

Liberal Democrats commit to ending rough sleeping in Britain

The Liberal Democrats have committed to ending the scandal of rough sleeping in Britain, as the Homelessness Reduction Bill enters into force today.

Following a campaign visit to the Hundred Houses Society, a charitable housing association in Cambridge, Tim Farron announced a series of measures the party would put in place to help end rough sleeping.

These include introducing a Housing First provider in each local authority, to put long-term homeless people straight into independent homes rather than emergency shelters. Other policies include increasing funding for local councils for homelessness prevention, reinstating housing benefit for under-21s and reversing planned cuts to Local Housing Allowance rates.

The number of people sleeping rough rose to 4,134 in 2016, up 16% on the previous year. The Government has estimated that homelessness costs the state up to £1 billion a year.

The news comes as a coalition of charities, including Centrepoint, Crisis, Homeless Link, Shelter and St Mungo's, have called on political parties to commit to end rough sleeping in Britain.

Liberal Democrat Leader Tim Farron said: "It is a national scandal that so many people are sleeping on the streets in 21st century Britain.

"By increasing support for homelessness prevention and properly funding emergency accommodation, we can end rough sleeping across the country.

"We will also ensure each local authority has at least one provider of Housing First services, to allow long-term homeless people to live independently in their own homes.

"The evidence suggests that supporting people and giving them long-term, stable places to stay is far more successful in tackling homelessness than constantly moving them to different temporary accommodation.

"Under this government, homelessness has soared and the stripping of young people of housing benefit threatens to make matters even worse.

"This election is a chance to change the direction of this country and stand up for a Britain that is open, tolerant and united."

Benefit cuts and Brexit squeeze to leave 3 million families £2,500 worse off

Planned benefit cuts by the Conservative government combined with soaring inflation will leave nearly 3 million working households an average of £2,500 a year worse off, according to analysis by the Institute of Fiscal Studies.

Low inflation over the last two years has meant the government's freeze on most working-age benefits has only amounted to a 1% real cut so far.

But rising inflation from the falling pound is now set to reduce the value of these benefits by 5% between now and 2020, with total cuts of over £5 billion a year in the long run.

Liberal Democrat Shadow Chancellor Susan Kramer commented: "Theresa May's plans for a divisive Hard Brexit and savage cuts to benefits will leave millions of working families worse off.

"Three million households will be hit to the tune of £2,500 a year as a result of cuts to tax credits, rising prices and the falling pound.

"The Brexit squeeze will hit people in the pocket across the country, with the poorest families hit hardest.

"This election is a chance to change Britain's future and stop a disastrous hard Brexit that will leave us all poorer.

"Every Liberal Democrat MP elected is a challenge to Theresa May's Hard Brexit agenda."

Tim Farron: 'I do not think gay sex is a sin'

Tim Farron has opened up publicly for the first time about his Christian faith and in a candid interview with the BBC has said that he does not believe gay sex is a sin.

The Liberal Democrat leader has very clearly said he does not believe being gay is a sin, and nor is gay sex.

He makes no secret of his private faith but believes political leaders should not make theological pronouncements or declare what people's personal faith

should be.

But why is he speaking out now? Whilst he does not believe politicians should declare what is or isn't sin he was concerned some people were forming an impression of him that is not accurate.

Tim's impressive LGBT+ record

Mr Farron has an impressive record on LGBT+ issues, both at home and abroad.

At Home

PrEP

The Liberal Democrats believe that Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) available on the NHS to those at high risk of HIV infection.

Norman Lamb, as Health Spokesperson and with the full support of the Leader has supported this campaign in and out of Parliament.

Gay Blood Ban

In 2014 Tim Farron added his name in support of a Private Members Bill [Blood Donation (Equality)].

In 2015, Tim endorsed the Freedom to Donate campaign and strongly welcomed the review of the ban on gay and bisexual men donating blood.

Tim has said that the ban is “scientifically and socially outdated, deeply and unjustly stigmatising, and urgently need to change.”

In 2016 Tim tabled a parliamentary bill that would end the ban on blood donations from men who have sex with men.

The Liberal Democrats have been campaigning for the end of the blanket ban since 2006 and in Coalition in 2011 we won a partial victory which removed the restriction on gay men – but only if they had been celibate for 12 months.

Turing Law

Thousands of gay and bisexual men convicted of now abolished sexual offences have been posthumously pardoned thanks to Liberal Democrat pressure.

Liberal Democrat peer John Sharkey, whose Private Member's Bill was instrumental in securing a pardon for Alan Turing, reached an agreement with the Government in November 2016 to grant a posthumous pardon to thousands of gay and bisexual men convicted under long-abolished sexual offence laws.

