



**Welsh Liberal Democrats**  
**Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru**

# **Freedom for Wales in a Liberal World**

The Welsh Liberal Democrats agenda for the General Election

# Applicability, costings and the General Election manifesto

This document has been agreed by the Policy Committee of the Welsh Liberal Democrats. It brings together the policy of the Welsh Party with that of the UK Liberal Democrats.

*Freedom for Wales in a Liberal World* contains the priorities of the Welsh Liberal Democrats. It is not an exhaustive statement of our policies for government. The absence of any specific Liberal Democrat policy does not necessarily mean that it will not be included in the manifesto for the General Election.

Specific guarantees in the document represent our minimum commitment over the period of a five-year Westminster Parliament. Subject to economic growth, our ambitions are not limited to this programme, and are set out more fully in our other policy documents. Where policies are proposed on devolved issues, these may be dependent upon Westminster making extra resources available to the National Assembly for Wales and are also subject to agreement by the Assembly.

A full costing of our programme for government will be published along with our manifesto setting out the programme at the time of the General Election. There will also be separate manifestos for England and Scotland.

## A message from Richard Livsey MP, Leader of the Welsh Liberal Democrats

*Liberal Democrats are more influential in Welsh politics than at any time for more than half a century.*

*Our progress at grass roots level has been steady and consistent but our relevance to the national politics of Wales took a dramatic leap last year when Welsh Liberal Democrat Assembly Members agreed to form a new Partnership Government with the Labour Party. The agreement, made for the benefit of the Assembly and for Wales as a whole, contrasts strikingly with the rudderless minority Labour administration that existed before.*

*People in Wales can now see Welsh Liberal Democrats put our policies into action. We are investing more in education and health. We are taking action to protect and develop our rural communities. We are opening up government and releasing the shackles of centralised control.*

*These policies are based on deep-rooted principles so they form a coherent set of actions designed with a vision for the kind of world in which we want to live.*

*One word sums this up: freedom. I believe politics should be about giving people the freedom to make the most of their lives without denying freedom to others.*

*It is about promoting independence for individuals and communities. It is about fairness and tackling poverty. And freedom is about caring for the environment in everything we do – which is why you will find policies for green action in every section of this paper.*


*It is a unique agenda for action.*

*The Conservatives record of 18 years in office restricted the freedom of the poor and the disadvantaged. Their opposition to devolution shows that they have no time for the freedom of the people of Wales.*

*The Labour Government has shown a worrying disrespect for the freedom of those who do not conform.*

*And freedom has a special meaning for Plaid Cymru – freedom from all contact with the rest of Britain.*

*So it is only the Welsh Liberal Democrats who put real freedom first. As this document proves.*

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Richard Livsey". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the bottom.

# Introduction

*Welsh Liberal Democrats believe that maximising personal freedom is fundamental to a liberal society.*

Freedom means the opportunity to live our lives as we choose, while recognising our responsibilities to other individuals, so that they can share the same opportunities.

Freedom is a principle prized by the people of Wales. It is prized because in too many areas of their lives, it is threatened or restricted.

Wales is a nation that suffers from poverty, appalling levels of ill-health, poor quality housing, low skills, low wages, crumbling schools and inadequate transport. In each of these areas Wales is near the bottom of any European league. All these factors restrict the freedom and opportunities available to the people of Wales.

Freedom also benefits communities which, with the shackles removed, are able to decide their own priorities.

Wales has suffered from decades of government centralised in Westminster and ignorant or uncaring of the needs of the people of Wales. The result has been a lack of freedom for Wales to make the decisions best suited to it.

In recent years, Wales was ruled by a Conservative Party without a mandate in Wales and without any understanding of Wales' needs. Wales was but a colony for Margaret Thatcher's and John Redwood's economic and social experiments.

Throughout these years Wales has also suffered from the Labour Party's domination of local government – one-party municipal states run for the Labour Party not the freedom of the communities they represented.

Since 1997, there have been improvements – not least from the limited devolution given with the National Assembly – but Tony Blair's government is guided by the focus groups of Middle England. Wales – as the Alun Michael debacle illustrated – lost out.

