

Pocket Guide to Liberal Democrat Policies



March 2010

A cycle of red-blue, blue-red government has got us into the current economic crisis and political malaise. It is time to try something new. If you want better, choose different, choose the Liberal Democrats.

Only the Liberal Democrats can provide Britain with the fresh start it needs. The Liberal Democrats will create a fair society and a different and better sort of politics. We will reform our economy so that everyone gets a fair deal and fix our rotten political system so that the right decisions are taken. We will deliver change that works for you.

The Liberal Democrats are different because we're the only party that believes in fairness: we'll bring change that works for you, instead of just those at the top.

Nick Clegg

Applicability

Liberal Democrats have championed devolution of powers to Scotland and Wales. That means that policies in those nations are increasingly different from those in England - reflecting different choices, priorities and circumstances, and often the influence of Liberal Democrats in government. This guide sets out our plans for a Liberal Democrat Government in Westminster. Our Scottish and Welsh Parties publish their own policies on devolved matters.

Note

This guide outlines key policies as we approach the 2010 General Election. As some policies are updated at each Party Conference, please refer to conference motions or briefings on the party website www.libdems.org.uk as necessary until this guide is next updated. The Liberal Democrat Manifesto setting out our costed programme for government in the next Parliament will be published at the beginning of the General Election Campaign.

Compiled and produced by:

Liberal Democrats Policy & Research Unit
Liberal Democrats
4 Cowley Street
London
SW1P 3NB



CONTENTS

ECONOMY	4
BUSINESS AND ENTERPRISE	5
PENSIONS AND BENEFITS	6
ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE	7
NATURAL ENVIRONMENT	8
RURAL AFFAIRS.....	9
LOCAL COMMUNITIES.....	9
TRANSPORT	11
HEALTH.....	12
EDUCATION	13
GOVERNMENT & CIVIL LIBERTIES	14
LAW AND ORDER.....	15
ARTS & CULTURE.....	16
EUROPE	17
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE.....	18

ECONOMY

Decades of Labour and Conservative rule has created an unsustainable economy, preoccupied with the artificial wealth of inflated property prices rather than productive work and invention. Our economy is too dependent on the "Square Mile" – the City of London – instead of on all 100,000 square miles of Britain. We will set out a clear plan to bring the national budget back under control, taking tough decisions in public spending to avoid the salami slicing of key public services. We will set up an infrastructure bank to direct private finance to essential projects such as new rail services and green energy. We will break up the banks, to ensure that taxpayers are never again expected to insure the activities of high-risk 'casino' banking.

Cutting taxes for people on low and middle incomes – There will be no income tax on the first £10,000 you earn – meaning 3.6 million working people and low income pensioners will no longer have to pay any income tax at all, while millions more will have an income tax cut of £700. Pensioners will get up to £100 extra. The change will be paid for by introducing a mansion tax, closing loopholes that benefit the wealthy and making sure airlines pay for the pollution they cause.

Getting the public finances in order – We will set out a clear plan to reduce the deficit and get public finances in order. Our approach will be based on economic indicators not political dogma. We will base our decision of when to start cutting the budget deficit on five tests; the rate of growth; the level of unemployment; credit conditions; the extent of spare capacity in the economy and the cost of Government borrowing. We plan to cut spending by, for example, capping public sector pay rises to £400 for two years, abolishing the Child Trust Fund, and scraping unnecessary defence projects including the like-for-like replacement of Trident.

Saving to spend – When people are losing their jobs, it's right to reallocate some of the money we save to help them. We will immediately reallocate £3.5 billion pounds to job-rich capital projects like bringing empty homes back into use, insulating schools and developing renewable energy. Over the longer term we will cut further wasteful or low priority spending so there is money to invest in improving education for our children as well as to pay down the deficit.

Sorting out and breaking up the banks – The UK banks owe their very existence to the British taxpayer. Some banks such as RBS, Lloyds-HBOS and Northern Rock have received direct taxpayer bailouts. However, all have benefited from the explicit guarantee that none of them will be allowed to fail. Yet many of these banks continue to engage in high risk activities which are of little or no benefit to ordinary taxpayers knowing that if things go wrong they can turn to the taxpayer. This is fundamentally wrong and the Liberal Democrats will split up the banking system, to make sure we are no longer expected to underwrite high risk banking. This will take time so we propose to introduce a 10% levy on bank profits as a recognition of the protection they receive until they have been broken up.

