**THE LIBERAL DEMOCRAT MANIFESTO 2024**

**Key Policies from a Wandsworth perspective**

The following summary provides a digest of key Manifesto policies as seen from a Wandsworth perspective. It covers in turn the main policies for Health and Social Care; Education, Children, Young People, and Families; Business, Jobs and Trade (including with Europe); Climate Change, Energy and Environment; Rights and Equality; and Political Reform. Explanation is included.

**HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**

**Health**

Let’s be clear, our NHS is in crisis.  Despite the first-class hospitals in Wandsworth, many residents in the borough have been experiencing difficulties seeing a GP, frustrating hours spent at A&E, slow ambulance response times and, and worst of all, long waits for treatment as waiting lists have risen to 7.5 million.   Patient safety is put at risk by overwhelming pressure on resources, staff shortages, and the long waiting times. Economic growth is being held back by people being unable to work.

Key policies are:

* **give everyone the right to see a GP within seven days, or within 24 hours if they urgently need to,** with 8,000 more GPs to deliver it

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* **Guarantee access to an NHS dentist** **for everyone needing urgent and emergency care** ending DIY dentistry and ‘dental deserts’.

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* **Boost Cancer survival rates** and introduce a guarantee for 100% of patients to **start treatment for cancer within 62 days from urgent referral**.

* Improve early access to mental health services by:
* Establishing **mental health hubs for young people** in every community
* Introducing **mental health check-ups** at key points in people’s lives when they are most vulnerable to mental ill-health.

* Help people to spend **five more years of their life in good health** by investing in public health.

Our plan will tackle the crisis at both the front door and the back door to the NHS: reducing the numbers going to hospital by investing in public health and in early access to community services including GPs, pharmacists and dentists; while stopping so many people being stuck in hospital beds through the weakness in social care.

**Care**

Everyone deserves high-quality care when they need it, in their own homes wherever possible. Yet social care services are in crisis. Hundreds of 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 pressure on the NHS. Both paid and unpaid care workers are under strain. This must be put right.

Key policies:

* **Introduce free personal care** based on the model introduced by the Liberal Democrats in government in Scotland in 2002, so that provision is based on need, not ability to pay.
* **Establish a cross-party commission to forge a long-term agreement on sustainable funding for social care.**
* **Create a social care workforce plan,** establish a Royal College of Care Workers to improve recognition and career progression, and 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** and a statutory guarantee of **regular respite breaks.**
* **Develop a digital strategy to enable care users to live tech-enabled lives.**

**EDUCATION, CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES**

**Education**

Liberal Democrats believe that education is the best investment we can make in our children’s potential and our country’s future. Yet our school and college systems are under great strain, from teacher shortages, from crumbling school buildings, and from the effects of Covid-19 lockdowns on the learning of some. The serious mental illness levels amongst school children are still on a rising trend.

Key Lib Dem policies address the problems and give every child the support they need:

* **Put a dedicated, qualified mental health professional in 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

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* **Increase school and college funding per-pupil** above the rate of inflation every year.
* **End the scandal of crumbling school and college buildings by investing in new buildings and clearing the backlog of repairs.**
* **Introduce a ‘tutoring guarantee’ for every disadvantaged pupil who needs extra support**.
* **Invest in high-quality early years education and close the attainment gap** by giving disadvantaged children aged three and four an extra five hours a week and tripling the Early Years Pupil Premium to £1,00 a year.

In addition, when the school age years are passed, key policies are:

* **Reinstate maintenance grants for disadvantaged students** so living costs can never be a barrier to studying at university.
* Expand opportunities for young people to study, teach and volunteer abroad by **rejoining the Erasmus Plus program** as an associated country.
* **Create new Lifelong Skills Grants,** giving all adults £5,000 to spend on education and training throughout their lives, and aim to increase them to £10,00 in future when the public finances allow.

**Families, Children and Young People**

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 offer economic benefit by assisting parents to re-enter the labour market; and are  important for reducing both the attainment gap between rich and poor, and the gender pay gap. Good parental leave arrangements in the first few months are needed for similar reasons,

Key policies are:

* **Extend free school meals** to all children in poverty, with an ambition to extend them to all primary school children when the public finances allow
* **Appoint a Cabinet Minister for Children and Young People**.
* **Ensure that all parents can access childcare that is flexible, affordable and fair,** including by reviewing the rates paid to providers for free hours, to ensure they cover the actual costs of high-quality childcare and early years education.
* Give parents genuine flexibility and choice in the crucial early months **by doubling statutory maternity and shared parental leave 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.**

**BUSINESS, JOBS AND TRADE**

**Business**

The cost-of-living crisis which affects us all is being fed by a weakness in our economy’s productivity and growth.  The last three years have seen hardly any improvement in productivity.  Weak investment levels are part of the picture. Yet the UK has a strength in innovative ideas worthy of support, and needs investment to fund its green transition.

