

**Online
Autumn
Conference
September 2021**

**A Fairer, Greener, More
Caring Society**

Policy Paper 143

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A Fairer, Greener, More Caring Society

1 Introduction

1.1 Britain has been renowned for its liberal and generous values, which we in the Liberal Democrats have championed throughout our history. Britain has long been committed to the liberal value of fairness, a system in which people can succeed regardless of their background. A country where we celebrate everyone's freedom to live their lives in the way they choose without discrimination.

1.2 These hard-fought for freedoms have been secured by our democratic traditions and institutions, and a deep-seated respect for the rule of law, protected by the Mother of All Parliaments.

1.3 Britain has shown that it is a caring and mutually supportive society, demonstrated in institutions such as the NHS and the welfare state.

1.4 Britain was also a pioneer of an open, trading, entrepreneurial culture, which has helped lift millions of people out of poverty at home and around the world. We have been a nation of creativity and innovation, especially in green technologies and medicine. This has been fostered by our outstanding tradition of education and research, with some of the best universities and schools in the world.

1.5 Britain has historically shown a long-lasting commitment to a fair international system and made significant contributions to key international institutions, being a key architect of the postwar order.

1.6 Tragically the Conservative UK government is betraying the people of Britain, their needs and wishes. The Conservatives' incompetent handling of the pandemic, which has seen one of the highest rates of Covid infection,

serious illness and death of any country in the world, has destroyed the lives and livelihoods of thousands of people unnecessarily.

1.7 Their policies and rhetoric have encouraged a divided and profoundly unfair society, in which one set of rules apply to an extremely wealthy and privileged few with close connections to the government, while NHS workers are poorly paid, and three million people are excluded from financial support during the pandemic. They have shown a shameful neglect of carers and those they care for and failed to come up with a solution to the crisis in social care. They have divided our society across the nations as well, with their mishandling of the United Kingdom as a whole, and the place of Scotland and Northern Ireland in the UK now in question.

1.8 The Conservatives have trashed the UK's reputation for upholding the rule of law around the world, with their willingness to break international law, including treaties they themselves negotiated and signed recently. They have also overseen a historic rupture with Britain's successful trading economy past, leaving the world's largest and most successful free-trade area, and causing additional damage to other global trading relationships.

1.9 Meanwhile, they have failed to take on the most pressing issue of our time, showing a lack of urgency and ambition in tackling the climate and nature emergencies.

1.10 This Government has also demolished long-held standards in public life, institutionalising lying and corruption at the highest levels. They have also fostered mistrust and suspicion of public services, resulting in constant serious failures in the justice system, chaos in the education system, and patients now routinely waiting up to two years for operations.

1.11 Only the Liberal Democrats have the vision to make Britain the fairer, greener, more caring society its people want to see. This means a society where:

- Everyone can have a good job and real opportunity, no matter where they were born or what school they go to.
- Small businesses and the self-employed can thrive, creating secure jobs with good pay.
- Every person's rights and dignity are respected.
- Women no longer have to fear harassment, abuse and violence from men.
- We invest in exciting new technologies and insulate every home – to create secure, well-paid, green jobs in every part of the UK.
- We work together with other nations to tackle the global climate emergency.
- We clean our air and protect green spaces, and so improve people's mental and physical health.
- We look after one another, and stand up for carers and give them the support they deserve.
- People with mental ill health get quality care, quickly – not least children and young people.
- We pay our nurses and care workers properly.
- We work with other countries and international organisations to promote security and prosperity around the world.
- We promote rather than undermine the basics of an honest, decent, truthful and law-abiding society.

1.12 This paper sets out in some more detail the Liberal Democrat approach to delivering a Fairer, Greener and More Caring society through the themes of: A Fairer Society, A Caring Society, A Greener Future, Dignity and Respect for Everyone, A Modern, Forward Looking Society, Supporting Businesses and Jobs, Education and Opportunity, and Britain working together with other countries.

2 A Fairer Society

2.1 Britain needs to be a fairer society, and the Government is failing to make that a reality. The UK is the 6th richest country in the world, yet 22% of working-age adults and 33% of children are in households living in poverty. Hard-working people feel they can't get ahead in life: they find it hard to save money; they can't afford a mortgage; and they struggle with childcare. And when they need support, they are faced with a punitive welfare system.

2.2 Even before the Coronavirus pandemic, too many people felt unsafe in their own homes or walking down their own streets. Crime – especially serious youth violence – is much too high, and far too many crimes go unsolved.