Westminster's Labour government has also shown a strong meddlesome streak – one shared with Plaid Cymru – in private lives and the economy. It gives away power with one hand, and imposes new controls and restrictions with the other.

Welsh Liberal Democrats want to set the people of Wales free.

We will do so by championing personal independence within a caring society so people can make decisions from themselves.

We will do so by promoting social justice – freedom from want, the freedom to contribute to community life and the freedom to work.

In this we recognise that this generation's freedom should not be achieved at the expense of the freedom of the next. Liberal Democrats believe that the environment is not just something you inherit from your parents, but something you protect and improve for future generations. A decent environment is a key part of a socially just society.

A concern for freedom does not stop at our national borders. Welsh Liberal Democrats believe in playing a part in a strong Britain in a strong Europe.

The freedom to trade goods from Wales to Europe has been seriously undermined by Labour's reluctance to join the euro. Both our manufacturing and farming industries have been hit hard by job losses. Welsh Liberal Democrats will ensure that the UK joins the euro at an early date to overcome the current crisis.

We are internationalists because we seek to further liberty, social justice, and sustainable development throughout the world. And because we recognise that international action and co-operation is the only way to tackle many of the problems which confront us everyday in our own communities.

## **Welsh Liberal Democrats: making the difference**

In Wales, the Welsh Liberal Democrats are part of the government. We are investing extra money in vital public services. This extra investment includes: more teachers, books and equipment for our schools; the upgrading of our crumbling school buildings; more doctors, nurses and other health care professionals; more hospital beds; action to prevent illness and disease by cutting prescription charges and abolishing charges for eye and dental checks where we are able.

We are also making important reforms. We are developing a Rural Schools Policy to protect the many threatened village schools across Wales. We are piloting a Welsh Baccaulaureate as an improvement to the post-16 examination system. In health, we are introducing greater flexibility for staff to allow greater freedom for training and supervision and to facilitate the movement of highly skilled professionals into areas of most acute health need.

We are standing up for rural Wales with vital support and investment for agriculture and other rural businesses. 'Farming Connect' will provide a free advisory service for farmers. An independent appeals mechanism will adjudicate in disputes between government and farmers. And we are working with Finance Wales to provide loans to help young entrants to farming.

This is the real difference Welsh Liberal Democrats in government are making for Wales. Labour on their own were unable and unwilling to achieve all this.

The same is true elsewhere. In Scotland, the Liberal Democrats in the Scottish Parliament have made a difference in education, health and rural issues. They struck a blow for students everywhere with the abolition of tuition fees. In London, we have a key role in leading the new London Assembly, and in running areas such as the police and fire services. Throughout Britain, we have nearly 5000 local councillors and we run, often in co-operation with others, over 70 local councils.

Where we are in power, people get a better environment, more open and accountable government, stronger health, education and transport services – and the more influence we have, the more we deliver.

## **The challenge in 2001**

At the general election, there will only be one party that is committed to these freedoms. Freedom in a liberal world is our core philosophy. It underpins our commitment to investment in schools and hospitals – and our pledge to be honest about paying for that investment.

Freedom is why we want to give power to people, local communities and an empowered Assembly through devolution, and why we co-operate with other nations in international organisations.

The election must not be fought on bogus arguments about which party can reduce tax by the most, as if that were never at the expense of pensioners, children, the poor and the sick.

Wales needs a vision for the twenty-first century. The Welsh people want a sense of idealism restored to politics. We demand a programme that delivers the best policies for liberty, social justice and the environment. We demand a government that acts for the people, not vested interests.

The Welsh Liberal Democrats are the only people to deliver this because we are the only people who put freedom first. We are the only party committed to set Wales free in a liberal world. And we are the only political party whose primary mission is to protect, promote and proclaim freedom, delivering new opportunities to every citizen in a liberal society.

