2034.
- Ensure the UK has the highest possible standards of environmental, health, labour and consumer protection, at least matching EU standards.
- Tackle the productivity crisis by encouraging businesses to invest in training, take up digital technologies and become more energy efficient, including through our industrial strategy.
- Work with the major banks to fund the creation of a local banking sector dedicated to meeting the needs of local small and medium-sized businesses.
- Power scale-up companies, especially outside of London and the South East, using innovative ways of 'crowding-in' private sector investment.
- Create a clear, workable and well-resourced cross-sectoral regulatory framework for artificial intelligence that:
  - Promotes innovation while creating certainty for AI users, developers and investors.
  - Establishes transparency and accountability for AI systems in the public sector.

- Ensures the use of personal data and AI is unbiased, transparent and accurate, and respects the privacy of innocent people.
- Negotiate the UK's participation in the Trade and Technology Council with the US and the EU, so we can play a leading role in global AI regulation, and work with international partners in agreeing common standards for AI risk and impact assessment, testing, monitoring and audit.
- Unlock British businesses' global potential, bring down trade barriers and use UK trade policy as a force for good by:
  - Giving Parliament real power in setting UK trade policy, by ensuring it is properly consulted on and signs off on negotiating mandates and any completed international trade agreements.
  - Ensuring that all information small and medium-sized enterprises need on trade is readily available from a single point of contact, with tailored support for those who need it.
  - Making it a clear objective of trade ministers to boost trade by small British businesses.
  - Placing human rights, labour and environmental standards and protection at the heart of international trade deals.

- Support our world-renowned whisky industry by reviewing the UK excise duty structure to better support whisky exports.
- Cut resource use, waste and pollution by accelerating the transition to a more circular economy that maximises the recovery, reuse, recycling and remanufacturing of products. This will cut costs for consumers and businesses, reduce exposure to volatile commodity prices, protect the environment and create new jobs and enterprises.
- Promote a public benefit company model for monopoly utility companies.
- Encourage employers to promote employee ownership by giving staff in listed companies with more than 250 employees a right to request shares, to be held in trust for the benefit of employees.
- Reform fiduciary duty and company purpose rules to ensure that all large companies have a formal statement of corporate purpose, including considerations such as employee welfare, environmental standards, community benefit and ethical practice, alongside benefit to shareholders, and that they report formally on the wider impact of the business on society and the environment.
- Extend the scope of the existing 'public interest' test when considering approvals for takeovers of large or strategically significant companies by overseas-based owners

to recognise the benefits to the UK economy, workers and consumers of protecting UK companies from speculative or short-term interests.

- Tackle the late payments crisis by requiring all government agencies and contractors and companies with more than 250 employees to sign up to the prompt payment code, making it enforceable.
- Invest in people's skills by:
  - Replacing the broken apprenticeship levy with a broader and more flexible skills and training levy.
  - Boosting the take-up of apprenticeships, including by guaranteeing they are paid at least the National Minimum Wage by scrapping the lower apprentice rate.
- Fix the work visa system and expand the Youth Mobility Scheme, as set out in chapter 18, to help address the labour shortages that are an outcome of the Conservatives' botched deal with Europe.
- Establish a powerful new Worker Protection Enforcement Authority unifying responsibilities currently spread across three agencies – including enforcing the minimum wage, tackling modern slavery and protecting agency workers.

- Establish an independent review to recommend a genuine living wage across all sectors, with government departments and all other public sector employers taking a leading role in paying it.
- Modernise employment rights to make them fit for the age of the 'gig economy', including by:
  - Establishing a new 'dependent contractor' employment status in between employment and self-employment, with entitlements to basic rights such as minimum earnings levels, sick pay and holiday entitlement.
  - Reviewing the tax and National Insurance status of employees, dependent contractors and freelancers to ensure fair and comparable treatment.
  - Setting a 20% higher minimum wage for people on zero-hour contracts at times of normal demand to compensate them for the uncertainty of fluctuating hours of work.
  - Giving a right to request a fixed-hours contract after 12 months for 'zero hours' and agency workers, not to be unreasonably refused.
  - Reviewing rules concerning pensions so that those in the gig economy don't lose out, and portability between roles is protected.

- Shifting the burden of proof in employment tribunals regarding employment status from individual to employer.
- Expand parental leave and pay, including making them day-one rights, as set out in chapter 9.
- Fix the broken Statutory Sick Pay system by:
  - Making it available to the more than one million workers earning less than £123 a week, most of whom are women.
  - Aligning the rate with the National Minimum Wage.
  - Making payments available from the first day of missing work rather than the fourth.
  - Supporting small employers with Statutory Sick Pay costs, consulting with them on the best way to do this.



## 5 Climate Change and Energy

Climate change is an existential threat. Soaring temperatures leading to wildfires, floods, droughts and rising sea levels are affecting millions of people directly, and billions more through falling food production and rising prices. Urgent action is needed – in the UK and around the world – to achieve net zero and avert catastrophe.

At the same time, sky-high energy bills are hurting families and businesses, fuelling the cost-of-living crisis. Russia's assault on Ukraine has reinforced the need to significantly reduce the UK's dependence on fossil fuels and invest in renewables – both to cut energy bills and to deliver energy security.

The Conservative Government has failed to act with anything close to the speed or ambition these challenges demand. The independent Climate Change Committee warns that the Government is not on track to meet its legally binding targets.

Liberal Democrats are committed to cutting greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2045 at the latest.

We will take the bold, urgent action needed to tackle climate change, cut energy bills and create hundreds of thousands of secure, well-paid new jobs. Together with innovative British businesses, we will make the UK the world leader in the clean technologies of the future. We will help households meet the cost of the transition to net zero and make sure everyone benefits from it, leaving no one behind.

## **We will:**

- Make homes warmer and cheaper to heat with a ten-year emergency upgrade programme, starting with free insulation and heat pumps for those on low incomes. The UK Government will work in partnership with the Scottish Government to provide resources.
- Drive a rooftop solar revolution by expanding incentives for households to install solar panels, including a guaranteed fair price for electricity sold back into the grid.
- Invest in renewable power so that 90% of the UK's electricity is generated from renewables by 2030.
- Appoint a Chief Secretary for Sustainability in the Treasury to ensure that the economy is sustainable, resource-efficient and zero-carbon, establish a new Net Zero Delivery Authority to coordinate action across government departments and work with devolved administrations, and hand more powers and resources to local councils for local net zero strategies.
- Establish national and local citizens' assemblies to give people real involvement in the decisions needed to tackle climate change.

- **Restore the UK's role as a global leader on climate change, by returning international development spending to 0.7% of national income, with tackling climate change a key priority for development spending.**

In addition, we will:

- Take the action needed now to achieve net zero by 2045, including:
  - Meeting the UK's commitment under the Paris Agreement to reduce emissions by at least 68% from 1990 levels by 2030.
  - Requiring the National Infrastructure Commission to take fully into account the environmental implications of all national infrastructure decisions.
  - Putting tackling climate change at the heart of a new industrial strategy, as set out in chapter 4.
  - Ensuring that nature-based solutions, including tree planting, form a critical part of the UK's strategy to tackle climate change, as set out in chapter 12.
  - Putting our farming and food system on an environmentally sustainable footing, as set out in chapter 13.

- Making it cheaper and easier to switch to electric vehicles, restoring the requirement that every new car and small van sold from 2030 is zero-emission, electrifying Britain's railways, and reducing the climate impact of flying, as set out in chapter 16.
- Coordinating action across the UK by creating a Joint Climate Council of the Nations, as set out in chapter 20.
- Cut energy bills and emissions, and end fuel poverty, by:
  - Launching an emergency Home Energy Upgrade programme, with free insulation and heat pumps for low-income households. The UK Government will work in partnership with the Scottish Government to provide resources.
  - Introducing a social tariff for the most vulnerable to provide targeted energy discounts for vulnerable households.
  - Helping people with the cost of living and their energy bills by implementing a proper, one-off windfall tax on the super-profits of oil and gas producers and traders.
  - Decoupling electricity prices from the wholesale gas price.
  - Eliminating unfair regional differences in domestic energy bills.

- Accelerate the deployment of renewable power and deliver energy security by:
  - Removing the Conservatives' unnecessary restrictions on new solar and wind power, and supporting investment and innovation in tidal and wave power in particular.
  - Maintaining the ban on fracking and introducing a ban on new coal mines.
  - Building the grid infrastructure as required.
  - Implementing the UK's G7 pledge to end fossil fuel subsidies, while ensuring a just transition that values the skills and experience of people working in the oil and gas industry and provides good opportunities for them, and takes special care of the regions and communities most affected.
  - Investing in energy storage, including green hydrogen, pumped storage and battery capability.
  - Working together with our European neighbours to build a sustainable supply chain for renewable energy technology.

- Building more electricity interconnectors between the UK and other countries to guarantee security of supply, located carefully to avoid disruption to local communities and minimise environmental damage.
- Support the expansion of community and decentralised energy, including:
  - Empowering local authorities to develop local renewable electricity generation and storage strategies.
  - Giving small low-carbon generators the right to export their electricity to an existing electricity supplier on fair terms.
  - Requiring large energy suppliers to work with community schemes to sell the power they generate to local customers.
  - Reducing access costs for grid connections.
  - Reforming the energy network to permit local energy grids.
  - Guaranteeing that community benefit funds receive a fair share of the wealth generated by local renewables infrastructure.
- Restore the UK's role as a global leader on climate change by:

- Restoring international development spending to 0.7% of national income, with tackling climate change a key priority for development spending.
- Showing leadership on the Paris Agreement by meeting the UK's Nationally Determined Contribution and arguing for greater global ambition.
- Working together with our European neighbours to tackle the climate emergency, including by associating the UK Emissions Trading System with the EU ETS.
- Continuing the UK's support for the UN Loss and Damage Fund for countries particularly vulnerable to the impact of climate change, to ensure a just transition for all.
- Pressing for all OECD countries to agree to end subsidies for foreign fossil fuel projects.
- Hold businesses to account for their role in tackling climate change by:
  - Introducing a general duty of care for the environment, as set out in chapter 4.
  - Requiring all large companies listed on UK stock exchanges to set targets consistent with achieving the net zero goal, and to report on their progress.

