

Watch Ed Davey's speech here

Good afternoon Conference.

Our country is hurting right now.

125,000 have been taken by this cruel virus.

125,000 mums and dads. Brothers and sisters. Sons and daughters.

125,000 empty chairs at kitchen tables.

So many families, mourning the loss of a loved one.

Even those who have been spared the agony of bereavement... even they are suffering enormous hardships.

Families kept apart by lockdown.

Parents who haven't seen their children for over a year.

Grandparents who've missed out on the joy of holding the new baby.

Businesses closed. Jobs lost. Savings destroyed.

A whole year of isolation. Fear. Grief.

GOVERNMENT FAILURES

All compounded tragically by the failures of this Conservative Government.

Poorly prepared. Slow to act. Ignoring expert advice.

Boris Johnson's indecision and incompetence has failed our nation.

Leaving the most vulnerable – elderly people, disabled people – to be attacked by the virus in their care homes, where they should have been safe.

Leaving our country with a shockingly high death rate – one of the worst in the world.

This Government must be held to account. Britain's bereaved families deserve answers.

So Liberal Democrats will continue to lead that charge.

Boris Johnson must set up now the independent inquiry he promised me in the House of Commons last June.

No more excuses. No more delays.

SARAH EVERARD AND PROTESTS

And after all the pain inflicted by Covid, last week we were forced to confront another national anguish.

The shocking, tragic killing of Sarah Everard.

And the violence perpetrated by far too many men against far too many women.

The abuse, the harassment and the fear women face every day, just walking down their own streets.

And then those awful scenes from Clapham Common.

Women, wrestled to the ground by police officers.

Handcuffed and dragged away, simply for holding a peaceful vigil in Sarah's memory.

Simply for saying enough is enough.

We have to do better as a country.

We must do better at tackling violence against women.

Believing survivors. Making clear that misogyny in any form is unacceptable.

And as men, we have to do better.

Listening to women. Calling out other men. Never turning a blind eye.

Just as with the Black Lives Matter protests last summer, this pandemic makes these issues more urgent – not less.

And this Government – these Conservatives, who talk so much about their freedoms and their free speech – must stop their assault on everyone else's freedoms.

Our fundamental rights to peaceful assembly and protest.

Rights that have always been so crucial to our democratic society.

Rights crucial to the struggle over decades to advance equality and end discrimination.

THE RECOVERY WE NEED

After so much hurt, we need hope.

And that is what our wonderful NHS staff and volunteers are injecting into our lives as they work tirelessly delivering vaccines.

Hope, so we can finally look forward.

And as we do, we must put recovery first.

The recovery of our health, our freedoms and our communities.

The recovery of business, the economy and jobs.

A recovery that is fair.

Fair for the doctors and nurses, care workers, teachers, and countless more on the frontline who have gone to work every day – putting themselves at risk to keep the rest of us safe.

Fair for the people who have stepped up heroically to look after their loved ones.

The unpaid carers so often forgotten.

The parents who have somehow juggled home-working with home-schooling.

Fair for the small businesses who have adapted and innovated and sweated their way through this crisis.

All of you – together – have pulled our country through.

Thank you.

So we need a recovery that does justice to the sacrifices you have made.

A FAIRER, GREENER, MORE CARING COUNTRY

A recovery that delivers on our vision of a fairer, greener, more caring country.

Fairer...

Where everyone can have a good job and real opportunity, no matter where they were born or what school they went to.

Where small businesses and the self-employed can thrive, creating secure jobs with good pay.

Where every person's rights and dignity are respected.

And fairer: where women no longer have to fear harassment, abuse and violence from men.

Greener...

Where we invest in exciting new technologies and insulate every home – to create secure, well-paid, green jobs in every part of the UK.

Where we work together with other nations to tackle the global climate emergency.

Where we clean our air and protect green spaces, and so improve people's mental and physical health.

And more caring...

Where we look after one another, and finally recognise the true value of care.

Where we stand up for carers and give them the support they deserve.

Where people with mental ill health get quality care, quickly – not least children and young people.

And where we pay our nurses and care workers properly.

How dare Boris Johnson say all he can afford is a one per cent pay rise for nurses and other NHS staff?

