

A Fair Deal for Our Armed Forces Community

These are people who have put their lives on the line in defence of our liberty and our democracy. Yet sometimes the Government can't even get the basics right in return, like access to decent housing.

The families of service personnel are too frequently an afterthought. Spouses only receive important information about their lives – where they are moving to for example – secondhand, through their serving partner. Clearly, all members of the armed forces community should be treated as individuals with aspirations of their own.

And we will all be familiar with how some veterans fall through gaps in support and are all too often unable to get the help they need – especially for those who suffer from mental ill health.

For female service personnel, the prevalence of sexual harassment and misogyny faced in the armed forces is simply unacceptable. This issue has not been adequately addressed, reflecting a lack of moral courage within parts of the armed forces, in spite of good intentions across the services.

This unfair treatment is damaging retention and recruitment of the best talent for our Armed Forces, impacting ultimately on the last guarantee of our freedoms. **Liberal Democrats firmly believe that it's time for a fair deal for our armed forces personnel, veterans, and their families.**

That's why today Liberal Democrat members have passed a new policy to ensure a fair deal for the armed forces community.

1. **Strengthening the Armed Forces Covenant:** Placing a legal duty on government departments to give due regard to the Armed Forces covenant.
2. **Improving Housing:** Rigorously reviewing maintenance contracts for Ministry of Defence housing and establishing a minimum quality standard for Single Living Accommodation.
3. **Empowering Families:** Establishing a centralised information hub for families of service personnel. Reaching an agreement with the European Union for reciprocal access to spousal employment for families of service personnel.
4. **Promoting Diversity:** Reviewing Armed Forces recruitment processes to boost diversity within the Forces, ensuring that steps are taken to foster a more inclusive environment.
5. **Protecting Women:** Implementing the recommendations of the Atherton Report on Women in the Armed Forces.
6. **Stronger Defence:** Cancelling the Conservative Government's ill-advised cut to the Army.

Read the motion in full

This community – made up of service personnel and their families who have dedicated themselves to protecting our liberties, must be given the respect and support they deserve.

No more sewage-filled homes, no more mental health service gaps, and no more lack of access to essential information.

This is a commitment to a fair deal for 1.8 million veterans, a commitment to standing with 150,000 serving personnel and their families, and a commitment to honouring their sacrifices. And I'm proud that our party is leading the way in giving this community a fair deal.

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Combating human trafficking & modern slavery

The unsettling truth is that modern slavery cases are on the rise here in Britain. An estimated 100,000 victims of modern slavery currently reside in the UK.

We all share a moral responsibility to confront and eradicate modern slavery.

Yet too often, the plight of its victims is overlooked and ignored by a Conservative Government that should be their defender.

Time and again, the Conservatives have let survivors down. They have dismantled crucial protections enshrined within the Modern Slavery Act, and abandoned their commitment to establish a single enforcement agency. They have perpetuated unfounded claims that individuals are “gaming” the modern slavery system. And they have left the UK without an Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner for over a year.

This cannot stand. **Liberal Democrats are unwavering in our determination to combat human trafficking and modern slavery.**

Our commitment begins with immediately reversing the Conservative Government's rollbacks, and extends to creating a new system designed to prevent exploitation, bring traffickers to justice, and provide survivors

with the support they so rightfully deserve.

- **Justice for Survivors:** Better resourcing for the criminal justice system to bring more traffickers to justice, and establishing a civil remedy that empowers survivors to seek redress from their traffickers.
- **Support and Protection:** Giving survivors the support they deserve. This includes access to legal aid, protection from detention or removal, and the right to work after three months in the National Referral Mechanism (NRM).
- **Worker Protection:** Establishing a powerful new Worker Protection Enforcement Authority, focused on proactive intelligence-led enforcement of labour market standards and a firewall that separates labour standards enforcement from immigration enforcement.

Our new policy also underscores the importance of overhauling migration rules to prevent exploitation from happening in the first place:

- **Safe and Legal Routes:** Creating safe and legal routes for sanctuary in the UK, curbing the demand for people smugglers.
- **Sensible Migration Rules:** Removing arbitrary salary thresholds so that employers and employees are less reliant on temporary worker visas.

Read the motion in full

Modern slavery is an affront to our values and a stain on our society. It is our collective duty to end this exploitation and cruelty.