- Regulating financial services to encourage climate-friendly investments, including requiring pension funds and managers to show that their portfolio investments are consistent with the Paris Agreement, and creating new powers for regulators to act if banks and other investors are not managing climate risks properly.
- Support British industry to cut emissions by:
  - Setting out a clear and stable roadmap to net zero, repairing the damage done by Conservative U-turns and giving businesses the confidence to invest.
  - Expanding the market for climate-friendly products and services with steadily higher criteria in public procurement policy.
  - Implementing the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism for high-emission products, protecting UK businesses from unfair competition.
  - Reducing emissions from industrial processes by supporting carbon capture and storage and new low-carbon processes for cement and steel production.
  - Providing more advice to companies on cutting emissions, supporting the development of regional industrial clusters for zero-carbon innovation and increasing the Industrial Energy Transformation Fund, benefitting the Scottish Government's scheme.



## 6 Health

Good health gives people the freedom to live their lives as they choose. A thriving economy needs a healthy population. Universal high-quality healthcare, free at the point of use and accessible wherever and whenever it's needed, is therefore essential for both individual freedom and national prosperity.

Our NHS used to be the envy of the world. But now, too many people can't access the care they need. The SNP have plunged the NHS into crisis – as have the Conservatives in England and Labour in Wales. With thousands of staff vacancies, a crisis in staff retention, long waiting times, missed targets and poor outcomes, patient safety is being pushed into the danger zone.

Getting an appointment with a GP can take weeks and seeing an NHS dentist is almost impossible. People are no longer confident that when they ring 999 an ambulance will turn up in time. Across the UK, millions are waiting for treatment, unable to work. The frontline workers who were rightly applauded are now overworked and burnt out.

Liberal Democrats believe that people should be in control of their own lives and health and that means everyone should get the care they need, when they need it, where they need it. Instead of just spending money firefighting crisis after crisis, we will invest now to save taxpayers' money in the long-run. We will fix crumbling hospitals, recruit and retain a workforce for the future, invest in technology that

improves outcomes and saves money, and restore the UK as a world leader in health research.

Our plan will tackle the crisis at both the front door and the back door to the NHS: investing in public health and early access to community services, including GPs and dentists, so fewer people need to go to hospital in the first place, and fixing the crisis in social care to stop so many people being stuck in hospital beds. Liberal Democrats understand that we need to fix social care to save our NHS.

**Our priorities are to:**

- **Give everyone fast access to GPs and a wider range of skilled staff locally, including in mental health and physiotherapy.**
- **Ensure everyone can register with and see an NHS dentist, ending DIY dentistry and 'dental deserts'.**
- **Deliver the world class mental health services Scotland needs, improving early access, funded by taxing the social media giants who cause so much of the problem.**

- **Boost cancer survival rates by backing research into the cancers with the lowest survival rates and halving the time for new treatments to reach patients.**
- **Treat Scotland's drug deaths crisis as the public health emergency it so clearly is, and devolving powers for tailored solutions where necessary.**

In addition, we will:

- Support changes that would enable everyone to get fast access to a GP, by:
  - Demanding the overhaul of the SNP's failed NHS Recovery Plan.
  - Backing measures that would lessen the workload on GPs by putting a wider range of specialists into local teams, including in mental health and physiotherapy.
  - Freeing up GPs' time by encouraging the extension of prescribing rights and public health advisory services to additional qualified health professionals.
- Prioritise access to an NHS dentist and improving toothcare for everyone by:
  - Demanding the overhaul of the SNP's failed NHS Recovery Plan so that it brings dentists back to the NHS from the private sector, examines the role of dental therapists, establishes high quality workforce planning and training forecasts, and

looks at emergency schemes to ensure those in vulnerable groups can get the appointments they need.

- Cutting the red tape that is constraining qualified dentists from overseas working in Scotland's NHS.
- Taking action to prevent tooth decay by scrapping VAT on children's toothbrushes and toothpaste.
- Establish the world class mental health services Scotland needs, funded by taxing the social media giants who cause so much of the problem. This could help deliver the Scottish Liberal Democrats' blueprint to cut mental health waiting times through:
  - Increasing access to clinically effective talking therapies.
  - Boosting the number of training places for psychiatrists and clinical psychologists, especially those specialising in CAMHS.
  - A new target for the rollout of counsellors to ensure access in all schools and at every stage of education, as set out in chapter 8.
  - A new target for additional mental health professionals working alongside GPs, in A&Es, with the police and prison staff.

- The incorporation of counsellors into NHS workforce planning so their skills can help more people.
- Supporting businesses and public services that are losing hundreds of thousands of working days to mental ill health through the ramping up of training, so that every workplace can be offered the benefit of a mental health first aider.
- A single point of contact for those on waiting lists so people only need tell their story once.
- Increasing capacity and coordination between services, so that no one is treated far from home, including through the creation of new dedicated mental health beds for children and young people north of Dundee, and beds for new mothers north of Livingston, ending the scandal of long journeys for treatment and people being separated from their support networks.
- Taking an evidence-led approach to preventing and treating eating disorders, and challenging damaging stigma about weight.
- Transforming perinatal mental health support for those who are pregnant, new mothers and those who have experienced miscarriage or stillbirth.
- Cutting suicide rates with a focus on community suicide prevention services.

- Recognising the relationship between mental health and debt, and providing better signposting between talking therapies and debt advice.
- Ending inappropriate and costly inpatient placements for people with learning disabilities and autism.
- A fresh ambition to reduce waiting times in the long-term, recognising that the current standard of 18 weeks is too long to wait for mental health treatment to begin.
- Boost cancer survival rates by:
  - Passing a Cancer Survival Research Act requiring the UK Government to coordinate and ensure funding for research into the cancers with the lowest survival rates.
  - Halving the time for new treatments to reach patients by expanding the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency's capacity.
- Help people spend more years of their life in good health by:
  - Working on a four nations basis to halt the dangerous use of vapes by children while recognising their role in smoking cessation for adults, and banning the sale of single-use vapes.

- Supporting the expansion of social prescribing and investment in community projects that bring people together to combat loneliness.
- Introducing a new kitemark for health apps and digital tools that are clinically proven to help people lead healthier lives.
- Introducing a new levy on tobacco company profits to help fund healthcare and smoking cessation services.
- Protecting children from exposure to junk food by supporting local authorities to restrict outdoor advertising and restricting TV advertising to post-watershed.
- Extending the soft drinks levy to juice-based and milk-based drinks that are high in added sugar.
- Tackling air pollution with a Clean Air Act, as set out in chapter 12.
- Train, recruit and retain the doctors, nurses and other NHS staff we need, including by:
  - Proposing the creation of a Health and Social Care Staff Assembly to put the experience and expertise of those who know their services best at the heart of the Scottish Government's response to the crises in health and social care.

- Pressing for a new Staff Burnout Prevention Strategy.
- Making flexible working a day-one right and expanding access to flexible, affordable childcare, as set out in chapters 4 and 9.
- Fixing the work visa system and exempting NHS and care staff from the Immigration Skills Charge, as set out in chapter 18.
- Ending the false economy of spending money on agency workers and encouraging the use of flexible staff banks.
- Persuade the Scottish Government to take long Covid seriously by:
  - Expanding its response to a scale that fully reflects how the condition is having a lasting impact on public health and the wellbeing, activity and work of tens of thousands of people.
  - Establishing dedicated care pathways, specialist clinics and in-home support for sufferers.
- Provide the Scottish Government with funding to help enable it to implement a ten-year plan to invest in hospitals and the primary care estate to end the scandal of crumbling roofs, dangerous concrete and life-expired buildings.



- Implement the recommendations of the Infected Blood Inquiry in full, including delivering full and fair compensation to all victims of the scandal in a timely and transparent manner.
- Enable patients to leave hospital when they no longer need to be there by investing in social care and community care, as set out in chapter 7, helping tackle delayed discharges, degrading corridor care and excessive handover delays for ambulances.
- Improve faster access to new and novel medicines and medical devices by seeking a comprehensive mutual recognition agreement with the European Medicines Agency.
- Combat the harms caused by drugs by:
  - Moving the departmental lead on drugs policy from the Home Office to the Department of Health and Social Care.
  - Protecting young people, tackling the criminal gangs and taking 'skunk' off the streets by introducing a legal, regulated market for cannabis. Sales will be restricted to over-18s only, from licensed retailers with strict limits on potency and THC content.
  - Treating Scotland's drug deaths crisis as a public health emergency, and devolving powers for tailored solutions where necessary.

## 7 Care

Everyone deserves high-quality care when they need it. Liberal Democrats want everyone to be able to live independently and with dignity, and receive any care they need in their own home wherever possible.

Carers – paid and unpaid, young and old – do a remarkable and important job. They deserve far more support, but are too often forgotten and ignored.

But social care services in this country are in crisis. Thousands of people are waiting for care. Many are stranded in hospital beds because the care isn't in place for them to leave, putting even more strain on the NHS.

