

# Local Government Finance Emergency

Our local councils are the front line of our democracy. From social care and schools to housing and bin collections, they provide the essential services that hold our communities together. But today, after years of Conservative neglect and a lack of seriousness from the new Labour Government to tackle the financial crisis in local government head-on, our councils are in survival mode.

Since 2018, seven councils in England have been forced to admit they cannot meet their spending commitments, and in the last year alone, 30 councils required emergency government bailouts. **This emergency threatens the local services we all rely on.**

**Today, our members passed a policy calling for an end to the sticking plaster approach, demanding a fair, long-term funding settlement for every community.**

## **A System at Breaking Point**

For too long, central government has handed down deep cuts while piling on more pressure. Councils are facing a perfect storm:

- **The Social Care Crisis:** Skyrocketing costs in adult and children's social care are draining budgets, forcing cuts of up to 70% in other vital areas.
- **The SEND Funding Gap:** The high needs deficit in Dedicated Schools Grants (DSG) for SEND is estimated to hit a staggering £5 billion this year.
- **The Housing Crisis:** The Conservative and Labour failure to boost the building of social homes and with councils spending more and more on temporary accommodation and central government subsidising less and less.
- **Deprivation vs. Funding:** Shockingly, the areas with the highest levels of poverty – those that need local services the most – have often seen the deepest cuts to their grants.
- **Outdated Taxation:** We are still using a Council Tax system which bears little relation to actual local need or demand for services.

# Our Plan to Save Local Services

We cannot afford to let our councils fail. The Liberal Democrats are calling on the Government to move past emergency bailouts and deliver a sustainable future for local government:

- **Real-Term Funding Increases:** A sustained increase in core funding to help councils keep pace with inflation and a growing, ageing population.
- **Fixing the SEND Deficit:** A dedicated, long-term funding solution for the high-needs education deficits that are currently bankrupting school budgets.
- **A Fair Funding Review:** Implementing a needs-based system that ensures money goes where it is needed most, with full protections so no council faces destabilising year-on-year losses.
- **A Comprehensive Review:** Fully review how we fund local government to ensure a fair, sustainable, multi-year settlement that allows councils to properly plan for the future.

Read our new policy in full

## Leading the Way

Despite these impossible financial hurdles, Liberal Democrat councillors and leaders across the country are innovating every day to protect their residents. It's no wonder that in 2025 we won more council by-elections than any other party – people trust us to deliver for their local area.

But innovation can only go so far when the bank is empty. It is time for the Government to stop the managed decline of our communities and provide the investment our councils need to drive economic growth and build the affordable housing our country deserves.

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# A digital world fit for the next generation

Tech companies have for far too long treated children as data to be mined rather than young people to be protected. They have let harmful content roam free on their sites from perpetuating negative body image to amplifying extreme and violent content. They have built addictive algorithms designed to keep children endlessly doom-scrolling at the expense of their mental health.

**But we know that blanket bans cannot work in the digital age.** They also disproportionately impact LGBTQ+ youth, disabled young people, and those in rural communities who rely on digital spaces for services, friendships and opportunities unavailable locally.

**We must instead look at a new standard of age-appropriate online safety online like the offline world.** While the Government's response to online safety has been disappointing, the Liberal Democrats are proposing a liberal, more practical alternative.

**Today, Liberal Democrats members passed a policy to move beyond blanket bans and toward a system where safety is baked into the technology itself.**

Our new policy calls for:

- **A Statutory Age-Rating System:** Introducing a classification framework for online platforms, like those used in the film industry – where services are rated by addictiveness of their platform design, the impact on children's mental health, and the harmfulness of the content they host. This is an approach supported by children's charities like the NSPCC.
- **Ending Addictive Design:** Requiring these safer modes to include high privacy settings, strict limits on behavioural advertising, and constraints on features designed to drive compulsive use.
- **Enforceable Standards:** Establishing statutory, auditable standards that platforms must meet, backed by rapid response requirements to ensure that when harms occur, they are addressed immediately.
- **Protecting Digital Citizenship:** Ensuring that young people's rights to information and community are preserved, while protecting them from the structural drivers of harm.

Read our new policy in full

We think these changes will also empower parents and young people to be informed about the risks of harmful online content and features through clear guidance and an understandable framework that mirrors existing best practices.

Importantly, this model is future-proof and builds on the lessons from Australia's social media ban. This would end the whack-a-mole approach of online safeguarding by providing a clear framework of standards for platforms. As new dangers inevitably emerge – such as unsafe chatbots, online gaming, or AI-driven harms – they can be quickly categorised and rated against clear and understandable principles of harm.