Tim Farron said: “The Liberal Democrats continue to be the strongest voice on equality in Parliament.

“Although it comes too late for those convicted, the friends and relatives of the thousands of people who suffered under this unfair and discriminatory law

will now have a weight lifted off their shoulders.”

X-passports

Gender is listed on all passports issued worldwide that meet International Standards. The use of “X”, meaning “Unspecified” as a gender marker is enshrined in the standards, but few countries currently issue new passports with these markers.

An increasing number of people in the UK identify as neither male nor female, or live part time in various gender roles. As well as giving people the ability to identify as they choose and not have the state impose an identity upon them, a perceived mismatch between gender roles and official ID can cause problems dealing with official organisations such as the DWP, Police or Border Agency.

Julian Huppert during the Coalition and Norman Lamb since have advocated for the introduction of x – passports.

Tim has said: “Our party conference introduced the Transgender and Intersex Charter with astounding support from party members. This called for the phased removal of gender markers in documentation unless it is absolutely necessary, and the introduction of an ‘X’ gender option and ‘Mx.’ title option on the remainder and a streamlined simplification of the Gender Recognition Act 2004 to allow individuals to change their legal gender at will amongst other things. And we are leading the way, our own party documentation is changing to phase out gender wherever possible. Something as small as not having to choose whether to tick the male or female box on applications can make a huge difference. In the last Parliament we desperately tried to get the Tories to agree to introducing gender neutral passports. This is not as radical an idea as it might seem – other countries like Australia have already introduced it and it is accepted by the International Civil Aviation Organisation. It is frankly ridiculous that even on something this small the Tories have refused to act.”

Trans Prisoners

Liberal Democrats have strongly advocated on behalf of the rights of individual trans-prisoners. Tim Farron has been at the forefront of this work in Parliament. In 2015 he took up Tara Hudson’s case, he said:

“There is a clear need for a policy change in this area. It looks like the Ministry of Justice needs be dragged kicking into the 21st century.

“As I understand it, Tara has lived all her adult life as a female. I worry potential risk of harm to her in a male prison which was deemed to have levels of violence ‘considerably higher than in similar prisons’ by the prisons inspectorate.” –

Simplifying the Gender Recognition Act

During Tim’s first conference as party leader the Liberal Democrats voted in favour of simplifying the Gender Recognition Act 2004 to allow individuals to

change their legal gender at will and for allowing changes to government-issued documentation on the basis of gender reassignment to be provided free of charge.

The Spousal Veto

Before England and Wales introduced same-sex marriage, it was necessary for married trans people to end their marriages in to gain legal gender recognition. Around 30 couples were forced to annul their marriages in this way. They have described it as like having their marriages “stolen”.

Thankfully this is no longer the case. However, instead, when a married trans person seeks gender recognition, their spouse must give permission. If they do not give permission “for the marriage to continue” then the trans person is blocked from having their gender recognised. The marriage continues to exist.

The Liberal Democrats would believe the law should be reviewed with the intention of removing them.”

Sex Education to include teaching about LGBT+ relationships and rights

The Liberal Democrats have long campaigned to make sex education compulsory in all schools. This was repeatedly blocked by the Conservatives during the Coalition government. The Government has finally capitulated thanks to pressure both internally and externally.

Tim has previously said that children must have “access to good sexual health and relationship education and give parents the help and support they need to talk to their children about this issue.”

Liberal Democrat peers recently attempted to amend the Children and Social Work Bill to ensure that sex education would be taught irrespective of the religious background of the school

Deportation of LGBT+ individuals

Liberal Democrats have a manifesto commitment to stop the deportation of people to countries where their sexual orientation or gender identification means that they risk imprisonment, torture, or execution. Over the years Liberal Democrat MPs and Peers have raised the plight of LGBT+ facing deportation.

Abroad

Chechnya

Tim Farron was the first party leader to come out against the outrageous homophobic purge in Chechnya. Tim said: “These reports from Chechnya are truly horrifying, and represent an extreme manifestation of increasing homophobic brutality and intolerance in Putin’s Russia.

“The UK government must strongly condemn this disgusting violence, and use

every possible opportunity to raise this with the Russian government, as well as in the UN and other international bodies.

“The UK must work with those who share our values to stop the mindless targeting of the LGBT community, which is still prevalent in too many countries across the world.

“Only through defending universal human rights will we ever hope to achieve a world in which every person can live, work and flourish without discrimination.

“It is disappointing that Boris Johnson has failed to stand up for these people by not visiting Russia after Trump told him to stay at home.”

