

10 years celebrating love

Ten years ago today, the UK's first same-sex marriages took place.

As we celebrate ten years of recognising love as equal in all its forms, this is a proud moment for our country.

But it is also a proud moment for our party. The tireless efforts of Liberal Democrat ministers like Baroness Lynne Featherstone were instrumental in getting the Same Sex Marriage Act passed. I am so grateful for the hard work of people like Lynne and the countless heroes from the LGBT+ community who made this a reality.

There is so much to be celebrating today.

Marriage for same-sex couples was a crucial step towards equality, and one that has touched so many lives for the better. The joys of getting to marry the person you love, surrounded by family and friends, is something that everyone deserves the chance to experience.

At the same time, we must acknowledge there is still a long way to go in achieving true equality for all LGBT+ people.

In the years to come, I know that Liberal Democrats will keep doing everything we can to help deliver that change.

Our party has done it before – from moving the clause to repeal Section 28, to legalising same-sex marriage. Just months ago, [Baroness Lorely Burt made great strides](#) in holding the Conservatives to account on their promise to ban conversion therapy with her private members' bill.

I know that we can keep delivering the change the LGBT+ community deserves. And today serves as a reminder of what we can achieve when we work together in the name of love.

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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.

Read our new policy

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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Author:

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.

Read our new policy

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.

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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