

Pocket Guide to Scottish Liberal Democrat Policies

March 2010

A cycle of red-blue, blue-red government has got us into the current economic crisis and political malaise. It is time to try something new. If you want better, choose different, choose the Liberal Democrats.

Only the Liberal Democrats can provide Britain with the fresh start it needs. The Liberal Democrats will create a fair society and a different and better sort of politics. We will reform our economy so that everyone gets a fair deal and fix our rotten political system so that the right decisions are taken. We will deliver change that works for you.

The Liberal Democrats are different because we're the only party that believes in fairness: we'll bring change that works for you, instead of just those at the top.

Nick Clegg

Applicability

This guide summarises the policies of the Scottish Liberal Democrats, as they apply to the Scottish Parliament for devolved matters and to Westminster for matters reserved under the Scotland Act.

Note

This guide outlines key policies at March 2010. As some policies are updated at each Party Conference, please refer to conference motions or briefings as necessary until this guide is updated.

Compiled and produced by:

**Scottish Liberal Democrats
4 Clifton Terrace
Edinburgh
EH12 5DR**

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| ECONOMY | 4 |
| BUSINESS AND ENTERPRISE | 5 |
| PENSIONS AND BENEFITS | 6 |
| ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE | 7 |
| NATURAL ENVIRONMENT | 8 |
| RURAL AFFAIRS | 9 |
| LOCAL COMMUNITIES..... | 10 |
| TRANSPORT..... | 11 |
| HEALTH..... | 12 |
| EDUCATION | 13 |
| GOVERNMENT & CIVIL LIBERTIES | 14 |
| LAW AND ORDER | 15 |
| ARTS & CULTURE..... | 16 |
| EUROPE | 17 |
| INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE | 18 |
| EQUALITIES..... | 19 |

ECONOMY

Decades of Labour and Conservative rule has created an unsustainable economy, preoccupied with the artificial wealth of inflated property prices rather than productive work and invention. Our economy is too dependent on the "Square Mile" – the City of London – instead of on all 100,000 square miles of Britain. We will set out a clear plan to bring the national budget back under control, taking tough decision in public spending to avoid the salami slicing of key public services. We will set up an infrastructure bank to direct private finance to essential projects such as new rail services and green energy. We will break up the banks, to ensure that taxpayers are never again expected to insure the activities of high-risk 'casino' banking.

Cutting taxes for people on low and middle incomes – There will be no income tax on the first £10,000 you earn – meaning 3.6 million working people and low income pensioners will no longer have to pay any income tax at all, including over half a million people in Scotland. Most people will have an income tax cut of £700. Most pensioners will pay up to £100 less. The change will be paid for by introducing a mansion tax, closing loopholes that benefit the wealthy and making sure airlines pay for the pollution they cause.

Getting the public finances in order – We will set out a clear plan to reduce the deficit and get public finances in order. Our approach will be based on economic indicators not political dogma. We will base our decision of when to start cutting the budget deficit on five tests; the rate of growth; the level of unemployment; credit conditions; the extent of spare capacity in the economy and the cost of Government borrowing. We plan to cut spending by, for example, capping public sector pay rises to £400 for two years, abolishing the Child Trust Fund, and scraping unnecessary defence projects including the like-for-like replacement of Trident.

Saving to spend – When people are losing their jobs, it's right to reallocate some of the money we save to help them. We will immediately reallocate £3.5 billion pounds to job-rich capital projects like bringing empty homes back into use, insulating schools and developing renewable energy. Over the longer term we will cut further wasteful or low priority spending so there is money to invest in improving education for our children as well as to pay down the deficit.

Sorting out and breaking up the banks – The UK banks owe their very existence to the British taxpayer. Some banks such as RBS, Lloyds-HBOS and Northern Rock have received direct taxpayer bailouts. However, all have benefited from the explicit guarantee that none of them will be allowed to fail. Yet many of these banks continue to engage in high-risk activities which are of little or no benefit to ordinary taxpayers knowing that if things go wrong they can turn to the taxpayer. This is fundamentally wrong and the Liberal Democrats will split up the banking system, to make sure we are no longer expected to underwrite high-risk banking. This will take time so we propose to introduce a 10% levy on bank profits as recognition of the protection they receive until they have been broken up. We want the Bank of Scotland back home - in Scotland. Smaller in scale and not part of a Lloyds "superbank", it will provide banking competition on the high street, protect jobs and support Scottish business.

BUSINESS AND ENTERPRISE

We are in the teeth of the longest recession on record. It happened because Labour, and the Conservatives before them, built a precarious economy that was too dependent on the City of London, soaring house prices and rocketing personal debt. Liberal Democrats want to create a thriving, fair and balanced economy with jobs that last in every part of the country, and in every sector, and where the environment is protected. First and foremost we will get the banks lending again so businesses can grow and avoid job cuts. We will set up Local Enterprise Funds and Regional Stock Exchanges to help businesses grow outside London and will stop burdening businesses with unnecessary regulations.

Get the banks lending responsibly again – Thousands of businesses can't get credit on fair terms, so they're having to cut investment and jobs. That's hugely unfair when we own some of the banks and are propping up the rest of them. There are taxpayers' representatives on the boards of the banks we own or part own. They should insist banks lend to viable businesses again immediately.

