

Political Reform to Tackle Sleaze

This country is built on the simple mantra, that it doesn't matter how high and mighty you think you are, the rules are the rules. If you break the rules, you get punished. Yet **Boris Johnson and many Conservative MPs think the rules don't apply to them.**

Conservatives' actions have created a sense of 'one rule for them, another rule for us', eroding the trust of the public they are meant to be acting in the best interest of.

This Government showed its true colours back in Autumn 2021, with their decision to overturn Owen Paterson's 30-day suspension from the House of Commons. Then their lies were exposed with the revelations of parties in Downing Street and the accusations that Number 10 officials and the Prime Minister have potentially breached lockdown rules.

Polling in December 2021 showed that just 5% of the public believe politicians work for the good of the country. **That is a tragedy for our democracy.**

The Government is accountable to the public, who have the right to a transparent Government that does not act above the law.

Previous Prime Ministers and previous Governments have all had their failings. However, **it has been a long time since we have seen, not just this stench of sleaze, but the absolute lack of resolve to do anything about it.**

Time and again, government ministers have refused to properly investigate allegations of sleaze, failed to declare relevant meetings and donations and tried to rig the system to cover their own backs.

Boris Johnson and many Conservative MPs think the rules don't apply to them.

This crisis has highlighted the imbalance of power between the executive and the legislature. This includes the Government's evasion of scrutiny during Parliamentary recess – only ministers can recall Parliament – and the Government's control of the Parliamentary timetable, thus limiting the issues which can be discussed by MPs.

The Conservatives' actions have created a sense of 'one rule for them, another rule for us', eroding the trust of the public they are meant to be acting in the best interest of.

In our new policy passed today, Liberal Democrats are calling for:

- A public inquiry into the ongoing Conservative sleaze scandal, with the disclosure of relevant documents
- Codifying the Ministerial Code into legislation with governance independent of the Prime Minister
- Introducing a range of sanctions for those who break the Ministerial Code with an Independent Advisor for investigating breaches
- Giving MPs more control of the business in the House (e.g. recalling Parliament)

[Read the full motion](#)

We need an independent, statutory public inquiry, with the powers and resources to get to the bottom of this Conservative sleaze scandal – including the power to summon witnesses and require them to give evidence under oath.

We also need an independent investigation system – at present it's the equivalent of defendants in a court case also taking part in the jury. And we must ensure those with a vested interest in tearing up Parliament's anti-sleaze rules don't have the power to do so.

Liberal Democrats are committed to creating an inclusive democracy, in which politicians from all parties can be trusted by the people they represent.

We will not stand by and allow this culture of sleaze to continue.

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Author:

[Meeting the challenge of the ecological emergency](#)

The UK has lost nearly half of its biodiversity since the Industrial Revolution. We're ranked in the bottom 10% in the world and the worst among G7 nations for biodiversity.

The UK should be leading at COP15, but the lack of action at home undermines our credibility

Conservative ministers claim to be close to the target of protecting 30% of the land and sea for nature, but are completely undermined by a lack of management measures and enforcement.

It's not acceptable. We can and must do better.

In new policy passed by our members today, Liberal Democrats are calling for:

- A plan for delivery of the target to halt the decline in species abundance by 2030, with specific and costed policy measures.
- Substance to the Government's promise to protect 30% of land and sea for nature.
- Reforming the powers, purposes, funding and duties for AONBs and National Parks to restore nature.
- Ensuring that the environment is at the heart of all government policymaking.
- Greater powers for local authorities to help tackle the nature crisis.
- Reversing the cut in International Aid to support developing countries restore their ecosystems.

[Read the full motion](#)

The forthcoming UN Biodiversity Conference (COP15) is a rare opportunity to secure global commitments to addressing the ecological emergency. The UK should be leading at COP15, but the lack of action at home undermines our credibility abroad.

We're ranked in the bottom 10% in the world and the worst among G7 nations for biodiversity.

Inadequate protection or investment in wildlife sites. **Debilitating funding cuts** to the statutory environmental agencies. Weak policies that fail to support a transition to a sustainable farming and fishing industry. **Undermining accountability** with their decision to restrict the independence of the new Office for Environmental Protection.

We must get our own house in order when it comes to the ecological crisis if we are going to be taken seriously on the world stage.

The world has failed to meet previous targets to halt the global decline in biodiversity. We cannot afford to fail again.

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Author:

[Expanding the Use of British Sign Language](#)

As a child I learned basic sign language.

My parents' had a friend whose mother had been deaf since birth and just loved looking after and playing with me.

Part of that was teaching me her language so we could chat about the TV we were watching, what I was doing at school or just whatever flitted through my happy little head.

It didn't seem like a big issue to me at the time. Natural in fact.

But over the years after Annie passed away I gradually forgot everything that she taught me so that when I met one of my heroes, Dame Evelyn Glennie I felt inept at relying on her to ensure we could communicate.

All deaf and hearing-impaired individuals have the right to participate in society fully and independently and too often these rights are not fully realised.

It shouldn't be that way. Not for anyone.

British Deaf Association figures suggest that 151,000 people can currently use BSL in the UK including 87,000 hearing impaired users.

British Sign Language was recognised as a language in its own right by the UK Government in 2003.

Many parents may want or need their children to learn sign language, however they will need to pay for these lessons. Subsidised or free lessons are entirely at the discretion of local authorities.

As a party, we are deeply concerned that, despite deafness not being a learning disability, it can lead to underachievement of deaf children. All deaf and hearing-impaired individuals have the right to participate in society fully and independently and too often these rights are not fully realised.