BUSINESS AND ENTERPRISE

We are in the teeth of the longest recession on record. It happened because Labour, and the Conservatives before them, built a precarious economy that was too dependent on the City of London, soaring house prices and rocketing personal debt. Liberal Democrats want to create a thriving, fair and balanced economy with jobs that last in every part of the country, and in every sector, and where the environment is protected. First and foremost we will get the banks lending again so businesses can grow and avoid job cuts. We will set up Local Enterprise Funds and Regional Stock Exchanges to help businesses grow outside London and will stop burdening businesses with unnecessary regulations.

Get the banks lending responsibly again – Thousands of businesses can't get credit on fair terms, so they're having to cut investment and jobs. That's hugely unfair when we own some of the banks and are propping up the rest of them. There are taxpayers' representatives on the boards of the banks we own or part-own. They should insist banks lend to viable businesses again immediately.

Local Enterprise Funds and Regional Stock Exchanges to help businesses grow – Local Enterprise Funds will help local people invest in growing businesses in every area of the country. And Regional Stock Exchanges will be a route for smaller businesses to access equity without the huge risks and costs of a London listing.

Cut regulation and create a fair playing field for business – We will properly assess the cost and effectiveness of regulations before and after they are introduced, reforming Impact Assessments. We will operate a 'one in one out' system so that for every rule introduced, another one is scrapped. And we will change the culture of regulators to help, not hinder, business.

Give the Post Office and Royal Mail long term futures – We will separate the Post Office from Royal Mail, retaining the Post Office in public ownership. To secure the future of the Post Office we will focus on developing new sources of revenue including a Post Bank. We will divide ownership of Royal Mail between a John Lewis style employee trust, incentivising staff as part owners of the business, and the government with the remaining 49% minority sold to create funds for investment.

A fair deal for consumers – We will introduce a Universal Service Code to secure high quality customer service in the private and public sectors, for example, by requiring that the customer service phone number is free from mobiles and landlines. We will ensure a fair balance between small and large retailers by establishing a local competition office within the OFT and by introducing a local competition test for all planning applications for new retail developments.

Fair trade – Rich countries still operate subsidies and tariff barriers that hit the poorest countries in the world. We will seek to break down these barriers, and promote trade and investment in developing countries. Dumping of subsidised agricultural exports by developed countries wrecks local farming in Africa and other parts of the world. This scandal must stop.

PENSIONS AND BENEFITS

The pensions and benefits system is unfair. Complicated forms and endless phone calls mean that many end up not getting the help they need. In the recession more people are finding themselves reliant on unemployment benefits for months on end with no help to get a job. We believe that people who want to get ahead should be supported and older people deserve a pension they can live on. Those without a job need help to get back into work and earn a decent living. People who've fallen on hard times should get a helping hand. We have affordable plans to increase the basic state pension and link it to earnings so pensioners are better off. We will make tax credits simple and stable.

Restore the earnings link immediately – It is unfair that as each year goes by, pensioners slip further behind. It is only fair that, at times when the country is getting richer, retired people share the benefit. We will immediately restore the link between pensions and earnings so pensioners' living standards finally improve.

Scrap the default retirement age – It is unfair to assume that just because someone has reached a particular age, they are not fit to do a particular job. People should be judged on their ability to do their work not their age. We would remove compulsory retirement ages.

Tax Credits you can rely on – Families should be able to sleep easy knowing that they can spend the money they receive without worrying it will be clawed back by the Treasury. We will fix the payments of tax credits for 6 months at a time so payments are stable and predictable for families – though of course there will be cases where exceptions are made on an emergency basis where needed, like if someone loses their job or has their hours drastically cut.

Help for the young unemployed – We will make a promise to young people that they will not spend more than 90 days on Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) before they get more training, education, an internship or a place on a work programme. We will do this by increasing the number of further education places, giving students financial support to return to college and creating a paid internship scheme.

Fair energy prices – Nearly 37,000 people died from the cold last winter, most of them elderly. Energy bills are too expensive for too many people, especially pensioners who often spend all day at home. We will force energy companies to introduce "social tariffs", lower than their other prices, for everyone struggling to make ends meet.