# 1. Freedom for Wales in a liberal Britain

*Liberal Democrats are passionate about real devolution for Wales. We have argued the case for more than 100 years and took great pride in its achievement in 1999. We believe that decisions are best made as close to people as possible. And we believe that Wales has many common interests best served by the people of Wales.*

However, although the establishment of the National Assembly is of undoubted benefit to Wales, it is but a timid and half-hearted attempt at devolution. The result has been a lack of clarity about the Assembly's powers and a continued and unnecessary reliance on Westminster. Most of all the Assembly has been hampered by a lack of power which has restrained it from doing what is best for Wales.

It is not just the weakened powers of the Assembly which diminish the freedom of Wales. The nation's economy, health, education, housing and infrastructure are also impoverished, suffering from under-investment, misunderstanding and neglect.

The fact that West Wales and the South Wales Valleys have qualified for European Union Objective One Funding is a badge of failure Wales wears with shame. The fact that such a bloody battle was fought to win the additional money needed to start the regeneration of so much of Wales is testimony to its need.

Welsh Liberal Democrats in the Assembly's Partnership Government are committed to spending every penny of the European money to maximise long-term economic advantage for Wales. However, there is more that can be done in the Treasury to make sure that, when the money runs out, Wales will be left self-reliant and prosperous.

## **Welsh Liberal Democrats will work to:**

- **Bring decision-making closer to the people** by giving primary legislative and tax-varying powers to the Welsh Assembly. We will re-establish the Assembly as a Welsh Senedd with powers equal to that of the Scottish Parliament.
- **Make sure that everybody's vote counts more fairly** by reforming the way Members of the Senedd are elected. There should be 80 members elected by the Single

Transferable Vote in multi-member constituencies. This would ensure a more representative Parliament with greater equality between Members, more influence for the voter and less for the political parties.

- **Give Wales a fairer slice of the cake** by reforming the inequitable way money is allocated to the regions and nations of the United Kingdom. Everybody accepts that the current 'Barnett Formula' for funding Wales fails to take account of its needs. The Liberal Democrats will establish a Finance Commission for the Nations and Regions (FCNR) to agree a new needs-based formula. Such a formula would provide a massive boost for public funding in Wales.
- **Help Wales enjoy the full benefits of European Union funding** by granting tax breaks and other aids to Welsh businesses in assisted areas.

## 2. Freedom to live: health

*Liberal Democrats believe that good health in a clean environment promotes freedom and social justice by ensuring that people are able to make the most of their life chances, regardless of their background or financial circumstances.*

We will promote the freedom to enjoy good health by investing in healthcare and strengthening patients' rights. We are fully committed to the NHS and aim to take some of the heat off the NHS through the prevention of illness, action against pollution, and reduction of poverty – all problems that are more acute in Wales than the rest of Britain.

We will also make sure that medical expertise, rather than government interference, is the basis of clinical judgements.

Welsh Liberal Democrats believe that the National Health Service in Wales should be fully devolved to a Senedd. We would give the Senedd the powers and fairer funding to make a substantial increase in investment in health services.

***Within the existing powers and block grant Welsh Liberal Democrats in the National Assembly's Partnership Government are already working to:***

- **Invest in the NHS** with an extra £150 million in 2001/02; £400 million in 2002/03 and £665 million in 2003/4 to make immediate progress in improving the NHS and cutting waiting times. We are also investing £200 million over the next three years to begin the process of improving long-term capacity.
- **Freeze all prescription charges immediately** with the aim of cutting them, starting with 16-25 year olds
- **Reduce ill health by spotting problems earlier** by scrapping charges for eye and dental checks for those who would benefit most
- **Develop and retain NHS staff** with more flexible and family-friendly working practices.

***At Westminster, Welsh Liberal Democrats will work to give a Senedd the power to:***

- **Invest further in the NHS** with additional resources and fairer funding provided to Wales.

- **End the 'postcode lottery' in prescribing medicines** by creating a Pharmaceuticals Agency (working with the National Institute for Clinical Excellence) to manage and negotiate drugs purchasing for the NHS, using savings to reinvest in ending the 'prescription lottery'. We would also reduce the costs of prescriptions by replacing per item charges with a per script charge, to make sure that ill people needing several items at once are not faced with a higher bill.
- **Scrap charges for eye and dental check-ups altogether** funded by putting 10p on the cost of a packet of cigarettes.
- **Tackle inequalities in the NHS** by ensuring that rich and poor people alike have access to healthcare. We will also make sure that older people are properly cared for by legislating against discrimination on the basis of age when healthcare is provided. We will provide free nursing care to elderly people in care as a first step towards implementing the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Long Term Care. We will invest in social care for older people and their carers.

### Green action

- Reduce ill-health caused by fuel poverty through a National Homes Insulation Programme to provide decent levels of home insulation in 15 years, by speeding up the current 30-year programme, funded by the utility companies.
- Promote high air quality to reduce illnesses such as asthma by tackling industrial pollution, encouraging greater use of less polluting vehicles and increasing the use of public transport. We will also increase investment in national habitat restoration to provide areas for recreation with positive health benefits and to promote biodiversity.

### 3. Freedom to learn: education

*Liberal Democrats believe that a properly funded education system, open to all, promotes freedom by giving people the chance to excel, and providing a route out of poverty. Education is for life and should be a lifelong experience.*

We will provide a Senedd with the powers and fairer funding to invest in providing a better quality of education for all. We also believe that government should interfere less in the professional judgements made by teachers, so we will cut bureaucracy in schools to allow teachers more freedom to teach.

Our plans for high quality education will cost almost £3 billion extra a year across the UK and we guarantee to fund this, if necessary by putting an extra 1p on the basic rate of income tax.

**Welsh Liberal Democrats in the National Assembly's Partnership Government have already started to invest more: We are working to:**

- **Reduce class sizes for 5 to 11 year olds by 2003** with a view to reaching a target of reducing all primary school classes to 25 or fewer within the second term of the National Assembly.
- **Give all children the best start in life** by providing high quality free nursery education for all 3 as well as 4 year olds whose parents want it by 2003.
- **Start to upgrade our crumbling school buildings** with an extra £200 million over the next three years.
- **Introduce free school milk** as part of a comprehensive strategy to aid children's nutritional development.
- **Protect small rural schools** with the establishment of a rural schools strategy designed to encourage federation, IT networking and other methods of support.
- **Provide equal recognition to academic and vocational qualifications** with the piloting of a new post 16 qualification – the Welsh Baccalaureate.
- **Establish a strong future for Welsh universities** by producing a ten-year strategy for adequately funded development and expansion.

**At Westminster, Welsh Liberal Democrats will give a Senedd the power to:**

- **Use Wales' share of the additional £3 billion investment** and the fairer funding for Wales to establish a maximum average class size of 25 in primary schools.
- **Promote access to higher and further education** by funding the abolition of tuition fees and establishing a student maintenance package that provides adequate support for students and that serves to improve access for traditionally under-represented groups in higher and further education. This will form part of a policy of encouraging flexible lifelong learning, to support, for example, women studying part-time, through Individual Learning Accounts containing funds to pay for tuition up to and including undergraduate level.

#### Green action

- Through the Senedd, promote the development of Safe Routes to School, to encourage parents to allow their children to walk or cycle to school in safety rather than driving them.
- Through the Senedd, fund a 'Schools 2010' programme to tackle the backlog of school building repairs and to include environmental assessment of buildings. The programme would promote the use of better insulation, double glazing, and solar panels wherever possible.



## 4. Freedom from poverty: pensions, wages, and benefits

*Poverty restricts freedom, because people without a decent income do not have the opportunities enjoyed by others. Such restrictions on freedom particularly affect women, younger people, and lone parents.*

To provide a level playing field, Liberal Democrats will provide decent pensions and benefits for all in need, and take action against the problems caused by low pay. This is particularly important for women, minority communities and children, who suffer disproportionately from poverty.

We recognise that the only way to tackle poverty effectively is through strengthening communities and by action that furthers social justice across a broad range of policy areas including health, education and the economy.

Welsh Liberal Democrats in the National Assembly's Partnership Government are doing just this. We are targeting its programmes at the regeneration of the most disadvantaged communities in Wales. Our proposals to improve Welsh housing are just one example of this commitment.

**To tackle poverty, Welsh Liberal Democrats at Westminster, will work to:**

- **Boost present pensioner incomes** by significantly increasing the basic state pension, plus extra payments for the over 75s and over 80s who are generally the poorest. We would reward pensioners who have saved throughout their lives by abolishing means testing on savings. We will guarantee a decent level of retirement income for future pensioners by introducing a new universal compulsory and personal Owned Second Pension Account. All earners would contribute towards this Account, with the government making contributions on behalf of those people who are unable to do so due to sickness, unemployment or caring responsibilities.
- **Reduce taxation for the lowest paid**, lowering over time the 10p tax rate to zero, taking 1.4 million people on low incomes out of paying tax altogether. It would be funded initially by closing tax loopholes, such as those relating to Capital Gains Tax, and by tackling tax as toughly as benefit fraud.

- **Protect workers on low incomes** by reviewing the national minimum wage annually on the basis of recommendations from the Low Pay Commission. We will also make the minimum wage available to all workers, ending the discrimination against workers aged under 21.
- **Tackle poverty among children and young people, and help lone parents** by increasing child benefit for the youngest child under 5, paid for by taxing child benefit at the marginal rate for the highest earner in households with one or more upper rate taxpayers. We will scrap the Child Support Agency and replace it with Family Courts. We will also restore 16 and 17 year olds' entitlements to benefits and increase housing benefit for the under 25s by ending the shared residency requirement.
- **Introduce a Carer's Benefit to replace the Invalid Care Allowance**, allowing all carers, including people who become carers after the age of 65, to claim benefit.
- **Speed up the compensation payments** due to coal miners affected by lung disease and Vibration White Finger following the High Court judgement of 1997

### Green action

- Through the Senedd cut fuel bills and reduce pollution by requiring all new housing to meet improved energy and water efficiency standards to make sure that the advantages of environmentally friendly building materials and techniques are effectively utilised. Our National Homes Insulation Programme, promoted through the Senedd, funded by the energy utilities, would also cut fuel bills.
- Tackle transport poverty by improving public transport. Welsh Liberal Democrats in the National Assembly's Partnership Government are investing extra money in bus and train services so that all have access to the transport that is necessary to help them access basic facilities and search for work.

## 5. Freedom from crime: law and order

*Liberal Democrats believe that freedom cannot fully flourish in a society so riddled by crime, and fear of crime, or in a court system that fails adequately to protect the interests of the innocent and the needs of victims.*

Liberal Democrats will give powers over policing in Wales to the Senedd. There we will make preventing crime and catching criminals the highest priority of law enforcement. We will give victims a greater sense of justice.

In the National Assembly, Welsh Liberal Democrats in the Partnership Government are supporting the efforts of local communities to combat crime.

**Welsh Liberal Democrats at Westminster will provide a Senedd with the power to:**

- **Provide sufficient police to improve the prevention and detection of crime** by providing funding for an extra 120 police officers in Wales (on March 2000 levels) and by ensuring the police spend more time on front line policing.
- **Support the maintenance of local police stations** kept open for longer.
- **Make Crime and Disorder Partnerships focus on real improvements for local residents**, including safer streets, cleaner neighbourhoods, secure housing and socially cohesive communities. We would encourage the use of accountable neighbourhood wardens and other officials by local councils to promote and secure public safety.
- **Cut reoffending** by introducing a full working day programme for the vast majority of prisoners to equip them for work after prison, providing more post-release support and rehabilitation and making better use of effective community sentences for less serious offenders including tagging, reparation to victims, fines and restorative justice schemes.
- **Give victims, or their families, greater rights to be heard in court**, to be supported in criminal cases and to be better compensated for criminal injury, and by improving consistency of sentencing.
- **We will make the legal system fairer and more supportive to women** by strengthening support for victims

of domestic violence, and improving the treatment of rape victims by the court system. We will take action to tackle hate crimes.

- **Target the causes of crime** including concentrating efforts on encouraging young people into constructive activity not criminal behaviour by increasing support for sport, recreation and the youth service and by expanding the use and availability of drug and alcohol misuse prevention and treatment, including introducing a maximum six week waiting time following referral for treatment.
- **Provide a penal institution for young people in Wales** so young people no longer need to be taken out of Wales

### Green action

- Promote animal protection by establishing an Animal Protection Commission. We would extend the size and powers of the Home Office Inspectorate and encourage more unannounced inspections. We would also end the use of animals in the development and testing of weapons and household goods, and unnecessary repetitive tests.

## 6. Freedom to travel: transport

*Liberal Democrats believe that a decent system of transport is vital if all people are to have the ability to travel with ease when necessary. So we will work to build a quick, sustainable and integrated transport system throughout Wales and the UK.*

Public transport needs significant investment to enable people to use buses and trains to reduce congestion and pollution. We aim to reduce traffic levels in urban areas by improving public transport, but we recognise that in rural areas, cars are often currently the only possible means of transport.

***Welsh Liberal Democrats in the National Assembly's Partnership Government are working to:***

- **Improve and better integrate transport throughout Wales** by establishing a Welsh Passenger Transport Authority.
- **Concentrate new road building on reducing congestion points on existing trunk roads**, rather than on new large-scale road building.
- **Increase investment in bus subsidy schemes**, particularly in rural areas, by £6 million over the next three years.
- **Introduce a bus concessionary fares scheme for pensioners and disabled people** which gives half price fares and a free bus pass from April 2001 and free fares from April 2002 for local bus services.
- **Seek the power for the Assembly to appoint a representative to the Strategic Rail Authority** and to direct the Authority in relation to a single Welsh franchise.

***To further create a sustainable transport system, Welsh Liberal Democrats at Westminster will work to give the Senedd the power to:***

- **Generate more money to improve public transport on trains and buses** through urban congestion and workplace parking charging. We will make sure that there is up-front investment in new public transport schemes to make them quicker and safer for passengers before implementing charges, at the discretion of local authorities.

- **Support British freight companies** by lowering freight vehicle excise duty.

***Welsh Liberal Democrats at Westminster will work to:***

- **Ensure that Railtrack invests adequately** in a modern, safe and fast railway network.

### **Green Action**

- Through the Senedd, reduce unnecessary journeys through better use of the planning system. This includes greater promotion of Home Zones to reduce vehicle speed, making communities safer by giving greater priority to pedestrians and cyclists, reducing the number of vehicles, and therefore reducing vehicle congestion and pollution in residential areas.
- Improve testing of vehicle emissions and strictly enforce freight vehicle weight limits and safety standards by increased roadside testing.

## 7. Freedom to prosper: Britain's economy

*Liberal Democrats believe that a thriving economy is the best way to provide people with economic freedom and to secure high levels of employment. We believe that a stable and sustainable economic framework boosts business and creates jobs for all.*

Liberal Democrats believe that the main aim of government economic policy should be to promote stability and create the conditions for sustainable growth. We also believe that, in a globalised market, it is impossible for nations to influence their economies effectively unless they co-operate with other countries.

**So Welsh Liberal Democrats will work to:**

- **Strengthen the independence of the Bank of England** which the government implemented following a proposal in the 1997 Liberal Democrat manifesto. We would do this by making Monetary Policy Committee members more independent and representative of the UK as a whole and by making the process of appointing Committee members more transparent.
- **Secure for British business the benefits of a stable economy not subject to fluctuations in the pound's exchange rate**, which is currently destroying thousands of jobs in manufacturing and therefore hitting Wales particularly badly. We believe that the euro offers the potential to avoid this exchange rate instability and reduce the costs of trade with the rest of the European Union. We would therefore set out a positive timetable and policies for achieving a sustainable entry into the euro, including a competitive level for the pound, followed by a referendum so that the British people, not politicians, decide on whether or not to enter the euro.
- **Improve the infrastructure necessary for sustainable economic growth throughout the UK** by allowing the Senedd and Welsh local authorities, to borrow for investment on a sustainable basis, following similar rules already established for central government.
- **Give the Senedd the power to vary the rate of income tax in Wales.**

- **Reconnect citizens with taxation** by providing each household with a Citizen's Tax Contract showing in simple terms how much tax is being raised and what services are being delivered, and why changes have been made. This would mean that central government had to provide the same information that local authorities already provide regarding expenditure and taxation.
- **Promote a more effective and transparent fiscal policy** by requiring the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee to publish 60 days before the Budget each year a Fiscal Assessment setting out the present impact of fiscal policy on interest rates and the anticipated effect over the year ahead, on existing plans and likely alternative options.