Key policies are:

* **Develop an industrial strategy** that will give business certainty and incentivise them to invest in new technologies to grow the economy, create good jobs and tackle the climate crisis.
* **Unlock British business’s 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 the subsection on trade below.
* **Boost small business and empower them to create good local jobs i**ncluding by abolishing business rates and replacing them with a Commercial Landowner Levy to help our high streets.
* Introduce a **duty of care for the environment and human rights** in business operations and supply chains.

**Jobs**

A shortage of skilled labour is widely reported by employers and is holding back growth.  While selective recruitment from overseas can help, the process is not good for countries losing their skilled workers and not good for British workers who have not been trained to fill the vacancies on offer.

Key policies are:

* **Fix the skills and recruitment crisis** by investing in education and training, including increasing the availability of apprenticeships and career advice for young people.
* **Boost productivity and encourage people to enter the job market**, such as carers, parents and people with disabilities, by making the most of technology and new ways for working.

**Trade**

Trade is the lifeblood of the Country’s economy and standards of living. We benefit from imports from all over the world, paid for by the exports of our more competitive firms and industries. Within this picture, small company exporters have been particularly hit by the paperwork and barriers to trading across the channel. With promised trade deals with the USA and India not having materialised, it is all-the-more important to renew our links with our nearest and largest trading partners in continental Europe.

To this end, Lib Dems will **fix the UK’s broken relationship with Europe** by following ar four-stage roadmap.

* **Take 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.
* **Rebuild 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 environmental initiatives, and cooperation on defence, security and crime.
* **Deepen the trading relationship** with critical steps for the UK economy, including negotiating comprehensive veterinary and plant health agreements and mutual recognition agreements.
* Finally, once the ties of trust and friendship have been renewed,  and the damage caused by the Conservatives to trade between the UK and EU has begun to be repaired, Lib Dems 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 opportunity of its citizens, and are also essential steps on the road to EU membership which remain our longer-term objective.

**In short, Lib Dems will immediately fix our broken relationship with Europe, forge a new relationship with Europe based on cooperation not confrontation, and move to conclude a new comprehensive agreement that removes as many barriers to trade as possible.**

**CLIMATE CHANGE, ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT**

**Climate and Energy**

Climate change is already causing major damage. Soaring temperatures are leading to wildfires, floods, droughts, and rising sea levels affecting millions directly, and billions through disrupted food production and higher prices. High gas prices as a result of the Ukraine conflict have underlined the need for the secure sources of energy which renewables provide.   Yet, following their backsliding, the Government has been warned by the independent Climate Change Committee that they are not on track to meet their legally binding targets.

The Lib Dems remain committed to reaching net zero by 2045 at latest – five years earlier than the 2050 date agreed internationally.   As additional policies to this end, a drive to improve Britain’s carbon inefficient housing stock will both reduce fuel bills, and contribute substantially to the reduction in the Country’s greenhouse gas footprint.

Key policies:

* **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

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* **Ensure that all new homes are carbon neutral.**
* **Drive a rooftop solar revolution** by expanding incentives for households to install solar panels, including a fair price for electricity sold to the grid.
* **Invest in renewable power to generate 90% of the UK’s electricity from renewables by 2030.**

In addition, to drive the necessary changes to our economy, and help abroad, Lib Dems will:

* **Appoint a chief secretary for sustainability in the Treasury, and establish a new Net Zero Delivery Authority** to coordinate action across Government Departments**.**
* **Hand more powers and resources to local councils for local net zero strategies.**
* **Establish national and local citizen’s assemblies** to give people real involvement in the decisions needed to tackle climate change.
* **Return international development spending to 0.7% of national income, with tackling climate change a key priority for development spending.**

Properly exploited, wind and solar power are nowadays cheaper than the carbon emitting alternatives. As a House of Commons Library briefing reports, new renewable schemes were able to generate electricity more cheaply than fossil fuels even before the gas price rises of 2021 and 2022.   Assisted by this benefit, we must invest in the green transition needed to make our contribution to global efforts to avoid and mitigate against the impacts of climate change.

