

The Funding Crisis in Local Government

Roads riddled with dangerous potholes, bus routes disappearing, breakfast clubs vanishing, youth services gone, the elderly are left without the care they deserve, bin collections less and less frequent. This isn't some distant dystopia; **it's the reality faced by communities across our country today.**

Rishi Sunak and his Conservative Government have left a blackhole in the finances of local councils. They're hoping you won't notice that they're to blame for when the services you rely on are stopped dead by a lack of funding.

The Conservatives have cut councils' funding by a quarter since 2016 in real terms. Parliament's cross-party local government select committee's report, released this year, found "systemic underfunding of local councils in England" and a £4bn hole in council funding for 2024/25.

This Conservative chaos leaves 1 in 5 councils in England now believing that it is likely that they will become insolvent in the next 18 months.

It's a crisis that knows no party lines – Labour, Liberal Democrat, Conservative – all councils are feeling the pinch. And at least 40 Conservative MPs have joined calls for more support from the Government.

Liberal Democrats have long called on the Government to properly fund local services – from health and social care to transport; to give local authorities more powers to deliver for their communities; and to reform business rates to boost local economies.

Today, Liberal Democrats have passed new policy calling to address the funding shortfall and get our vital local services back on their feet:

- **Urgent Funding for Local Authorities:** Close the current £4 billion funding gap immediately identified by the cross-party local government select committee.
- **Support for Local Services:** Recognise the vital role of local authorities and ensure they have the resources they need to deliver essential services for the long term.
- **Addressing the Crisis in Social Care:** 70p of every £1 of top-tier council spending goes to adult and children's social care, we must build a consensus on long-term funding of social care.
- **Taking On the Big Challenges:** Support the LGA's 'Make It Local' campaign, which outlines how local government is key to delivering solutions to the biggest issues for the public.

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It's time for change. We cannot sit idly by as our local services crumble. Liberal Democrats will always stand up for a fair deal for communities.

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Beyond Rwanda: A Fairer Way Forward on Asylum

In the ongoing saga of the Conservative Government's Rwanda asylum scheme, the truth is clear: it's destined to fail.

This policy is **immoral, unworkable and extortionately expensive** for the taxpayer. And it betrays our country's proud tradition of offering sanctuary to those in need.

When the Conservatives first came up with this scheme, we told them it was wrong and wouldn't work. It's unsurprising that three Home Secretaries and millions of taxpayers' pounds later, the Conservatives still have nothing to show for their failing Rwanda policy.

The fact that this Government is content to squander millions on a totally unworkable white elephant of a policy tells you everything you need to know about their priorities.

It will do nothing to stop dangerous Channel crossings, people trafficking or modern slavery. All Rishi Sunak cares about is acting tough. So much so that he's content to trample the rule of law and tear up human rights protection.

That's why this Conservative Government refuses to even consider doing what would actually work to stop the dangerous crossings – tackling the backlog and creating safe and legal routes for refugees.

Liberal Democrats have been clear – we have no faith in this failing scheme. Today, we have passed new policy to keep fighting this policy every step of the way, and to offer a positive alternative that would actually work:

- **Scrap the Rwanda Scheme:** This failing policy has cost taxpayers at least £241 million, money that could have been spent on crucial services.
- **Uphold Human Rights:** Reaffirm the UK's commitment to upholding the important human rights legislation, including the European Convention on Human Rights and the UN Refugee Convention.
- **Tackle the Backlog:** The asylum system is in disarray, with 128,000 people still waiting for an initial decision on their claim. The government should establish a new, dedicated unit to process claims

quickly and fairly.

- **Create Safe and Legal Routes:** An expanded refugee resettlement scheme and the creation of humanitarian travel permits to undercut the people traffickers and help those fleeing war and violence.
- **Give Asylum Seekers the Right to Work:** Manage the costs of the system and give individuals a sense of dignity and purpose.

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It's time for the Conservative Government to admit defeat on the Rwanda scheme. It's not just failing; it's actively harming individuals and wasting taxpayer money.

Instead, let's focus on what truly works: tackling the backlog, creating safe routes, and upholding our commitment to human rights. As Liberal Democrats, we will continue to fight for a fairer and more compassionate asylum system.

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[The Death of Alexei Navalny](#)

The death of Alexei Navalny on 16 February 2024. at the hands of Vladimir Putin is a shocking and harrowing tragedy. Navalny's widow, Yulia Navalnaya, has said that Navalny was 'tortured, starved, cut off and killed by Putin'.

