

# Jane Dodds' conference speech

Jane started by thanking everyone who came to help in Brecon and Radnorshire..

*Whether you came during the recall petition or the by-election or even both – thank you. Without all of you, and the wider party and beyond, I would not be standing here today as the MP for Brecon & Radnorshire.*

She moved onto our recent wins:

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## Q&A with Jo!

**Q: Do you forgive David Cameron for calling the 2016 referendum?**

A: No, I don't forgive him. Much of the problems we currently face come from David Cameron's shocking misjudgement and putting the interests of the Conservative party above the national interest. He did it when he announced the referendum in the first place, he did it when he won a majority. And this is clearly a pattern with Conservative prime ministers. The future of our country is at stake – people are losing jobs, feeling the impact of the falling pound and they're worried about our public services. Over 5000 of our nurses are from EU countries. There are 3 million EU citizens living now with uncertainty and a disturbing spike in hate crime. On so many grounds such as these, David Cameron cannot be forgiven.

**Q: After the motion this morning for adopting the revocation of Article 50 in the case of a Liberal majority, there is some concern about how that may affect people who voted Leave. What specific policies and/or actions will you take to build those bridges?**

**Q: What happens after we have stopped Brexit and stayed in the EU?**

We also have to dig beneath what lay behind the Leave vote. There's a complex set of factors at play.

A: As far as leave voters are concerned, there is no doubt that our country is in a divided place at the moment. We're all concerned about that and we can't bridge this division by lacking clarity.

We must be straightforward and honest about our belief that we're better off

inside the EU. I recognise that there are people who genuinely disagree with that but they still can appreciate that we're clear about our position. It's important to make clear that there may be people who are different to us but it doesn't make them bad people. We can conduct debate in a culture of respect, meeting people with arguments in a constructive fashion.

We also have to dig beneath what lay behind the Leave vote. There's a complex set of factors at play. For many people, life has been tough. If they work hard, there's no guarantee they'll succeed. It's a failure of the social contract that we urgently need to address. We have strong policies for that. We also need to have that communication about wider issues, on a national level and on a local level. People care about local issues that affect their daily lives – Liberal Democrat councils deliver for local communities across the country every day.

I do believe that if you really believe in something, you can make it happen. We have believed from the beginning that this is a fight we must win. Of course we want to reform the EU; there is a range of ways that this can be done and connect with people about what the EU does for us. People have had much more exposure to this since the referendum. If we stop Brexit, there will be a huge chunk of the population who want the government to address the issues that have been ignored while we've had to deal with Brexit. Things like the technological revolution, like the climate emergency, and other issues that have received less attention because of Brexit.

**Q: How concerned are you that Brexit will lead to the breakup of our United Kingdom?**

We're talking about tearing apart a decades-old union. Think about how hard it's going to be to break up a union that's hundreds of years old.

A: I thought it was interesting hearing Sam Gyimah talk about how he sees the Tories increasingly playing to English nationalism. That force represents a threat to the UK. I'm determined to keep the UK united. It's a partnership, a family of nations that has worked well. We're stronger together. The reasons are the same for staying in the EU as they are for staying united. If we can learn anything from this mess, it's that breaking up is hard to do. We're talking about tearing apart a decades-old union. Think about how hard it's going to be to break up a union that's hundreds of years old.

It's the last thing that any of those nations needs. I'm worried because the Prime Minister does not care about the UK. He didn't bother to go to the Irish border. I did, last month. Sitting and listening to people's stories is so powerful. Brexiteers will call it scaremongering and Project Fear. But when you listen to people in Northern Ireland talk about the inevitable border created if Brexit happens, especially a No Deal Brexit, their genuine fear – they're not making it up. They've lived through the Troubles and they are genuinely worried. Brexiteers keep dismissing this. As a Scot, I want our UK to stay together. The thought of breaking apart fills me with dismay. I

was elected on a strong promise to fight for Scotland's place in the UK and the UK's place in the EU. It's a promise I intend to keep. We can save our UK and we can stop Brexit – we should not have to choose between them.

