



Who we are.
What we believe.
Why we're asking
for your support.

A short summary



Progressive
The Liberal Party
Policies for **Change**
Programmes for **Action**

www.liberal.org.uk



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Who we are

The Liberal Party is Britain's oldest political party. Formed on 6 June 1859, the Liberal Party has always been radical and progressive. It founded our welfare state, introducing many reforms that people still hold dear today. Liberals, such as Lloyd George and William Beveridge, were responsible for national insurance, state pensions, unemployment benefit and the NHS.

We're sometimes confused with the Liberal Democrats, but they are a completely different party that has become more and more right wing over recent times. Many ex-Lib Dems have now joined with us to help fill the vacuum on the radical side of politics - and we're proud to be the standard bearers for progressive, inclusive and forward-looking people and politics.

Up and down the country, Liberal councillors serve and support their local communities in parish, town, borough, unitary and county councils. Wherever Liberals are elected, you'll find them initiating policies for change and programmes for action - all to benefit local residents.

In this document, you'll find a summary of some of our main national policies. More detailed information can be found on our website at www.liberal.org.uk.



The Economy

Working in the interests of the people

Liberals believe that the economy should serve the interests of the people. A key liberal objective is to distribute wealth fairly, wage war on poverty and ensure a minimum standard of living for all, but also to reward innovation, initiative, commitment and good work. We remain committed to a genuine free enterprise economy with stricter controls over monopoly power (similar to the US anti-trust laws) and greater employee participation, including co-ownership.

We deplore the influence of electoral considerations on the management of the economy, with successive governments building up reserves so that they can attempt to bribe the electorate with tax cuts or increasing public spending just before an election. We believe that the introduction of proportional representation would bring greater stability. Other key aims of Liberal Party economic policy are to support world development and oppose protectionism, and to foster the development of local economies.



Employment

Continuing the quest for full employment

Regional development is a key priority for Liberals and we would encourage further grants and tax incentives for businesses to settle outside of London and the Home Counties. We believe that the quest for full employment cannot be abandoned. There should be a change to the jobseekers allowance and benefit rules so that earnings from part-time work do not lead to a disproportionate loss of benefit.

Liberals call for the introduction of a ‘Workers’ Charter’, clearly defining and safeguarding workers’ and trades union rights. Such a charter would include the right of every worker to join or not to join a union, and democratic procedures for the conduct of ballots. Legislation should be introduced to make sure employees are involved in fundamental decisions affecting the business they work for, such as mergers and take-overs. There should also be opportunity for employee and community involvement in the running of state owned enterprises.



Education

Access to education - a life-long entitlement

Liberals believe that education should be seen as a form of empowerment rather than as something that is done to the pupil or student, and be regarded as an ongoing entitlement, with access not restricted by age. We oppose the principle of a national curriculum, believing it to be a dangerous concentration of power in the hands of the Secretary of State for Education.

Testing in schools should be reduced to a necessary minimum, in order to remove unnecessary pressure on pupils and staff and to reduce the time and resources which are spent on it. With a few exceptions, we believe the ability of private sector schools to claim charitable status should be removed. We also believe that Ofsted and league tables should be abolished forthwith. For higher education, we would press for the restoration of student grants to a basic living wage level.



Crime, Civil Liberties and the Law

Protecting the rights of the individual

We believe there should be reform of criminal and civil procedures to give adequate protection to the rights of the individual. Courts should be given the additional power to initiate further investigation. Liberals also believe that all defendants should have the right to choose a trial by jury over a trial in a Magistrates Court, whatever the offence. Magistrates and judges should be subject to similar rules about conflicts of interest as local councillors.

Liberals envisage a more devolved structure for police authorities, with local police stations being more autonomous and accountable to the communities they serve. We call for an end to custodial sentencing in general, and believe that imprisonment should only be considered for crimes against the person, or which put persons at risk of physical, psychological or emotional injury. Liberals would seek to prevent security forces (e.g. police, MI5) infringing on the rights and privacy of people involved with peaceful protests.



