

Fair Votes Now!

The 2024 general election has again exposed the flaws of the First Past the Post system. Leaving millions of voices unheard and creating a divisive, adversarial political climate where collaboration is discouraged and accountability is often sidestepped.

The previous Conservative government, by making voting harder and ignoring democratic integrity, has only deepened these systemic issues, eroded public trust, and allowed for a 'winner takes it all' attitude to infiltrate the democratic process.

The Liberal Democrats have long championed proportional representation, advocating for a voting system where every vote truly counts. We believe that reforming our electoral system is crucial for a fairer democracy and better governance.

Improving our democracy is an important end in itself, but it is also a necessary step to building a better country, with good schools and hospitals, affordable housing, safe communities and clean air. With a better electoral system and more democratic institutions, politicians and parties will have to be more focused on the things that really matter to people, and we'll have better public services and a fairer society as a result.

Liberal Democrats have a comprehensive plan to build a better politics, starting with a fair voting system so no one's vote is wasted:

- **Replace first past the post** with proportional representation via STV for UK General Elections and local elections in England.
- Ensure that the UK has **an automatic system of inclusion on the electoral register**.
- Protect and **strengthen the Electoral Commission**, including by **repealing the Government's power** to designate a strategy and policy statement for the Commission.
- **Scrap** the Conservatives' **Voter ID scheme**.
- Enable **all UK citizens living abroad to vote for MPs in separate overseas constituencies**, and to participate in UK referendums.

Give young people the right to vote in the first election after their 16th birthday, for UK general elections and referendums, and local elections in England.

Read our new policy in full

The First Past the Post system continues to be an unfair reflection of the UK, leaving many voices unheard and deepening divisions within our politics. It's time to move beyond this outdated system and create a political landscape that truly reflects and serves the needs of the public.

[Go to Source](#)

Author:

Saving our NHS

The NHS is in crisis.

A crisis that is the legacy of the former Conservative Government. They promised new hospitals but failed to deliver, they oversaw spiralling waiting times – hours for an ambulance, weeks to see a GP, and months for urgent cancer treatment. Now that the Conservatives are out of office, it's time to fix this mess.

The Liberal Democrats are leading the charge to restore our health and care systems and are calling for this new Government to:

- Bring forward a plan to **save GP services** including increasing the number of full-time equivalent GPs by 8,000 to ensure everyone has the right to see a GP within seven days, or within 24 hours if they urgently need to.
- End DIY dentistry and 'dental deserts' by **guaranteeing access to an NHS dentist for everyone needing urgent and emergency care**, and fixing the broken NHS dental contract to bring dentists back to the NHS from the private sector.
- Boost cancer survival rates and **introduce a guarantee for 100% of patients to start treatment for cancer within 62 days** from urgent referral.
- **Increase the Public Health Grant** so that local authorities can improve the health of their communities and prevent ill health.
- Fix the life-threatening crisis in our ambulance services by **ending excessive handover delays** and increasing the number of staffed hospital beds.
- Improve **early access to mental health services** by establishing **walk-in mental health hubs** for young people in every community and introducing regular mental health check-ups at key points in people's lives.
- Prioritise the proposed bill brought forward in the King's Speech to **finally reform the Mental Health Act**.
- Implement a **ten-year plan to invest in hospitals and the primary care estate** to end the scandal of crumbling roofs, dangerous concrete and life-expired buildings.
- Introduce **free personal care**, a higher Carer's Minimum Wage, and a workforce plan for social care.

We believe everyone deserves high-quality healthcare, accessible when and where it's needed and free at the point of use. Our plan will ensure everyone receives the care they need and deserve.

Read our policy in full

[Go to Source](#)

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National Nature Parks

Everyone deserves the chance to enjoy open green spaces, clean blue rivers, and the stunning beauty of Britain's coast. These natural treasures are not just scenic; they are vital to preserving the ecosystem of many of the nation's favourite animals.

Yet, despite the importance of these landscapes, the UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world. Years of neglect and inaction from the Conservative government to meet their environmental pledges have left our green spaces and waterways in a precarious position.

Today the Liberal Democrats have laid out a bold and ambitious plan to restore the UK's natural environment and ensure that everyone can access a clean, healthy, and thriving green space:

- Create at least three **new National Nature Parks** to the existing 10 National Parks in England.
- Provide the **National Parks budget** with an **additional £50m a year** to support new and existing National Parks to become National Nature Parks.
- Ensure any **new National Park** has a clear **duty to manage protected areas** for nature's restoration.
- Launch a **consultation to determine which new areas should become National Nature Parks**, giving natural landscapes priority for the shortlist.
- Establish **new walking routes**, including routes through National Parks and ensure **local authorities** can **maintain existing walking routes**.