**Q: Should we have a written constitution and when?**

A: Yes, we should, ideally several years ago, before this mess. It's partially why we're in this position now. An unwritten constitution creates confusion, lacks clarity and creates opportunity for abuse. That's what our Prime Minister has prepared to do. Our unwritten constitution works on the basis of convention. Most MPs abide by that. Boris Johnson is prepared to shut down parliament at a time of national crisis. Sending four members of the privy council to Balmoral to force the queen's hand put her in an impossible position – a responsible Prime Minister would not have done that. And of course, Parliament will be shut down for 5 weeks. A Prime Minister who can stand before police officers with a straight face and say he'll die in a ditch rather than obey a law passed; it's a dangerous time when this happens. A written constitution protects us from this.

**Q: As a Scottish MP, following in the footsteps of Ming and Charles and another Jo, could you explain Federalism to the English once and for all?**

We need to come together as a family of nations who are in a genuine spirit of partnership. It's not about one being dominant over the other, and not about the UK entity being in control. It's about the power resting in those different nations coming together, not about being content with centralisation. We know from Scotland what it's like to have a Scottish government that is a centralising government. We are a party that wants to disperse power fairly so that communities have power over their lives. It's also how we can work with other countries and remain internationalist.

**Q: What can be done to encourage more young people to get involved with politics and the party?**

I want to see a politics that is diverse at both ends of the age spectrum

When it comes to young people, one positive thing we have seen over the past few years is an awakening of interest in politics from young people. It's very healthy. I have felt that most in the past few weeks where I've had people telling me that BBC Parliament has become the new Love Island. We have to change our politics to stop young people looking at us and thinking we're ridiculous.

I'm a big fan of young people getting involved in politics. I was the youngest MP in the House of Commons at age 25. I was often asked this question by broadcasters. Personally, I've always been into politics. I think it's about relevance, engaging in a way that strips away the stuffiness and the procedure and having straightforward conversations. There can be very patronising attitudes towards young people in politics. We need to engage with young people as adults.

When we see inspiring young people, we should praise them. We should make conferences accessible to them. Let's listen to what young people have to say, ask them questions and let them ask us questions.

One of the most enjoyable things I do is to go to local schools and talk about things and take questions. My favourite age group is 10-year-olds. They know a lot about the world but they have very little self-consciousness. They'll ask you anything! If you can explain a policy to a 10-year-old, you know you've understood it properly. I want to see a politics that is diverse at both ends of the age spectrum.

**Q: From your experience as a working mum, how can you be an active Liberal Democrat and balance family life?**

A: How brave might the Lib Dems might be in terms of considering job-shares for MPs, a carer's allowance for councillors? Some structural changes could help.

I don't always feel young, personally. I remember life before the internet. I think "politics young" should be its own category!

How do we change our politics to be genuinely inclusive? I was delighted to see earlier today a training session about how to campaign when you have young children, well attended by both women and men. Fathers role is v important too. I've seen a lot of kids at this conference. Luciana brought baby Zion with her. We should be inclusive. People must be able to participate. We shouldn't have a fixed idea of a good activist. Phone canvassing is a wonderful way of reaching people. When my son had a lunchtime nap, I got on the phone and phoned 10 people.

I'm aware of my responsibility as leader to develop a way of doing differently. Vince, Tim, Nick, me – we all do it differently. I have to juggle this as the mother of a 5-year-old and a 1-year-old. This doesn't make me a worse MP or worse leader. I do fewer evening engagements because I want to put my kids to bed at night. I do a lot of conference calls. We have to be flexible like that, in local parties, across the regions. Family-friendly social events, non-alcoholic events. We must build our politics around people's lives.

**Q: Can we expect you to bring back a creche to conference?**

A: We used to have conference creche. We have an access fund now to help with extra assistance. As good libs, we won't leave it to the leader. Conference committee are looking into this, for certain.

