

Campaigning on Europe – members' views

You may remember, last November, taking part in a **survey on members' views on Brexit and the party's campaigning on the future of UK-EU relations**. Thanks to everyone who participated – **6,500 members, more than any previous survey of this type** – and thanks to Greg Foster and Dan Schmeising at party HQ who organised it on behalf of the Federal Policy Committee. This article gives you the results.

The first question asked how you voted in the 2016 referendum. Completely unsurprisingly, over 91 per cent voted to Remain. Most of the rest couldn't vote (for example because they were too young); just 2.5 per cent voted to Leave. No less than 95 per cent would describe themselves now as Remainers (more than four-fifths of whom chose the option 'Yes, I am a Remainer and I am proud of it') and just 1.3 per cent described themselves as Leavers (a third of whom – 25 people – were proud of it).

In response to the question, '**Do you think people in your life who aren't Liberal Democrats associate the current problems the country is experiencing – shortages of truck drivers, farmworkers, care workers and goods in shops – with Brexit?**', on a 0–6 scale, the average answer was 3.7: **in other words, they do, but not all that strongly**. Of course, the pandemic and the government's feeble response have complicated the picture substantially, but this will change over time, as the impacts of Brexit become ever clearer. Indeed, if we'd asked the question now rather than two months ago, I suspect the response would have been stronger.

We next asked which **EU-related policy areas the party ought to treat as a priority**, given that the impact of Brexit is being felt across so many; people could choose three out of a list of fourteen. **Trade came top**, listed by more than half of respondents. **The others, in order, were:** climate change and energy; freedom of movement and immigration; rights of EU citizens in the UK and UK citizens in the EU; standards for environment and labour issues; scientific collaboration; cultural, artistic and educational links; environment and biodiversity; defence and security; health policy; justice and police cooperation; foreign policy (countries outside the EU); international development; and crime.

The remaining questions dealt with **how people thought the party should communicate its existing policy** (as decided by party conference – to build closer links between the UK and EU, leading in the longer term to joining). We asked (on a 0–6 scale) whether people thought that (a) people who aren't Liberal Democrats and (b) party members and supporters, would like to hear us talk more about building a better relationship between the UK and EU, short of joining the EU; and whether they'd like to hear us talk more about the UK rejoining the EU. **For each audience, respondents thought that 'building a better relationship between the UK and EU, short of joining' would be a better message than 'the UK rejoining the EU'** (by 4.2 to 3.1 for non-Lib Dems and 4.9 to 4.5 for party members and supporters). All those are on the positive side of the results (3.0 is the mid-point), though only just so for

a rejoin message for non-members.

We asked similar questions about the party's target audience at elections: 'The Liberal Democrats should pitch our appeal mainly to former remain voters by emphasising our belief that the UK should join the EU' (score 3.6) and 'The Liberal Democrats should pitch our appeal mainly to former leave voters by stressing the need to build a better relationship between the UK and EU, and avoiding talking about joining one day' (score 3.9) – both positive, but neither exactly ringing endorsements. **The combined position – 'The Liberal Democrats should pitch our appeal to both former remain and former leave voters' – even though this may be a less clear message – by stressing the need to build a better relationship between the UK and EU in the first instance, leaving open the possibility of rejoining' – proved more popular, with an average score of 4.5.**

The final question asked people to choose between those three positions. **The combined message was a very clear winner**, chosen by 65 per cent of respondents. The 'appeal to remainers' message won the support of 19 per cent and the 'appeal to leavers' message 16 per cent. Although we tried to force the issue by stressing the likelihood of the combined message being a less clear one, you were having none of it!

Thanks again to everyone who took part. The FPC's task is to take that core message and put policy flesh on it. Look out for our policy paper on the future of the trading relationship between the EU and the UK, and Single Market membership, due for debate at spring conference.

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Author:

[Future of the Federal Board: what members say they want](#)

After the disappointment and failure of the 2019 general election, an independent post-mortem was carried out into what went wrong. [The findings of the Thornhill Review](#) set a broad and challenging reform agenda for the party, which we've made good progress on implementing so far.