The SNP promised to eradicate delayed discharges, deliver fair work for staff, and that ministers would retain their WhatsApp messages for the public inquiries into their handling of the pandemic and the tragedy of Scotland's care homes. They have broken all these promises.

We will empower care users, and support care workers and the millions of unpaid carers looking after loved ones. We will invest to save, recognising that providing care reduces demand on more expensive NHS services.

**We will:**

- **Introduce a higher Carer's Minimum Wage.**
- **Give unpaid carers a fair deal so they get the support they so desperately need, including paid carer's leave.**
- **Provide the Scottish Government with funding it can use to deliver an uplift to Carer Support Payment in Scotland, equivalent to the improvements that will be made to Carer's Allowance by the Liberal Democrats in the rest of the UK.**
- **Oppose the Scottish Government's billion-pound ministerial takeover of social care that would strip away local powers, and advocate for it to spend this money on staff, frontline services and raising care standards for care users.**

In addition, we will:

- Demand truly personalised care that empowers individuals by:
  - Opposing the Scottish Government's centralisation of social care that would strip away local powers, and advocate for it to instead spend the money on staff, frontline services and raising care standards for care users.
  - Calling for the Scottish Government to implement a new human rights-focused approach to social care to be provided through integrated and accountable local services, championing preventative approaches, and giving all care users national

standards and entitlements accompanied by effective complaint resolution for when they are not met.

- Give unpaid carers a fair deal by:
  - Increasing Carer's Allowance and expanding eligibility for it, as set out in chapter 10, and providing the Scottish Government with money to deliver an equivalent uplift and improvement to Carer Support Payment in Scotland.
  - Introducing paid carer's leave, building on the entitlement to unpaid leave secured by the Liberal Democrats.
  - Making caring a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010 and requiring employers to make reasonable adjustments to enable employees with caring responsibilities to provide that care.
- Make careers in social care more attractive and value experienced staff to improve retention by:
  - Creating a new Carer's Minimum Wage, boosting the minimum wage for care workers by £2 an hour, as a starting point for improved pay across the sector.

- Calling on the Scottish Government to back this up with clear career pathways, enhanced representation for this skilled workforce, and an end to the undervaluing of skills in the sector.
- Make care experience a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010 to strengthen the rights of people who are in or have been in care.

## 8 Education

Liberal Democrats believe that education is the best investment we can make in our children's potential and our country's future.

Scotland used to have one of the best education systems in the world, but under the SNP it is now just average. We have tumbled down the international education rankings. It is time to give Scottish education the support and resources needed.

We will invest in education, starting in the crucial early years and continuing throughout adulthood. We want every child to get the support and attention they need at school, so they leave with the skills, confidence and resilience to be happy and successful – whatever they choose to do next.

**We will encourage the Scottish Government to:**

- **Guarantee access to dedicated, qualified mental health professionals across every primary and secondary school, making sure all children and parents have someone they can turn to for help, funded by increasing the Digital Services Tax on social media firms and other tech giants.**
- **Boost in-class support in every school by inflation-proofing Pupil Equity Funding and ensuring teachers are given proper stable contracts instead of**

**short-term and zero hours work.**

- **End the scandal of crumbling school, college and university buildings by investing in new buildings and tackling the backlog of repairs.**
- **Invest in high-quality early years education and close the attainment gap by supporting the introduction of a new Nursery Premium to provide extra support to children from a deprived background.**

In addition, using Scotland's share of the extra resources that come from the Liberal Democrats' plans, we will encourage the Scottish Government to:

- Tackle the crisis in teacher recruitment and retention and lift up Scottish education by:
  - Strengthening Pupil Equity funding, giving schools confidence to recruit more staff for the long-term.
  - Prioritising the building of top-class leadership in our schools, developing support networks and career opportunities for teachers and pupil support assistants, encouraging specialist additional support needs training and addressing hard-to-fill teaching posts through three-year packages for probationer teachers for specific areas.

- Helping teachers share learning resources between schools to alleviate workloads.
- Putting people with recent teaching experience at the heart of real replacements for the SQA and Education Scotland.
- Creating a more attractive career path for STEM graduates within teaching by bringing back principal teachers for these subjects.
- Establishing a guaranteed minimum level of support staff.
- Holding the SNP Government to account for the promises it has made, including increasing the numbers of teachers and classroom assistants by 3,500 and reducing class-contact time by 90 minutes per week.
- Make sure that young people with additional support needs get the support they require by recruiting more expert staff, including specialist behavioural support and educational psychologists.
- Improve the quality of vocational education, including skills for entrepreneurship and self-employment.
- Strengthen careers advice and links with employers in schools and colleges.



- Introduce a Service Pupil Premium so that armed forces families in Scotland get the same benefit as those in England, as part of the commitment to delivering the Armed Forces Covenant.
- Expand provision of extracurricular activities, such as sport, music, drama, debating and coding, starting by piloting a new free entitlement for disadvantaged children.

In addition we will:

- Review further education funding, including the option of exempting colleges from VAT.
- Safeguard the future of our world-leading universities by:
  - Supporting science, research and innovation in universities, including continuing to participate in Horizon Europe and joining the European Innovation Council, as set out in chapter 4.
  - Enabling Scottish universities to continue to punch above their weight in research, valuing public investment and creating the conditions for them to successfully compete for UK-wide research funding.
  - Returning to the Erasmus Plus programme as an associated country, as set out in chapter 9.

- Reporting international student flows separately to estimates of long-term migration.
- Encouraging the Scottish Government to produce a plan to protect Scottish universities against global shocks and the exposure that arises from the reliance upon the fees of international students.

## 9 Families, Children and Young People

Every child deserves the best possible start in life and the opportunity to flourish, no matter their background or personal circumstances. Protecting their rights and wellbeing as children and ensuring they are properly nourished are top priorities.

Families come in all shapes and sizes, and parents should have the support and flexibility to juggle work with parenting as they see fit.

Flexible, affordable childcare and early years education is a critical part of our economic infrastructure and helps close the attainment gap between rich and poor. It gives parents more choice over how to organise their lives and helps them return to work if they want to. Lack of access to affordable childcare is a key driver of the gender pay gap.

But affordable childcare is only part of the picture. We will also overhaul parental leave to give parents a genuine choice over how to manage things in the first months of their child's life.

### **We will:**

- **Give parents genuine flexibility and choice in the crucial early months by doubling Statutory Maternity and Shared Parental Pay to £350 a week and**

**introducing an extra use-it-or-lose-it month for fathers and partners, paid at 90% of earnings.**

- **Make all parental pay and leave day-one rights, and extend them to self-employed parents.**
- **Ensure all parents can access early learning and childcare that is flexible, affordable and fair.**
- **Expand opportunities for young people to study, teach and volunteer abroad by returning to the Erasmus Plus programme as an associated country.**

In addition, we will:

- Protect and support the rights and wellbeing of every child by:
  - Incorporating the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child into UK law.
  - Setting up an independent advocacy body for children's safety online.
  - Addressing the underfunding and neglect of children's mental health services, youth services and youth justice services.

- Supporting the creation of a protocol to guarantee bereaved children and young people know how they can access support services, and relevant professionals have the training they need.
- Tackling child poverty, as set out in chapter 10.
- Giving 16- and 17-year-olds the right to vote in UK general elections, as set out in chapter 20.
- Ensure that all parents can access early learning and childcare (ELC) that is flexible, affordable and fair. We will encourage the Scottish Government to deliver this in Scotland by:
  - Introducing fairer rates for private, voluntary and independent providers for funded hours to cover the actual costs of delivering high-quality early learning and childcare.
  - Restoring childminding as a valued part of the ELC system
  - Urgently increasing take-up of funded ELC among eligible two-year-olds.
  - Supporting the extension of funded entitlements so that more 2-year-olds get the benefit, preparing for an extension to one-year olds, and ensuring all families have the holiday options and wraparound provision they require.

- Making a long-term commitment to funding childcare to improve career progression and give greater certainty to the workforce.
- Give parents genuine flexibility and choice in the crucial early months by:
  - Making all parental pay and leave day-one rights, including for adoptive parents and kinship carers, and extending them to self-employed parents.
  - Doubling Statutory Maternity and Shared Parental Pay to £350 a week.
  - Increasing pay for paternity leave to 90% of earnings, with a cap for high earners.
  - Introducing an extra use-it-or-lose-it month for fathers and partners, paid at 90% of earnings, with a cap for high earners.
  - Requiring large employers to publish their parental leave and pay policies.
  - Introducing a 'Toddler Top-Up': an enhanced rate of Child Benefit for one-year-olds.
- In the longer term, when the public finances allow, our ambition is to give all families (including self-employed parents, adoptive parents and kinship carers):
  - Six weeks of use-it-or-lose-it leave for each parent, paid at 90% of earnings.

- 46 weeks of parental leave to share between themselves as they choose, paid at double the current statutory rate.
- Introduce paid neonatal care leave.
- Fully review and reform the Child Maintenance Service to ensure it works for all children and parents, including removing the Collect and Pay charge for receiving parents and ensuring that payments cannot be used as a form of coercive control over domestic abuse survivors.

## 10 Pensions and Safety Net

The cost-of-living crisis has caused huge financial hardship across the country and restricted the life chances of millions. The Government response has been a series of patchy and short-term fixes.

Liberal Democrats believe that no one should fear for their future, struggle to put food on the table, or worry about heating their home.

Our aim is to make the UK the best place in the world to work, raise children and enjoy retirement by ensuring that proper support is in place for those who need it.