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[Hundreds of NHS ambulance staff waiting for driver training despite deadly delays](#)

When there is a real shortage of ambulance drivers and patients suffering in pain and distress, it is staggering that the Government has not tackled the backlog of NHS paramedics waiting for vital training.

The Liberal Democrats submitted a Freedom of Information request to NHS

ambulance Trusts across England, asking how many staff are currently waiting to complete C1 and Blue Light driving courses. The data show that more than 700 NHS staff across the country are currently waiting to complete a C1 driving course. 630 staff are on the waiting list to complete a Blue Light driving course.

Ambulance drivers are required to complete C1 training to drive a vehicle up to 7.5 tonnes – these courses can cost around £1,000 and paramedics are required to pay for it themselves in most cases. Paramedics also do a Blue Light training course which is considered the gold standard for emergency response drivers.

This is adding serious pressure on our frontline emergency workers.



The Liberal Democrats are calling for the Government to address the backlog by bringing forward a plan to recruit more specialist driving instructors and assessors, as well as covering the cost of ambulance driver training.

Earlier this year, the Lib Dems revealed that 43,000 people died before an ambulance reached them. Recent figures have also shown almost 500 NHS patients suffered permanent or long-term harm due to emergency response delays.

The Conservatives are asleep at the wheel, while patients struggle to access emergency treatment. **Ministers need to get a grip on the situation**, starting by bringing forward a plan to recruit more specialist driving instructors and

assessors, as well as covering the cost of ambulance driver training so that paramedics can jump into action as soon as they graduate.

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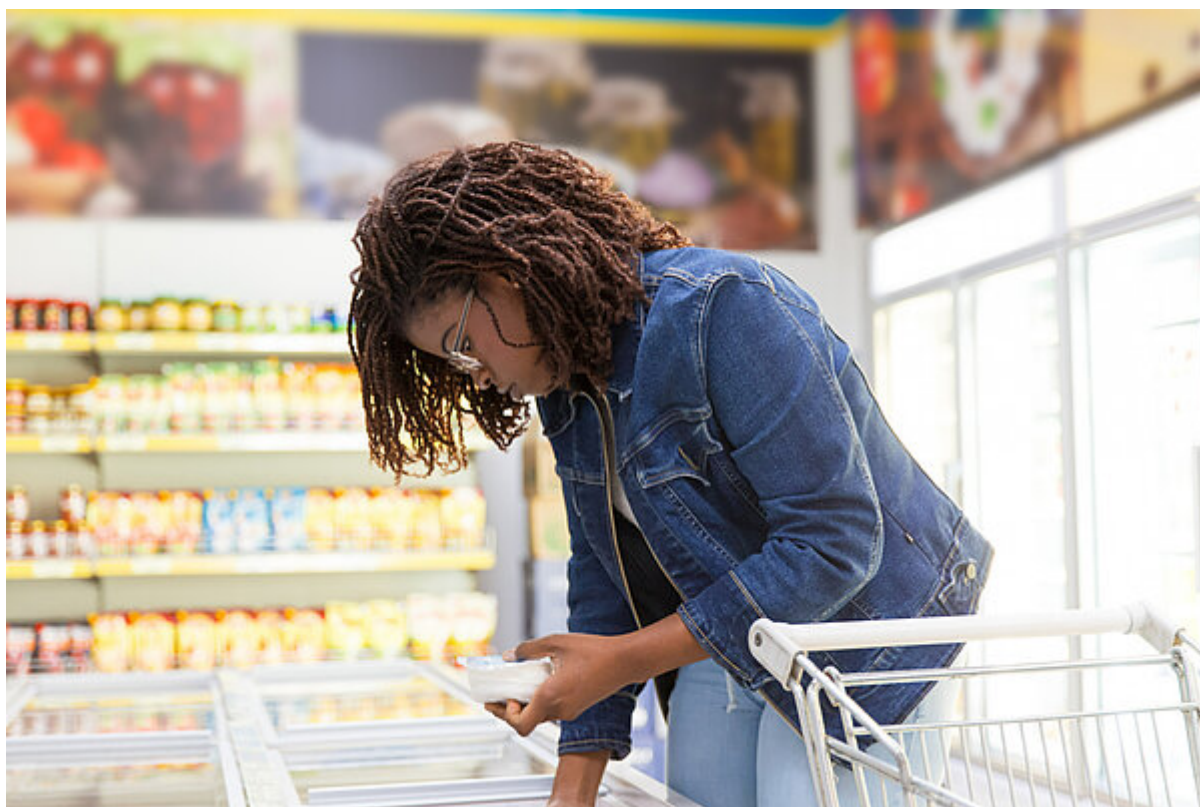
Food prices soar by a third

Rishi Sunak has failed people on food inflation.

