

CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

The way Britain is run means the Government doesn't have to listen to you. One party can get control over Parliament even if only a quarter of the people vote for them. So individual people and local communities don't seem to have a voice to influence what happens. The old parties are comfortable because they know they'll get into government every few years - so they never change things and they never will. But people are fed up of being ignored. It's time to make real change happen. We need to have an open political system that's designed to listen to people and deliver what they need. Everyone should have an equal voice - not just people who can afford to pay big donations.

Liberal Democrats will throw open the doors of government, reinvigorate Britain's democracy and give power back to people. We will modernise government so that it serves the interests of all people, not just the vested interests of politicians, corporations or rich donors. Liberal Democrats plan to reform government so there will be no more privileged patronage, no more dodgy dossiers, no more excessive secrecy and no more safe seats. Government should uphold the law, as well as our liberties, not seek ways to undermine them. We will create a British democracy for the 21st century that people can be proud of.

A Fully Written Constitution for Britain

Britain has an uncodified constitution - rather than being written in one document, our constitution is made up of a variety of legislation, prerogative and convention. We have no binding Bill of Rights that protects our people from the actions of an irrational government, and anything can be overridden by a single act of parliament with a simple majority. The Liberal Democrats will seek the public's approval to introduce a written constitution for Britain that defines and limits the power of government, with a Bill of Rights at its heart to protect individual rights - including, for the first time, the right to a clean environment. The Bill of Rights will strengthen and entrench the rights guaranteed in the Human Rights Act, which we have consistently supported. The constitution should also set out the powers of Parliament, Ministers, Judges, the Head of State and the national assemblies.

Handing Power Back - Cutting Central Government

We need a political system that gives every voter real power. Devolution to Scotland and Wales did not go far enough - the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales should get more powers. We need to take control away from central government, where bureaucrats and ministers are in charge, and give it to local government, people and communities. By making government smaller at the centre, we can make sure that more of the money that's spent in your area is raised locally too. That way you get a real choice over what happens. We will:

- **Cut the excessive number of government departments and reduce the number of government ministers.**
- **We will cut the number of MPs at Westminster by 150.**
- **Move government bureaucracy out of London, saving money on office rents and spreading wealth and jobs more equally through the UK.**
- **Consult the Scottish Parliament about how to extend its role.**
- **Give the National Assembly for Wales the same powers held by the Scottish Parliament.**

- **Replace the existing Barnett formula** for allocating grants with a new needs-based formula.
- **Give people in England the choice** of having directly elected regional assemblies where approved through referendums which would take powers and functions from central government and unelected quangos. In other areas we will encourage local authorities to form partnerships to take on the necessary strategic decision-making roles.

Political Funding

The issue of cash for honours and large donations to particular parties by individuals undermines public confidence in the political system and the democratic process. People are seen as being able to buy influence, and peerages, thereby influencing political decisions. Without a clean-up of the way political parties are funded, people will not trust the integrity of political parties and involvement in the political process will continue to decline. We've got to stop big donors from bankrolling the big parties to get their way with our country. We will:

- **Put a cap on political donations so no one can buy influence over our elected Parliament.**
- **Introduce tough new rules so that MPs' expenses are independently audited and receipts are required for every penny.**
- **Place limits on spending by political parties inside and outside elections.**
- **Introduce state funding of parties** broadly related to the votes gained in the previous general election, with regional party funding being based on their performance within the relevant area. Voters will also be able to nominate a party (or none) to which public funding should be donated, and either a local branch or the central party HQ.
- **Make political contributions from trade union members subject to a clear and transparent process** linking the intention of the member to the destination of the donation.

Fair Votes

Liberal Democrats will give people a fair voting system where every person's voice counts. It'll put power into individuals' hands to choose people who truly represent them. And it'll force politicians to listen to ordinary people all the time, not just when there's an election on. We will:

- **Introduce the fair single transferable vote (STV) system**, as used in Scottish local elections, to all local elections across Britain, and to the Westminster Parliament, Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales. This system would give parties seats in proportion to the number of votes they receive, ensure better representation of ethnic minorities and women in Parliament and allow people to choose between different candidates from the same party. Under this system MPs would still represent a constituency.
- **Reform the European electoral system allowing people to choose individual candidates** for the European Parliament, rather than vote by party only as at present.
- **Give young adults the right to vote and stand for election at 16.** If you are old enough to work, join the army and pay income tax you have the right to a say over how those taxes are spent.

Reforming Parliament - Holding Government to Account

Prime Ministers have for many years in effect been able to use the Royal Prerogative to make treaties and declare war. We will curb this excessive concentration of power, cut back the powers of patronage and increase the effectiveness of Parliament in scrutinising the activities of the government. We will:

- **Give select committees greater power of examination**, including vetting new Secretaries of State before they take office.
- **Give Parliament the outdated Royal Prerogative powers**, such as the current war-making powers of the Prime Minister.
- **Introduce a Civil Service Commission** which would put the Civil Service on a proper, accountable basis through a Civil Service Act.
- **Reform the role of the Attorney General**, including ensuring that legal advice is given publicly. We believe that all politicians should be removed from responsibility for deciding on prosecutions.
- **Introduce 'People's bills'**, whereby the six legislative proposals that received the most petition signatures from registered voters in any given year would be guaranteed a second reading debate in the House of Commons.
- We will allow constituents to **recall MPs** who have broken the rules. This would mean that if an MP is recommended for suspension by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, 5% of constituents can petition to remove that MP from office, prompting a by-election.
- **Introduce a War Powers Act** which will provide that formal declarations of war would have to be approved by Parliament. British troops could still defend themselves if attacked, or the government could order emergency military action when faced with an act of aggression - however the Act would specify that commitments of troops in such an emergency could only continued beyond a defined time limit with parliamentary approval.
- **Introduce fixed parliamentary terms of four years.**

The House of Lords is still unelected and illegitimate. It is unacceptable for a modern democracy to have one house of Parliament appointed by patronage. **Our policy is to replace the House of Lords with a second chamber wholly elected by STV.**