2.3 The Conservatives don't care about these issues and can't fix them. They raised taxes on working people by freezing the Income Tax personal allowance. They refused to give NHS workers a decent pay rise in the middle of a pandemic. They've ignored vulnerable workers working for corporate giants – especially in the gig economy – who are forced to skip bathroom breaks, and get less than a week's notice of their working hours.

2.4 Only the Liberal Democrats understand what it takes to create a fairer society. We understand that people don't simply need more jobs – they need good, decent-paying jobs.

2.5 We need a better welfare system that supports people without penalising them. And we will ensure that a thriving economy goes hand-in-hand with a decent livelihood for everyone.

2.6 **Our goal is a fair society in which every person can have a decent income and a secure home no matter what their background or family circumstances are.**

2.7 To achieve this we will:

- Create a properly funded commitment to free childcare from 9 months until the day a child starts school.
- Make the £1000 pa uplift to Universal Credit permanent and scrap the sanctions system.
- Introduce a 20% higher minimum wage for people on zero-hour contracts, and a clearer 'dependent contractor' status with basic protections, between employment and self-employment.
- Introduce a green jobs guarantee, offering a well-paying green job to anyone who wants one.
- Give consumers of essential utilities a fairer deal.
- Restore proper community policing, where officers are visible, trusted and given the time to focus on preventing and solving crimes.

3 A Caring Society

3.1 The Coronavirus pandemic has shone a light on the cracks in the UK's health and care systems as nothing else could. Everyone should be able to live a healthy life with the support they need, but this is sadly not the case.

3.2 People are selling their homes to pay for care and more than 1.5 million people are missing out on the care they need. People are stranded in hospital, unable to leave because follow-up care just does not exist. This is putting increasing strain on the NHS, which does not have the cash or the resources to cope.

3.3 Before the pandemic waiting times were already rising and the Government had done little to bring them down. Now the backlog stands at over five million people waiting for treatment. Some believe the true waiting list to be double this number.

3.4 NHS staff will be key to tackling this backlog, but they are burned out, traumatised and stressed. NHS, health, and social care workers have worked tirelessly throughout this crisis to keep us safe and get us vaccinated. They have been our greatest asset throughout this pandemic, but the Government has failed to recognise this and even cut their pay.

3.5 The Government has completely failed to reform social care, despite numerous promises to bring forward a plan this year. They claim that the cost of reform is high, but Liberal Democrats believe the true cost of inaction is far higher.

3.6 These delays to social care reform, and the pressures facing the NHS, are falling on the shoulders of the 11.5 million unpaid carers in the UK, whose contribution the current system almost completely ignores. The cost of reform to the Government may seem large but it is a fraction of the

true cost to families across the country. It is estimated that unpaid carers save the Treasury £193bn a year.

3.7 Social care reform will be key to ensuring a more caring society as we emerge from this pandemic. That is why the Liberal Democrats would properly invest in the NHS and social care, doing more across government to promote wellbeing and to reduce inequality at every stage of life.

3.8 It means making the shift from healthcare that kicks in only when people are ill to systems of wellbeing that help them to stay healthy and minimise levels of physical and mental ill-health.

3.9 Liberal Democrats are the only party which is forward-thinking and committed to pursuing the preventative measures that will secure the future of the NHS and Social Care. We recognise that a well-trained and well-funded workforce lies at the heart of making sure that people can receive the care they need. We cannot continue to leave our NHS and social care staff undervalued, overstretched and demoralised, and we must support the millions of unpaid carers that shoulder such a great burden.

3.10 Our goal is a caring society in which everyone's health and care needs are met and we stand up for carers and give them the support they deserve.

3.11 To achieve this we will:

- Raise Carer's Allowance by £1,000 a year and fund regular breaks for every unpaid carer.
- Build a cross-party agreement on a long-term, sustainable future for social care - Dilnot would be our minimum starting point in any negotiations.
- Raise £7 billion a year in additional revenue by putting 1p on Income Tax, with this money to be ringfenced for spending on the NHS (focusing on mental health services) and social care.

- Increase NHS, health and social care workers pay above inflation and produce a national workforce strategy, taking the long view and matching training places to future needs.
- Move the NHS away from lacking staffing and bed 'spare capacity', to one which has routine excess capacity planned in to cope with unpredictable challenges and variations in demand.
- Transform mental health services by treating mental health with the same urgency as physical health.

4 A Greener Future

4.1 Britain and the world are at a crossroads: the international community is beginning to tackle the climate emergency as a global problem, while the nature emergency is only just rearing its head. The UK has a responsibility to deal with both, which means ambitious programmes to slash greenhouse gas emissions as well as restore and enhance the natural environment.