This Government should be standing up for struggling families and pensioners hammered by soaring food prices. Yet this out of touch Government seems happy to stand by as millions struggle just to pay for the weekly shop.

Food prices have risen by 30% in the last two years, the biggest rise on record, according to Liberal Democrat analysis of new official statistics.

The 30% two-year rise in the Office for National Statistics' index of food prices between July 2021 and last month dwarfs the previous record of 19.3% between February 2007 and February 2009, at the height of the financial crisis.



Cost of essentials shoots up

The average price of a loaf of bread has gone up by 52p (27%) in the last two years.

A pint of milk is up 24p (57%),

Source: ONS.

Unless there is a clear urgent plan to tackle rising food prices, anything else Rishi Sunak says is just another empty promise.

Liberal Democrats want to see the government cracking down on anyone profiteering – from supermarkets to food multinationals – and helping farmers and traders hit by costly red tape, so people get the fair deal they deserve.

Our plan to protect shoppers



1. Invest an extra billion pounds in British farms, to boost food production

We should be supporting our farmers to boost the UK's environmentally-friendly and sustainable food supply.

Starting by targeting support at shortage areas, we can protect ourselves from import shocks, put more good-quality food on the shelves, and bring down prices for the long term.



2. Cut energy bills for farms and businesses

In April, the Government cut energy support for businesses by 85%, forcing farmers and shops to raise their prices. We'd put that support back in place, cutting costs for producers and retailers.

And in the meantime, the Government should ensure that energy-intensive farms qualify for extra support.



3. Let our farmers and fishers recruit the staff they need

The Government's unfair visa rules have left our farmers and fishers producing less food because they can't recruit enough workers. Tonnes of fruit and veg has gone to waste as a result.

The Government must fix its broken visa system which is holding back our food supply, by scrapping arbitrary salary thresholds.



4. Free school meals for every child in poverty

Unfair rules put in place by the Conservatives in 2018 have excluded 800,000 children growing up in poverty from Free School Meals. And another 200,000 eligible children are missing out because they're not registered.

The Government must immediately end this injustice by scrapping the arbitrary household income threshold, and automatically enrolling every eligible child.

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Author:

Lib Dem investigation reveals sewage cover up

Water firms are failing to disclose how much sewage is being discharged into rivers, lakes and coastlines.

Environmental Information Requests by the Liberal Democrats revealed that water firms could be guilty of a scandalous cover up.

We have no idea how many billions of litres of sewage is being pumped into our precious rivers and lakes. The true extent of environmental damage caused by this scandal is completely unknown.

Tim Farron

The staggering admission follows public outrage at water companies destroying the environment with sewage discharges. Currently, water firms only provide the length of sewage discharges, broken down by time. However, they refuse to publish the volume and litres of sewage discharged, essential information for understanding the environmental impacts.



Thames Water said they did not hold the volume data, however, the firm has previously made public that some of its monitors do measure volume. Last year it was reported Thames Water pumped over two billion litres of sewage into the Thames over a 48 hour period. This data was not given when Thames Water responded to the Environmental Information Request.

Meanwhile, Scottish Water does publish the volume of sewage discharged into waterways. Scottish Water's sewage monitors revealed that 174 million m³ of sewage has been dumped into Scotland's rivers, lakes and coastal waters since 2018, with 47 million m³ in 2022. Unlike England and Wales just a small proportion of Scotland's storm overflows have monitors installed.

The Liberal Democrats believe the industry is either not telling the truth on holding the data, or it has installed inadequate sewage monitors. Previous analysis by the party has found one in six sewage monitors were broken last year.

Ministers need to get tougher on these water firms by demanding they fit proper sewage monitors which are up to the job. The Government is letting water firms get away with faulty and flawed monitors.

Tim Farron

Stop Sewage Dumping

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

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