We all know family members who suffer from mental illness. Our goal should be nothing short of full parity with physical health

**Q: How important is mental health to a Lib Dem government? How will you tackle the MH crisis?**

A: This is an area of huge importance. I want to pay tribute to Norman Lamb and his fantastic work. When Norm started flying the flag, there was not a broad consensus on MH. We've made good progress but it's not been matched with resources and policies to help change people's lives. Far too many people have to wait far too long. It's heartbreaking to hear from kids and young who have to wait months and months for treatment. What has been so powerful is the way the MH stigma is being broken down.

Many members have shared their experience at conference. We all know family members who suffer from mental illness. Our goal should be nothing short of full parity with physical health. No difference between breaking a leg or having a breakdown. We must engage in positive mental health in the public health way. We shouldn't just wait til they're struggling. We have to promote positive MH. It's all to do with wider policies. Access to arts, leisure, sports, housing.

Mental health means a lot to me. I had to wait over a year and a half for a diagnosis of autism. Young people are burning themselves out over the climate crisis and adults are letting young people fight that battle for them. I am one of those young people. On Friday, will you attend the global strike for climate? Will you stand with young people on this issue?

Thank you – that was such a powerful question. It is shaming for adults that it's children and young people who are this voice. The energy in this movement comes from people like Greta Thunberg. I am excited to see that energy. But this must not be on the shoulders of young people on their own. We have to stand shoulder to shoulder. Yes, of course I will be striking on Friday back home in my seat. We must harness that energy and use it to create real change. We are a crucial part of that. Thank you for what you are doing.

**Q: Psychotherapy is a solution to mental health problems. It's expensive. What can the LDs do to extend this to people for however long they need it?**

A: Good mental health starts at home. Elections are stressful. Activists need to be supported in the party. Why are we not getting mental health training and mental health first aid?

There's excellent research on talking therapies, setting out economic case to increase access to these therapies. You can reap a huge benefit from this, reduction in health problems, increased ability to contribute at work and at home. We must invest in this issue. This is a win win – it's helping people to make the contribution that they want to make, but also help themselves. It's an essential way forward. The rationing of this help can mean that people don't get sufficient times in therapy. We have policy to increase number of people working in MH.

We have to understand the pressure people elected to office are under. I have been to a lot of LD training events. We can expect superhuman efforts from people. If you want to win, you have to be unreasonable about what to expect. Partially, that's how I was elected. Ambition motivates. But too often we could work smarter, as we let too much on the shoulders of too few people. At this moment, we must be more pro-active to encourage new people to join the

efforts. Let's make involvement sustainable, so it doesn't take up everyone's entire life. Elections are stressful – so let's look out for each other, de-escalate and look after each other better. We need to work together, stay together and look after each other together.

We need to hold local authorities to account for the way they spend. SEN and funding.

We have a strong team and strong constituencies. We will be winning in the North of England.

I'm often struck by the challenges my constituents face. There are too many challenges for parents of those with special educational needs and it's wrong for them to have to fight the system too. We need a system that is more individualised, where support is bespoke, Too often it's not there and its too much of a fight. Most worrying is that not all parents are able to take on those fights. It means we're failing children who should be getting better support.

**Q: How are we going to challenge and win in the North of England?**

We are! If we look at council gains in Liverpool, Manchester, Hull and the types of candidates we'll welcome to Parliament, like Tom Morrison, Kamran Hussein, Lisa Smart, Laura Gordon – we have a strong team and strong constituencies. We will be winning in the North of England. There's a sig need for investment and infrastructure – HS2, transpennine railway improvements. I remember getting on Northern Spirit trains through Yorkshire – there's been no step forward in the last 20 years. There's a mindset shift. I notice there's an attitude that thinks London and South are the centre of the world. Too often anything outside is dismissed. The mindset needs to change. Then we ned to take our LD message. People in N are concerned about Brexit, jobs, climate. Just as we champion devolution, we need to ensure there's genuine power in Northern cities too.