British Sign Language should have equal status to the UK's other official languages.

Better access and understanding of the language used by deaf children by both their teachers and their peers can only help to alleviate some of these problems. British Sign Language should have equal status to the UK's other official languages.

The British education systems teach modern languages in the hope of fostering greater communication between peoples and bringing long-term economic benefits, British Sign Language lessons would fulfil both of these aims. Sign language is included on the education curriculum in Sweden, Norway and Finland who have seen no detrimental effects on children's education by adding more subjects.

School budgets are already creaking under the consistent underfunding and cuts from the Conservative Government.

In order for schools to be given the resources they need to teach British Sign Language, it must form part of the core curriculum for young people.

In our new policy passed today, the Liberal Democrats are calling for:

- The rapid introduction of GCSE equivalent qualifications in BSL in England.
- The Department for Education to commission a feasibility study into the introduction of BSL lessons in primary schools to embed the teaching of basic BSL from an early age, with expert findings to be offered to devolved education departments.

[Read the full motion](#)

This policy would sit alongside our other education policies to improve the system for all, including for English, Maths and Science. We have also been in strong support of British Sign Language being given legal status as a way of raising awareness of deaf culture. Now that this idea is gaining traction politically across the spectrum, a GCSE and more accessible studies of the language should follow

Young children are able to learn languages at a faster rate due to rapid neural formation. If the aim is to get young children to fluency, then it is best to start at a young age.

Around 150,000 people in the UK use British Sign Language, these changes would give them a chance for a more integrated future with the children and adults around them.

As Liberal Democrats, we are committed to inclusivity. Not only will learning British Sign Language include those children who have hearing impairments, it will teach all children about the importance of this inclusivity.

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Author:

[Conference update Spring 2022](#)

Conference starts on Friday, and if you haven't yet registered you can do so [HERE](#).

The Federal Conference Committee met on Saturday, 5 March to review amendments, emergency motions, and questions to reports submitted for next week's Spring Conference.

Spring Conference 2022 will again be held online via the Hopin platform, and we would like to **thank the Conference Team and the wider team at HQ for making it happen.**

As mentioned via email and in an earlier post on Lib Dem Voice and the Federal Conference Facebook Page the FCC has agreed to allow a **later deadline on emergency motions on the topic of Ukraine**, following the Russian invasion and the evolving situation. You can still submit an emergency motion on Ukraine [HERE](#).

We are also delighted to announce that there will be a **fringe session held on Sunday, 13 March from 17:40 to 18:45 with Kira Rudyk, Leader of the Holos Party in Ukraine** (a sister party of the Lib Dems), who will be **joined by Layla Moran MP, answering questions from members on her experience and the current situation in Ukraine**. I do encourage you to attend this exciting fringe event.

The FCC reviewed the emergency motions submitted by 28 February and as these were either out of order or have been accommodated as emergency amendments to motions already on the agenda, the Committee therefore decided that it would select one of the Ukraine motions which have a later deadline of Thursday 10 March at 14:00. This means that we will have a 70-minute Ukraine motion; this motion will be unamendable. **The Committee will publish the selected Ukraine motion on Friday around midday.**

In addition, the submitters of motion F16 Selection of Speakers (Standing Orders Amendment) have informed the Federal Conference Committee that they wish to withdraw their motion from consideration at Conference. Once a motion (or amendment) has been included in the agenda it can only be withdrawn by leave of Conference. Therefore, **during the Federal Conference Committee Report to Conference (F2) there will be a vote held if Conference agrees that the motion is withdrawn.**

I have included below the list of amendments selected, I have provided a summary of the nature of the amendments. These titles are based on my summarisation of the amendments and I apologise in advance if any of these have not been summarised correctly.

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Author:

Break the Bias

I'm proud of the strides our country has made towards gender equality, and of the role Liberal Democrats have played in delivering that progress. **Yet there is still so much more to do.**

Far too many women still face violence, sexism and discrimination – a reality that has been brought into sharp focus by the pandemic and Sarah Everard’s murder last year.

Liberal Democrats continue to fight for true gender equality. We are campaigning to make misogyny a hate crime, establish a royal commission on violence against women and girls, and reverse the cuts to international aid.

This year, **International Women’s Day is focused on breaking the bias** – because whether conscious or unconscious, bias makes it difficult for women to move ahead in our society. And simply acknowledging this isn’t enough. We need to take far more action to level the playing field.

This starts with representation in our politics. That’s why Liberal Democrat initiatives like the Campaign for Gender Balance are so important for encouraging and supporting women who want to stand as candidates.

Now, **for the first time ever, women make up the majority of our parliamentary party**. I was delighted to be joined by two more brilliant women in the House of Commons last year – Sarah Green, the new Liberal Democrat MP for Chesham and Amersham, and Helen Morgan, the new Liberal Democrat MP for North Shropshire.

In the House of Commons, nine of the Liberal Democrats’ thirteen MPs are women.

This year for [#InternationalWomensDay2022](#), our MPs are proposing nine new Bills which embody the principles at the heart of our party.

Check them all out below †<https://t.co/I0oT7BZGKd>

– Liberal Democrats (@LibDems) [March 8, 2022](#)

And they are doing fantastic work. Today, my colleagues have proposed nine new Bills to celebrate International Women’s Day, which you can read about here. From ending the pay gap once and for all, to addressing maternal health for Black and Asian women, these Bills tackle problems affecting women and girls in the UK and beyond.

So this International Women’s Day, I will be celebrating so many incredible women – who have brought us this far; who work tirelessly for equality; and who are helping us all to finally break the bias.

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Author: