

MOTIONS CARRIED AT THE LIBERAL PARTY SPECIAL ASSEMBLY 25th FEBRUARY 2017

PENAL REFORM

The Liberal Party recognises the importance of an effective prison system as part 2. of an effective and integrated National Offender Management Service (NOMS). It identifies the recent increase in the prison population to 84,450 as being a cause for concern. The current prison population is 92 percent greater than the 1993 prison population. Given that there has not been a similar increase in the general population this indicates that we are currently incarcerating a higher percentage of our population than we did in 1993. Such an increase is an indication of a failure in the judicial and penal system.

The Liberal Party sees the purpose of the prison system to be the rehabilitation of offenders rather than a form of punishment!

It is the courts who punish offenders by imposing the loss of liberty upon them. The prison system enforces this loss of liberty but has a duty to do this humanely with the aim of rehabilitation of the offender and reducing further offending. Prisons need to be given appropriate assistance to prevent the offender being caught in the vicious cycle of being in and out of custody throughout their lives.

The Liberal Party believes that in a humane liberal society the level of incarceration should be kept to a minimum and wherever possible alternative methods should be used to deal with offenders.

The Liberal Party sees the primary aim of Offender Management (as implemented through NOMS) as the rehabilitation of the offender and the reduction in offending and re-offending, carried out in a form that protects and supports the protection and security of the public. It is the position of the Liberal Party that NOMS and the Prison Service, in particular, are failing in this duty.

The current prison system has a poor record for reducing re-offending, with 46 percent of adults re-convicted within 1 year of release, this rises to 60 percent for those serving a sentence of less than 1 year.

48 percent of women leave prison are re-convicted within 1 year of release, this increases to 77 percent for women who have had 11 consecutive short sentences. 68 percent of under 18s are re-convicted within 1 year of release.

Short prison sentences are less effective than community sentences at reducing re-offending, they are 7 percentage points higher for re-offending than an offender serving a community sentence and they commit more offences than those on community sentences.

Re-offending costs the taxpayer billions per year between £9.5 and £13 billion per annum of which £7 to £10 billion are spent on short sentence prisoners.

The use of release on temporary licence in 2012 resulted in only 26 cases involving prisoners being arrested on suspicion of committing an offence, that is a 99.95 percent success rate. Lately, sadly, RoTL are 37 percent down being used and SOE employers say they have received no one on RoTL saying that though when used it still is 99.93 percent success rate.

The Liberal Party will look to address the causes why people offend, offenders to have a planned care plan to help with drug addiction debt and gambling addiction programmes to be run. Mental health treatments to help offenders cope and manage their conditions. The goal of these reforms is to prevent people entering a lifestyle of crime and, if they have to prepare the person to live an offending free life when they have served their sentence.

Prisoners to be given the opportunity to undertake meaningful education, employment, day release to work at actual companies, training and effective offending behaviour courses so that on their release they have qualifications and experience for potential employers or if they wish to become self-employed advice and support to be given to them.

The Liberal Party calls for the current prisoner pay structure which imposes a positive disincentive to prisoners undertaking education, training or offending behaviour work to be revised so that prisoners undertaking such activities are not at a disadvantage with respect to earnings.

The Liberal Party will look at decriminalising certain victimless offences from acts of criminality such as prostitution related offences.

The Liberal Party calls for the habitual use of custodial sentences of less than twelve months in duration to be abolished and replaced with non-custodial community offending behaviour programmes and rehabilitation services. We want to see short prison sentences that are applied to petty criminal activity used to fund drug dependency replaced by mandatory drug rehabilitation programmes.

New or young offenders to not be put in the general prison population but placed away from seasoned and hardened criminals who may coach and mentor these green inmates and encourage them not to better themselves but turn to a life of crime.

Prison officers to have the appropriate training so they can become effective mentors and role models to the offenders they care for. Prison officers are to be given the recognition, rewards, protection and tools to continue the hard work and the service they do for society.

The Liberal Party calls for the number of prison officers to be increased to a level where they are able to provide a safe and caring environment within the prison system and maintain a safe working environment for themselves.

The Liberal Party calls for the upgrading of the prison estate to a standard that will ensure that every prisoner has a cell with single occupancy and with direct access to sanitary facilities twenty-four hours a day, without restrictions.

FLY TIPPING

The Liberal Party notes with alarm the rise in cost and incidents of environmental crime and clearing sites of fly tipping

In England in 2015 it was estimated the cost of clearing fly tipping was £50m to local councils

The Liberal Party wishes to support calls by the LGA to increase penalties for fly tipping

Furthermore we call for the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 to be amended to allow Local Councils to monitor hot spots for environmental crime, whereby communities and local councillors can nominate sites needing monitoring and the local authority publish those sites on the internet and ward councillors advised

That notice must give the justification for monitoring 4 weeks prior to surveillance and allowing any interested parties to appeal against CCTV being installed at that site.

This would not negate the rights of individual households to privacy

PRIVATISED WATER SUPPLY

The Liberal party notes the completion of the trial of the private water company Thames Water on water pollution offences. Thames Water now faces what the judge has stated will be the company's "biggest ever fine".

The private company has over a protracted period of time presided over a lax and accident prone operations, which has seen repeated pollution incidents affecting the River Thames, as well as water courses in the vicinity of Slough and the Newbury area.

These incidents have environmental, commercial and public health implications and often contain the most unsightly and polluting domestic materials.

The Liberal Party maintains that the supply of water is a natural monopoly, which should be returned to public ownership, both for reasons of supply and, arguably, protection of the environment.

A substantial fine will act as an important reminder of the consequences of a failure to respect the environment from which the company derives its business. The Liberal Party calls for individual directors and senior managers to be held accountable, and subject to criminal sanction in appropriate cases, in line with the approach taken in 'health and safety' prosecutions.

DEFENCE SPENDING

The Liberal Party notes with alarm the increasingly unstable global security situation.

Further the Liberal Party notes increasingly hostile acts apparently directed both at this country in particular and 'the west' in general by a resurgent Russia, for example the aircraft carrier Admiral Kuznetsov's passage back and forth along the English Channel, numerous Russian incursions into UK airspace, and the report of Russian submarines lying off Faslane monitoring the UK's submarine operations.

The Liberal Party restates its demand for a return to pre-2010 levels of funding, capability and manpower as a first step to ensuring our armed services are sufficient to meet needs of national defence and international obligations.

The Liberal Party would fund such an increase in expenditure by the immediate decommissioning of the UK's nuclear weapons and incurring no expenditure on the Trident replacement.