Winter Fuel Payments for disabled people – Over-60s get a Winter Fuel Payment of at least £200, no matter their income or health, while disabled people who may be stuck at home all day, get nothing to help them keep warm. We will reform the system, granting payments to disabled people paid for by delaying age-related payments until people reach 65.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is getting worse. It's unfair because it's our children who will suffer. Labour has failed to make it easy for us to go green. We can't trust the Conservatives: they talk about going green but many don't even accept climate change science. Liberal Democrats are the only party that takes climate change seriously enough. We believe there is a huge opportunity to get out of this recession by going green, strengthening the economy and creating jobs that last. As well as investing in green infrastructure, we'll insulate homes and force energy companies to make bills fair so you can afford to keep warm. We'll oppose new dirty coal or nuclear power stations: we will use our lasting natural resources like wind and wave power. Over time, we'll ensure Britain doesn't contribute at all to climate change because we absorb as much carbon as we emit.

Build green infrastructure to create jobs that last – Now is the time for big investment to get the wheels of the economy turning again. By investing in green technologies, home insulation, and public transport we will create hundreds of thousands of new jobs that will last, and make the economy sustainable for the long term.

Fair fuel bills – Energy companies charge you less for your energy the more you use. That's unfair and environmentally crazy. It means a pensioner heating one room pays more per unit than a millionaire heating a mansion. We believe people who use less should pay less so we'll change bills so the first units are cheapest. We'll protect the poorest customers by making energy firms create "social" tariffs at lower prices for those who need them.

Major insulation programme to warm our homes – Britain has some of the worst insulated homes in Europe. Tens of thousands of older people die from the cold every year, and a million pensioners can only afford to heat one room. We want homes we can be proud of, that we can afford to keep warm. We'll have a major programme to give every home, school and hospital the opportunity to be insulated, paid for by the savings from lower energy bills. We'll make sure every new home and building is fully energy efficient by improving building regulations.

Yes to renewables to generate your own power – To cut carbon emissions and give people a fair chance to go green, we will create an "eco-cashback" scheme where you get cash from the government for installing micro-generation technology like solar panels or a wind turbine at home. Then you'll be able to sell the energy back to the National Grid at a profit, with a so-called "feed-in tariff".

No to nuclear and dirty coal – The power stations we rely on are not only threatening the climate, many of them are coming to the end of their useful life. As we replace them, we have to move on from old technologies. We will not waste taxpayer subsidies on nuclear power and we will block any plans for dirty coal power stations.

A zero-carbon Britain – We are the first party to aim for a carbon neutral Britain so we don't contribute at all to global warming - making the British economy carbon neutral overall by 2050, reducing carbon emissions in the UK by over 40% of 1990 levels by 2020 as a step on the way.

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

We live in a beautiful country, but we aren't protecting it well enough. Liberal Democrats will change the way we protect the environment so everyone has fair access to clean water, clean air, and open spaces. We're the only party that takes seriously the responsibility of protecting our natural heritage. We will protect your health by cutting pollution. We will use less landfill by reducing packaging and increasing recycling. We will change the planning system so homes aren't built either in dangerous flood areas, or where there isn't enough water, and our precious open spaces are protected, in towns, villages and the open countryside, too.

Keeping you in touch with our natural environment – We believe in a universal right to responsible, managed access and will increase the general right of access to the countryside, along the lines of the model introduced by the Liberal Democrats in Scotland. We will make national parks democratically accountable, allowing a proportion of the Park boards to be elected.

Local planning decisions – We will scrap Labour's Planning Act and return decision-making to local people, scrapping the Infrastructure Planning Commission and giving people the right to appeal against decisions in favour of development. We will create a new designation – similar to SSSI status – to protect green areas of particular importance or value to the community. We will define gardens as greenfield sites in planning law so that they cannot so easily be built over.

Protect greenfield land – We will equalise VAT on new build and repair on an overall revenue neutral basis. It will also help to reduce the costs of repairs to historic buildings and encourage building on brownfield land.

Manage water for everyone – Many areas need protection from flooding, while others face drought. We'll stop house building in major flood risk areas. In areas where there isn't enough water we'll introduce compulsory smart meters, which will help people use less and pay less. We'll crack down on the big water companies so they waste less, too.

No more landfill, a lot more recycling and a lot less waste – Landfill isn't fair for future generations – it destroys our natural landscape and stores up problems with pollution. We will set targets for "zero waste" so that we never squander land in this way again. That means much more recycling, much less packaging, and a huge increase in "anaerobic digestion" technology to generate energy from food and farm waste.

Save lives by cutting air pollution – 24,000 people die every year because of air pollution. It's unfair that they and their families suffer. We will improve your health by cutting pollution. We will cancel plans for a third runway at Heathrow and other airport expansion in the South East. We will move to revenue-neutral road user pricing over the longer term to reduce congestion and city centre pollution.