4.2 However, the Conservatives are failing to tackle either crisis. As the recent Committee on Climate Change report concluded, the government is failing to back up its climate commitments with credible action, with almost all its green policy efforts marred by uncertainty, delay, and insufficient engagement with the public. Indeed, they're reversing progress; just this year they have scrapped the Green Homes Grant and cut grants for electric vehicles.

4.3 At the same time they are failing to put in place an adequate framework for the protection of the natural environment to replace the EU's. And while they have promised to reform farm payments to reward farmers for nature-friendly farming, they've signed free-trade agreements which fail to protect high environmental and animal welfare farming standards and are phasing out existing support payments before their new system is ready. Farmers are vital allies in tackling both crises, without a thriving agricultural sector it will be all but impossible to promote biodiversity, protect the countryside and restore and enhance carbon sinks.

4.4 Liberal Democrats understand what's needed. We would lead a green recovery from the pandemic and invest £150 billion over the next three years to put the UK on the path to net-zero. This will help to create hundreds of thousands of new jobs in renewable energy, home insulation, low-carbon transport and green finance, reduce dependence on natural resource imports and improve the competitiveness of the UK economy,

and bring major benefits to health and well-being. We will cut emissions by 75% by 2030, reaching net zero at the latest by 2045.

4.5 Our objective is to make Britain a leader in the fight against the climate emergency and a place where everyone can enjoy the benefits of nature.

4.6 We will achieve this by:

- Delivering a green recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, by spending £150 billion over the next three years to kick-start programmes to:
 - Retrofit all UK homes in the next ten years, eliminating fuel poverty, cutting fuel bills and reducing carbon emissions, and introducing standards to ensure that new homes are zero-carbon.
 - Generate 75% of electricity from renewables by 2030.
 - Complete the electrification of the rail network, support cycling and walking, and speed up the introduction of electric vehicles.
- Protecting and enhancing the natural environment by:
 - Backing British farmers by reforming farm payments to support nature-friendly farming.
 - Backing fair trade, ensuring that UK environmental and animal welfare standards are maintained for imported food.
 - Restore the natural environment through setting legally binding near-term and long-term targets for improving water, air, soil and biodiversity, with supporting funding.
- Increasing the availability of housing and supporting sustainable communities, by:

- Opposing the Government's proposed planning reforms and backing councils to build 300,000 new homes a year, including homes for social rent.
- Enhancing the powers of local authorities to build new homes as well as buying land from developers that has planning permission but hasn't been developed, and ensuring councils can limit the number of second homes and holiday lets in the area, keeping communities viable.
- Supporting the development of local zero-carbon strategies for housing, transport, local energy generation and land use.

5 Dignity and Respect for Everyone

5.1 Everyone should be able to get on in life and be who they are, free from discrimination or state intrusion. Everyone's rights and dignity should be respected. Equality and diversity should be fundamental parts of our society – in businesses and in public life.

5.2 But too many people's lives are blighted by discrimination, inequality or intrusion. Black and Asian children are more than twice as likely to grow up in persistent poverty as White children. Black and mixed-race people are over-represented throughout the criminal justice system. Women and minority groups face far too much hostility and abuse online. Homophobic and transphobic hate crimes are rising, and violence by men against women and girls is far too prevalent. Meanwhile, all of our rights and freedoms are under threat.

5.3 The Conservatives are failing to stand up to hatred or combat entrenched inequalities. Boris Johnson and other Conservative politicians use irresponsible, divisive rhetoric that inflames hatred, while passing unnecessary new laws that undermine fundamental British rights and freedoms. Their crackdown on protests, assault on the rule of law and attempts to weaken the Human Rights Act are all about trying to silence individuals and stop them holding governments to account.

5.4 Liberal Democrats always promote justice, human rights and the rule of law. We reject hatred and discrimination, and are committed to tackling all forms of injustice, inequality and institutional bias throughout society.

5.5 **Our objective is to make the UK a beacon for individual rights, diversity and inclusiveness.**

5.6 **To achieve this we will:**

- Oppose the Conservatives' dangerous and draconian crackdown on protests, and defend the Human Rights Act, the European Convention on Human Rights and judicial review from Tory attacks.
- Tackle the rise in hate crimes by making them all aggravated offences, giving law enforcement the resources and training they need to identify and prevent them, and condemning inflammatory rhetoric – including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia – by those with public platforms.
- End violence by men against women and girls, including by making misogyny a hate crime, giving police, prosecutors and judges better training and more resources, and improving age-appropriate sex and relationship education in schools.
- Combat racial injustice, including by abolishing the Conservatives' Hostile Environment, ending the disproportionate use of Stop and Search, and implementing a new Race Equality Strategy.
- Continue the fight for LGBT+ equality, including by making it easier for people to gain legal recognition of their gender identity, introducing an 'X' gender option on passports, and promoting the decriminalisation of homosexuality around the world.
- Continue the fight for gender equality, including by closing the gender pay gap, scrapping the gender price gap, and ending period poverty.
- Set ambitious targets for diversity in public appointments and hold organisations to account for meeting them.
- Tackle modern slavery and human trafficking through proactive, intelligence-led enforcement of labour market standards.