On the role of the Federal Board itself, the Thornhill Review found that:

The lack of connection between operational, political and governing parts of the party has created structures which foster a lack of collaboration and isolated decision making. (p.35)

A fragmented organisation led to low collaboration and isolated decision making. (p.33)

There is no clear 'leadership team' where the three pillars of the party – political, operational, federal – can make cohesive decisions, simply, quickly, and effectively. The Federal Board – 40+ members – is not, cannot, and should not be that team. (p.34)

The Federal Board was often a 'rubber-stamp' and is too large a group to be a realistic decision-making body. (p.22)

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Federal Policy Committee January 2022 Report

FPC members started the year bright and early with our first meeting last week. We cancelled our December meeting so we could all focus on North Shropshire, so this was our first meeting since November.

Big areas of focus for FPC this year will be further work on our messages and key policies to support them, **leading up eventually to the Manifesto for the next General Election**; and our substantial programme of working groups developing policies in politically useful areas, to bring to autumn conference.

We started with a discussion with Richard Benwell, **chair of the group on the natural environment**. We discussed a wide range of elements here, from land and marine management, to the links to the planning regime, the role of the wider economic and financial framework in supporting sustainability, the government's strategic arrangements for managing the natural environment, and the relationship to climate change action. The group is developing some really interesting ideas, which it will be consulting the party on at spring conference. **If you're interested in this area, please do read and respond to this – it's always the most effective moment to influence its proposals before they become fairly fixed by the time they come to Conference.**

Next we discussed the work of the homes and planning group with FPC member and Cumbria councillor Peter Thornton who is leading this. Some key themes of the discussion here included, unsurprisingly, the need for the planning of local homes to meet the needs of local community, and increasing housing supply significantly, including specifically social and council housing. Tenants' rights, rent reform, and the pros and cons of right to buy were all

discussed, as was the central role of finance and mortgage availability to house prices and building plans. **A key question for this group is around the right scale of ambition for increasing housing, and they will be consulting widely on this, again at spring conference.**

We had an in-depth discussion of our **motion for spring conference on the future of the UK's trading relationship with the EU**. The direction of our strategic ambition is clear and we have quite a large number of detailed specific proposals to make for progress in the short term as well. **The tone we take as we make them is also a politically crucial question for us a party**, and is something we discussed again this week with both Layla Moran, foreign affairs spokesperson, Duncan Brack, chair of this group, and others, reflected in our final motion for spring conference.

Our last substantive business was an excellent discussion with Judith Jolly, the chair of the group bringing forward proposals for a more caring society. We discussed many aspects of this, including providing care to adults with learning disabilities and the costs associated with this. It's clear however that the **most difficult question in this remit will be the view we take on providing care for the elderly and how this is funded**. FPC encouraged the group to think boldly about possible solutions to this at this stage and, again, the group will be **consulting party members fully about this at spring conference – so please do contribute your views!**

With a little discussion about committee housekeeping issues that finished us off for the evening. We are pleased that **Lucy Nethsingha, one of the two vice chairs of the committee, will now be representing FPC to the Federal People Development Committee (FPDC)**, in a new role aimed at helping to link up our own work on engaging party members with that committee which oversees it more broadly.

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[Our plan for 2022](#)

In 2021 we achieved something we've not achieved since 1993: winning two Parliamentary by-elections in the same year off the Conservatives. **We start this new year with a larger Parliamentary Party than any of us would have dared dream of a year ago.** (A winning run that has continued with the first council by-election of this year too – congratulations to now councillor Andrew Dunkin who [won a seat from Labour](#) from third place.)

The question now is how do we build on that success in 2022, and how do we make the most of our limited resources? Here's the plan.