### Green action

- Publish a full Green Budget assessment of the budget as a whole each year at budget time each year to make sure that environmental priorities are at the heart of government spending plans.
- Enforce a wider 'polluter pays' principle by establishing a 'Green Tax Commission' to recommend ways to shift taxation from goods such as wealth creation towards 'bads' such as pollution, on the basis that environmental taxes are about taxing differently, not taxing more.

## 8. Freedom for enterprise: business and innovation

*Liberal Democrats believe that an open and competitive economy will encourage enterprise and wealth creation. The job of government is to make sure that this growth takes place within a framework that allows all to benefit.*

If a liberal economy is to create jobs and promote the freedom to work, there must be a framework that allows innovation and risk-taking. There must also be protection of workers' rights, consumers and the environment in a market-friendly, non-bureaucratic manner.

We recognise that only by creating a strong, vibrant, indigenous business sector will we achieve our goal of bridging the prosperity gap between Wales and the rest of the UK.

However, in the Partnership Government, we are continuing to seek high quality inward investment and to strengthen the support given to overseas trade.

***So Welsh Liberal Democrats in the National Assembly's Partnership Government are working to:***

- **Support a robust regional policy** with the successful implementation of Objective 1 and 2 programmes in Wales and an examination of further fiscal variations for the most depressed regions.
- **Support community enterprises and develop entrepreneurship** by ensuring that money is available through the Welsh Development Agency to promote the Regional Technology Plan
- **Support new Welsh-based businesses and help them to grow** with the establishment of a 'Business Birth-Rate Strategy' – just one element of a National Economic Development Plan for Wales.
- **Promote closer links between business, further and higher education** seeking to develop high calibre clusters of academic and entrepreneurial excellence.

***Welsh Liberal Democrats at Westminster will work to give a Senedd the power to:***

- **Liberalise the economy and reform the regulatory framework to ease burdens on business** by scrapping

burdensome regulations and making business regulations subject to a 'sunset' clause.

- **Cut business rates on small businesses** by introducing a Business Rates Allowance on a revenue neutral basis, similar to personal tax allowances, so that smaller businesses pay less and the smallest do not pay business rates at all.
- **Guarantee decent standards for workers** through stronger investigation and enforcement regimes for health and safety including criminal liability. We will legislate to prevent discrimination against workers, including the imposition of compulsory retirement ages. We will vigorously combat discrimination and promote a business culture which embraces equal opportunity as a cornerstone for a committed and motivated workforce. We will legislate to reinforce mutual ownership for building societies, insurance companies and credit unions, and promoting wider share ownership. We will reform the 'All Work Test' so that people with disabilities are assessed for work and benefits on the basis of what they can do, rather than on the nature of their disability.

### Green action

- Replace the bureaucratic and discriminatory Climate Change Levy, which damages manufacturing, with the gradual phasing in of a carbon tax more precisely targeted on greenhouse gas emissions and by introducing an emissions trading scheme to allow businesses to cut greenhouse gas emissions cost-effectively.
- Reduce the environmental impact of energy production by aiming for a minimum of 10% of UK energy to be generated from UK-based renewable sources (creating 'green jobs' in Britain) by 2010, to be increased by 1% per year thereafter. We will also work towards the EU target of 12% gross inland energy consumption from renewable sources by 2010. We would also end the dangers posed by nuclear energy by withdrawing nuclear power stations as they reach end of their safe operating lives.