Read our new policy in full

The time to act is now. By embracing this plan, we can turn the tide, restoring the UK's natural environment to its former glory for everyone.

[Go to Source](#)

Author:

Standing up for consumers

For many people, Buy Now Pay Later is a useful and convenient solution, offering them flexibility with their purchases. But consumers need stronger protections.

The use of BNPL has increased exponentially which means that more and more people could find themselves at risk if things go wrong. More than one in three adults use BNPL. And in the first quarter of 2024, more than £1 in every £7 spent online was through a BNPL product.

But during the cost-of-living crisis, more and more people are facing financial problems because there are no rules or protections with BNPL. In May 2024, Citizens Advice saw two times more cases than in May of 2023, or seven times more compared to three years ago.

Despite being the fastest growing type of personal debt, BNPL remains completely unregulated. BNPL companies often don't make it clear to people that they are taking on debt. And they are not required to check if you can afford the debt you're taking on. If you can't afford your BNPL debt, you can't go to the Financial Ombudsman Service for help.

This means that people don't get vital protections that are available with other forms of debt (e.g. credit cards). And BNPL companies don't need to follow the same rules as other lenders.

Martin Lewis, Citizens Advice, Which? and many other campaigners have called for regulation of BNPL.

Our new policy passed today calls on the Government to take a sensible and balanced approach, making sure that BNPL is regulated like all other forms of lending, so that people are protected and can enjoy the flexibility it offers in a safe and sustainable way:

- Stopping BNPL firms from engaging in harmful or misleading advertising
- Bringing BNPL under 'consumer duty' rules for financial products, which require that key terms & conditions are clearly set out
- Requiring that fair and consistent support is available to all BNPL users who need it
- Looking into setting a centralised cap on BNPL late fees to promote fair

and consistent treatment across platforms.

- Ensuring that proper affordability checks are in place, with appropriate information-sharing across BNPL firms and other credit providers.
- Reviewing whether BNPL products by large online retailers, such as Amazon or Apple, should be treated in the same way as products by third-party providers.

Read our new policy in full

The previous Conservative Government had promised to introduce protections but they didn't keep their word. In opposition, Labour called for regulation but measures weren't included in the King's speech and while they've indicated they'll take action, they haven't said when they'll bring in any new protections.

Liberal Democrats are leading the way in giving consumers the protection they need.

[Go to Source](#)

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Closing the attainment gap

From the moment they start school, children from disadvantaged backgrounds are already playing catch-up with their peers, and as they move through the education system, these gaps only widen.

By the end of secondary school, many disadvantaged pupils are now 19.2 months behind their peers – a gap that has grown since 2019 to its highest level since 2012.

The former Conservative Government had a chance to make a real difference for disadvantaged children, but instead, they fell short, making promise after promise and failing to deliver.

The attainment gap between pupils eligible for free school meals and those who have never received them has ballooned since the pandemic, erasing over a decade of progress made in closing the gap. Yet, despite this setback, the potential for change remains, if we prioritise the right strategies and investments.

Investments in early years education and tutoring can have a real impact on

the life chances of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Our new policy passed today prioritises investment in these areas to give all children the best possible start in life:

- Investing in **high-quality early years education** and **closing the attainment gap** by giving disadvantaged children aged three and four **an extra five free hours a week** and tripling the Early Years Pupil Premium to £1,000 a year.
- Increasing school and college **funding per pupil above the rate of inflation** every year.
- Introducing a '**Tutoring Guarantee**' for every disadvantaged pupil who needs extra support which would:
 - Be focused on **prioritising children from low-income backgrounds**, with low prior attainment or with additional needs.
 - Enable an **estimated 1.75 million disadvantaged young people** each year to get **additional tutoring help and support**.
 - **Empower headteachers**, who know their children the best, to **set up tutoring in a way that works for them and their pupils**, by using their own teaching staff, recruiting tutors or choosing from quality-assured external providers.
- Introduce a Young People's Premium, **extending Pupil Premium funding to disadvantaged young people aged 16-18**.

Ensure no child is hungry in school by **expanding free school meal eligibility** to all children in poverty.

Read the motion in full

The widening educational gaps we see today are not inevitable; they are the result of the Conservatives' failures. Our children and young people deserve better.

With the right investment, **we have the opportunity to turn things around and ensure that every child, regardless of their background, has the chance to succeed**.

[Go to Source](#)

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