### **We will:**

- **Tackle child poverty by removing the two-child limit and the benefit cap.**
- **Set a target of ending deep poverty within a decade, and establish an independent commission to recommend further annual increases in Universal Credit to ensure that support covers life's essentials, such as food and bills.**
- **Support pensioners by protecting the triple lock so that pensions always rise in line with inflation, wages or 2.5% – whichever is highest.**



- **Ensure that women born in the 1950s are finally treated fairly and properly compensated.**
- **Provide the Scottish Government with funding it can use to deliver an uplift to Carer Support Payment in Scotland, equivalent to the improvements that will be made to Carer's Allowance by the Liberal Democrats in the rest of the UK, as set out in Chapter 7, and stop pursuing carers for old overpayments of Carer's Allowance.**

In addition, we will:

- Repair the broken benefits safety net by:
  - Reducing the wait for the first payment of Universal Credit from five weeks to five days.
  - Scrapping the bedroom tax.
  - Replacing the sanctions regime with an incentive-based scheme to help people into work.
  - Ending the young parent penalty for under-25s by restoring the full rate of Universal Credit for all parents regardless of age.

- Provide funding to the Scottish Government so that carers in Scotland can get the same benefits as those elsewhere in the UK, where Liberal Democrats will increase Carer's Allowance and expand eligibility for it by:
  - Raising the amount carers can earn and introducing an earnings taper to end the unfair cliff-edge.
  - Reducing the number of hours' care per week required.
  - Extending it to carers in full-time education.
- Reverse the Conservatives' cut to support payments for parents whose partners have died.
- Make the benefits system work better for disabled people by:
  - Giving disabled people and organisations representing them a stronger voice in the design of benefits policies and processes.
  - Bringing Work Capability Assessments in-house.
- Give everyone the chance to enjoy a decent retirement by:

- Developing measures to end the gender pension gap in private pensions and ensure working-age carers can save properly for retirement.
- Improving the State Pension system by investing in helplines to ensure quicker responses to queries and resolution of underpayments.
- Ending the scandal of lost top-up payments by overhauling the processing system and providing proper receipts.
- Fix the broken Statutory Sick Pay system, as set out in chapter 4.
- Require pension funds and managers to show that their portfolio investments are consistent with the Paris Agreement, as set out in chapter 5.
- Ensure that military compensation for illness or injury does not count towards means testing for benefits, as set out in chapter 21.

# 11 Crime and Policing

Everyone deserves to feel safe in their own homes and communities. But for too many people in the UK, that's simply not the reality today.

Liberal Democrats will prevent crime and build communities where people can truly feel safe. We will:

- Properly resource the National Crime Agency to combat serious and organised crime.
- Improve the police and prison service's response to mental ill-health through our plans to transform mental health services, as set out in chapter 6.
- Combat the rise of fraud and scams by:
  - Naming and shaming the banks with the worst records on preventing fraud and reimbursing victims.
  - Requiring banks to reimburse victims of automated push payment scams unless there is clear evidence that they are at fault.

- Improve cooperation with our European neighbours on tackling cross-border crime, such as human trafficking, the illegal drug trade, cybercrime and terrorism, including by:
  - Working with Europol and Eurojust to develop and implement a joint strategy for dealing with cross-border threats, with the closest possible cooperation on shared priorities.
  - Restoring direct, real-time access for UK police to EU-wide data sharing systems to identify and arrest traffickers, terrorists and other international criminals.
- Tackle modern slavery and human trafficking by:
  - Reversing the Conservatives' rollbacks of modern slavery protections.
  - Establishing a powerful new Worker Protection Enforcement Authority to protect people in precarious work, with proactive intelligence-led enforcement of labour market standards and a firewall with immigration enforcement.
- Introduce new laws to crack down on puppy and kitten smuggling.

## 12 Natural Environment

Protecting our precious natural environment lies at the heart of the Liberal Democrat approach. Everyone should be able to enjoy open green spaces, clean blue rivers and the beauty of Britain's coast.

The UK is facing a nature crisis. One in six species are threatened with extinction from Britain. Air pollution claims tens of thousands of lives every year, and costs the NHS billions. The Government's own Office for Environmental Protection has rebuked the Conservatives for falling "far short" of the action needed. The Conservatives are using Brexit as an opportunity to erode previously high environmental standards.

Nowhere is the SNP's lack of care for the environment clearer than the national sewage scandal. They are letting bosses at the government-owned water company take bumper bonuses while dumping millions of litres of sewage into our rivers, lochs and coastal areas. Scotland is lagging far behind England on monitoring the network, hiding the true scale of the problem.

Liberal Democrats have a bold plan to restore the UK's natural environment, and give everyone access to a clean and healthy natural world.

**We will:**

- **End the sewage scandal in the rest of the UK, sharing learning, and embarrassing the SNP Government into finally taking this seriously instead of being spin doctors for outdated sewage standards.**
- **Plant at least 60 million trees a year, helping to restore woodland habitats, increase the use of sustainable wood in construction, and reach net zero. We will work in partnership with the Scottish Government to achieve this and ensure the right tree is planted in the right place.**
- **Pass a Clean Air Act, underpinning the requirement that every new car and small van sold from 2030 is zero emission, as set out in chapter 16.**
- **Ensure that nature-based solutions form a critical part of the UK's strategy to tackle climate change and work with international partners to fight deforestation around the world.**

In addition, we will:

- Capitalise on the momentum to tackle sewage dumping across the UK, led by the Liberal Democrats, by calling for a Clean Water Act in Scotland to update the sewage network, monitor every sewage dump and publish binding reduction targets, introduce a blue flag system for our rivers, and introduce a complete ban on the release of sewage in protected areas such as bathing waters.

- Ensure everyone has access to a healthy natural environment, regardless of where they live, by:
  - Passing a new Environmental Rights Act, recognising everyone's human right to a healthy environment and guaranteeing access to environmental justice.
  - Making sure that the UK has the highest environmental standards in the world.
  - Working together with our European neighbours to tackle the nature crisis, including applying to join the European Environment Agency.
- Hold businesses to account for their responsibility to the environment by:
  - Introducing a general duty of care for the environment, as set out in chapter 4.
  - Requiring large businesses to publish transition plans to become nature-positive across their activities and supply chains.
  - Introducing nature-related financial disclosure requirements for large businesses.
- Create a nature-positive economy, tackle plastic pollution and waste, and get Britain recycling by:



- Introducing a deposit return scheme for food and drink bottles and containers, working with the devolved administrations to ensure consistency across the UK, learning the lessons from the difficulties with the Scottish scheme.
- Aiming for the complete elimination of non-recyclable single-use plastics within three years and replacing them with affordable alternatives.
- Working to protect 30% of the world's oceans by 2030 through the UN High Seas Treaty and finalising a Global Plastics Treaty to cut plastic pollution worldwide.
- Setting an ambition of ending plastic waste exports by 2030.

## 13 Food and Farming

The UK's food system is failing to serve the interests of citizens, whether they are farmers or consumers.

Too many families simply can't afford enough healthy, nutritious food. Ultra-processed foods, high in saturated fat, sugar and salt, are usually much cheaper than healthier foods – contributing to serious health problems, especially among poorer households.

Farmers are key allies in tackling climate change and the nature crisis, caring for and restoring the countryside while producing high-quality food for our tables. But they have had to contend with increases in bills for energy, fertilisers and feed. It is hardly surprising we have seen food shortages in the supermarkets.

The Conservatives' botched deal with the EU is also contributing to food shortages and high food prices, and severely damaging farmers' and fishers' ability to export to their main markets in Europe. New trade deals undermine animal welfare and environmental protection, undercutting responsible British farmers and setting a dangerous precedent for future deals.

Liberal Democrats will stand up for British farmers and fishers and ensure everyone can get affordable, healthy and nutritious food, produced to high welfare and environmental standards.

**We will:**

- **Introduce a holistic and comprehensive National Food Strategy to ensure food security, tackle rising food prices, end food poverty and improve health and nutrition.**
- **Deliver an extra £1 billion a year to support profitable, sustainable and nature-friendly farming across the UK, with money going to the Scottish Government to increase budgets.**
- **Maintain high health, environmental and animal welfare standards in food production and guarantee that all future trade deals will meet them too, ensuring that Britain's farmers and food manufacturers are not put at an unfair disadvantage.**
- **Give Britain's farmers the ability to trade with our European neighbours with minimal need for checks by negotiating comprehensive veterinary and plant health agreements.**

In addition, we will:

- Provide the Scottish Government with a fair share of an extra £1 billion a year to support farming across the UK, enabling the enhancement of Scotland's agricultural support framework.
- Ensure the UK Government works in partnership with the Scottish Government to provide the extra resources for agriculture. We would encourage it to adopt the principles that this will support active farming, promote environmental sustainability and restore biodiversity, support profit and employment, enhance critical mass in the supply chain and associated industries to increase the processing of food within Scotland and reduce food miles, and fully support the vibrancy of rural and remote communities.
- Give farmers and fishers a fair deal by:
  - Using public procurement policy to support the consumption of food produced to high standards of environmental and social sustainability, and which is nutritious, healthy and locally and seasonally sourced.
  - Renegotiating the Australia and New Zealand trade agreements in line with our objectives for health, environmental and animal welfare standards, withdrawing from them if that cannot be achieved.
  - Ensuring that sustainability lies at the heart of fisheries policy, rebuilding depleted fish stocks to achieve their former abundance. Fishers, scientists and

conservationists should all be at the centre of a decentralised and regionalised fisheries management system.