RURAL AFFAIRS

The Liberal Democrats are the only party with the vision, commitment and political drive to deliver positive change which will in turn safeguard the future of our rural communities. We want living communities with affordable homes and successful economies. We believe that no matter where you live local services should be affordable and accessible. We will stop big food companies bullying farmers, we will cut taxes for village shops and pubs to help them get through the recession and open more post offices in rural areas.

Keep local Post Offices and tax cuts to save rural shops and pubs – We will keep Post Offices open in rural areas where they're the lynchpin of community life, ending the Labour and Conservative closure programme. And in villages where there's only one shop or pub, we'll cut business rates to keep them open.

Improve local bus services – There aren't enough buses for people to get around, especially for older people and school children that live in rural areas who can't drive. We will give councils greater powers to regulate bus services according to rural community needs, meaning local people get a real say over routes and fares.

Affordable homes for all – We will provide more homes for local people by increasing councils' powers over second homes and promoting schemes for affordable homes like equity mortgages and 'Home on the Farm' which encourage farmers to convert existing buildings into affordable housing. Local councils will be given the power to identify the needs of the community so that more affordable housing is built in the areas which really need it.

Regulate supermarkets to ensure fair trade for farmers and a fair price for food – We will stop supermarkets bullying farmers, ensuring both farmers and shoppers get a fair price for food. We'll do this by creating a legal Supermarket Code and an independent regulator of Britain's food market.

Reform CAP payments to target support for farmers – We will introduce a minimum and maximum level for the Single Farm Payment so that big landowners get less, and the money goes to working farmers who need it not people who farm one field as a hobby. That will free money for extra support for hill farmers and cheap loans to help farmers invest in environmentally friendly biogas digesters.

National insulation programme to warm our homes – Fuel poverty is twice as bad in rural areas as in urban areas. Yet rural areas have received as little as 5% of Government grants to upgrade their insulation and heating even though rural areas account for a fifth of the population. Because many rural homes are off the gas network and both expensive and environmentally costly to heat, we will make homes that are dependent on fuel oil a priority for energy efficiency measures.

LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Too often, people's opinions about what happens in their area are ignored. Taxes we pay locally disappear into the Treasury and are spent elsewhere, and the way public services are provided reflects what central government wants rather than what local communities need. It's completely unfair that big developers and faceless bureaucrats have more power than local families in deciding where new buildings go up. Liberal Democrats will do things differently, because we believe local people and families know best about how things should be done in their area. We will cut back central government and all the stifling targets that it sets, make sure local taxes are spent locally and give people a real say over things like their local NHS, neighbourhood policing and new housing.

Give people a say in policing and the NHS – It's completely unfair that you get to vote for the council which collects the bins, but you don't get a say in the NHS that could save your life or the police who keep your family safe. We will create directly elected health boards and police authorities so these services deliver what you need.

Scrap £1bn of inspection regimes – We will free communities to set their own priorities and targets, and close down the inspection regimes that keep council staff busy filling in forms for the government instead of looking after local people.

Improve local bus services – There aren't enough buses for people to get around, especially for older people who can't drive. We will give councils greater powers to regulate bus services according to community needs, meaning local people get a real say over routes and fares.

Control over what is built in your area – Residents should have the power to appeal planning applications where an authority has said 'yes', just as developers presently have the right to appeal applications to which a Council has said 'no'.

Fairer local taxes: return Business Rates to councils – Local government and local people have to rely on central government for almost three quarters of the money spent locally. Government bureaucrats hold the purse strings so they decide what happens in your area: that's unfair. We will put councils back in charge of Business Rates, giving local people more control and a real incentive to stimulate local business growth and create jobs.

Fairer local taxes: Scrap the unfair Council Tax – The Council Tax is an unfair tax which bears no relationship to the ability to pay. Liberal Democrats believe that it should be scrapped and replaced with a fair local tax, based on people's ability to pay. We will pilot a fair local income tax in areas that choose to try it out.

TRANSPORT

The transport system is in a mess. There is too much traffic on the roads, trains are expensive and overcrowded, and buses are too few and far between, particularly in the countryside. This has to change. Liberal Democrats believe in public transport: it's part of a fair society and the best way to cut carbon emissions from transport without trying to limit people's opportunities to travel. We are different because we are the only party to have identified real money to allocate to improvements in public transport. We will cut rail fares by renegotiating the deals made with the train companies. We will improve bus services by giving local people more control over fares and routes. And we will use the tax system to reduce carbon emissions from transport.