How can he find billions for contracts for his Tory cronies, but not for the amazing people who have put their lives on the line for us?

How dare he boast about the vaccine rollout they are delivering so brilliantly, while he treats them so disgracefully?

Prime Minister: pay NHS and care staff properly. Do it now.

PUT RECOVERY FIRST

Friends, that's the recovery our nation needs.

That's the fairer, greener, more caring country that lies ahead of us.

I know the British people can get there. But it will take the Liberal Democrats to lead the way.

Just as Liberal Democrats have already led the way towards a fairer, greener, more caring country –

With the progress we have delivered in Parliaments and councils across the UK
–

Wherever and whenever we win elections.

And we can do it again now. Because we will put recovery first.

If only the others would.

But the Conservatives won't.

They have put Brexit ahead of the national interest, with their disastrous

trade deal.

The Conservatives have put enriching their wealthy friends ahead of fair pay for nurses or support for small business.

And the Tories are putting their right-wing, shrink-the-state ideology ahead of working with industry, even junking the very idea of an industrial strategy. Just when we need a recovery.

And the Nationalists in Scotland certainly won't put recovery first.

Because they put their obsession with independence ahead of everything else.

Even as Covid claims thousands of lives, devastates businesses and threatens jobs across Scotland –

The SNP want to plunge our economy into years of chaos and uncertainty.

They divide the Scottish people.

They are seeking to divide our United Kingdom.

Now, they're even divided among themselves.

What Scotland needs is a leader who will bring people together: Willie Rennie.

And a party who will put recovery first: the Liberal Democrats.

THE PARTY OF SMALL BUSINESS

The UK's economic recovery starts with small business.

Small businesses are at the heart of every local community, and every local economy.

They create the jobs people need.

In Government, Liberal Democrats championed small businesses and helped them create two million new jobs.

And during this pandemic, it's been the Liberal Democrats pushing for more action to support small businesses and the self-employed, every step of the way.

We know how tough the past year has been, for almost every small business.

Many have seen their incomes evaporate. Many have had to stay closed all year.

And for so many, the support from the Treasury hasn't been nearly enough.

A chaotic series of last-minute announcements, short-term sticking plasters

and unpredictable U-turns.

Three million people – mostly the self-employed – excluded altogether.

The result?

Almost a million jobs lost.

Small businesses saddled with unmanageable debt.

Many worried they won't make it much longer.

So here's the mission now for Liberal Democrats at every level – in Cardiff and Holyrood, in London and all across England, at May's elections and beyond:

Let's work with local small businesses to help their recovery, and so help our communities recover too.

And let's challenge the Chancellor to give small businesses a bold new tax cut to support thousands of new jobs.

Slash their National Insurance Contributions by – not doubling, not trebling – but quadrupling the annual Employment Allowance from £4,000 to £16,000.

So no small business pays a penny in National Insurance Contributions on their first five employees.

A Liberal Democrat tax cut to back small businesses, create jobs, and put recovery first.

TRADE AND THE BREXIT DAMAGE

And there's another critical part of our plan to back British business and put recovery first.

And it's trade.

Trade with our European neighbours is critical for so many businesses and jobs in every part of the UK.

But Boris Johnson's trade deal with the EU –

The first trade deal in history to put up new barriers to trade –

Is hurting our businesses and seriously harming our recovery.

An act of economic vandalism at the worst possible time.

In January – the first month of Johnson's deal – these new barriers cost Britain's exporters more than £5 billion.

£5 billion in one month.

So I'm proud that the Liberal Democrats voted No.

I'm proud it's Liberal Democrats leading the argument that the Government must get back round the table...

Talk with our European neighbours. Rebuild those relationships.

And I'm proud that – as we have affirmed once again this weekend – Liberal Democrats remain a strongly pro-European party...

Making the argument for the closest possible relationship with the EU – so we can put recovery first.

THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY

And let's be clear: when we say recovery, we mean a green recovery.

A recovery that faces up to the existential threat of climate change.

We've seen the warnings.

Floods devastating communities across the UK.

Fires burning the Amazon, burning Australia.

This is a global emergency.