Local Enterprise Funds and Regional Stock Exchanges to help businesses grow - Local Enterprise Funds will help local people invest in growing businesses in every area of the country. And Regional Stock Exchanges will be a route for smaller businesses to access equity without the huge risks and costs of a London listing.

Cut regulation and create a fair playing field for business – We will properly assess the cost and effectiveness of regulations before and after they are introduced, reforming Impact Assessments. We will operate a 'one in one out' system so that for every rule introduced, another one is scrapped. And we will change the culture of regulators to help, not hinder, business.

Give the Post Office and Royal Mail long-term futures – We will separate the Post Office from Royal Mail, retaining the Post Office in public ownership. To secure the future of the Post Office we will focus on developing new sources of revenue including a Post Bank. We will divide ownership of Royal Mail between a John Lewis style employee trust, incentivising staff as part owners of the business, and the government with the remaining 49% minority sold to create funds for investment. In Scotland, Liberal Democrats persuaded the Scottish Government to set up a special fund to help post offices diversify and keep serving their communities.

A fair deal for consumers – We will introduce a Universal Service Code to secure high quality customer service in the private and public sectors, for example, by requiring that the customer service phone number is free from mobiles and landlines. We will ensure a fair balance between small and large retailers by establishing a local competition office within the OFT and by introducing a local competition test for all planning applications for new retail developments.

Fair trade – Rich countries still operate subsidies and tariff barriers that hit the poorest countries in the world. We will seek to break down these barriers, and promote trade and investment in developing countries. Dumping of subsidised agricultural exports by developed countries wrecks local farming in Africa and other parts of the world. This scandal must stop.

PENSIONS AND BENEFITS

The pensions and benefits system is unfair. Complicated forms and endless phone calls mean that many end up not getting the help they need. In the recession more people are finding themselves reliant on unemployment benefits for months on end with no help to get a job. We believe that people who want to get ahead should be supported and older people deserve a pension they can live on. Those without a job need help to get back into work and earn a decent living. People who've fallen on hard times should get a helping hand. We have affordable plans to increase the basic state pension and link it to earnings so pensioners are better off. We will make tax credits simple and stable.

Restore the earnings link immediately – It is unfair that as each year goes by, pensioners slip further behind. It is only fair that, at times when the country is getting richer, retired people share the benefit. We will immediately restore the link between pensions and earnings so pensioners' living standards finally improve.

Scrap the default retirement age – It is unfair to assume that just because someone has reached a particular age, they are not fit to do a particular job. People should be judged on their ability to do their work not their age. We would remove compulsory retirement ages.

Tax Credits you can rely on – Families should be able to sleep easy knowing that they can spend the money they receive without worrying it will be clawed back by the Treasury. We will fix the payments of tax credits for 6 months at a time so payments are stable and predictable for families – though of course there will be cases where exceptions are made on an emergency basis where needed, like if someone loses their job or has their hours drastically cut.

Help for the young unemployed – We will support young people while they get valuable work experience by paying anyone undertaking an internship a 'training allowance' of £55 a week (£5 more than Job Seekers' Allowance). This will help employers who want to offer young people work experience but cannot afford to pay them. We will also invest in back to work programmes to help young people back into the labour market.

Fair energy prices – Nearly 37,000 people died from the cold last winter, most of them elderly. Over 600,000 households in Scotland live in fuel poverty – that is, they have to spend 10% of their income on heating. Energy bills are too expensive for too many people, especially pensioners who often spend all day at home. We will force energy companies to introduce "social tariffs", lower than their other prices, for everyone struggling to make ends meet. We will subsidise home insulation to cut heating costs.

Winter Fuel Payments for disabled people – Over-60s get a Winter Fuel Payment of at least £200, no matter their income or health, while disabled people who may be stuck at home all day, get nothing to help them keep warm. We will reform the system, granting payments to disabled people paid for by delaying age-related payments until people reach 65.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is getting worse. It's unfair because it's our children who will suffer. Labour has failed to make it easy for us to go green. We can't trust the Conservatives: they talk about going green but many don't even accept climate change science. Liberal Democrats are the only party that takes climate change seriously enough. We believe there is a huge opportunity to get out of this recession by going green, strengthening the economy and creating jobs that last. As well as investing in green infrastructure, we'll insulate homes and force energy companies to make bills fair so you can afford to keep warm. We'll oppose new dirty coal or nuclear power stations: we will use our lasting natural resources like wind and wave power. Over time, we'll ensure Britain doesn't contribute at all to climate change because we absorb as much carbon as we emit.

Build green infrastructure to create jobs that last – Now is the time for big investment to get the wheels of the economy turning again. By investing in green technologies, home insulation, and public transport we will create hundreds of thousands of new jobs that will last, and make the economy sustainable for the long term.

Fair fuel bills – Energy companies charge you less for your energy the more you use. That's unfair and environmentally crazy. It means a pensioner heating one room pays more per unit than a millionaire heating a mansion. We believe people who use less should pay less so we'll change bills so the first units are cheapest. We'll protect the poorest customers by making energy firms create "social" tariffs at lower prices for those who need them.