Cut rail fares and rail replacement bus services – We will make sure that regulated fares go up by less than inflation, meaning prices will come down, and we will make Network Rail refund a third of your ticket price if you have to take a rail replacement bus service.

A National Infrastructure Bank to invest in public transport like High Speed Rail – Britain needs new High Speed Rail links to encourage people not to take domestic flights. We will set up a national infrastructure bank to help attract private finance for infrastructure projects like this.

Improve local bus services – There aren't enough buses for people to get around, especially for older people who can't drive. We will give councils greater powers to regulate bus services according to community needs, meaning local people get a real say over routes and fares, in order to produce an effective transportation system that accurately reflects each individual area.

Tax pollution, not people – As part of our plan to cut income tax for millions of people, we will ensure polluters pay for the damage they cause. We will replace Air Passenger Duty with a per-plane tax that will help to stop planes flying half empty and encourage people to use less polluting means of travel within the UK.

No 3rd runway at Heathrow – Heathrow is big enough. There must be no third runway and no expansion of other airports in the South East either.

Sustainable methods of moving freight – We will ensure good rail paths on key strategic freight corridors, facilitate the maximum use of inland and coastal waterways and encourage research and development into low-carbon technologies for freight vehicles.

More power to local authorities – Labour has failed to tackle congestion in Britain's towns and cities. Town planning should be used to minimise the need for car use. We will include promotion of safer cycling and pedestrian routes in all local transport plans. We will end the highly centralised planning approach and empower local authorities to deal with issues such as traffic target resolution and the regulation of local bus services.

Green zero-carbon vehicles – We will set a zero emissions target for all new cars by 2040. We will also extend targets to all other vehicles, to ensure that by 2050 all freight vehicles are running on electricity, sustainable biofuels or other renewable fuels.

HEALTH

The NHS is a source of pride because it's built on the basic British principle of fairness. We're right to be proud of the NHS but the truth is that it still isn't as good as it should be. It's often too big and complex for patients to handle, too much money is being wasted on bureaucracy and doctors and nurses spend too much time trying to meet government targets instead of caring for patients. Liberal Democrats believe we have to change the NHS so patients come first. And that care would improve if local people had a say in how their health services were run. Our first priority is to protect front line services by making the NHS work better with the money it has and investing the money we save back into frontline services. We will save money in the long term by investing in public health.

Protecting NHS frontline services – The NHS is facing increasing pressure on vital services: more and more people suffer from dementia, there are ever more expensive cancer drugs available, and increasing obesity is leading to more heart patients. To ensure these services aren't cut even though budgets are tight, we will cut waste and re-invest every penny in frontline services, such as cancer treatment, mental health services, maternity services and dementia care, which could face cuts.

Putting local people in charge – It's wrong that local hospitals can be closed without the communities affected having any real say. We will give people the power to take control over their local NHS through elected health boards. This also means local people will be able to hold their NHS to account if the quality of care isn't up to scratch.

Patient contract – It's not fair that patients who don't get the treatment they need from the NHS within target times are often then left on long waiting lists. We believe that everyone should be seen within the agreed timeframe. So we'll improve the quality of care people get from the health service by paying for people to go private if the NHS can't treat you on time.

Improving GP services – Many of us lead hectic lives and the NHS should be there to help. That's why we'll make sure everyone has the right to register with the GP that's most convenient to them. There still aren't enough GPs in deprived areas where they are needed most. So we'll pay GPs a bit more to provide healthcare to patients in deprived areas with the worst health, paid for by rebalancing the pay system across the board.

Patient safety – Patients' lives are at risk because foreign doctors are allowed to work in the NHS without proper tests of competence and language. We'll introduce a national test to make sure everyone who works in the NHS can speak English and is up to scratch. It's also crazy that hospitals get paid for mistakes like cutting off the wrong leg. We'll stop hospitals from getting paid for mistakes and put in place a legal duty for them to tell patients if something has gone wrong.

A review of social care – The long-term funding system for adult social care in England is not fit for purpose and funding for services is likely to become more difficult in the future. We want a cross-party commission set up to reach a consensus on social care and sort this problem out once for all. Our preference is for a partnership model, where the state and the individual both contribute, with a guaranteed contribution to the costs of care.

EDUCATION

Liberal Democrats want every child to get an excellent education because it is the best way to get on in life, get a good job, and learn about the world. Only when all children get a good start, no matter where they live or what their parents do, will we have a fair society. We will provide a fair start for all children by giving schools the money they need to cut class sizes and set teachers free to spend more time teaching in the classroom. We will scrap unfair university tuition fees so everyone has the chance to get a degree, regardless of how rich their parents are.