**Q: Would you consider moving parliament to Manchester or another city or a circular Parliament?**

**Q: How carefully are you vetting new MPs? I'm concerned not all new joiners don't share Lib values.**

**Q: How do we gain the votes of the 52% who voted Leave?**

A: Regarding Parliament, yes, I think the London centric nature of Parliament is an issue. I think we should look at how to reform the way it operates. I was disappointed to see the artist impressions of the plans to reform the chamber. Parliament is a massive fire risk at the moment. The temporary chamber is a carbon copy of the existing house of commons. It's a wasted chance to try something different. The temporary move is a great opportunity to try new ideas.

Re vetting, there is a process for MPs who want to defect. It's not the same

as the candidate approval process, partially because some of this is redundant for experienced members of parliament. There is an in-depth interview with our chief whip to test for shared values. I am confident that our new MPs do share these values. They might not share our views on every single issue but neither do our members. As Liberals, it's possible to reach different conclusions from the same values. There is that test in place.

I have some experience of being underestimated. People only ever do it once.

In terms of 52%, it's complex addressing those grievances. One is economic, one is cultural. We need fundamental reform on economic issues as the economy is not working for our people or our planet. Culturally, there's a battle going on. Who we are as a country is at stake. The morning after the ref, the dismay was not just about EU instit., it was about who we are. Are we an open country, do we treat people as individuals, do we believe in equality? Those are the things under threat, those are the things we'll stand up for as Liberals.

**Q: You were described as 'fluffy' by a Tory. How would you respond to this?**

A: I wrote a whole book about unconscious bias and equality. I was elected to Parliament as a 25 year old. I have some experience of being underestimated. People only ever do it once.

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## **Education is for Everyone: Investing in Further Education and Learning Throughout Life**

**There is nothing more important than education.**

Education opens up opportunities, shows us what we are capable of and challenges our preconceptions. **When education is accessible it can be a great equaliser, however with cuts from 2010 then it is no longer fit for purpose.**

Our economy is changing. It is crucial that our education system evolves at the same rate.

**Our economy is changing. It is crucial that our education system evolves at the same rate.** Many people face redundancy with their skillset no longer valued in an age of increasing automation. We believe this policy will help everyone from 16-60 to adapt to the world of work in 2019.

People of all ages are in colleges, or apprenticeships building knowledge in a whole range of areas, from set design to machine learning for the ministry of defence.

But with many adult learners struggling to meet the cost of education and understandably reluctant to take out loans with work, mortgage and/or family responsibilities – education is simply out of reach.

**We demand better.**

The right to an education, to learn new skills, to nurture creativity and to develop one's talents is for everyone of every age.

At our Autumn Conference we were excited to pass the Education for Everyone Policy. **We are proud to support learning throughout life.**

Education is for everyone no matter what life stage they are in.

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## **[A Liberal Democrat government will stop Brexit](#)**

The European Court of Justice ruled that **the UK has the power to unilaterally revoke article 50 and withdraw us from the Brexit process.**

And the further we get into understanding what Brexit will mean for the UK, the clearer it is that we need to stop Brexit.

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**The last few months with Boris Johnson as Prime Minister have been like living in a dystopian nightmare.**

The Tory government's own research has shown that a no-deal Brexit would

cause immeasurable damage to our NHS, jobs, the environment, and would put people's lives at risk.

EU citizens were told that they could lose their right to healthcare, to rent property, or to have a job in the UK after October 31st.

And this Conservative government has chosen to shut down democracy rather than accept any scrutiny of their decisions.

The Liberal Democrats demand better than Brexit, and **we have a plan to stop it.**

We will take on the tired old parties with an unambiguous stop Brexit message

First and foremost, the Liberal Democrats are calling for a **people's vote to stop Brexit.**

But if a general election comes first, we will take on the tired old parties with an unambiguous stop Brexit message.

**And we do so with the full-throated support of our members.**

Liberal Democrats members at our autumn conference have just passed a motion committing us to campaign to revoke article 50 in a general election.

And I'm so proud to be able to say: **A Liberal Democrat government will stop Brexit.**

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## **Rehabilitation for Offenders**

Dignity and respect should be at the core of our criminal justice system.

This is crucial if we are serious about reducing reoffending rates, supporting young people who have grown up in poverty and caring for people with poor mental health.

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