

# Happy Pongal

It's been a huge privilege to come to know many Tamil people in my constituency and across the UK since being elected to Parliament back in 1997, and I can therefore say with total certainty, that the contribution of British Tamils to our country and society has been exemplary, with the hard work, intelligence and dedication of so many amazing British Tamils.

**Celebrations like this are an opportunity to remember the exceptional contributions we witness everyday from entrepreneurs, public servants and of course our frontline workers. Thank you for all you do.**

Current lockdown measures mean this year's Pongal celebrations will feel distinctly different as so many of us remain separated from friends and loved ones. Despite these challenges, let us look to the future with hope and let us strengthen our collective efforts to beat this virus.

**To everyone celebrating, I wish you overflowing happiness and good health for the year ahead. Iniya Thai Pongal Nalvazhthukkal!**

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## Parents must be given vouchers instead of woefully inadequate food parcels

**It is completely unacceptable that parents have received woefully inadequate food parcels in place of free school meals.**

The Secretary of State must urgently investigate this situation.

The amount of food parents have received to feed their children is not anything like enough to provide an adequate, nutritious lunch every day.

Nor do they appear to represent value for money, given what the parcels should theoretically be worth.

It is unacceptable that parents have received woefully inadequate food parcels in place of free school meals.

Our Education Spokesperson [@libdemdaisy](#) has written to the

Secretary of State urging him to investigate the situation & replace these abysmal hampers with food vouchers.

[pic.twitter.com/GfTdF5Ww40](https://pic.twitter.com/GfTdF5Ww40)

– Liberal Democrats (@LibDems) [January 13, 2021](#)

These abysmal hampers must be urgently replaced with food vouchers.

I have written to the Secretary of State asking him to investigate the situation urgently and replace these abysmal hampers with food vouchers.

**Time and time again, this Government has let children and families down on the issue of free school meals, which are critical to the education and future of so many children.**

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## [11 Lib Dem bills the Tories are killing today](#)

Over the past year, Liberal Democrat MPs have tabled a number of Private Members' Bills that would make important changes to help **build a fairer country, tackle deep-rooted inequalities and ensure a more effective response to the Covid pandemic.**

Eleven key Liberal Democrat Bills were due to have "Second Reading" – the next stage of their progress through Parliament – over the next three months.

Some have been waiting for over nine months. But today, **Jacob Rees-Mogg** is pushing through a government motion in the House of Commons that will end any chance of them becoming law in this parliamentary session.

Here are the **eleven crucial new laws** that the Conservatives are blocking today:

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# Daisy, diversity & deliveries

Last month's Federal Communications and Elections Committee (FCEC) kicked off with a productive Q&A with **deputy Leader** [Daisy Cooper](#). Daisy's approach to collaborative working across parts of the party was warmly welcomed and FCEC expressed its support, and desire to assist, Daisy's ongoing work to support a diverse range of candidates to stand.

We were pleased to note the progress made by the State Parties on the approval process for parliamentary candidates, which has needed to adapt to the online-only world in which we are currently living. The Thornhill Review specifically pointed to the need to select strong candidates early in a Parliament, to maximise their chances to campaign, and we wish to **thank the unsung heroes doing the behind the scenes work to make it all possible.**

Looking ahead, we considered the latest analysis of our prospects in the next few General Elections. It remains vital to take a wholistic view, which means planning not just for 2024, but 2028 and beyond. This is not the space for a full explanation, but the party must remain realistic about what can be achieved in a single election and watchful of developments to the [Fixed-Term Parliaments Act](#).

Encouragingly, progress on our communications strategy continues apace. **To win elections, we need to be heard by the public, more importantly we need the public to hear how our values relate to solving the problems that matter most to them.**

We meet again on the 27th, our first meeting since the country returned to lockdown. [Ed's response](#) to the government's shocking failure to act sooner has set the groundwork for a Lib Dem vision for a fairer, safer, and economically more sensible approach to the crisis. For activists, **please read [our latest advice on campaigning](#)**; for everyone, stay safe!

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## The Government must catch up with cancer

In the early months of this pandemic, the Government's messaging was clear. **'Stay at home. Protect the NHS. Save lives.'** And so it is once again.

Monday's lockdown announcement, although belated, was absolutely right.

But why must we protect the NHS? So that it can continue to tackle COVID, but also, equally, so that the NHS can carry on its life-saving work in every other area.

We must protect the NHS to tackle COVID and help the NHS carry on its life-saving work in every other area

Cancer research UK report that **we will see 35,000 excess cancer deaths because of the Coronavirus pandemic**. For every 2 people who have so far lost their lives due to COVID, another will unnecessarily lose their battle with cancer.

Screenings and treatments are being cancelled, delayed and disrupted until it is too late. Usually, we see a 70:30 split between curative and palliative care. This year, it's 50:50.

The answer is not to exhort our heroic frontline staff to work harder.

It is not to carry on doing what we have always done, just doing it a little better. **This requires some new thinking.**

As Chair of the Radiotherapy APPG, I met with Matt Hancock in October and asked him to back both Catch Up with Cancer's 6-point plan to boost radiotherapy services and the APPG's submission to the Comprehensive Spending Review.

Thousands of people could have their lives lengthened, their lives saved and their families spared of unspeakable grief if we act urgently to boost cancer services.

The Government must [#CatchUpWithCancer](https://twitter.com/l0rhKwkJkZ) and save lives.  
[pic.twitter.com/l0rhKwkJkZ](https://twitter.com/l0rhKwkJkZ)

– Tim Farron (@timfarron) [December 2, 2020](#)

**Radiotherapy is a clean form of cancer treatment.**

It does not affect immunity or open up a patient to infection. It therefore holds **huge potential to boost cancer treatment services to 120% of pre-Covid capacity**, the levels required to clear the backlog within 2 years.

So, following the Spending Review on 25th November, there was a **collective gasp of disbelief** across the oncology and radiotherapy sector. It was baffling. There was no investment for, or no reference made to, COVID-safe radiotherapy treatment.

The Government must act urgently to catch up with cancer

Next week, I am meeting with the Under Secretary of State for Health, Jo Churchill, to remind her of the ever-increasing need for ring-fenced investment into radiotherapy services.

Thousands of people could have their lives lengthened, their lives saved, their families spared unspeakable grief, **if the Government acts urgently to catch up with cancer.**

But, most importantly, if you have even the slightest hint of a doubt that something might be wrong or unusual with any part of your body, the NHS is open to protect you.

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