We believe that child safety is built through **platform accountability and resilient design**, not by shutting young people out of the digital world completely.

It is time to start building a digital world that is fit for the next generation to grow up in.

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## [Trump and the Wider World](#)

The international stage has been shaken by a series of reckless and illegal actions from Donald Trump's White House that threaten the very foundations of global security.

From the unilateral military strike on Venezuela to the extraordinary threats against the sovereign territory of a NATO ally in Greenland, and more recently initiating conflict in Iran and the wider Middle East – President Trump's "might is right" doctrine is putting the UK and our closest partners at risk.

These actions do not happen in a vacuum. They send a green light to dictators like Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping, suggesting that international law is optional and national sovereignty can be disregarded by the powerful.

**Liberal Democrats believe the UK must stand firm against bullying and lawlessness, no matter where it comes from.**

**Today, our members passed a motion to bolster our national defence and strengthen our alliances with reliable partners who share our belief that rules-based order is the best protection against insecurity and conflict.**

# Standing Up for Sovereignty and International Law

The events of early 2026 have been a wake-up call. We cannot rely on an unpredictable US administration that treats international relations like a “pay-to-play” business deal. Our new policy calls for UK foreign policy to:

- **Condemn the attack on Venezuela:** Affirming that the unilateral military operation in Venezuela was an egregious breach of international law. Change must come through diplomatic and economic pressure and legal accountability, not illegal kidnappings.
- **Defend Denmark and Greenland:** Invest in expanding the UK’s multilateral partnerships across defence and trade with partners whom we can rely on, including by joining Canada and France in establishing a formal consulate in Greenland’s capital, Nuuk.
- **Stand for fair, open trade:** Working in unison with European and Commonwealth partners to ensure the UK is not bullied by reckless trade tariffs.

## Securing Britain’s Future

With threats rising and the Trump Administration proving an unreliable partner, the UK must be able to defend its own interests. We are proposing a radical shift in how we fund and prioritise our security:

- **3% Defence Spending:** Holding cross-party talks to reach a national consensus on how to raise defence spending to 3% of GDP by 2030.
- **£20 Billion “Defence Bonds”:** Launching a major programme to allow the public and institutions to invest directly in the UK’s security, injecting vital cash into research, development, and capital projects.
- **Strengthening European Ties:** Doubling down on security and defence partnerships with our neighbours in Europe to reduce our strategic dependence on the US.

Read our new policy in full

## Pragmatism, Not Populism

The Liberal Democrats have always been the party of internationalism. But

international cooperation requires a shared commitment to respect common rules. By threatening NATO allies and ignoring the UN, Donald Trump is undermining a system that – despite its imperfections – has helped keep the peace for decades.

We will not stand by while the world is carved up by those who believe might is right. The UK should defend sovereignty, uphold the law, and invest in our defence to keep us safe.

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## [Britain's nuclear deterrent depends on Trump. It's time to change that](#)

If the answer to “Is our nuclear deterrent working?” depends on what Donald Trump had for breakfast, then the answer is no, it's not. And our deterrent is not truly independent.

This should be keeping British defence planners awake at night. Yet it's not being asked loudly enough in our public debate. Perhaps because Conservative- and Reform-supporting commentators don't want to face up to the profound implications of Trump.



Our nuclear deterrent – the ultimate guarantor of our national security, the thing that successive governments of every stripe have described as the bedrock of Britain's defence – is not fully ours.

The Trident missiles sitting in our Vanguard submarines are leased from the United States. Their maintenance depends on American facilities. And that means the operability of our deterrent ultimately depends on the goodwill of whoever sits in the Oval Office.

A few years ago, that didn't feel like an issue. It certainly feels like one now.

Donald Trump has threatened to annex Greenland. He has bullied NATO allies. He has shown far more warmth towards the tyrant bombing Ukrainian cities – Vladimir Putin – than towards the brave Ukrainians defending them.

He and his White House lackeys have made it clear, repeatedly and unmistakably, that American support for European security is conditional – conditional on European countries doing what Trump wants, whether on trade, relations with China, or just being nice to him. Certainly nothing to do with the values and alliances that have kept us safe for eighty years.

While Trump is in charge, we certainly cannot rely on America as a dependable ally in the way we used to. And we can no longer bet our nation's security on the hope that the US won't produce new versions of Trump in the future.

