

# 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.

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## [North Shropshire: it's on](#)

I've often said history points to two routes for Liberal Democrat (and before that Liberal Party) revivals. One, which we'd much rather avoid, is a foreign disaster – Iraq, former Yugoslavia, Suez... The other is seizing electoral opportunities outside Westminster general elections to give us momentum, increased prominence and growing relevance.

After Sarah Green's brilliant win in Chesham and Amersham, we saw the boost that gave the party nationally with consistently higher poll ratings and greater media attention.

**Now we've got a chance – a real chance – to pull off something even bigger in North Shropshire.**

Some people are most moved by positive messages, others by negative messages, so let give you one of each: Helen Morgan and Boris Johnson.

Helen is a fantastic candidate and would make a brilliant MP. Other words apply to Boris Johnson... What a Christmas present for Helen winning would be, and what a Christmas headache for Johnson that would be too.

**There's still time to make a difference to the result.**

Please do help if you can. [Details of how to help are on Helen Morgan's website.](#)

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## [Why we're opposing Priti Patel's Anti-Refugee Bill](#)

The scenes of people trying to cross the Channel demand urgent action. They also show that the Government's approach isn't working.

in her two years as Home Secretary, Priti Patel has only made the problem worse.”

These **crossings are incredibly dangerous** – as demonstrated so tragically by the deaths of 27 people when their dinghy sank two weeks ago. They line the pockets of the criminal gangs engaged in people smuggling and human trafficking. And they undermine public confidence in our whole immigration system.

These crossings need to stop, but the Conservatives' Anti-Refugee Bill – officially the 'Nationality and Borders Bill' – will only make things worse.

Priti Patel likes to talk tough about this, and keeps putting forward ever more cruel and impractical proposals, from housing refugees on North Sea oil rigs to building a floating wall in the Channel. But in her two years as Home Secretary, she has only made the problem worse.

We know that **the best way to stop refugees taking dangerous and irregular journeys to the UK is by providing safe and legal routes to sanctuary instead.** Yet Priti Patel has closed them down.

Last year, she ended the scheme for resettling unaccompanied refugee children from elsewhere in Europe after bringing just 480 to the UK. This year, she closed the UK's three biggest resettlement schemes and replaced them with a single much smaller scheme. She has also changed the rules to make it harder for people to claim asylum in the UK – yet another example of this Conservative Government breaking international law.

The UK has a proud history of providing sanctuary”

The result? The dangerous Channel crossings have increased.

**The Government's Anti-Refugee Bill, now before Parliament, doubles down on that failed approach.**

It does nothing to expand safe and legal routes for refugees – despite amendments the Liberal Democrats tabled to require the Government to do so. It does nothing to tackle the huge backlog of asylum claims, but will actually create even more delays.

It does nothing to increase cooperation with other countries on combating the cross-border smuggling and trafficking gangs. And it does nothing to reverse the Conservative cuts to international aid that will only create more refugees.

Instead, the Bill would make it harder for refugees to claim asylum in the UK and give many of them fewer rights if they are successful. It reduces vital protections for victims of human trafficking and modern slavery, making them less likely to come forward and therefore allowing more criminals to get away with it. And it further undermines the UK's long-standing commitments under the 1951 UN Refugee Convention.

**The UK has a proud history of providing sanctuary for people forced to flee their homes because of war or persecution.** Priti Patel's Anti-Refugee Bill

undermines that tradition. It is fundamentally un-British. And it wouldn't stop the dangerous Channel crossings. That's why Liberal Democrats are fiercely opposing it.

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