6 Modern, Forward Looking Society

6.1 The UK has frequently been at the forefront of modern and progressive values, from being one of the world's first democracies to creating the NHS. Whilst we should be proud of our achievements, we still have many archaic institutions, from our 19th Century First Past the Post electoral system, to an unelected and bloated House of Lords and an overbearing central government in need of being dragged into the 21st Century. Too many people feel disillusioned with politics and remote from the people making decisions which impact their daily lives.

6.2 The Conservatives have allowed progress to stall, and in many areas go backwards. They have sought time and again to reduce transparency, take power away from communities and rig the democratic rules in their favour. After losing several mayoral elections this year, they have decided to change the electoral system so they won't lose again. The Government is seeking to undermine scrutiny of their administration by attacking the BBC and threatening to privatise Channel 4. The Labour Party also has a mixed record in this area. Successive Labour governments have rejected electoral and constitutional reform, as well as centralising power in Whitehall rather than giving power to local communities.

6.3 The Liberal Democrats have always been the UK's most forward looking party, promoting issues ahead of their time. It was the Liberal Party who passed the 1911 Parliament Act, establishing the supremacy of the House of Commons over the House of Lords and it was the Liberal Democrats in the Coalition Government who achieved marriage equality. We are the party most at ease with change, embracing modernity and looking to the future, not the past for solutions to our country's problems.

6.4 **Our objective is to make the UK a modern, democratic state in which people can have real control over the decisions which affect them and confidence in the integrity of politicians and institutions.**

6.5 To achieve this we will:

- Make every vote count through reforming the electoral system to make it more proportional, using the single transferable vote, for all public elections in the UK; and through votes at 16.
- End the corrupt 'Cash for Honours' practice by making the House of Lords elected.
- Give power back to the people by strengthening local government in England.
- Empower the nations and regions by moving to a Federal structure for the United Kingdom, with a written constitution drawn up by a Constitutional convention.
- Retain public ownership of Channel 4 and protect the independence and financial viability of the BBC by putting future decisions about the license fee in the hands of an independent body.
- Make the Ministerial Code legally enforceable.
- Use digital technology to enhance democratic participation.

7 Supporting Businesses and Jobs

7.1 Small and medium sized businesses are the backbone of our economy and the heart of our local communities. They bring life to our town centres and high streets. And they create millions of jobs that we all rely on. 16.8 million people work in small businesses – they account for 6 in 10 private sector jobs. But the Coronavirus pandemic and Government failures have left small businesses terribly hit. Countless SMEs are suffering under a mountain of debt exceeding £100 billion, and billions more in rent-arrears. Thousands of jobs are at risk. Similarly, the self-employed have struggled, seeing their incomes dry up. And three million self-employed people were excluded from all Coronavirus support schemes.

7.2 Boris Johnson's Conservatives don't care about small business. Their priorities lie with defending Brexit and securing the interests of their billionaire friends. They have utterly failed to protect small businesses and the self-employed. Companies outside of retail, hospitality and leisure have received paltry amounts of support. The Government's constant U-turns and delays on business and employment support heightened uncertainty and led to job losses. Meanwhile, Boris Johnson's terrible EU trade deal has devastated small firms trading with Europe. This has left countless small businesses on the brink.

7.3 Only the Liberal Democrats understand that economic recovery starts with small business. Allowing entrepreneurs, SMEs, and the self-employed to thrive will create good jobs, spread prosperity and grow our economy.

7.4 **Our objective is to make Britain the best place in the world to start and to grow a business.**

7.5 **To achieve this we will:**

- Quadruple the Employment Allowance, which will allow small businesses to employ five people at the median salary without having to pay employer NICs.
- Give small businesses relief on their rent arrears.
- Replace Business Rates with a Commercial Landowner Levy.
- Create an Entrepreneur's Allowance to help people start new businesses.
- Strengthen competition policy to make it easier for small businesses to compete for contracts.

8 Education and Opportunity

8.1 Schools should support every pupil to thrive, no matter their background or circumstances. The Coronavirus crisis has shone a spotlight on unacceptable inequalities in the education system and it looks likely that the impact of lost learning during the pandemic will widen the attainment gap.