- Opposing any repeat of the top-down Highly Protected Marine Areas proposals, instead ensuring that government always works in close partnership with the coastal, island and fishing communities who know their area best.
- Making sure immigration policy is sensitive to the skills needs of the agricultural, catching and processing sectors, as set out in chapter 18.
- Strengthen the Groceries Code Adjudicator to protect consumers from unfair price rises and support producers.
- Give consumers confidence in the food they eat by ensuring all imported food meets UK standards for health and welfare, and that goods are properly checked.
- Ensure Britain continues to be a world leader in animal welfare and standards by:
  - Ensuring that no animal product that would be illegal to produce in the UK can be sold here, including foie gras and food produced with antibiotic growth promoters.

- At least matching the EU's stricter rules on preventative use of antibiotics, and introducing a comprehensive plan to tackle antimicrobial resistance in farm animals, working in collaboration with the Scottish Government.
- Developing safe, effective, humane, and evidence-based ways of controlling bovine tuberculosis, including by investing to produce workable vaccines, helping protect Scotland's officially TB-free status in the process.

## 14 Housing

Liberal Democrats know that a home is a necessity and the base on which people build their lives. So we will ensure that everyone can access housing that meets their needs.

Yet, in Britain today, many people cannot afford to buy or rent a home of good quality where they live. Too many people live in housing so poor it damages their health.

There is a housing emergency in Scotland. Homelessness now sits at record levels and there are 10,000 children living in temporary accommodation. Affordable housebuilding has collapsed, and the cost of living crisis has meant that rents and mortgages are becoming difficult for many people to afford.

Over the last few years, the housing sector has faced a number of challenges including skills shortages, Brexit, inflation and the Scottish Government's decision to make deep cuts to the housing budget.

Liberal Democrats are committed to tackling these housing failures head-on by:

- **Working with business and the communities we serve to develop a new National Housing Plan for Scotland that can stand up to the housing emergency, get more homes built and give people a home to call their own.**

- Increasing building of new homes to 380,000 a year across the UK, including 150,000 social homes a year, working in partnership with the Scottish Government and through meaningful community engagement to achieve this.
- Seeing social renting re-established as a long-term option and thousands of long-term empty homes brought back into use.
- Fostering stability, certainty and confidence by managing the public finances responsibly, as set out in chapter 3.
- Putting the construction sector on a sustainable footing by investing in skills, training and new technologies such as modern methods of construction.
- Making homes warmer and cheaper to heat with a ten-year emergency upgrade programme, as set out in chapter 5.
- Removing dangerous cladding from all buildings.
- Exempting groups of homeless people, and those at risk of homelessness, from the Shared Accommodation Rate.
- Encouraging the Scottish Government to work with business and local authorities to develop a new programme for key worker housing, helping to



alleviate local shortages of vital skills such as qualified carers, nurses and teachers.

# 15 Communities and Local Government

People want to live in flourishing communities. No community can flourish without powers and resources.

Liberal Democrats are committed to allowing communities to take the action they need to improve their areas. We believe, for example, that given sufficient powers and resources local authorities can play a major role in combating the climate and nature emergencies, whether by insulating homes or improving air quality.

Yet this Scottish Government is robbing local communities of their powers and their resources. The SNP have forced councils to do more and more with less and less, plunging many into financial crisis. In rural areas, the lack of public transport, the ferries fiasco, the housing emergency and poor broadband connectivity are undermining the viability of our communities.

## **We will:**

- **Oppose the SNP Government's centralisation agenda, instead championing a power surge for local authorities in Scotland.**
- **Work in partnership with the Scottish Government to urgently establish a new fund aimed at helping public authorities deal with the dangerous concrete**

crisis, recognising that the choices of SNP ministers have left them without the resources they need to make their buildings safe.

- Ensure local authorities have the powers and resources they need to tackle the climate and nature emergencies.
- Work in partnership with the Scottish Government to ensure that gigabit broadband is available to every home and business, including in rural and remote communities, and support local bespoke solutions so that no property is left out.
- Encourage the Scottish Government to work in partnership with local authorities, communities and the UK Government to progress investigations and studies into fixed links, such as tunnels and bridges, between island communities to improve connectivity and resilience, while ensuring investment continues in lifeline ferry services in the meantime.
- Encourage post offices to become community banking and government hubs, and keep DVLA services available at post office counters.
- Help motorists in rural areas who face higher fuel costs by expanding Rural Fuel Duty Relief.

- Work with communities to tackle the alarming rise of antisemitism and Islamophobia.

## 16 Transport

Everyone should have convenient, affordable options to get around – whether to get to work or the shops, to go to school or hospital, to visit friends and families or to access other services. A safe, reliable transport system is vital for economic prosperity in all parts of the country. And improving transport is essential to combat climate change and air pollution.

Conservative Ministers have badly neglected our transport infrastructure. Their chaotic U-turns have seriously undermined the rail industry, electric vehicle manufacturing and regional development.

The SNP Government has failed to rollout electric charging points at anything like the speed necessary, and they have left local bus routes in rapid decline. Their ferries fiasco has left islanders without the lifeline services they need. Roads are in a terrible state, with potholes everywhere and the dualling of trunk roads miles behind schedule.

By investing in electric vehicles and clean public transport, as well as encouraging walking and cycling, Liberal Democrats will enhance local, regional and national connectivity while boosting the economy, protecting the environment and improving public health.

**We will:**

- **Make it cheaper and easier for drivers to switch to electric vehicles by rapidly rolling out far more charging points, reintroducing the plug-in car grant, and restoring the requirement that every new car and small van sold from 2030 is zero-emission.**
- **Significantly extend the electrification of Britain's rail network, improve stations, greatly improve disabled access, reopen smaller stations and seek to connect more communities.**
- **Invest in research and development to make the UK the world leader in zero-carbon flight, and take steps to reduce demand for flying.**

In addition, we will:

- Make it easy and cheap to charge electric vehicles by:
  - Rolling out far more charging points, including residential on-street points and ultra-fast chargers at service stations.
  - Supporting new charging points with an upgraded National Grid and a step-change in local grid capacity.
  - Cutting VAT on public charging to 5%.

- Requiring all charging points to be accessible with a bank card.
- Protect motorists from rip-offs, including unfair insurance and petrol prices.
- Make rail a genuinely convenient, affordable and environmentally-friendly option for both passengers and freight by:
  - Urgently establishing a new Railway Agency: a public body which would help to join up the industry – from track to train – putting customers first, holding train companies to account, and bringing in wholesale reform of the broken fare system, working with the devolved administrations at each stage and respecting their responsibilities.
  - Being far more proactive in sanctioning and ultimately sacking train operators if they fail to provide a high-quality public service to their customers, including for cross-border services.
  - Exploring the introduction of an annual pass for all railways.
  - Improving accessibility at stations through the Access for All programme.

- Reviewing the Conservatives' cancellation of the northern leg of HS2 to see if it can still be delivered in a way that provides value for money, including by encouraging private investment, or if an alternative is viable.
- Establishing a ten-year plan for rail electrification to increase the number of passenger journeys covered by electric trains, investing in other zero-carbon technologies including batteries, and ensuring all new rail lines are electrified as standard.
- Introducing a national freight strategy to move as much freight as possible from road to rail, supported by a freight growth target and electrification of freight routes.
- Introducing an international rail strategy to support new routes and operators, and permitting other operators to use the Channel Tunnel and HS1.
- Reduce the climate impact of flying by:
  - Reforming the taxation of international flights to focus on those who fly the most, while reducing costs for ordinary households who take one or two international return flights per year.
  - Introducing a new super tax on private jet flights, and removing the VAT exemptions for private, first-class and business-class flights.



- Requiring airlines to show the carbon emissions for domestic flights compared to the equivalent rail option at booking.
- Banning short domestic flights where a direct rail option taking less than 2.5 hours is available for the same journey, unless planes are alternative-fuelled.
- Placing a moratorium on net airport expansion until a national capacity and emissions management framework is in place, and opposing the expansion of airports in and around London.

## 17 Culture, Media and Sport

The UK's rich and vibrant cultural heritage is a national treasure. Our creative and tourism industries contribute billions of pounds to our economy and employ millions of people. Art, music, drama and sports bring people together. They are an essential part of a thriving society.

The Covid pandemic hit culture and tourism businesses extremely hard. And instead of helping, the Conservatives have only inflicted even more damage, such as erecting new barriers to British musicians and actors performing elsewhere in Europe following our withdrawal from the EU.

Meanwhile, the SNP Government can't be trusted with the culture budget that they have chopped and changed, leaving the sector uncertain about the future.

Liberal Democrats will invest in our cultural capital and nurture the next generation of talent. We will support the creative and tourism industries across the UK so that businesses can thrive and people everywhere can enjoy the benefits of sports, music and the arts.

### **We will:**

- **Protect the BBC, S4C, BBC Alba and Channel 4 as independent, publicly owned, public service broadcasters.**

- **Promote creative skills, address the barriers to finance faced by small businesses, and support modern and flexible patent, copyright and licensing rules.**
- **Negotiate free and simple short-term travel arrangements for UK artists to perform in the EU, and European artists to perform in the UK.**

In addition, we will:

- Establish creative enterprise zones to grow and regenerate the cultural output of areas across the UK.
- Maintain free access to national museums and galleries for the benefit of everyone across the UK.
- Boost funding for cultural and creative projects by applying to participate fully in Creative Europe, helping sectors including film, television and gaming in Scotland be globally competitive.
- Require at least 80% of on-demand TV content to be subtitled, 10% audio-described and 5% signed.