Major insulation programme to warm our homes – Britain has some of the worst insulated homes in Europe. Tens of thousands of older people die from the cold every year, and a million pensioners can only afford to heat one room. We want homes we can be proud of, that we can afford to keep warm. We'll have a major programme to give every home, school and hospital the opportunity to be insulated, paid for by the savings from lower energy bills. We'll make sure every new home and building is fully energy efficient by improving building regulations.

Yes to renewables to generate your own power – To cut carbon emissions and give people a fair chance to go green, we will create an "eco-cashback" scheme where you get cash from the government for installing micro-generation technology like solar panels or a wind turbine at home. Then you'll be able to sell the energy back to the National Grid at a profit, with a so-called "feed-in tariff".

No to nuclear and dirty coal – The power stations we rely on are not only threatening the climate, many of them are coming to the end of their useful life. As we replace them, we have to move on from old technologies. We will not waste taxpayer subsidies on nuclear power and we will prevent new dirty coal power stations such as Hunterston being built without full carbon capture and storage.

A zero-carbon Britain – We are the first party to aim for a carbon neutral Britain so we don't contribute at all to global warming - making the British economy carbon neutral overall by 2050, reducing carbon emissions in the UK by over 40% of 1990 levels by 2020 as a step on the way.

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Liberal Democrats want to see clean water, healthy soil and sustainable food. Britain's countryside is breathtaking, and we are a nation rich in plants and wildlife and beautiful open spaces. For nature's beauty to be maintained and enhanced our countryside must be looked after. We will use its resources more wisely. We will protect the parks, countryside and coastline. We believe everyone has a part to play also that everyone should be able to reap its benefits.

Enhancing our natural environment – Scotland's landscape is celebrated around the world. We will protect and enhance this cherished natural asset and halt the loss of biodiversity to prevent any further loss of Scotland's natural heritage. We will promote schemes to improve wildlife protection and enhance our most valuable and endangered species and habitats. We will crackdown on wildlife crime and ensure that those who commit such crimes are caught and punished. At sea we have plans for strengthened regulation to protect the marine environment. We also want to promote policies that reconnect people with the natural environment through education, access to green space and we will continue to improve public access to Scotland's environment.

Saving money by saving the planet – We will tackle the rising levels of waste (a major source of greenhouse gases) by acting to reduce packaging and increase recycling.

We will help farmers help the environment – We believe that the CAP should be replaced gradually with a new European Sustainable Rural Development Policy. This would help farmers to get a fair price for their produce, encourage home grown food, deliver an appropriate level of food security, enhance biodiversity through habitat management and conserve our countryside, support rural economies, help tackle climate change, ensure cleaner water and protect water supplies. The reformed policy must allocate Rural Development Funds to member states on objective needs-based criteria, replacing the current arrangement that has left many parts of the UK, particularly Scotland and Wales, short-changed for decades.

Protect greenfield land – We will equalise VAT on new build and repair on an overall revenue neutral basis. It will also help to reduce the costs of repairs to historic buildings and encourage building on brownfield land.

Supporting our fishing industry – We believe that more responsibility for implementing policy on conserving fish stocks should be worked out regionally. Decisions on fisheries management should be made on a regional basis, with more powers being given to fishermen, scientists and communities through Regional Management Councils.

Adapting to climate change – We will instil new urgency in the drive to adapt to the consequences of climate change, in particular by improving management of water resources and by enhancing flood defences through investment in infrastructure and better coordination of the responsible agencies. We will work with water companies to deliver long term solutions to reduce impact and deliver sustainable, secure supplies.

Supporting developing nations in tackling climate change – We will support developing nations with our International Leapfrog Fund to jump high carbon development by transferring renewable and low carbon technology to those countries which need it most.

RURAL AFFAIRS

Liberal Democrats are the only party with the vision, commitment and political drive to deliver positive change which will in turn safeguard the future of our rural communities. We want living communities with affordable homes and successful economies. We believe that no matter where you live local services should be affordable and accessible. We will stop big food companies bullying farmers. We will open more post offices in rural areas.

Breathing new life into rural communities – Post offices are the hub of many small communities and we will invest to ensure that they stay open. We will take action to tackle the digital divide by ensuring equal access to enhanced broadband services throughout Scotland, not just the central belt. We will bring down the price of fuel at the pump in rural areas to that available in other parts of the UK by working with Europe to reduce fuel duty.

A fair deal for farmers – To ensure prompt farm payments, we will cut red tape by simplifying the application processes and clarifying the funding mechanisms and criteria. We will overhaul the New Entrants scheme to encourage a new generation in farming and we will provide certainty for the industry through reliable future funding of support schemes. We will fight unnecessary bureaucracy by continuing to oppose electronic sheep tagging and ensuring that regulations on animal transport and pesticides are proportionate and targeted.

Helping farmers help the environment – We will accelerate the replacement of CAP production subsidies with payments for social goods, such as good environmental practice. We will also nurture the market for bioenergy through longer-term targets under the Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation, a new assurance scheme to ensure bioenergy is sustainably produced and transported, and reform of existing woodland tax breaks.