The world must act. Before the fires burn out of control and the flood levels rise beyond measure.

And the UK must lead. At the crucial climate talks in Glasgow this year, and beyond.

Just as we did before, when the Liberal Democrats were in Government –

And I led the UK delegation for three UN climate summits –

Securing an ambitious EU climate agreement, critical for achieving the landmark Paris Climate Agreement.

Now Boris Johnson has recently started talking about climate change.

But talk is cheap. It's actions that matter.

And just look at the Conservatives' actions since 2015:

Our zero carbon homes law? Scrapped.

Our Green Investment Bank? Privatised.

Liberal Democrat initiatives on onshore wind, solar power, community energy? All binned by the Conservatives.

When Tory Ministers talk about the strong progress the UK has made on climate change, let's be clear:

Those are Liberal Democrat achievements, delivered by Liberal Democrat Ministers in Government.

Because back when Boris Johnson was going round saying wind farms couldn't pull the skin off a rice pudding...

We were investing £8 billion to help make the UK the world leader in offshore wind.

And look what we achieved:

Four times as much clean, renewable power generated here in the UK.

Offshore wind now even cheaper than gas.

Thousands of good new jobs – in every part of the country. Parts of the country that need them most.

SOVEREIGN GREEN WEALTH FUND

And there's something else that Liberal Democrat investment has created...

A whole new source of green wealth for our nation.

Just last month, an auction for the right to build wind farms off the coast of England and Wales attracted bids far, far higher than anyone expected.

Raising £9 billion. With more to come.

Now you probably haven't heard about that nine billion – because the Tories don't want you to know.

They don't want you to know that Liberal Democrat investment has translated into green wealth for the country.

They'd rather slip the cash quietly into the Chancellor's wallet, to pay for all their dodgy contracts.

No. This green wealth doesn't belong to Rishi Sunak, or the Tories.

It belongs to the British people.

So I say: let's invest it in a Sovereign Green Wealth Fund.

Let's invest this windfall from wind power into more climate action...

To build new infrastructure and attract more private investment.

To grow our green wealth even further, and create thousands of manufacturing jobs here in the UK.

By investing in the green technologies and industries of the future – tidal power, hydrogen, green flight – Britain can not only recover but become the world's first Green Powerhouse.

And with our new Green Wealth Fund, we can also invest in an emergency ten-year programme to insulate every single home.

Lower heating bills for everyone – and an end to fuel poverty.

Warmer homes for everyone – and green jobs in every village, town and city across the UK.

Real climate action to slash Britain's carbon emissions.

If the Tories had invested the windfall from North Sea oil in the '80s, they could have created a Wealth Fund worth more than £500 billion today.

But they squandered the nation's wealth then, just as they are doing now.

But we must not let them.

Liberal Democrats, let's put recovery first. A green recovery.

To build a fairer, greener country.

MAY'S ELECTIONS

Conference, after all the darkness of the last 12 months – all the sadness and sacrifice – this is the brighter, hopeful vision our country needs.

Where Governments and councils put recovery first.

A green recovery, with small business at its heart

Where, together, we build a future that is so much better than the past.

A fairer, greener, more caring country.

The Liberal Democrats offer that vision.

We can deliver that future.

We will build that country.

And that's why, in May's bumper crop of elections, we must get out there and make our case across the UK.

Because our communities need us.

They need us to campaign harder than ever before.

To knock on every door. Speak to every voter. Deliver every leaflet.

And they need us to win.

After all the pain our country has endured, our communities cannot afford the Tories to take us backwards or the SNP to tear us apart.

It's up to us to stop them – and to offer something better.

So, let's get Scottish Liberal Democrats elected to Holyrood, to invest even more in schools, mental health services and local communities across Scotland.

Let's get Welsh Liberal Democrats elected to the Senedd, to support small businesses and the self-employed across Wales.

Let's get Liberal Democrats elected to the London Assembly, to build homes in the heart of London and take real action for clean air.

Let's get Liberal Democrats elected to councils across England, who will work tirelessly for their communities, revive our high streets and protect our precious environment.

Let's get Liberal Democrats elected.

Let's put recovery first.

And let's get to work for our communities.