- Support independent, Leveson-compliant regulation to ensure privacy, quality, diversity and choice in both print and online media, and proceed with Part Two of the Leveson Inquiry.
- Support the BBC both to provide impartial news and information, and to take a leading role in increasing media literacy and educating all generations in tackling the impact of fake news.
- Protect fans from being exploited by ticket touts by implementing the Competition and Markets Authority's recommendations to crack down on illegal ticket resale.
- Protect sports and arts funding via the National Lottery.
- Combat the harms caused by problem gambling by:
  - Introducing the planned compulsory levy on gambling companies to fund research, prevention and treatment.
  - Restricting gambling advertising.
  - Establishing a Gambling Ombudsman to redress wrongs.
  - Implementing effective affordability checks.

- Taking tough action against black market gambling.
- Expand the list of sporting fixtures which must have live free-to-air coverage to include more football matches as well as key international cricket, rugby, golf and tennis fixtures.
- Support and encourage campaigns to improve equality, diversity and inclusion in sport.

# 18 Immigration and Asylum

The UK has a proud history of welcoming newcomers – whether people seeking to build their lives here, or refugees fleeing war and persecution. People from all over the world have greatly enriched our economy, our culture and our communities.

But our immigration system has been broken by the Conservatives. Their damaging new rules mean British employers can't recruit the people they need and families are separated by unfair, complex visa requirements. Their dysfunction has made the asylum backlog soar. Public confidence in the system is shattered. The Home Office is not fit for purpose.

Meanwhile, the Conservatives have closed down safe and legal routes to sanctuary, leaving desperate people to make perilous attempts to cross the Channel in small boats – often in the hands of criminal smugglers and traffickers.

Liberal Democrats are fighting for a fair, effective immigration system that treats everyone with dignity and respect.

## **We will:**

- **End the Conservatives' Hostile Environment and invest instead in officers, training and technology to tackle smuggling, trafficking and modern slavery.**

- **Transfer policy-making over work visas and overseas students out of the Home Office and into other departments.**
- **Scrap the Conservatives' Illegal Migration Act and their Rwanda scheme, uphold the Refugee Convention, and provide safe and legal routes to sanctuary for refugees, helping to prevent dangerous Channel crossings.**
- **Tackle the asylum backlog by establishing a dedicated unit to improve the speed and quality of asylum decision-making, introducing a service standard of three months for all but the most complex asylum claims to be processed, and speeding up returns of those without a right to stay.**
- **Lift the ban on asylum seekers working if they have been waiting for a decision for more than three months, enabling them to support themselves, integrate in their communities and contribute to the economy.**
- **Work closely with Europol and the French authorities to stop the smuggling and trafficking gangs behind dangerous Channel crossings.**

In addition, we will:

- Replace the Conservatives' arbitrary salary threshold with a more flexible merit-based system for work visas, with the relevant department working with employers in each sector to address specific needs as part of a long-term workforce strategy

that also focuses on education and training to address skills gaps from within the UK.

- Exempt NHS and care staff from the £1,000-a-year Immigration Skills Charge, and reverse the Conservatives' ban on care workers bringing partners and children.
- Expand the Youth Mobility Scheme by:
  - Negotiating with the EU to extend it on a reciprocal basis.
  - Increasing the age limit from 30 to 35.
  - Abolishing the fees for these visas.
  - Extending the length of visas from two to three years.
- Reverse the Conservatives' unfair increase to income thresholds for family visas, so that no more families are torn apart.
- Protect the rights of EU citizens and their families in the UK by:
  - Automatically granting full Settled Status to all those with Pre-Settled Status.
  - Providing them with physical proof of their right to stay.



- Reduce the fee for registering a child as a British citizen from £1,214 to the cost of administration.
- Overhaul the Immigration Rules to make them simpler, clearer and fairer, and ensure greater parliamentary scrutiny of future changes.
- Extend the participation of devolved administrations in the development of the evidence base for UK-wide policy on work permits and student visas, helping ensure rules are sensitive to the skills needs of every corner of the UK and every sector of the economy.
- Strengthen the powers of the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration.
- Implement the Windrush Lessons Learned Review in full, without further delay.
- Ensure victims of the Windrush scandal get the compensation they are entitled to by making the compensation scheme independent of the Home Office.
- Establish a firewall to prevent public agencies from sharing personal information with the Home Office for the purposes of immigration enforcement and repeal the immigration exemption in the Data Protection Act.

- Expand access to immigration legal advice and encourage the Scottish Government to make improvements to the legal aid system so that this can be delivered.
- Provide safe and legal routes to sanctuary for refugees by:
  - Expanding and properly funding the UK Resettlement Scheme.
  - Creating new humanitarian travel permits that would allow asylum seekers to travel to the UK safely to proceed with their claims.
  - Establishing a new scheme to resettle unaccompanied child refugees from elsewhere in Europe.
  - Reuniting unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in Europe with family members in the UK.
  - Expanding the scope of refugee family reunion, including enabling unaccompanied child refugees in the UK to sponsor close family members to join them.
  - Funding community-sponsorship projects for refugees, and rewarding community groups who develop innovative and successful ways of promoting social cohesion.

- Offering asylum to people fleeing the risk of violence because of their sexual orientation or gender identification, ending the culture of disbelief for LGBT+ asylum seekers, and never refusing an LGBT+ applicant on the basis that they could be discreet.
- Cancel the Conservatives' unworkable Rwanda scheme and invest the savings in clearing the asylum backlog.
- End the detention of children for immigration purposes, and reduce detention for adults to an absolute last resort, with a 28-day time limit.
- Increase the 'move-on' period for refugees to 60 days, providing vital time for new refugees to prepare for life in the UK while ensuring that other public bodies are not left to pick up the costs of them becoming destitute.

## 19 Rights and Equality

Liberal Democrats exist to build a free society where every person's rights and liberties are protected. Everyone should be able to live their lives as who they are: free to pursue their dreams and fulfil their potential, safe in the knowledge that their fundamental rights will be protected.

In decades past, the UK has led the world in advancing human rights, civil liberties and equality for women, LGBT+ people and disabled people. But under the Conservatives, progress has stalled. They are failing to stand up to hatred and prejudice, or tackle entrenched inequalities. Instead, they keep threatening to rip up the UK's Human Rights Act, which protects our fundamental British freedoms.

Liberal Democrats champion the freedom, dignity and wellbeing of every individual. We will combat all forms of prejudice and discrimination, wherever they exist, including where intersectionality means individuals face particular disadvantages.

We believe that the UK's rich diversity is one of its greatest strengths. We will celebrate that diversity and ensure it is better reflected throughout public life. We will apply the principles of openness, transparency and accountability to tackle institutional biases, promote equality and hold power to account.

**We will:**

- **Champion the Human Rights Act and resist any attempts to weaken or repeal it.**
- **Give everyone a new right to flexible working and every disabled person the right to work from home if they want to, unless there are significant business reasons why it is not possible.**
- **Respect and defend the rights of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities, including trans and non-binary people.**
- **Ban all forms of conversion therapies and practices, working in partnership with the Scottish Government to achieve this.**
- **Scrap the Conservatives' draconian anti-protest laws covering England and Wales, restoring pre-existing protections for both peaceful assembly and public safety, and immediately halt the use of live facial recognition surveillance by the police and private companies.**

In addition, we will:

- **Defend hard-won British rights and freedoms by:**
  - Upholding the UK's commitment to the European Convention on Human Rights and resisting any attempts to withdraw from it.

- Introducing a Digital Bill of Rights to protect everyone’s rights online, including the rights to privacy, free expression, and participation without being subjected to harassment and abuse.
- Ending the bulk collection of communications data and internet connection records.
- Introducing a legally binding regulatory framework for all forms of biometric surveillance.
- Upholding the Equality Act 2010, and making caring and care experience protected characteristics as set out in chapter 7.
- Ensure that survivors of violence against women and girls and domestic abuse get the support they deserve by fully implementing the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, with protections for all survivors regardless of nationality or immigration status.
- Require social media companies to publish reports setting out the action they have taken to address online abuse against women and girls, and other groups who share a protected characteristic.
- Stand up to hatred by:

- Exposing and confronting the stereotyping, demagoguery and hate speech in public life and the media that inflames hatred and leads to spikes in hate crimes.
- Providing funding for protective security measures to places of worship, schools and community centres that are vulnerable to hate crime and terror attacks.
- Expand the rights of couples by:
  - Introducing legal recognition of humanist marriages in the rest of the UK to match that in Scotland.
  - Implementing the Law Commission's proposals to reform wedding laws in England and Wales, giving couples more choice over how and where their wedding takes place, while respecting religious beliefs and practices.
  - Extending limited legal rights to cohabiting couples, to give them greater protection in the event of separation or bereavement.
- Tackle the specific economic barriers facing women by:
  - Ending the gender price gap so that women are not charged more than men for practically identical products or services marketed at them.

- Expanding access to flexible, affordable childcare, doubling Statutory Maternity Pay and expanding shared parental leave, as set out in chapter 9.
- Reform the gender recognition process to remove the requirement for medical reports, recognise non-binary identities in law, and ensure there are no cross border barriers to mutual acceptance.
- Improve diversity in the workplace and public life by:
  - Requiring large employers to monitor and publish data on gender, ethnicity, disability, and LGBT+ employment levels, pay gaps and progression, and publish five-year aspirational diversity targets.
  - Extending the use of name-blind recruitment processes in the public sector and encouraging their use in the private sector.
  - Improving diversity in public appointments by setting ambitious targets and requiring progress reports to Parliament with explanations when targets are not met.
  - Providing additional support and advice to employers on neurodiversity in the workplace, and developing a cross-government strategy to tackle all aspects of discrimination faced by neurodiverse children and adults.