Affordable housing in rural areas – We will provide more homes for local people by encouraging and promoting the conversion of farm buildings and cottages, making it easier to develop redundant farm land for affordable housing. We will support the innovative Community Land Trust scheme to empower local people to meet local housing needs.

Regulate supermarkets to ensure fair trade for farmers and a fair price for food – We will stop supermarkets bullying farmers, ensuring both farmers and shoppers get a fair price for food. We'll do this by creating a legal Supermarket Code and an independent regulator of Britain's food market.

Warm homes for all – Fuel poverty is twice as bad in rural areas as in urban areas, yet initiatives on offer fail to take into account the higher cost of tackling this problem in remote and island communities. We will ensure that energy assistance schemes are available across the whole of Scotland and help target rural areas. Because many rural homes are off the gas network and both expensive and environmentally costly to heat, we will make homes that are dependent on fuel oil a priority for microrenewable energy, including biomass, and energy efficiency measures.

LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Too often people's opinions about what happens in their area are ignored. Big developers and faceless bureaucrats have far more power than local families in deciding where new buildings go up and the taxes we pay locally disappear into the government coffers. Liberal Democrats will do things differently, because we believe local people and families know best how things should be done in their area. We will give people a real say over their area by increasing the responsibilities of local government and making it a stronger partner for central government.

Community power – We are passionate about empowering people and communities. We will introduce new models of community management, giving local people the opportunity to manage local libraries, parks, sports facilities and other spaces and services where local people want it. We will introduce a 'light touch' support programme to help engage communities and give them the power to influence events in their area. We will introduce a new Common Good Act to regulate, protect and modernise the framework for land, property or funds to be held in trust for the local community. We will give more focused support to build capacity in key areas of the voluntary sector and take action to break down the barriers to volunteering.

Providing affordable homes – We will boost the provision of affordable housing, particularly in the rental sector, by investing in home building programmes across Scotland through housing associations and local authorities. We will end the Right to Buy for new-build social housing and increase the stock of social housing to rent. We will release public sector land to Community Land Trusts, taking out the cost of buying land to develop, so they can build affordable homes for their local communities. We will cut VAT on repair and renovation to encourage developers to repair and re-use empty buildings and brownfield land, rather than always building over the countryside.

Fairer local taxes: Scrap the unfair Council Tax – The Council Tax is an unfair tax which bears no relationship to the ability to pay, and penalises pensioners and people on low incomes, who pay a far higher proportion of their income in tax than the very rich. Liberal Democrats believe that it should be scrapped and replaced with a fair local tax, based on people's ability to pay.

TRANSPORT

The transport system is in a mess. There is too much traffic on the roads, trains are expensive and overcrowded, and buses are too few and far between, particularly in the countryside. We believe buses and trains should be affordable and reliable so people can have a real choice about how to travel. That's how we can cut pollution and make it easy for people to leave their car at home. We will open new railway stations and new lines with high speed trains between cities. We want to cut the number of lorries on our roads to reduce congestion and cut exhaust fumes. We want more to be done to make roads safer, especially by educating young people.

Cut rail fares and rail replacement bus services – We will make sure that regulated fares go up by less than inflation, meaning prices will come down, and we will make Network Rail refund a third of your ticket price if you have to take a rail replacement bus service.

A modern, viable, accessible transport system – We believe people have a right to safe, reliable and affordable transport choices wherever they live. We will build a national rail network fit for the demands of modern Scotland, including commencing a priority programme for high speed rail. We will continue to develop an attractive, efficient and affordable public transport system to reduce journey times, tackle congestion and provide alternatives to the private car.

An environmentally friendly transport policy – We will introduce strict new targets on new car emissions – to at least 120g/km on average by 2015 at the European level. In the longer term, revenue-neutral pricing system for motorways and major trunk roads would replace Vehicle Excise Duty and lower harmful motor emissions while costing rural drivers less. We will make sustainable transport provision a key component of all transport infrastructure and promote safer cycling and pedestrian routes in all transport plans. We will boost active transport and encourage people out of their cars with better facilities for walking and cycling and the development of a core network of safe, segregated cycle paths.

Sustainable methods of moving freight – We will ensure good rail paths on key strategic freight corridors, facilitate the maximum use of inland and coastal waterways and encourage research and development into low-carbon technologies for freight vehicles.

Green zero-carbon vehicles – We will set a zero emissions target for all new cars by 2040. We will also extend targets to all other vehicles, to ensure that by 2050 all freight vehicles are running on electricity, sustainable biofuels or other renewable fuels.

HEALTH

The NHS treats most people very well. Our priority is to treat more people, more quickly, more appropriately, closer to home. The future of health care must be local and personal. Even though budgets are tight, we will cut waste and restrict the costly bonuses paid to the highest paid staff in health boards in order to spend the money on frontline services instead.

More local health care – People should be able to see a doctor in their community, and should not have to make lengthy trips for routine procedures which could be carried out closer to home. We will improve local facilities so that a wider range of services are available under the same roof, with health care professionals working together to plan and deliver more flexible services.

Cleaner hospitals – We all have the right to expect clean hospitals. To tackle health care associated infections we will enforce rigorous hygiene standards across all health care facilities and extend these to visitors as well as staff.