Building the fairer, greener, more caring country we all want to live in.

Thank you.

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Author:

Motion Passed: Lifting Barriers to Work for Disabled People

For too long those with disabilities have struggled to obtain secure employment – a struggle intensified by Covid-19. Even though the huge increase of working from home could have made finding and keeping a job easier, disabled workers have instead been disproportionately impacted by furlough, reduced hours and redundancies.¹

Labelling LGBTQ+ as an 'ideology' and suppressing LGBTQ+ people is outrageous.

That's why today [@LaylaMoran](#) is launching our new campaign to [#ProtectOurTwins](#), encouraging UK towns to work with their Polish twins to defend human rights. <https://t.co/eWsyZtWpIL>

– Liberal Democrats (@LibDems) [March 11, 2021](#)

Even before the pandemic, those with disabilities had a 52% employment rate, compared to 81% for non-disabled people – a staggering employment gap. Disabled workers also earn £2.10 less per hour than their non-disabled colleagues.

That's why the Liberal Democrats are calling on the Government to lift the unjust barriers excluding disabled people from the workplace.

Today we have passed a motion that sets out a targeted strategy furthering the employment of disabled people as we emerge from the pandemic. We are demanding overdue policy changes including:

For too long those with disabilities have struggled to obtain secure employment

1. A Jobs Guarantee for newly unemployed disabled people and specialist disability employment support
2. A £20 a week increase in Employment Support Allowance and Personal Independence Payments, in line with the Universal Credit uplift
3. Disabled people to have a 'day one' right to work from home if they want to, unless there are significant business reasons as to why this could not be accommodated

Read the full motion here:

[Lifting Barriers to Work for Disabled People](#)

The Liberal Democrats are dedicated to defending disabled peoples' right to work and secure employment. We recognise that the UK economy can only be truly successful if it supports disabled workers.

¹[Leonard Cheshire](#)

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Author:

Fixing the Government's Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic

Liberal Democrats are urging the government to fix its response to Covid-19.

The Liberal Democrats have watched in horror and disbelief as **the government made mistake after mistake** tackling the Covid-19 crisis.

We mourn the suffering and loss of life caused by the Conservatives' ineptitude. **We demand the Government reassess its approach** and address the long term ramifications of the pandemic.

While we are relieved by the success of the NHS's vaccination programme, nothing can bring back those lost to the virus, numbering over 126,000. **Behind every statistic is life – a parent, a sibling, a friend.**

That's why Liberal Democrat members have voted to back a motion **urging the government to fix its response to Covid-19.**

Our motion set out how we would address the most pressing problems caused by the Government's mishandling of the pandemic:

We need a Public Inquiry

It's long past time for the government to launch an independent public inquiry as promised by Boris Johnson.

From China to Italy, last Spring we saw other nations battling the virus before numbers started to climb in the UK.

The government had a chance to limit the number of infections but **they failed to take action.**

Why? Bereaved families who have lost loved ones to Covid-19 deserve answers.

We need a full, independent, public inquiry.

In the words of Ed Davey,

"This is the biggest catastrophe, the biggest trauma the British nation has suffered since the second world war.

It has to be the toughest, most independent inquiry that British law allows, and anything short of that would be totally unacceptable."

It's time our frontline heroes' work was recognised by more than payment in

claps.

Support for NHS and Social Care workers

NHS, social care workers and emergency service personnel need proper support with **a proper pay reward**.

They have borne the brunt of the physical and psychological scars caused by Covid-19 and **it's time their work was recognised by more than payment in claps**.

We are also calling for **increased funding for mental health support services** to help key healthcare workers cope with the trauma of Covid-19.

In addition, we urge the government to grant foreign nationals working in healthcare indefinite leave to remain.

Support for Disabled People

Disabled people and their carers have been **disproportionately affected by the pandemic**.

Disabled workers have been disproportionately impacted by furlough, reduced hours and redundancies and many have been in self-isolation since last March.

The Government must **increase their support for disabled people** through the social care, housing, education and mental health systems.

A Strategy for Understanding and Treating Long Covid

Last December, the ONS estimated that **one in ten people in the UK are suffering with the effects of long Covid**.