Winning over those with liberal values

We showed in both Chesham & Amersham and in North Shropshire how to appeal to many Conservatives. People with (some) liberal values, who often voted Remain, but who backed Boris Johnson in 2019. They're now willing to listen to us, even to **vote for us – as long as we listen in turn to what they say is most important to them**. That's why our campaigns in both those by-elections didn't start with us lecturing them. They started with us listening to them, finding the common ground between their concerns and our values.

Tactical voting was important in both contests. We should be grateful for the cooler heads in other parties who saw this too.

But winning over a soft Conservative counts double – one on our total plus one off the Tory total. A tactical vote only counts once – one on our total but nothing off the Tory total.

We need to do both to win (and of course substitute in our main rival in places where it isn't the Conservatives we're up against).

Securing electoral reform

Get this right and we can be a big part of the story of removing the Conservatives from power. Get this right and we can be a big part of forcing a hung Parliament. Get this right and we can use that power finally to secure electoral reform for Westminster.

That is why the Conservative-Lib Dem battleground of the Blue Wall is so important. **It's the way to change all our politics.**

But, the majority of our members, our elected representatives and our votes are from outside the Blue Wall. So **we must get the balance right** but I hope you can see why there is so much focus on the Blue Wall.

For Labour facing areas, having voters hear us talk about the part the party can play in removing the Conservatives from power will also be helpful mood music. Background noise that will make it easier for our local messages about Labour's failure in so many town halls to work.

Refining our message

To succeed, we must continue to refine our political messages. We need to give people a clear sense of the difference that the Liberal Democrats make.

We've got an extensive set of market research underway and now have regular feedback sessions with our most active canvassers. That way we can make sure our decisions are rooted in what voters are telling us – an important lesson from what went wrong in 2019.

In his [autumn federal conference speech](#), Ed started setting out this messaging, with the idea of a fair deal for everyone at the heart of it. That desire to give everyone a fair deal, enabling them to lead their lives as

they wish, is what makes us distinctive as liberals.

Improving our campaign support

We saw in both Chesham & Amersham and North Shropshire how important our local organisation is. **Without the May election results we had in both seats, we wouldn't have had the by-election successes we did.**

We're starting to see the benefits of our big investment in our networks of field campaign staff. It's been tough to prioritise this area of expenditure, but both results show the benefits of those difficult decisions.

We also need to continue to modernise our campaigning. So the [Campaign Innovation Fund is back for 2022](#) to fund more experiments, helping us learn what works. We're also bringing key data work back in-house so we can **improve the data available to campaigners on the front line**. We'll be making major changes to our web presence during the year and improving many of our other tools.

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[Vaccine passports give a false sense of security](#)

Liberal Democrats have and always will support public health protections that work but the use of so called "vaccine passports" provides a **false sense of security**.

The Government has lost sight of why they put forward these measures in the first place – to reduce transmission of the virus. **The vaccines being given in the UK are highly effective at reducing the severity of Covid symptoms**, the likelihood of admission to hospital and against the risk of death. But even those who are fully vaccinated can still spread the virus.

The most effective way of reducing transmission is with testing combined with rigorous tracing and supported isolation. Testing allows the vaccinated and unvaccinated alike to know whether they have Covid. This can be done quickly and easily with lateral flow testing.

The Government should scrap its plans to record people's vaccination status on Covid passes and pursue testing as a more effective form of infection control.

Lateral flow tests are highly accurate. Although they came under intense

scrutiny at the beginning of the pandemic over concerns about their effectiveness, subsequent research has shown that this is not the case.

Researchers from UCL found LFTs were more than 80% effective at detecting any level of Covid-19 infection and likely to be more than 90% effective at detecting who is most infectious when they use the test.

The Scottish Government has introduced vaccine passports and yet Omicron is spreading fast through community transmission in Scotland. The UK Government has put forward no official evidence that vaccine passports significantly reduce transmission despite repeated requests.

Recent studies have also suggested that **vaccine passports might actually reduce some people's willingness to get vaccinated** in the UK, particularly among certain groups, such as those who are hesitant.

The Government should scrap its plans to record people's vaccination status on Covid passes and pursue testing as a more effective form of infection control.

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