Care from a doctor not a call centre – We believe that 24 hour health care in our communities should be driven and delivered by health professionals, not call centres. GPs are only one piece of the jigsaw and our vision includes care supplied by local authorities and the services of the nursing profession, community pharmacies, allied health professionals and the ambulance service. We will make use of the latest advances in medical technology to help deliver community-based health care across Scotland and tackle unacceptable postcode lotteries. Expanding the use of telemedicine will ensure that people living in rural communities can access high levels of care locally and do not have to make unnecessary trips to hospital.

Tackling the dentist crisis – We will boost the number of dentists in Scotland to ensure that everyone has access to an NHS dentist, especially in remote and rural areas where registration rates are disproportionately low. We will also promote oral health education for children so that they can learn to take better care of their teeth.

Improving access to treatment for people with depression and anxiety – Drugs are not the only solution, and people with depression and anxiety should have access to alternative forms of treatment. We will improve mental health services in the community so that GPs can refer patients for specialised community support in their own area.

Tough action on the big public health challenges – We are facing huge public health problems – obesity, alcohol abuse and smoking remain the biggest causes of preventable deaths. Improving public health and wellbeing is vital if we are to challenge Scotland's poor reputation as the 'sick man of Europe.' We will encourage an active lifestyle and tackle childhood obesity and we will give people the information and opportunities to make healthy choices through clearer food and alcohol labelling. We will also address the wider problems behind health inequality in Scotland such as poverty, poor housing and poor environment.

Drugs and alcohol – By improving services such as family support, housing, and opportunities for education, training and employment we will tackle the root causes of drug and alcohol misuse, preventing people from developing drug and alcohol problems and helping them move away from them for good. We need to change the culture which tolerates binge drinking and excess alcohol consumption. We will make people, particularly young people, more aware of the dangers of problem drinking and we will ensure that existing alcohol laws are vigorously enforced. We will ban the sale of alcohol below the cost of duty plus VAT and prohibit irresponsible alcohol promotions to end the practice of loss leading.

Patient safety – Patients' lives are at risk because foreign doctors are allowed to work in the NHS without proper tests of competence and language. We'll introduce a national test to make sure everyone who works in the NHS can speak English and is up to scratch.

EDUCATION

Liberal Democrats want all children to get the best of start in life. We will allow shared parental leave so that parents get a real opportunity to bond with their children. When it comes to school, every child is different, so teachers need to be free to teach children in different ways and get the very best from them.

Providing the best start for children and the best deal for families – We will allow parents to share parental leave between them so they can arrange family life in the way that suits them best and making it easier for fathers to play a fuller role in their children’s early life. We will take action to improve parenting skills and encourage parental involvement in their children’s education. We will focus effort on improving the quality of childcare and early years’ facilities.

Set schools free, stop Government meddling – Teachers should run schools, not politicians. Too much of what goes on in schools is determined by SNP Government micro-management. We will give schools the flexibility they need to develop their own solutions and strategies in order particularly to drive up standards and improve discipline levels. Greater freedom to innovate will help encourage more high quality school leadership and new sources of school governance.

Personalised learning – We need to bring out the best in every pupil, with flexible learning and teaching adapted to the individual. We will support early interventions to help improve pupils’ literacy and numeracy and ensure no child gets left behind. We will give greater flexibility to teachers during the first years of primary school to allow for the early identification of those that require extra help and support, as well as easing the transition into formal education.

Pupil Premium – We will give every child a fair start in life and improve chances for disadvantaged pupils by providing additional investment through a pupil premium. We will enable schools to spend the pupil premium on cutting class sizes, boosting one-to-one tuition, improving discipline, extending school days or increasing after-school tuition and holiday support. Head teachers will be free to spend the money as they see fit.

More teachers in classrooms – The number of teachers in Scotland’s schools is plummeting, yet many qualified teachers are unable to find jobs and teacher training posts are being cut. This is unacceptable. We will create more opportunities for those who are trained or want to train in this profession and put more teachers into Scotland’s classrooms, ensuring that our children receive the support they need in school to develop their full potential.

Support for students – The current economic downturn has hit students badly, and many are living below the poverty line. We will put an end to student hardship by providing a minimum income guarantee of £7,000, beginning with the poorest students, to get money in their pockets, while they are studying. And we will scrap unfair university tuition fees that still hit Scottish students who study in England.

Skills and training – We want to encourage a culture of genuine lifelong learning. We will make it easier for people of any age to add to their skills, change their careers and develop their passion for learning. We will give a higher priority to vocational courses and give more support to partnerships between schools, colleges and businesses to give more young people the opportunity to learn new vocational skills.

Further and higher education – Our universities and colleges are a huge strength for Scotland, with an excellent reputation right around the globe. It is vital that we maintain high levels of investment in further and higher education and continue to retain and attract the best staff to Scotland. We will oppose SNP attempts to centralise control and curtail the autonomy of universities, and we will encourage better links between research and industry to allow universities to boost Scotland’s economic potential.