Ensure children get the individual attention they need by cutting class sizes by introducing a 'Pupil Premium' - To give every child a fair start in life, the Liberal Democrats will spend an extra £2.5bn on schools, guaranteeing them the money they need to support children who are struggling. It will be targeted at schools taking on children who need more help and can be used to cut class sizes and make sure they get the individual support they need. Headteachers will be free to spend the extra money as they see fit. An average primary school could cut classes to 20, with a typical secondary school able to cut classes to just 16 or start a programme of catch-up classes for 160 pupils.

The best start for the youngest children – We will replace the bureaucratic Early Years Foundation Scheme with a slimmed down framework which includes a range of educational approaches and enough flexibility to suit the needs of every young child. We will also guarantee SEN tests for all 5-year olds to find out early on which children need extra help, and improve SEN training for teachers.

Better, reliable assessment – We will scale back Key Stage 2 tests at age 11, and use teacher assessment, with external checking, to improve the quality of marking.

Give pupils the freedom to choose what they want to study – We will create a General Diploma to bring GCSEs, A-Levels and high quality vocational qualifications together, enabling pupils to mix vocational and academic learning. We will also give 14-19 year olds the right to take up a course at college, rather than at school, if it suits them better.

Education Freedom Act – Teachers want to get the best from children but they are held back because of constant government interference which stops them from spending time with their pupils. The Liberal Democrats believe that all schools should be free from meddling politicians to work in creative and interesting ways to make sure every child gets a fair start in life. We will slim down the curriculum and pass an Education Freedom Act banning politicians from getting involved in the day to day running of schools.

Scrap unfair University Tuition Fees – To get a degree, young people are saddled with thousands of pounds of debt when it is tough enough to get a job, get on the housing ladder and make ends meet. The Liberal Democrats are the only party which believes university education should be free and admissions based on ability not bank balance. We will scrap unfair tuition fees for all students taking their first degrees saving them nearly £10,000 each. We have a financially responsible plan to phase fees out over six years, so that the change is affordable in these difficult economic times.

GOVERNMENT & CIVIL LIBERTIES

The expenses scandal has destroyed public confidence in politicians. But it was the symptom of a wider problem: our political system is rotten. The Liberal Democrats are the only party that will radically shake up politics to make it fair, and put power in the hands of citizens, rather than politicians. We will give people a real say in who governs the country by introducing fair votes. We will stop big donations, give people the power to sack corrupt MPs and make sure every single MP and Lord pays full British taxes. Labour has made Britain less fair by taking away our hard-won rights and freedoms, often supported by the Conservatives. The Liberal Democrats are the only party that believes in a fairer, freer Britain, where everyone gets fair treatment and everyone's privacy is respected.

Make votes fair – We will change politics forever and abolish safe seats by introducing a fair, more proportional voting system for MPs, and for the House of Lords. By giving voters the choice between people as well as parties, it means they can stick with a party but punish a bad MP by voting for someone else.

Give you the right to sack MPs who have broken the rules – If an MP has acted corruptly and breaks the rules, there should be a mechanism by which they can be sacked. The Liberal Democrats would introduce a 'recall' system in which a small percentage of constituents could force a by-election for any MP suspended for wrongdoing. Power should be in the hands of voters at all times, not just on Election Day.

Get big money out of politics – Politics should be a battle of ideas, not marketing budgets. No-one should be able to buy influence or buy an election. We will take big money out of politics by capping donations and spending throughout the electoral cycle.

Make all MPs and Lords pay full British taxes – Top Conservative donor Lord Ashcroft gets to vote on the laws of Britain, but he hasn't come clean about whether he pays full British taxes on all his earnings – or whether he's got non-domiciled tax status meaning he doesn't pay tax on offshore income. We believe everyone who decides laws in Parliament should pay full British taxes. We will pass a law to ensure they do.

Introduce a Freedom Bill to restore and protect our civil liberties – Liberal Democrats have put together all the freedoms that have been undermined by Labour and the Tories in the last twenty years to restore them in a single Act of Parliament. We will scrap ID cards; get innocent people off the DNA database; regulate CCTV; allow people to protest at Parliament; stop councils from spying on people; and stop unfair extradition to the US. See <http://freedom.libdems.org.uk/>

End plans to spy on your email and internet use – Labour want companies to store information about your email and internet use – even storing data about what you do on social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace. This is a huge waste of money and time, which we will scrap. We will ensure your private data is kept safe.