Transport

Towards creating a fully integrated network

Liberal transport policy is aimed at creating a democratically controlled integrated transport network with which local community based transport systems connect. We believe the planning system should discourage out-of-town retail and leisure facilities. Liberals also propose a programme of public works to reinstate and rehabilitate Britain's canal and railway networks and the extension of government grants to enable the transfer of freight from road to rail.

We believe the current number of railway companies should be merged at no cost to the Exchequer, pending eventual re-nationalisation. Liberals do not believe that it is possible, or desirable, to undertake more major road building. If widespread gridlock on our roads is to be avoided in the future, some sort of rationing of vehicle use and even vehicle ownership is inevitable. Where necessary, regional airports can be appropriately developed for international traffic, rather than increasing the size of the big airports.



The Environment

Local communities' role as important as government's

Liberals recognise that the planet's ecology is as much in the hands of men and women in local communities as it is in those of national governments. Liberals urge the establishment of a task force for the preparation of a UN Covenant on Environment and Development.

We call for an immediate halt to fracking in the UK and an end to all dumping of waste at sea. A Pollution Inspectorate should be created with power to investigate actual and potential causes of pollution, to order reduction measures and to penalise institutions responsible. We recognise that there will be a continuing need for landfill sites, but believe that these should never be the major means of waste disposal. Liberals call for an end to the use of nuclear generation of electricity. However, we support the continued research and development on nuclear fusion. We call for all companies to include in every third annual report and accounts an 'environmental audit report' to be carried out by appropriately qualified professionals.



Citizens' Rights

A need for a bill of rights and written constitution

Liberals call for the establishment of a Constitutional Convention, with an extensive brief to draft a Bill of Rights and a written Constitution. These should incorporate the rights of freedom of association, lawful demonstration, dissent picketing, privacy, and protection from racial, sexual or any other form of harassment.

We believe in the introduction of legal aid in libel cases to allow ordinary citizens to participate in the legal system fairly. Liberals believe the freedom of an individual ought to extend to the right to die with dignity at a time of one's own choosing. Accordingly, we would seek a comprehensive study of voluntary euthanasia. The Liberal Party calls for the appointment of an independent committee to safeguard the public interest and to regulate the use of cameras both on private and public property.



Peace

UN's role should be strengthened

We see this country as committed to supporting and strengthening the United Nations, and working steadfastly for the eventual abolition of national armies and armaments. Britain should attempt to prevent the export of arms and other military equipment where they will be used to fuel conflicts or oppress innocent civilians.

We would restrict defence expenditure to the average of our European partners, prioritising the defence of our legitimate interests and the shouldering of our fair share of United Nations policing etc. We also call for a government initiative, including grants and tax incentives, to assist arms manufacturers to reorientate their businesses to other products.

The Liberal Party is committed to the abandonment of UK nuclear weapons and to the abandonment of all weapons of mass and indiscriminate destruction. We call for all others with similar weapons to follow this lead.



Government

A need for electoral reform

The Liberal Party calls for the introduction of the single transferable vote in multimember constituencies, based on utilising current city, unitary authority and county boundaries. The Liberal Party believes that the revitalisation of British politics will not be achieved through government funding of political parties. The Liberal Party believes maximum expenditure limits should be reduced by at least 50%.

We would reduce the minimum voting age to 16 and allow 16 year olds to stand for public offices. We oppose any extension of postal voting and the use of referenda in general, and certainly do not wish to see government by referenda. However, we believe that referenda would be necessary to effect changes in a written constitution were one to be adopted. Liberals believe that the State and the Church should be separate and that the State should neither discriminate against nor endorse any religion or religious doctrine.



Health

The NHS should meet all the nation's health needs

We believe that the NHS should be firmly established on the Liberal principle of public funding sufficient to meet all the health needs of the nation, with the private sector being available as an additional choice for those who wish to pay for it, but not as an alternative form of healthcare.

With finite financial resources, difficult decisions have to be made about priorities. Public health, prevention and basic care services that benefit the many must generally take priority over technological advances which, at best, can help only the few. We call for the setting up of a Royal Commission to investigate the impact of medical technology on ethics and medical funding. We also believe that, as a general principle, decision-making should be devolved to the most local practical level. It is also important that there are continuing local consultations between health service professionals and the public on the manner in which services are provided.



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