- Implement a comprehensive Race Equality Strategy, including:
  - Ending the Conservatives' Hostile Environment and implementing the Windrush Lessons Learned Review, as set out in chapter 18.
  - Scrapping the Conservatives' voter ID scheme and requiring political parties to publish candidate diversity data, as set out in chapter 20.
  - Halting the use of facial recognition surveillance, which is most likely to wrongly identify black people and women.
- Make it easier for disabled people to access public life, including the world of work, by:
  - Adopting new accessibility standards for public spaces.
  - Improving the legislative framework for blue badges.
  - Incorporating the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities into UK law.
  - Tackling the disability employment gap by implementing a targeted strategy to support disabled people into work, with specialist disability employment support.

- Raising employers' awareness of the Access to Work scheme and simplifying and speeding up the application process.
- Introducing 'Adjustment Passports' to record the adjustments, modifications and equipment a disabled person has received, and ensuring that Access to Work support and equipment stays with the person if they change jobs.
- Building on the British Sign Language Act by increasing the use of BSL in government communications and working collaboratively with the BSL Alliance to promote and facilitate the use of BSL.

## 20 Political Reform

We want to ensure that your voice is heard – and we want to transfer power back to the people.

The shambolic Conservative Government has created a crisis for democracy in this country, with their cronyism, rule-breaking and constant sleaze scandals. Successive Conservative Prime Ministers have acted without integrity and treated Parliament and the people with disdain.

It is a symptom of a broken political system, which enables the Government to take families up and down the country for granted. It is clear that we need a political system with fair representation, so that politics is made to work for you again.

Liberal Democrats want to begin to repair the damage that has been done by the constant stream of Conservative sleaze, and to end the era of SNP neglect.

### **We will:**

- **Ensure no politician can take you for granted, by introducing proportional representation by the Single Transferable Vote for electing MPs.**

- 1 Strengthen democratic rights and participation by scrapping the Conservatives' voter ID scheme and giving 16- and 17-year-olds the right to vote in UK general elections.**
  
- 1 Finally hold Government Ministers to account for corruption and sleaze by enshrining the Ministerial Code in legislation.**
  
- 1 Reform the House of Lords with a proper democratic mandate.**
  
- 1 Transfer greater powers away from Westminster and Whitehall, introduce a written constitution for a federal United Kingdom with strong voices for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and oppose a second Scottish independence referendum and independence.**
  
- 1 Take big money out of politics by capping donations to political parties.**

In addition, we will:

- Reform our politics to put more power in people's hands by:
  - Giving 16- and 17-year-olds the right to vote in UK general elections and referendums.

- Extending the right to full participation in civic life, including the ability to stand for office or vote in UK referendums and general elections, to all EU citizens with settled status, and to anyone else who has lived in the UK for at least five years and has the right to stay permanently.
- Introducing a legal requirement for local authorities to inform citizens of the steps they must take to be successfully registered with far greater efforts in particular to register underrepresented groups, and ensuring that the UK has an automatic system of inclusion in elections.
- Enabling all UK citizens living abroad to vote for MPs in separate overseas constituencies, and to participate in UK referendums.
- Restoring to Parliament – instead of the Prime Minister alone – the power to call and set the date of an early general election.
- Ensuring that a new Prime Minister, and their programme for government, must win a confidence vote of MPs before taking office.
- Taking a zero-tolerance approach to harassment and bullying in Westminster and legislating to empower constituents to recall MPs who commit sexual harassment.
- Bringing into force Section 106 of the Equality Act 2010, requiring political parties to publish candidate diversity data.

- Establishing national and local citizens' assemblies to ensure that the public are fully engaged in finding solutions to the greatest challenges we face, such as tackling the climate emergency and the use of artificial intelligence and algorithms by the state.
- Make it a national security priority to protect the UK's democratic processes from any threats or interference.
- Ensure justice for the victims of scandals and prevent future scandals, including by:
  - Providing full and fair compensation to all victims of the Horizon Post Office scandal and the Infected Blood scandal as quickly as possible.
  - Protecting whistleblowers by establishing a new Office of the Whistleblower, creating new legal protections, and promoting greater public awareness of their rights.
  - Introducing the Hillsborough Law: a statutory duty of candour on all public officials, including during all forms of public inquiry.
- Make the role of the Adviser on Ministers' Interests truly independent by:

- Empowering them to initiate their own investigations, determine breaches and publish their report.
- Putting the role on a statutory basis and giving Parliament the power to appoint them.
- Introduce new rules to ensure that a Prime Minister must have served for at least one year before becoming eligible to access the Public Duty Cost Allowance fund.
- Ensure that Ministers receive annual training to prevent sleaze.
- Establish a rigorous, transparent and independent process to appoint significant public roles, involving a confirmatory vote by the relevant Parliamentary select committee.
- Bring reporting standards for the List of Ministers' Interests in line with the House of Commons Register of Members' Interests, so that publication takes place more frequently.
- Strengthen and expand the lobbying register.
- End the scandal of 'Government by WhatsApp' by:

- Requiring that all Ministers' instant-messaging conversations involving government business must be placed on the departmental record.
- Ensuring that a record of all lobbying of Ministers via instant messages, emails, letters and phone calls is published as part of quarterly transparency releases.
- Make elections fairer and more transparent, and raise the quality of political debate, by:
  - Protecting and strengthening the independence of the Electoral Commission, following Conservative attempts to undermine it.
  - Introducing public awareness campaigns about emerging threats and misinformation campaigns online.
  - Pushing for a global convention or treaty to combat disinformation and electoral interference, supplemented by an annual conference and Global Counter-Disinformation Fund, to safeguard and promote democracy at home as well as abroad.
  - Mandating the provision of televised leaders' debates in general elections, based on rules produced by Ofcom.



- Working towards radical real-time transparency for political advertising, donations and spending, including an easily searchable public database of all online political adverts.
- Reform the UK and strengthen our family of nations around the principles of federalism, working in cooperation and partnership, including by:
  - Creating a United Kingdom Council of Ministers to bring together the governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland with regional leaders across England.
  - Removing the ability for the UK Parliament to unilaterally change the powers of the devolved parliaments or pass laws in their areas of responsibility.
  - Creating a Joint Climate Council of the Nations to tackle the climate emergency by helping to foster innovation and encourage collaborative action.
  - Securing cooperation and agreement through common frameworks and a new dispute resolution process, sharing power, resolving differences maturely between administrations and delivering better governance.
  - Improving joint ministerial work on new cross-cutting policies, such as the UK industrial strategy.
- Deliver a fair deal for the people of Scotland by:

- Allocating to the Scottish Parliament all the powers set out in the Scotland Act 2016, many of which have already been used by the Scottish Parliament, with others delayed at the request of the Scottish Government.
- Continuing to back city deals in Scotland by bringing together all spheres of government.
- Work in partnership with the Scottish Government to split up the role of the Lord Advocate to trigger reform to fatal accident inquiries.
- Work constructively with the Northern Ireland Executive to build a permanently peaceful Northern Ireland, with a stable devolved government and a truly shared society, including by:
  - Supporting policies and initiatives that promote sharing over separation and counter the cost of division.
  - Helping to grow the economy in Northern Ireland, boost infrastructure and support local businesses.
  - Fixing the UK's broken relationship with Europe and accordingly reducing barriers to trade between Great Britain, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

- Ensure reliable funding for the nations of the UK by:
  - Retaining the Barnett formula to adjust spending allocations across the UK and protect the individual nations' budgets from external shocks.
  - Establishing a joint council to oversee the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and other 'levelling up' spending, working in partnership with governments, combined authorities and councils across the UK.
- Support the creation of a UK Constitutional Convention, with the aim of drafting a new Federal Constitution that sets out the powers of the government at each tier, founded on the principles of democratic engagement, liberal values and respect for diverse identities, underpinned by a fair distribution of resources based on respective needs.

## 21 Defence

Keeping our country secure should be the first priority of any government. We must always take defence seriously – and work with allies to protect all our freedoms.

The Conservative Government has been negligent in its approach to the defence of the United Kingdom. Cutting troop numbers by 10,000 is irresponsible. Their inability to procure assets on time and on budget is leaving our Armed Forces without the equipment they need. And their failure to look after service personnel and veterans properly – from suitable housing to mental health support – is unforgivable.

The spectre of Donald Trump returning to power in the United States – and his lack of support for Ukraine and for NATO – should shake the UK and our European partners out of their state of complacency when it comes to the defence and security of our continent.

It is time for the UK to lead within Europe on security, working closely with our democratic European allies so that we can support Ukraine, and each other, during peace and war.

Liberal Democrats will strengthen our Armed Forces and support the people who work in them, and keep the UK free, safe and secure by:

- **Reversing the Conservative Government's cut to the Army, with a longer-term ambition of increasing regular troop numbers back to over 100,000.**
- **Maintaining the UK's support for NATO, and accordingly increasing defence spending in every year of the Parliament, with an ambition to spend at least 2.5% of GDP on defence.**
- **Securing a fair deal for service personnel and veterans.**
- **Maintaining the UK's nuclear deterrent with four submarines providing continuous at-sea deterrence, while pursuing multilateral global disarmament.**
- **Controlling arms exports to countries with poor human rights records.**

In addition, we will:

- Legislate to ensure there is a parliamentary vote before engaging in military action, and support intervention only when there is a clear legal or humanitarian case, while preserving the government's ability to engage in action in emergencies with a retrospective vote or under treaty obligation.
- Introduce a 'presumption of denial' for arms exports to governments listed as human rights concerns in the Foreign Office's annual human rights report.