Get innocent people off the DNA database to focus it on criminals – Your DNA contains some of the most private, personal information about you. We will remove innocent people from the database and stop storing DNA from innocent people and children in the future, too.

LAW AND ORDER

People's lives are being ruined by crime and they don't feel safe in their own homes or their neighbourhood. Yet too many criminals are getting away without being caught or punished – and those who are caught are sent to prison and come out, unreformed, ready to commit more crimes. There's an endless cycle that makes us all less safe. Governments are always talking tough but nothing seems to change. Liberal Democrats are the only party which will cut crime because we will focus on what works. That means catching more criminals and making them pay for what they have done. It means making prison work to put them back on the straight and narrow, and involving communities in the fight against crime and anti-social behaviour. It means improving crime prevention and crime detection, which we know work to cut crime.

Catching criminals with 3,000 more police on the beat – Everyone knows the way to cut crime is to catch people who commit crime – and we need more police out on the streets to do it. By scrapping pointless ID cards, we will pay for 3,000 more police, and cut bureaucracy so they're out fighting crime not filling in forms. We will stop posturing on penalties and concentrate on catching criminals. We will also make police work better by giving local people a direct say in policing and by tackling outdated or bad working practices.

Crack down on gun and knife crime – We will make hospitals share information with the police so they know where gun and knife crime is happening. The police can then target these "hot spots" for stop and search to find these illegal weapons and destroy them. In Cardiff, where this model has been piloted, this practice has reduced violent crime by 40%.

Make prisoners work to pay compensation to victims – It is only fair that criminals pay for the damage they cause. We will make prisoners work and contribute from their prison wages to a compensation fund for victims. At the moment, prisons are just colleges of crime. Making prisoners work (as well as educating and training them) will give them the skills they need to 'go straight' when they are released.

Justice in your neighbourhood – We will give people a direct say in how petty criminals and those who engage in anti-social behaviour are punished in their area. This will be achieved by the creation of Neighbourhood Justice Panels, like the one run by Liberal Democrats in Somerset where 95% of offenders have been turned away from further crimes.

Tackle terrorism – It's vital to convict terrorists rather than putting entire communities under suspicion. We will scrap Control Orders and replace them with measures designed to secure convictions of terror suspects. We also support efforts to make it easier to charge suspects genuinely suspected of terrorism through a temporary lowering of the 'threshold test', the use of the post-charge questioning and intercept evidence. We will also reach out to the communities most at risk of radicalisation to improve the relationships between them and the police and increase the flow of intelligence.

ARTS & CULTURE

The Liberal Democrats believe that everyone should have the chance to take part in sport. We believe that the arts and culture are important because they enrich our lives, teach our children about their heritage and bring communities together. We will target funding to those who need it most. We will also stop public playing fields being lost and improve access by ensuring that facilities are open when people need them. We will stop lottery money being controlled by Government, so that local projects get an equal chance for funding. We also recognise the crucial importance of the creative industries to our economic prosperity. The creative industries are growing faster than any other sector and in 5 years' time will be as important as the financial services industry has been for the past 10 or 15 years. In order to ensure our creative future is as bright as possible we will support ailing media markets and provide support to new creative business ventures.

Use cash in abandoned betting accounts to improve sports facilities – Millions of pounds are lying in abandoned betting accounts. We believe this money can be put to good use going back into grassroots sport and will set up a capital fund for improving local facilities and supporting sports clubs.

Help creative business ventures – New start-ups in the creative industries often struggle from a lack of support in challenging commercial environment. In order to help more new businesses get off the ground we will set up a 'Creative Enterprise Fund' offering training, mentoring and small grants or loans when appropriate.

More lottery money into arts, heritage and sport – Reform the National Lottery. To replace some of the funds taken from good causes to pay for the Olympics, we will change the way the National Lottery is taxed to deliver millions of pounds more for good causes, prizes and the Exchequer.

Safeguard independent media – We will ensure that the BBC remains strong, free from interference and securely funded, not least to provide impartial news, independent of political and commercial pressures. We will also bring forward measures to support ailing commercial media producers, both local and national.