So the real question is not whether we should build a sovereign British nuclear deterrent. The question is what happens if we don't.

Trident missiles will need replacing in 2042. If we haven't built our own capability before then, we'll have no choice but to go back to the Americans. Who knows what terms they'll offer? Who knows how much President Donald Trump Jr will charge us to lease US-made nuclear missiles? We cannot afford to leave our national security to chance.



I know building a sovereign capability sounds like an enormous undertaking. It is. It will cost billions over the next two decades.

But Britain can do it – because we've done it before. If France can maintain a fully independent deterrent, Britain certainly can.

Don't forget, the UK developed and built our own nuclear weapons in 1952 – the third country in the world to do so. For decades, the RAF maintained a sovereign nuclear capability that owed nothing to Washington. We gave that up when America seemed like a rock-solid ally on which we could depend forever. When what we are seeing in the Oval Office today was unimaginable.

So instead of handing billions of taxpayers' hard-earned cash to the American defence and technology industry, let's spend it here. Let's invest in British science and manufacturing, build up our defence industry, and guarantee a fully independent deterrent we can truly rely on – no matter who sits in the Oval Office.

In the short term, that means developing our own capability to maintain existing Trident missiles here in the UK, ending our dependence on American facilities for servicing. In the longer term, when those missiles come to the end of their lives, we will have British-made replacements ready. But only if the government starts that work now.

Let me be clear. None of this means abandoning the goal of multilateral disarmament – something the Liberal Democrats have always been strongly committed to. But with Vladimir Putin sitting on a stockpile of more than 5,000 nuclear warheads, we must deal with the world as it is.



Trump's reckless, unpredictable presidency – and the reality that we can no longer count on America as we once assumed we could – is a challenge we cannot ignore.

Britain's response must include a deterrent that is genuinely, verifiably ours: not dependent on Trump, not dependent on whoever his successor may be, not hostage to the breakfast-table moods of any foreign leader.

True national security is about more than hardware. It is about alliances, values and Britain's standing in the world. We want a Britain that is secure because it is respected, and respected because it is strong. And today, sadly, that means ending our dependence on Trump's America.

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**[Whole-Person Mental Health: Care, Choice, Community, and Combatting](#)**

# Populism

Mental health is a fundamental part of our overall health. Yet for too long, a firefighting approach to mental health has left millions of people without any support until they reach a crisis point.

Britain faces a mental health crisis, with rising levels of eating disorders, suicide and severe illness. The services that are supposed to support people are unable to cope, having been pushed to breaking point under the Conservatives.

Now, the Labour Government is shockingly scrapping suicide prevention grants and vital mental health targets. And last year, Nigel Farage disgracefully said that the UK is creating a “class of victims”.

**The Liberal Democrats believe in a mental health system that intervenes early, supports families, and meets people where they are.**

**Today, our members passed a transformative new evidence-based policy to ensure that mental health is treated with the urgency and dignity it deserves.**

## Putting Prevention First

We would move away from a system that only reacts to crises and toward one that builds resilience, through:

- **Mental Health Check-ups:** Introducing regular check-ups for everyone at key stages of life, to ensure nobody is left unsupported when they are vulnerable.
- **Walk-in Youth Hubs:** Opening a mental health hub in every community for young people, with specific support for children that have fallen between school and CAMHS support.
- **Support for Our Farmers:** Tripling the Farmer Welfare Fund to provide mental health outreach at livestock markets and county shows, and offering support following Rural Payment Agency visits.
- **“No Wrong Door”:** Enshrine the “no wrong door” principle into law so people get the help they need, regardless of which public service they have turned to.

## A Fairer, More Integrated System

Mental health doesn't exist in a vacuum. It is often tied to housing, debt, and employment. Our plan integrates these services to provide a safety net that actually catches people:

- **Financial & Housing Support:** Integrating mental health services with money, substance abuse, and housing advice by default.
- **Free Prescriptions:** Making NHS prescriptions free for those with chronic mental health conditions, ending the unfair financial burden on the most vulnerable.
- **Properly Supporting Carers:** Placing a legal duty on health professionals to identify and support unpaid carers and family members, ensuring they aren't left to cope alone.

Read our new policy in full

By investing £400 million – funded through a windfall tax on big banks and an increased digital services tax on social media giants – we can build a system that saves money in the long run and, more importantly, saves lives.

Liberal Democrats have a proud record of pushing Britain's mental health services forward. Now we are offering the bold solutions we need to fight the crisis unfolding in our communities.

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