GOVERNMENT & CIVIL LIBERTIES

The expenses scandal has destroyed public confidence in politicians. But it was the symptom of a wider problem: our political system is rotten. The Liberal Democrats are the only party that will radically shake up politics to make it fair, and put power in the hands of citizens, rather than politicians. We will give people a real say in who governs the country by introducing fair votes. We will stop big donations, give people the power to sack corrupt MPs and make sure every single MP and Lord pays full British taxes. Labour has made Britain less fair by taking away our hard-won rights and freedoms, often supported by the Conservatives. The Liberal Democrats are the only party that believes in a fairer, freer Britain, where everyone gets fair treatment and everyone's privacy is respected.

Make votes fair – We will change politics forever and abolish safe seats by introducing a fair, more proportional voting system for MPs, and for the House of Lords. By giving voters the choice between people as well as parties, it means they can stick with a party but punish a bad MP by voting for someone else.

Give you the right to sack MPs who have broken the rules – If an MP has acted egregiously and breaks the rules, there should be a mechanism by which they can be sacked. The Liberal Democrats would introduce a 'recall' system in which a small percentage of constituents could force a by-election for any MP suspended for wrongdoing. Power should be in the hands of voters at all times, not just on Election Day.

Get big money out of politics – Politics should be a battle of ideas, not marketing budgets. No-one should be able to buy influence or buy an election. We will take big money out of politics by capping donations and spending throughout the electoral cycle.

Make all MPs and Lords pay full British taxes – Top Conservative donor Lord Ashcroft gets to vote on the laws of Britain, but he's got nondomiciled tax status meaning he doesn't pay tax on offshore income. We believe everyone who decides laws in Parliament should pay full British taxes. We will pass a law to ensure they do.

Introduce a Freedom Bill to restore and protect our civil liberties – Liberal Democrats have put together all the freedoms that have been undermined by Labour and the Tories in the last twenty years to restore them in a single Act of Parliament. We will scrap ID cards; get innocent people off the DNA database; regulate CCTV; allow people to protest at Parliament; stop councils from spying on people; and stop unfair extradition to the US. See <http://freedom.libdems.org.uk/>

End plans to spy on your email and internet use – Labour want companies to store information about your email and internet use – even storing data about what you do on social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace. This is a huge waste of money and time, which we will scrap. We will ensure your private data is kept safe.

Strengthening devolution – We have advocated the strongest possible Scottish Parliament within the UK – a true Home Rule settlement. We will implement the recommendations of the Calman Commission to give significant new powers and responsibilities to the Scottish Parliament, recognising the appetite for a Scottish Parliament equipped to build a sustainable economy, promote social justice and contribute to tackling climate change. We have everything to gain from making a success of the radical changes proposed by Calman and using them as a base for further powers in the future. We continue to oppose the break up of the United Kingdom.

LAW AND ORDER

People's lives are being ruined by crime and they don't feel safe in their own homes or their neighbourhood. Too many criminals are not caught or punished. Liberal Democrats believe that tackling crime is about catching criminals and making them pay for what they have done. We will put more community police on the streets and give victims and local communities a major say in punishing offenders.

Together we can cut crime – We need more high profile policing in our communities, where and when you need it. We will recruit extra police for Scotland by scrapping Labour's expensive and ineffective ID card scheme. Community police officers on the street will cut crime and antisocial behaviour in neighbourhoods. Local policing has long proved its worth in Scotland and we will keep Scotland's police forces operationally independent of government. We will make offenders work to pay back the communities they have harmed and will pilot community courts to ensure that justice is delivered as quickly and locally as possible. These courts will also help tackle directly the root causes of crime by providing access to addiction, mental health, employment and housing services.

Sentencing to reduce reoffending – Scotland's prison and sentencing framework is not working – it is not cutting crime and reoffending. While prison is appropriate for those who commit serious and violent crime, there is clear evidence that very short prison sentences simply reinforce offending behaviour. We will end the 'revolving door' prison system by replacing very short sentences, which are ineffective and expensive, with tough community penalties where offenders can pay back the communities they have harmed. Prison-based training and work schemes will be expanded to provide previous offenders with realistic alternatives to crime, cutting reoffending and easing the pressure on the prison service and on the tax-payer.

Tackling violent crime – We will set up a 24 hour border force that would incorporate immigration, customs and police at all UK ports to stop the presence of guns on our streets. We will crack down on knife crime, working with the police to target violence 'hot spots' with effective action to break down gang culture and the reasons behind violence. We will restrict the availability of airguns in Scotland through a tough licensing scheme, bringing airguns into line with other lethal firearms.

Drugs, alcohol and crime – There is no simple solution to fix Scotland's complex alcohol problem. We will start by rigorously enforcing the existing laws on selling alcohol to under 18s and using test purchasing to crack down on rogue retailers. We will introduce arrest referral schemes to target problem drinkers and adopt a zero tolerance approach to stamp out alcohol related violence at Accident and Emergency departments. We will crack down on drug pushers who prey on the vulnerable and we will treat drug addiction as the disease it is, providing a support structure to help rehabilitate drug users back into society.

Tackle terrorism – It's vital to convict terrorists rather than putting entire communities under suspicion. We will scrap Control Orders and replace them with measures designed to secure convictions of terror suspects. We also support efforts to make it easier to charge suspects genuinely suspected of terrorism through a temporary lowering of the 'threshold test', the use of the post-charge questioning and intercept evidence. We will also reach out to the communities most at risk of radicalisation to improve the relationships between them and the police and increase the flow of intelligence.