Putin's despicable methods might be to kill his enemies, but he will never kill the light of freedom and democracy which Navalny has stood for so courageously.

It takes a special kind of bravery to do what Alexei Navalny did in 2021. Having been poised with a Novichok nerve agent by Putin's FSB, he was hospitalised in Germany. Yet he still chose to return to Russia, to fight for democracy, knowing he faced prison and risked his life.

It's been three long years since Navalny was sentenced to prison, and yet the UK government has failed to fully sanction all those named on the 'Navalny List'. Shockingly, nearly 1 in 5 individuals remain unsanctioned. This is unacceptable.

Right now, British national Vladimir Kara-Murza is unjustly imprisoned in

Russia. The UK must make it a diplomatic priority to secure his release.

Putin's vile actions towards Navalny must also embolden us to support Ukraine further. There is no doubt about what Putin's plans are for Ukraine and Ukrainians. The UK must lead in Europe, to ensure that we and our allies step up to support Ukraine – while the US sadly wavers. That starts with seizing Russian assets in our country, and redirecting them for the purpose of funding Ukraine.

Today, Liberal Democrats have passed new policy calling for decisive action to increase the pressure on Putin's Russia:

- **Sanctioning the 'Navalny list':** Immediately impose sanctions on all those named as enablers of Putin's regime.
- **Supporting British dual nationals:** Enshrine in law a right for British dual nationals who have been politically detained to access UK consular services.
- **Standing with Ukraine:** Seize frozen Russian assets in the UK, with proceeds repurposed to finance support for Ukraine.
- **Tackling economic crime:** Take concrete steps to combat economic crime: finally publish the 'golden visas' review, close economic crime legal loopholes and properly fund the National Crime Agency to pursue Russian economic crime.

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Navalny cast a light on the corruption of Putin and his cronies. His tragic death, at the hands of Putin, cannot and will not stifle the democratic ideals that he fought for. Together, let us be a voice that speaks for those who have been silenced.

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[40 New Hospitals – The Government's Broken Promise](#)

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Tackling Persistent Absence

The number of children persistently absent from school has doubled, with around one in five young people now missing 10% or more of their lessons. And rates of persistent absence are even higher among disadvantaged backgrounds, children with mental health conditions, and those with special education needs. **This is not a problem that can be ignored or swept under the rug.**

This alarming trend not only impacts their immediate education but also has far-reaching implications for their future opportunities and life chances.

The Conservatives have consistently let down children and parents, neglected schools and colleges, and failed to grasp the scale of the pandemic's damage to children's learning and mental health.

Liberal Democrats understand that education is the best investment we can make in our country's future. The reasons for absence are complex but we must make getting children back in the classroom a priority.

That's why, today, Liberal Democrats have passed new policy to encourage school attendance and support children who are struggling:

- **Understanding the scale of the problem:** Place a duty on local authorities to maintain a register of children who are not in school, providing funding for them to do so. This will provide crucial data to understand the extent of the issue and target interventions effectively.
- **Mental Health Support:** Provide a dedicated mental health professional in every school, ensuring that every child and parent has someone to turn to for help and support.
- **Expansion of Free School Meals:** Expand Free School Meals to all children on universal credit, addressing the link between poverty and school absence.
- **SEND Funding:** Tackle the crisis in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) funding by providing extra funding to halve the amount that schools pay towards the cost of a child's Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan. Establish a National Body for SEND to fund support for children with high needs.
- **Young carers:** Improve identification of and support for young carers, helping them balance their caring responsibilities and their education.
- **Permanently Excluded Pupils:** Introduce a commitment that permanently excluded pupils must be placed with a registered provider.
- **Clear Guidance for Parents:** Give clear guidance to parents on when their child should be off school due to illness, helping to reduce unnecessary absences.
- **Direct support:** Roll out of a programme of education welfare officers and attendance hubs across England to work closely with families and

schools.

- **Teacher Home Visits:** Train more teachers to undertake home visits, addressing underlying barriers to school attendance and providing targeted support.

Making school somewhere children want to be: A new commitment to sports, music, drama, and art will make school a place that pupils want to go, fostering a positive and engaging learning environment.

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Every child can achieve great things. By investing in education, supporting families, and prioritising mental health and wellbeing, we can ensure that every child has the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential.

Let us commit to building a future where every child feels safe, supported, and valued in our schools.

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