EUROPE

Liberal Democrats believe European cooperation is the best way for Britain to be strong and safe in this changing world. But we need to change the way we do it: putting Britain front and centre in the European Union will get us more influence than if we remain lukewarm, like we have been, or withdraw to the fringes as the Conservatives want. Liberal Democrats will stand up for the crime-fighting measures that keep Britain safe and ensure Europe works together on defence and security matters. But we will also keep up pressure on the EU to improve – reforming wasteful agricultural subsidies and scrapping the expensive second Parliament in Strasbourg.

Keep Britain safe: keep Britain part of international crime-fighting – The rise of cross-border crime means we need to work with our partners to tackle fraud, drugs and paedophile networks. We must not expose Britain to attack from criminal gangs. Liberal Democrats will keep Britain at the heart of international crime-fighting measures such as the European Arrest Warrant and the European Police Office (Europol) that the Conservatives want us to pull out of.

Share the security burden through more defence co-operation with allies – European countries need to work together more effectively on defence and security. There are huge savings to be made by buying in bulk and sharing military assets. With the defence budget under terrible strain, it would be irresponsible not to do this.

Keep the pressure on for CAP reform and to close wasteful Strasbourg Parliament – Europe is vital to Britain's interests, but that doesn't make it perfect. We will continue to fight for reform of agricultural subsidies so farmers get a fair deal. And we will fight to stop MEPs having to travel to Strasbourg every month, wasting €200m a month.

Create more jobs and chart a green road out of recession – We will work to create new jobs by breaking down trade barriers across Europe. We want to create jobs in green industries, put money in people's pockets from saving energy and build a transport network we can be proud of. We will encourage other EU countries to put in place similar investments to ensure we emerge from recession stronger and greener than before.

Promote free and fair world trade – We want the EU to promote a world trading system that is both free and fair. That means a liberal and open system that increases economic growth and jobs, but that takes account of environmental and social standards too. The EU has a key role to play in salvaging the Doha development round of the WTO, including eliminating trade barriers and production subsidies in agriculture.

The Euro – Liberal Democrats believe that it is in Britain's long-term interest to be part of the Euro. But Britain should only join when the economic conditions are right, and with the present economic turbulence and volatility, they are not at the moment. If the government were to recommend joining the euro, Liberal Democrats believe this should only take place if that decision were supported by the people of Britain in a referendum.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE

Liberal Democrats will put British values of fairness and the rule of law back at the heart of our foreign policy. We will always put the country's security first, but the national interest demands that we work with allies, stand up for human rights, and help people in the poorest parts of the world. We will not repeat the errors of Iraq. By working closely with our allies, Britain will have more influence in tackling international problems like poverty, climate change and terrorism. The brave men and women of our armed forces are the most precious military asset we have. They must be treated fairly, with pay and conditions that reflect their amazing commitment to this country. They must get the right equipment to do their jobs properly and as securely as possible.

A full inquiry into allegations of British complicity in torture and state kidnapping –

Liberal Democrats are completely opposed to the use of torture and state-kidnapping known as extraordinary rendition. The Government has consistently failed to tell the truth about the extent of its involvement in these practices by foreign intelligence agencies, including the CIA. Only a full inquiry will get to the bottom of the issue and restore Britain's reputation for decency and fairness.

Critical friends of the Afghanistan mission –

We support the mission in Afghanistan. Failure would have devastating consequences for Afghanistan, the region, for NATO and for Britain's security. But we owe it to our troops to ask tough questions about how success can be achieved. We will continue to demand that the strategy in Afghanistan pushes for a more legitimate government, tackles corruption and involves others players in the region.

A pay raise for the lower ranks –

Our brave troops put their lives on the line for this country. But too many of them are paid a pittance in return. Liberal Democrats will give lower ranks a pay rise, so that their pay is brought into line with the starting salary of police constables. The cost will be met, pound for pound, by reducing the number of bureaucrats and civil servants in the Ministry of Defence.

Homes for heroes –

Too many armed forces' families live in slum-like conditions. The least our heroes and their families deserve is a decent home. We would double the rate of modernisation of forces' family homes, and the cost will be met, pound for pound, by reducing numbers of top brass officers.

No to like-for-like Trident –

Full-scale Trident is a Cold War system intended for a by-gone age. It is unnecessary and, at £100bn over a lifetime, it is unaffordable. Liberal Democrats believe that our security could be better served by different systems more suited to current threats, and will hold a full defence review to help decide on this and other major defence procurement plans.

Meeting Britain's promise on aid –

Increase the UK's aid budget to reach the UN target of 0.7% of GNI by 2013 and enshrine that target in law. We will hold the G8 to its Gleneagles pledges on aid, including on the 0.7% target.