Liberal Democrat MP Layla Moran has led the way raising awareness of this condition in Parliament.

Together with the All-Party Group on Coronavirus, Layla is calling on the government to **recognise Long Covid as an occupational disease**.

Our motion backs research into the long-term effects of COVID-19 to **help clinicians treat the condition**.

The Covid-19 mortality rate is up to 4.3 times higher for Black and South Asian people.

A Plan for Supporting Ethnic Minorities

The disproportionate toll of Covid-19 on people from black and ethnic minority groups is extremely alarming.

The Covid-19 mortality rate is up to 4.3 times higher for Black and South Asian people according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS)

Furthermore, people from BAME groups **make up a significant percentage of those on the frontline**, increasing their exposure to the virus and their subsequent risk of falling ill.

We need **more research** into why ethnic minorities are so severely impacted by Covid-19.

That's why we are calling for a **cross-government Race Equality Strategy** to ensure an effective response to the coronavirus crisis.

As liberals we must be wary of creating a two-tier system of rights here at home.

Saying No to Vaccine Passports

Introducing so-called 'vaccine passports' for domestic use would establish **a two-tier system**.

Vaccine passports will **discriminate against those who cannot have the vaccine**, either for health reasons or because they are not old enough.

And no vaccine has yet been authorised for use in children and adolescents.

Whilst they may be inevitable for international travel, **as liberals we must be wary of creating a two-tier system of rights here at home**.

What's more, countries like Australia, Taiwan and New Zealand have shown it's possible to lift the restrictions on our liberties with robust public health interventions to keep the virus under control.

The fairest way to lift restrictions and to make lockdowns a thing of the past is to **keep cases low and get as many people vaccinated as possible**.

Learning from our Neighbours

Countries like New Zealand, Australia and South Korea have effectively managed outbreaks of the virus.

We must learn from their success and build a Coronavirus strategy that draws on the successes we've seen overseas.

All of these have used strict border controls and this **undoubtedly helped stop the spread of the virus**.

We must introduce robust quarantine measures to reduce the transmission of the virus and its new variants in the UK.

We must ensure no-one slips through the net as the scale of the mental health impact of this crisis emerges.

Mental Health Support

The coronavirus crisis has exacerbated mental health issues for many people across the UK.

As we address the physical effects of Covid-19, **we cannot ignore the impacts of successive lockdowns, isolation, bereavement and financial pressure on people's mental wellbeing**.

Our motion highlights the importance of signposting available mental health support, while increasing the level of funding for mental health charities on top of providing additional investment in mental health services.

We must ensure no-one slips through the net as the scale of the mental health impact of this crisis emerges.

It is vital that everyone in the UK is protected from the scourge Covid-19, no matter where they came from and that migrants have access to all the same services.

Ending Immigration Checks in the NHS

The coronavirus does not respect international borders, nationality or ethnicity.

It is a moral and healthcare imperative that migrants are not prevented from accessing vaccines, healthcare or financial support.

We are demanding the government suspend the 'no recourse to public funds' rule, end immigration checks and upfront charging in the NHS and establish a firewall to prevent public agencies from sharing personal information with the Home Office for the purposes of immigration enforcement.

It is vital that everyone in the UK is protected from the scourge Covid-19, no matter where they came from and that migrants have access to all the same services, respecting their right to equality.

Read the full motion here: <https://www.libdems.org.uk/f14-covid19-pandemic>

The Liberal Democrats are dismayed that the government did not learn from their mistakes last spring, leading to a **further 84,000 deaths since our Autumn Conference**.

The government should take on our policy recommendations and put the UK's recovery first.

[Go to Source](#)

Author:

Here's how we help young people

Young people's lives have been severely disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Lockdowns have taken a toll on young people's education, mental health and future prospects – hitting those with fewer resources especially hard.

The Liberal Democrats believe significant policy changes are needed now to safeguard young people's futures. We want to make up for the opportunities missed in lockdown, giving young people the chance to flourish.

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Author:

My Vision for Britain

At our Liberal Democrat Spring Conference today, I outlined my vision for building a Fairer, Greener and More Caring country by putting recovery first. Take a look at my commitments here:

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