

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.

Read our new policy

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.

Read our new policy

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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Are you drinking what we're drinking?

Untreated sewage is pouring into UK waters more than 1,000 times a day. Between 2020 and 2022, England's water companies used storm overflows over a million times, totalling a shocking 7.5 million hours. Millions of litres of water are lost to leaks each day. Just 3 in 20 of England's rivers are in a 'good' ecological state.

How did it get to this?

Since the Conservatives privatised English water companies, those companies have piled on £54 billion in debt and handed out £66 billion in dividends to shareholders. All while failing to properly invest in the infrastructure we need.

And they've been allowed to get away with it – by a toothless regulator and a Conservative government that doesn't seem interested in making polluters pay. The Environment Agency, severely underfunded, has struggled to enforce the law effectively.

The status quo is simply not working, and it's time for a new approach.

That's why today, Liberal Democrats have passed new policy to address this national scandal. Our plan is comprehensive and ambitious, aimed at transforming our waterways, protecting our environment, and holding water companies accountable for their actions.

- **Ending Sewage Dumping:** Set meaningful targets and deadlines for water companies to end sewage discharges.
- **Sewage Tax:** Introduce a tax on water company profits to fund the cleanup of waterways.
- **Robust regulation:** Abolish Ofwat and establish a new 'Coastal, Rivers and Lakes Authority' with strengthened regulatory powers to issue fines to the top executives of water companies and initiate prosecutions in extreme cases.
- **Reform water companies:** Turn water companies into public benefit companies so that particular economic and environmental policy objectives must be considered.
- **Increase monitoring:** End the current system of "self monitoring" and ensure unannounced spot checks are part of the new regulatory framework. Mandate that new monitors cover designated bathing waters and sites of environmental importance such as SSSIs.
- **Local Empowerment:** Give Local authorities increased powers to hold water companies accountable, with new water boards and catchment partnerships.
- **Protecting Citizens:** Extend the Freedom of Information Act to cover water companies and introduce a new 'Sewage Illness Victim Compensation Scheme'. Permit citizens, charities and other groups to take water companies to court.
- **Promoting Transparency:** Require consumer representatives to be included on water company boards, and ensure bills clearly show where money is

spent. Make water companies fund local environmental reporters.

- **Investment and Innovation:** Water companies will have 25-year investment plans, including nature-based solutions and innovative approaches to water management.
- **Clean swims:** Increase the number of designated bathing water sites to 1,500 by 2030. Set legally binding targets to prevent sewage dumping into bathing waters and highly sensitive nature sites.
- **Eliminating water poverty:** Create a new water social tariff, aiming to eliminate water poverty by the end of the next parliament. Ensure that energy retrofitting programmes also include measures to improve water resilience and cut bills.

Read our new policy

Liberal Democrats are leading the charge to clean up our rivers, lakes and coastlines. It's time to put an end to sewage dumping, protect our precious waterways, and ensure a sustainable water system for generations to come.

Stop Sewage Dumping

Tax water companies' huge profits and fix our sewage system.

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Share Buyback Tax Scheme – why we are doing it and how it would work

Some of the biggest and most profitable companies in the world are listed on the London Stock Exchange, every year they spend tens of billions of pounds doing nothing more than buying back their own shares.

Rather than reward shareholders by paying a dividend, a company can achieve the same result through share buybacks. The stock price goes up; investors receive a premium; and remaining shareholders get a bigger stake in the company.

But share buybacks are controversial.

Every pound spent inflating share prices is a pound that could have been spent to grow our economy and tackle the climate emergency. And at a time when the UK is near the bottom of the table for business investment among major economies, that's a problem.

Take BP for example. Last year, they raked in a massive, unexpected £11 billion, off the back of Putin's illegal invasion of Ukraine. They spent less than £1 billion of that money investing in low carbon energy, and more than £5 billion buying back their own shares – five times more.

In the last two years, share buyback programmes from the 100 biggest firms on the Stock Exchange reached record highs, exceeding 50 billion pounds a year.

That's why the Liberal Democrats are calling for a 4 per cent tax on share buybacks, which would incentivise proper business investment, spur economic growth and raise funds fairly for our public services. At current buyback levels, it would raise £2 billion a year.

Liberal Democrat Leader Ed Davey said:

"Neither the Conservative government or Labour Party have explained how they will fund public services fairly after the next election.

"The Liberal Democrats led the way in calling for a windfall tax on oil and gas giants making eye-watering profits from soaring prices. Now we are leading the way again, with a bold call for a new tax on share buybacks that could raise £2bn a year to fund our public services.



<https://twitter.com/GeorgeDibb/status/1768914358711484454>

Companies already pay huge fees to intermediaries when they do share buybacks

which are often a lot higher than 4%. In 2022 Royal Mail paid double that with an 8.5% fee and still went ahead with its buyback.



<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/are-companies-being-ripped-off-by-big-banks-over-share-buybacks-k6dzk08t2>

That is over double what our new policy would levy, showing that companies are more than willing to push ahead with buybacks in order to boost their share price, despite the added cost.

Over the last two decades, there has never been a year where companies didn't do share buybacks. Even in the depths of the financial crisis, listed firms spent billions of pounds buying back their own shares.

And if companies decided to increase dividends instead of doing buybacks, this would lead to higher revenue from dividend tax, which is levied at a top rate of 39.35%.

This bold new policy will incentivise productive investment and promote economic growth while raising additional revenue for our public services.

Ed Davey said:

"Large corporations from fossil fuel giants to banks are making huge profits off the back of families facing soaring energy bills, mortgage payments and food prices. It is only fair that we ask these companies to pay more in tax.

"This new levy would not just raise much-needed money for public services, it would encourage investment, help create jobs and boost growth including in the green industries of the future."

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