8.2 The Government has let down the most vulnerable children repeatedly throughout the pandemic. Families have had to battle time and again to get free school meal provision during periods where children couldn't attend school. The Government missed its targets repeatedly for the distribution of laptops to pupils who didn't have access to one at home in order to keep up with their lessons remotely.

8.3 The Government's paltry 'education recovery package' fell far short of what was needed, and it is pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds - who lost out on the most learning during the pandemic - who will feel the impacts of this most severely. The Liberal Democrats will put in place an ambitious, long term plan to support young people in the wake of the pandemic, where educational and emotional recovery go hand in hand.

8.4 For too long, our education system has not been designed to properly support those who need to access education or training opportunities after the age of 21. Our FE colleges have been woefully underfunded and far less financial support is available to learners. The Liberal Democrats want to build an education system that genuinely supports learning at every stage of life.

8.5 **Our objective is to create a truly world class education and skills system.**

8.6 **To achieve this we will:**

- Give every child the best start in life by extending eligibility for Free School Meals to every child living in poverty, providing food vouchers during school holidays and tackling the 'digital divide' by making household internet more affordable.
- Introduce a 'curriculum for life' in English schools to better prepare students for the real world.
- Give every adult the chance to access education and training opportunities throughout life with 'Skills Wallets' - the Government will put £4,000 in your wallet when you turn 25, £3,000 when you turn 40 and £3,000 when you turn 55.
- Deliver an ambitious, long-term plan to support young people's educational and emotional recovery from the pandemic - including by devolving NCS and Youth Investment Fund money to local authorities to enable them to run education recovery programmes.
- Increase funding for SEND and FE colleges.
- Reinstate maintenance grants for university students.

9 Britain Working together with Other Countries

9.1 The Covid-19 Pandemic has clearly demonstrated that the UK is fundamentally interconnected to the rest of the world; what happens on the other side of the planet will impact us at home. Global cooperation is therefore essential to the UK's long term security and prosperity, on issues ranging from climate change, trade, investment, war, refugees and regulation.

9.2 For all their rhetoric about 'Global Britain' the Conservatives want to reject reality and act in 'Splendid Isolation' from the rest of the world. By slashing foreign aid, adopting the hardest possible Brexit, turning their backs on refugees, draconian immigration laws and lifting the cap on nuclear weapons, they have demonstrated how hollow their claims of being "Global" are. The Labour Party have also lacked moral courage in this area, first dithering on Brexit under Corbyn and abandoning Europe altogether under Starmer.

9.3 The Liberal Democrats have always been the UK's most internationalist party, from supporting free trade under Gladstone, to opposing the Iraq War and Brexit in more recent times. We have always been in favour of the international rule of law, human rights, cooperation between nations and fair and equal treatment for all, rather than the swaggering might-makes-right unilateralism of Trump, Xi Jinping and Johnson. Our internationalist approach is not just the better moral choice, it is also the most effective at delivering a better UK and a better world.

9.4 **Our objective is to make Britain a strong and responsible international partner for peace, democracy and prosperity.**

9.5 **To achieve this we will:**

- Reverse cuts to development aid and ensure the UK keeps its word by protecting existing aid projects.
- Creating the closest possible alignment between the UK and the EU, including rejoining the Customs Union, Single Market and other EU agencies and programmes as appropriate, and supporting a longer-term objective of UK membership of the EU.
- Promote free and fair trade that works for consumers and the environment rather than just multinational corporations.
- Push for a Global Counter-Disinformation Fund to defend democracy in the UK and abroad from 21st Century threats.

A Fairer, Greener, More Caring Society

Policy Paper 143

This paper has been approved for debate by the Federal Conference by the Federal Policy Committee under the terms of Article 7.4 of the Federal Constitution.

Within the policy-making procedure of the Liberal Democrats, the Federal Party determines the policy of the Party in those areas which might reasonably be expected to fall within the remit of the federal institutions in the context of a federal United Kingdom.

The Party in England, the Scottish Liberal Democrats, the Welsh Liberal Democrats and the Northern Ireland Local Party determine the policy of the Party on all other issues, except that any or all of them may confer this power upon the Federal Party in any specified area or areas.

The Party in England has chosen to pass up policy-making to the Federal level. If approved by Conference, this paper will therefore form the policy of the Federal Party on federal issues and the Party in England on English issues. In appropriate policy areas, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland party policy would take precedence.

Further copies of this paper can be found online at www.libdems.org.uk/policy_papers

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

Printed by Sarum Colourview,
Unit 8, The Woodford Centre,
Old Sarum, Salisbury, Wiltshire, SP4 6BU

ISBN: 978-1-910763-89-6