**Our Natural Environment**

Our natural environment is suffering. The UK is failing to meet 17 of its 20 biodiversity targets. One in 6 species are threatened with extinction from Britain. The Conservative Government’s neglect is evident in the sewage crisis, which has led to a million sewage discharges into rivers, lakes and coastal areas in the last three years, while water company executives have been awarding themselves fat bonusses.

Key policies:

* **Set meaningful and binding targets to stop the decline of our natural environment and double nature by 2050:** doubling the size of the Protected Area Network, the area of vital wildlife habitats and species abundance.
* **End sewage discharges** by transforming water companies into public benefit companies, banning bonuses for water bosses until discharges and leaks end, and replacing Ofwat with a tough new regulator with new powers to prevent sewage dumps.
* **Plant at least 60 million trees a year,** helping to restore woodland habitats while providing carbon sinks to help reduce global warming.
* **Pass a Clean Air Act,** based on World Health Organization guidelines, and enforced by a new Air Quality Agency

**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.  In the past, the UK has led the world in advancing human rights, and equality for women, LGBT+ people and disabled people. But under the Conservatives, progress has stalled. They fail to stand up to hatred and prejudice, instead even toying with ripping up the UK’s Human Rights Act. Our Country’s culture of tolerance is under threat.

**Equality and Opportunities**

To combat the unfairness, prejudice, and restricted opportunities which discrimination brings, and improve opportunities, key policies are:

* **Develop and implement a comprehensive Race Equality Strategy** to address deep inequalities, including in education, health, criminal justice and the economy.
* **Respect and defend the rights and identities of all sexual orientations and gender identities,** including trans and non-binary people.
* **Protect everyone’s right to make independent decisions over their reproductive health** without interference by the state and ensure access to high quality reproductive healthcare.
* Give every person with disabilities the **right to work from home,** unless there are significant business reasons why it is not possible**;** and strengthen opportunities for all employees by giving them a right **to flexible working** subject to the same proviso.

**Legislative protections**

We must defend existing laws which offer us fundamental protections and pursue new laws to cover areas where policy is lacking.

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Key policies to these ends are:

* **Champion the Human Rights Act** and resist any attempts to weaken or repeal it.
* **Scrap the Conservatives’ draconian anti-protest laws**, restoring pre-existing protections for peaceful assembly and public safety, and immediately **halt the use of live facial recognition surveillance** by the police and private companies.
* **Make misogyny a hate crime and** give police and prosecutors the resources and training they need to **prevent and prosecute all hate crimes** while supporting survivors.
* **Ban all forms of conversion therapies and practices.**

**POLITICAL REFORM**

**Fair votes**

Above all, our electoral system must be fair, and it must involve all voters. Yet our present system fails on both counts. It is far from fair that parties can win power with less than 40% of the votes cast, as happened in both 2010 and 2015.   And, far from being involved, many voters are left feeling marginalised by our system’s winner-takes-all approach, particularly in constituencies not targeted by a political party.  We need change - to a fair voting system which gives every voter a say in the outcome.

To this end, our key policy is:

* **Introduce proportional representation by the Single Transferable Vote for electing MPs, and local councillors in England,** to ensure that no politician can take you for granted.

To strengthen democratic rights and participation, in addition Lib Dems will :

* **Reform the House of Lords with a proper democratic mandate**
* **give 16- and 17-year-olds the right to vote.**
* **scrap the Conservatives’ voter ID scheme**

Though it may seem novel, proportional representation (PR) has already been introduced, without any problems, for the Scottish Parliament, and for the Welsh and London Assemblies. PR has been adopted widely on the Continent and beyond, including in well-governed states from Switzerland to Germany to the Scandinavian countries, the Irish Republic, and New Zealand. The higher turn-out rates associated with PR testify that it brings an increased sense of political participation, with every vote counting and tactical voting unnecessary.

**Restoring public trust in politics**

Nothing undermines public trust in politics more than seeing a political party appear to respond to influence from lobbyists and donors, and using money to distort the democratic process.

Key policy:

* **Take big money out of politics by capping donations to political parties.**

Lib Dems will also enshrine **the Ministerial Code in legislation** to hold Government Ministers to account for corruption and sleaze.

**Modernising our Constitution**

As Liberal Democrats, we believe in empowering individuals because people know what works best for them. In turn, regions and local areas know what is best for their residents, so they should have a greater say over their lives.  Yet, at present, our Country’s governance is very heavily centralised. Even in Scotland, devolution is incomplete without a written constitution to act as a regulator and check on the sovereignty of the central parliament.

Accordingly, key policies are:

* **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.
* **Oppose a second Scottish Independence Referendum and Independence.**