Russia

Tim laid the following EDM: “That this House deplores the recent legislation passed in Russia banning the promotion of non-traditional relationships; notes that this is akin to the former Section 28 legislation in the UK; further notes that the new law appears to be part of a wider crackdown on the freedoms of the LGBT community in Russia; believes that we must listen to those Russian LGBT groups and activists who urge very strongly that boycotts in any form or nature, from sporting, like the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics, to drinking vodka, are not supported by them and only increase the likelihood of harm towards LGBT Russians; and calls on the Government to work through international and diplomatic channels, like the G20, the Council of Europe and the International Olympic Committee and commercial and business interests already involved in sponsoring the 2014 Winter Olympics, alongside indigenous LGBT campaign groups based in Russia itself, to stand up for the human rights of the Russian LGBT community”

Speaking about the EDM he said: “As a long-time supporter of Amnesty International I believe human rights are inalienable and something we must protect and extend throughout the world. The recent laws passed in Russia are the equivalent of the awful section 28 laws we had in the UK. I hope the government will use every avenue of diplomatic pressure possible to make them drop these laws, this is an area we can take a stand and I hope we will.”

Uganda and Nigeria

Tim signed this EDM on LGBT rights in Uganda and Nigeria

Lib Dem MEPs also wrote to the European Commission urging for action to be taken over new anti-homosexual laws introduced in Uganda

Revealed: The highly embarrassing air pollution report that the Government doesn't want you to see

The Liberal Democrats have demanded the government publish a highly embarrassing report on air pollution before the election.

Ed Davey, Lib Dem former cabinet minister for Energy and Climate Change, has said the government is reportedly blocking release of its report into air pollution because it is worried the “shaming” findings would become a major election issue.

Ed Davey said: “Air pollution is one of the biggest health challenges in Britain today. The Conservatives have hidden the truth about their toxic policies. Increasingly air pollution is linked to a rise in asthma, COPD, heart conditions, and even recently to dementia. A vote for the Tories is a vote for more air pollution.

“It is a disgrace that the government wants to block a report which is expected to say that pollution is at dangerous levels in many of our cities and towns.

“Ministers are hugely embarrassed because it is EU air quality standards the government is flouting. No wonder Theresa May wants a hard Brexit, so she can change the rules to leave polluters free to damage the nation’s health.

“You can’t have clean air and a hard Brexit.

“The government is refusing to spend the money on measures that would improve air quality, such as investment in public transport, but this is a false economy because it burdens the NHS and destroys lives.”

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Liberal Democrats expected to surpass 100,000 members

The Liberal Democrat membership surge is about to take the party to a landmark 100,000 members – thanks to a staggering 12,500 joining since Theresa May announced the snap General Election last Tuesday.

Reaching six figures makes the party bigger than it has been since the mid-1990s and puts it on course to reach its highest membership ever within days. The biggest the party has been since its formation is 101,768 in 1994.

It means that more than 50,000 members have joined since last year's European referendum and more than 67,500 since the 2015 General Election.

Liberal Democrat leader Tim Farron pledged to build the party to 100,000 members by the end of the parliament as a key pledge during his 2015 leadership campaign – but at that point everyone expected the end of the parliament to be 2020.

[**Join the Liberal Democrats**](#)

Tim Farron said:

“Thousands of people are joining the Liberal Democrats every day because they want to change Britain’s future.

“People want a strong opposition to Theresa May’s Hard Brexit agenda and the Liberal Democrats are the only party challenging them up and down the country. Jeremy Corbyn’s Labour has completely failed, offering no opposition whatsoever and giving Theresa May a blank cheque to pursue a Hard Brexit.

“This election is your chance to change the direction of our country. If you want to stop a disastrous Hard Brexit, if you want to keep Britain in the Single Market, if you want a strong opposition to fight for an open, tolerant and united Britain, this is your chance.”

The landmark figure is just the latest sign of the party’s gathering momentum:

- The latest poll in Sunday’s Observer gave the party a four point increase. The party is consistently polling between 11-14%, close to double its average for most of 2015 and 2016.
- We are on a winning streak. Not only did we win the Richmond Park by-election in stunning style in December 2016, we have had an astonishing run of council by-election gains – more than 30 since last May – making it the best year for by-election gains in the party’s history. We are winning from the Tories, Labour and UKIP, and in areas that voted both Leave and Remain. We are also the only party to have increased its share of the vote in every recent parliamentary by-election.
- We have over-taken Labour in fundraising. In the last quarter of 2016, the Liberal Democrats raised nearly £2m – more money than the Labour Party for the first time ever.