ARTS, CULTURE & SPORT

Our rich heritage has a major impact on the quality of our communities and provides many of the most fulfilling moments in our lives. We believe that everybody should have the opportunity to participate in and enjoy a diverse range of cultural and sporting experiences. We will increase funding to community sports and help to improve the health of the whole nation. We will secure arts and heritage by restoring the independence of National Lottery funds. We will also ensure that public service broadcasting remains strong, free from interference and securely funded.

Cultural Scotland – We recognise the enormous contribution that arts, heritage and culture make to the lives of citizens and to the economy, and the part they can play in education. The arts play a major role in Scotland’s reputation globally, and our nation’s art, drama and music festivals are recognised and admired the world over. We will continue to invest in arts, heritage and culture so that Scotland can take pride in, and expand upon, its well-deserved reputation.

More lottery money into arts, heritage and sport – Reform the National Lottery. To replace some of the funds taken from good causes to pay for the Olympics, we will change the way the National Lottery is taxed to deliver millions of pounds more for good causes, prizes and the Exchequer.

Support for sport – The 2014 Commonwealth Games and the 2012 London Olympics are a superb opportunity to boost interest and participation in sport and physical activity, with major benefits to people’s health and wellbeing. We will ensure that the benefits are spread across Scotland. We will attract more high profile sports events to Scotland to showcase our international standard facilities and boost tourism. Millions of pounds are lying in abandoned betting accounts. We believe this money can be put to good use going back into grassroots sport and will set up a capital fund for improving local facilities and supporting sports clubs.

Freedom for the arts – Artists must have the freedom to create, and the arts must be free from excessive government interference and bureaucracy. We will boost the health and vitality of arts and cultural creation and performance in Scotland by freeing the industry from excessive red tape, giving artists the freedom that they need to create by removing unnecessary bureaucratic barriers.

Free Media – Essential to a free society is a strong and diverse media free from Government interference and pressure. Independent, impartial and trusted media sources are needed across Scotland and the rest of the UK. We will ensure that public service broadcasting remains strong, free from interference and securely funded, not least to provide impartial news, independent of political and commercial pressures. We also recognise the vital roles that commercial radio, television and new media play. We will foster a climate in which diverse ownership and competition can thrive, and provide flexible regulation that adapts to the rapidly changing media environment.

Digital divide – All licence payers pay the same amount and deserve the same quality of service. The current level of digital television service in Scotland is simply unacceptable. We will make sure that any surplus from the digital levy goes to equipping relay transmitters to improve the quality of digital programme reception for the whole of Scotland. We will also ensure equal access to enhanced broadband services throughout Scotland.

Scottish Language – The Gaelic language is not just an element of Scotland’s past, but also an important aspect of its future. We will continue to support, and expand upon, the policies laid out in the National Plan for Gaelic, ensuring that it continues to play a role in Scottish culture and society. The future of the Gaelic language relies upon Scotland’s newest generations, and so we will increase the availability of Gaelic pre-school, primary and secondary education. We will also improve support for projects that recognise the importance of Scots language.

EUROPE

Liberal Democrats believe European cooperation is the best way for Britain to be strong and safe in this changing world. But we need to change the way we do it: putting Britain front and centre in the European Union will get us more influence than if we remain lukewarm, like we have been, or withdraw to the fringes as the Conservatives want. Liberal Democrats will stand up for the crime-fighting measures that keep Britain safe and ensure Europe works together on defence and security matters. But we will also keep up pressure on the EU to improve – reforming wasteful agricultural subsidies and scrapping the expensive second Parliament in Strasbourg.

Keep Britain safe: keep Britain part of international crime-fighting – The rise of cross-border crime means we need to work with our partners to tackle fraud, drugs and paedophile networks. We must not expose Britain to attack from criminal gangs. Liberal Democrats will keep Britain at the heart of international crimefighting measures such as the European Arrest Warrant and the European Police Office (Europol) that the Conservatives want us to pull out of.

Share the security burden through more defence co-operation with allies – European countries need to work together more effectively on defence and security. There are huge savings to be made by buying in bulk and sharing military assets. With the defence budget under terrible strain, it would be irresponsible not to do this.

Keep the pressure on for CAP reform and to close wasteful Strasbourg Parliament – Europe is vital to Britain's interests, but that doesn't make it perfect. We will continue to fight for reform of agricultural subsidies so farmers get a fair deal. And we will fight to stop MEPs having to travel to Strasbourg every month, wasting €200m a month.

Create more jobs and chart a green road out of recession – We will work to create new jobs by breaking down trade barriers across Europe. We want to create jobs in green industries, put money in people's pockets from saving energy and build a transport network we can be proud of. We will encourage other EU countries to put in place similar investments to ensure we emerge from recession stronger and greener than before.

Promote free and fair world trade – We want the EU to promote a world trading system that is both free and fair. That means a liberal and open system that increases economic growth and jobs, but that takes account of environmental and social standards too. The EU has a key role to play in salvaging the Doha development round of the WTO, including eliminating trade barriers and production subsidies in agriculture.