- Strengthen the Intelligence and Security Committee by giving it the power to decide what it publishes and when, and enabling the Houses of Parliament to elect its members.
- Tackle long-standing problems in defence procurement, including by ensuring that procurement is part of a comprehensive industrial strategy to secure a reliable long-term pipeline of equipment procurements, which will strengthen the Army, Royal Air Force, Royal Navy and Strategic Command.
- Support and promote the development of international treaties on the principles and limits of the use of technology in modern warfare.
- Secure a fair deal for the armed forces community, and improve recruitment, retention and resettlement, by:
  - Strengthening the Armed Forces Covenant by placing a legal duty on the Defence Secretary and government departments to give it due regard.
  - Improving the standard of Ministry of Defence housing, including by reviewing maintenance contracts.
  - Waiving application fees for indefinite leave for members of the armed forces on discharge, and their families.

- Accepting the recommendations of the Atherton Report on women in the armed forces.
- Ensuring that military compensation for illness or injury does not count towards means-testing for benefits.
- Establishing a 'Fair Deal for Service Personnel, Veterans and Families Commission'.
- Work collaboratively with our democratic European partners and promote security, including through deterrence, by:
  - Strengthening cooperation with our Nordic and Baltic allies via the Joint Expeditionary Force.
  - Building on existing UK-French cooperation arrangements, including the Lancaster House Treaties.
  - Developing closer cooperation with EU agencies and member states over defence, intelligence and cyber-security.
  - Prioritising interoperability with NATO allies and other strategic partners.

- Working more closely in the joint development of innovative defence technologies and procurement.
- Seeking a defence and security agreement with the EU and its member states.
- Continuing to work closely with our Five Eyes partners.



## 22 International

Whether on apartheid in South Africa, the illegal war in Iraq or the persecution of Hong Kongers, Liberal Democrats have always stood up for the vital British values of democracy, liberty, human rights and the rule of law. We will resist those states that threaten us and robustly challenge our allies when necessary.

The UK must support democracies around the world, especially those threatened by aggression such as Ukraine and Taiwan. We must stand up to states like China and Russia, resisting their attempts to undermine our democratic values and preventing them from filling the vacuum that the UK has left in Africa and the rest of the Global South, following the Government's short-sighted cut to the aid budget.

Following years of Conservative Government, our influence on the world stage is sadly but undeniably diminished. Liberal Democrats will reverse this decline. We will rebuild our relations with our allies – not trash them. We will uphold international law – not undermine it. We will restore Britain's role as an international development superpower.

With war raging on our continent, now more than ever Britain must lead within Europe. Liberal Democrats are the only party that will fix the UK's broken relationship with Europe, by following our four-stage roadmap. Not only will this leave us and our allies more secure, but it will help restore the British economy and the prosperity and opportunities of its citizens.

We will:

- Work to counter the global rise in authoritarianism by championing the liberal, rules-based international order and supporting international institutions such as the United Nations, the Commonwealth, NATO and the International Criminal Court.
- Fix the UK's broken relationship with Europe, forge a new partnership built on cooperation, not confrontation, and move to conclude a new comprehensive agreement which removes as many barriers to trade as possible.
- Stand with the people of Ukraine and provide them with the support that they need in the face of Putin's illegal invasion.
- Restore the UK's reputation as an international development superpower, by returning spending to 0.7% of national income and re-establishing an independent international development department.
- Advocate for an immediate bilateral ceasefire in the Israel-Gaza conflict to resolve the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza, get the hostages out, and provide the space to reach a two-state solution based on 1967 borders with security and dignity for Israelis and Palestinians.

In addition, we will:

- Protect, defend and promote human rights for all around the world by:
  - Working to abolish the death penalty and end the use of torture.
  - Using the UK's Magnitsky sanctions to stand up against human rights abuses.
  - Banning imports from areas with egregious abuses such as Xinjiang.
  - Enshrining in law a right for British nationals, including dual nationals, who have been politically detained or face other human rights violations abroad to access UK consular services.
  - Developing a comprehensive strategy for promoting the decriminalisation of homosexuality and advancing LGBT+ rights.
  - Appointing an ambassador-level Champion for Freedom of Belief.
- Fix the UK's broken relationship with Europe by following our four-stage roadmap:
  - Taking initial unilateral steps to rebuild the relationship, starting by declaring a fundamental change in the UK's approach and improving channels for foreign policy cooperation.

- Rebuilding confidence through seeking to agree partnerships or associations with EU agencies and programmes such as the European Aviation Safety Agency, Erasmus Plus, scientific programmes, climate and environment initiatives, and cooperation on defence, security and crime.
- Deepening the trading relationship with critical steps for the British economy, including negotiating comprehensive veterinary and plant health agreements and mutual recognition agreements.
- Finally, once ties of trust and friendship have been renewed, and the damage the Conservatives have caused to trade between the UK and EU has begun to be repaired, we would aim to place the UK-EU relationship on a more formal and stable footing by seeking to join the Single Market.

All these measures will help to restore the British economy and the prosperity and opportunities of its citizens, and are also essential steps on the road to EU membership, which remains our longer-term objective.

- Restore the UK's role as a global leader in tackling the climate and nature emergencies, as set out in chapters 5 and 12.
- Finally put a stop to oligarchs from corrupt regimes channelling their money through the UK by:

- Beginning the seizure of frozen Russian assets in the UK, with proceeds being repurposed to finance support for Ukraine, so that we can stand with Ukraine even if US support wavers.
- Properly resourcing the National Crime Agency.
- Closing the loopholes in economic crime legislation which allow Putin's cronies and other kleptocrats to continue funnelling dirty cash into our country.
- Effectively using the UK's sanctions regime to tackle economic crime.
- Conducting an audit of UK-based assets owned by officials from countries listed as Foreign Office human rights priorities, including China and Iran.
- Work with our allies to help bring security and stability to the Middle East, which has become a tinderbox amidst the Israel-Gaza conflict, including by:
  - Advocating for an immediate bilateral ceasefire in the Israel-Gaza conflict, recognising that there is no military solution to remove Hamas from Gaza.
  - Leading a diplomatic push towards a two-state solution in Israel and Palestine based on 1967 borders, to deliver the security and dignity that Israelis and Palestinians deserve.

- Officially recognising the independent state of Palestine with immediate effect.
- Recognising the existential threat of Iran not just in the Middle East but to Western democracies, by proscribing Iran's Revolutionary Guard.
- Upholding and respecting international courts and international law.
- Stand with Hong Kong, Taiwan and the Uyghurs including by:
  - Continuing to fight for British National (Overseas) passport holders' rights by closing gaps in the BNO visa scheme.
  - Extending BNO integration funding for Hong Kongers in the UK for the duration of the Parliament.
  - Recognising that the human rights abuses being perpetrated against the Uyghurs in Xinjiang amount to the crime of genocide.
  - Building new diplomatic, economic and security partnerships with democratic countries threatened by China, including Taiwan.
- Work with the international community and neighbouring countries on the provision of safe, legal passages for those who wish to leave Afghanistan, and support Afghan refugees in the UK.

- Increase UK humanitarian assistance to Sudan and play a stronger role in seeking a ceasefire and long-term peace where civilians form a democratic government and war crimes are prosecuted.
- Provide safe and legal routes to sanctuary for refugees, as set out in chapter 18.
- Properly fund the impartial BBC World Service from the Foreign Office budget and restore its global reach.
- Pursue a foreign policy agenda with gender equality at its heart, focusing on:
  - The transformation of the position of women through economic inclusion.
  - Education and training, ensuring the lives of women and girls are not ignored in favour of trade or regional alliances.
  - Working to extend reproductive rights and end female genital mutilation.
  - The eradication of sexual violence in conflict, including by increasing international development funding for such initiatives.

- Ensure that the UK's international development spending is used effectively and with a primary focus on poverty reduction, as we reverse the Official Development Assistance cut, including by:
  - Putting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals at the heart of the UK's international development policy.
  - Funding genuine partnerships that are rooted in local needs and developed on grounds of mutual respect.
  - Ensuring that the use of the international development budget continues to be consistent with the OECD/DAC rules and guidelines, and with UK legislation, and in particular its primary purpose should remain the economic development of, and poverty reduction within, the partner country.
  - Recognising the role of education as a force for good, and committing to spend 15% of ODA on education in the world's most vulnerable areas, especially focusing on girls and young women.
  - Increasing the proportion of ODA committed to tackling climate change and environmental degradation, in line with our commitment to climate justice.
  - Tackling the growing global crisis of food insecurity and malnutrition by increasing the proportion of ODA committed to delivering life-saving nutrition interventions.



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This manifesto sets out Liberal Democrat policies and priorities for the whole United Kingdom. The Scottish Liberal Democrats set policy on devolved matters that are the responsibility of the Scottish Parliament and publish a detailed manifesto before each Holyrood election. The broad direction of policy on devolved matters such as health and education are briefly set out in this manifesto. This is especially the case where the UK manifesto contains funding proposals that will generate extra income for the Scottish Government through Barnett consequential or funding protections.

**ISBN:** 978-1-915375-24-7 © June 2024

**Price:** £10

**Further copies may be obtained from:**

Liberal Democrat Image, The Workshop, 24 Cheyne Way, Farnborough,  
Hampshire GU14 8RX

**Email:** [info@libdemimage.co.uk](mailto:info@libdemimage.co.uk)

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Published and promoted by Mike Dixon on behalf of the Liberal Democrats, both at 1 Vincent Square, SW1P 2PN

Printed by: Full Spectrum Print Media, 10 Honywood Business Park, Honywood Road, Basildon, SS14 3HW

Design and layout by: Louise Tait, Think, 65 Riding House Street, London W1W 7EH  
[www.thinkpublishing.co.uk](http://www.thinkpublishing.co.uk)