The Euro – Liberal Democrats believe that it is in Britain's long-term interest to be part of the Euro. But Britain should only join when the economic conditions are right, and with the present economic turbulence and volatility, they are not at the moment. If the government were to recommend joining the euro, Liberal Democrats believe this should only take place if that decision were supported by the people of Britain in a referendum.

Ensure green, affordable and secure energy supplies – Britain has the potential to lead the world in renewable energy particularly wave, tidal and wind power. Our goal is for Britain to source all energy needs from within the EU by 2030 and become a net exporter of energy by 2050. This will deliver secure supplies of cleaner energy.

A fair deal for shoppers and holidaymakers – We want to open markets in Europe and force down the costs. Liberal Democrats stood up for holidaymakers by slashing mobile phone roaming charges, blacklisting unsafe airlines and introducing flight delay refunds. We will continue to fight for a better deal for Britain's consumers.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE

Liberal Democrats will put British values of fairness and the rule of law back at the heart of our foreign policy. We will always put the country's security first, but the national interest demands that we work with allies, stand up for human rights, and help people in the poorest parts of the world. We will not repeat the errors of Iraq. By working closely with our allies, Britain will have more influence in tackling international problems like poverty, climate change and terrorism. The brave men and women of our armed forces are the most precious military asset we have. They must be treated fairly, with pay and conditions that reflect their amazing commitment to this country. They must get the right equipment to do their jobs properly and as securely as possible.

A full inquiry into allegations of British complicity in torture and state kidnapping – Liberal Democrats are completely opposed to the use of torture and state-kidnapping known as extraordinary rendition. The Government has consistently failed to tell the truth about the extent of its involvement in these practices by foreign intelligence agencies, including the CIA. Only a full inquiry will get to the bottom of the issue and restore Britain's reputation for decency and fairness.

Critical friends of the Afghanistan mission – We support the mission in Afghanistan. Failure would have devastating consequences for Afghanistan, the region, for NATO and for Britain's security. But we owe it to our troops to ask tough questions about how success can be achieved. We will continue to demand that the strategy in Afghanistan pushes for a more legitimate government, tackles corruption and involves others players in the region.

A pay raise for the lower ranks – Our brave troops put their lives on the line for this country. But too many of them are paid a pittance in return. Liberal Democrats will give lower ranks a pay rise, so that their pay is brought into line with the starting salary of police constables. The cost will be met, pound for pound, by reducing the number of bureaucrats and civil servants in the Ministry of Defence.

Homes for heroes – Too many armed forces' families live in slum-like conditions. The least our heroes and their families deserve is decent home. We would double the rate of modernisation of forces' family homes, and the cost will be met, pound for pound, by reducing numbers of top brass officers.

No to like-for-like Trident – Full-scale Trident is a Cold War system intended for a by-gone age. It is unnecessary and, at £100bn over a lifetime, it is unaffordable. Liberal Democrats believe that our security could be better served by different systems more suited to current threats, and will hold a full defence review to help decide on this and other major defence procurement plans.

Meeting Britain's promise on aid – Increase the UK's aid budget to reach the UN target of 0.7% of GNI by 2013 and enshrine that target in law. We will hold the G8 to its Gleneagles pledges on aid, including on the 0.7% target.

EQUALITIES

Over the last forty years, the life-chances and opportunities for many people have improved considerably as a result of legislation and action taken to address disadvantage, inequality and discrimination. We will build on this progressive legislation and ensure that no one is denied opportunities because of their race or ethnicity, their disability, their gender or sexual orientation, their age or religion. We will create a Scotland which is fair and inclusive to all.

Disability rights and support – We want to see an accessible, equal Scotland for all with increased participation of disabled people in public life. We will support disabled people towards independent living and improve the delivery of services to disabled people in Scotland. We will ensure that best use is made of housing stock that is accessible to disabled occupants and set challenging targets to improve the employment levels of disabled people.

Gender equality – We will tackle the scourge of violence against women with a zero-tolerance approach to domestic violence of any kind. We will make employers check for pay discrimination so that women get the money they deserve, and address the delay in the implementation of the equal pay policy across Scotland. We will take action to tackle the occupational segregation which prevents women and men from fulfilling their potential in the labour market, and we'll ensure that everyone's skills are being utilised to the maximum potential. We will allow everyone to request flexible working patterns.

Faith and race equality – There is no place in modern Scotland for racism. We will publish a new Race Equality Strategy and Action Plan for Scotland, and improve 'clear up' rates for racially motivated crime. We will increase ethnicity recording by health boards to ensure that the health services they provide meet the needs of many different ethnic groups in Scotland.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) equality – We will work closely with LGBT communities to develop an understanding of homophobia and to tackle discrimination and prejudice. We will tackle homophobic bullying in schools and put an end to the discrimination against same-sex couples seeking to foster and adopt children. We oppose the blanket, lifetime ban on gay and bisexual men, and their female partner, donating blood. We will continue to press the Government to consider using more advanced testing of blood which could make it safe to lift the ban.

Hate crime – We will tackle the root causes of why people commit hate crimes to create a cultural shift towards a more tolerant and accepting society.