### *In UK government the Liberal Democrats will work to:*

- **Defend consumers through lower prices** by tougher action against monopolies and cartels in sectors such as banking, telecommunications, broadcasting and civil aviation. We will strengthen consumer protection, for example, in mortgages and banks, and encourage “workmanship guarantees” to combat “cowboy builders” and abusive practices. We will establish a universal service obligation for the Post Office branch network and require banks to observe social obligations in service provision.
- **Substantially increase science research and development spending in industry** (funded by scrapping the Export Credit Guarantee Department’s subsidy to arms exports) and set up an Academy of British Invention. We would also make the UK a leading player in creating an international code against corruption.

## 9. Freedom to participate: reforming politics and the constitution

*Liberal Democrats believe that government should be the servant of the people. We believe that can only happen if there are clear constitutional rules on what government can and cannot do, and if all voices are heard in the political process.*

Britain's political system has changed for the better since 1997, with the implementation of democratic devolution to Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland,

But Liberal Democrats believe that further reforms of politics are necessary, to give people more control over government. Similar reforms are needed in the way quangos and other government agencies involve people and treat their stakeholders. None of them can succeed in the task of regeneration or health promotion without involving local people as equal partners, and Liberal Democrats are committed to making sure this happens.

**Welsh Liberal Democrats at Westminster will work to:**

- **Make sure that everybody's vote counts and create more co-operative politics in Britain** by introducing fair votes for all local and national elections, using the Single Transferable Vote system, so that all parties and under-represented groups in society achieve fairer representation in politics. Wales would benefit greatly from fairer representation in Westminster. In the short-term, we would support the system of AV+ as proposed by the Jenkins Commission as a clear step in the right direction.
- **Replace the House of Lords with a smaller directly elected Senate** with clear powers to improve quality of legislation. We will set up a Supreme Court to carry out the judicial functions currently undertaken by the House of Lords. We would also reform Parliament to make it more practical as a career for a wider range of people, especially women, by measures including the introduction of more family-friendly and effective working practices.
- **Bring decision-making closer to people** by enhancing the effectiveness of local government by increasing its powers, and by replacing the Council Tax with a fair local income tax, so that nobody pays more than they can afford.

- **Give younger people a stake in politics** by introducing votes at 16, and allowing people to stand for elected office at the same age – the age at which people may work full-time and pay taxes, and at which point they can no longer rely on their parents for support.
- **Cut the size and cost of central government** by reducing the number of ministers, and reforming the House of Commons by reducing the number of MPs and members of the House of Lords, alongside the introduction of the single transferable vote and an elected senate.

### Green action

- Introduce an Environmental Responsibility Act to set out reporting requirements and environmental standards for government, businesses and households, and to introduce sustainability assessments across all government departments.
- Strengthen the Department of the Environment and Transport by incorporating the energy and water functions of the Department of Trade and Industry.

## 10. Freedom to be yourself: civil liberties

*Liberal Democrats believe that freedom can only widely flourish if we take action against all forms of discrimination so that all people are able to reach their potential and make their own choices in a diverse and genuinely liberal society.*

Liberal Democrats will uphold as absolutes the rights and liberties of all to live without discrimination, by ensuring that there are effective legal barriers against discrimination.

That means ensuring that there is a strong framework of individual rights, extending the protection already provided by the European Convention, so that the individual is stronger than government.

To help achieve this, Welsh Liberal Democrats in the National Assembly's Partnership Government are working to develop a culture of openness and transparency in all the Assembly's work by introducing a 'Protocol on Freedom of Information'

**And Welsh Liberal Democrats at Westminster will work to:**

- **Give greater weight to the fight against discrimination** by passing an Equality Act tackling all discrimination to expand existing protection against discrimination on the basis of, for example, age, disability and sexuality. We would help promote human rights through the creation of a Human Rights Commission.
- **Give people broad rights to know what information government and public bodies hold, including the facts and figures behind government policy decisions**, by implementing genuine Freedom of Information legislation to break open the excessive secrecy of government and to develop open and accountable administration at all levels of government.
- **Protect privacy** by opposing a system of national identity cards and by introducing stricter rules against the interception of electronic communications. While opposing a privacy law as likely to restrict free speech, we would introduce a civil offence of physical intrusion to prevent harassment of individuals by the media. We would also make sure that police use of intrusive surveillance requires full judicial oversight. Our policies on privacy are underpinned by the belief that government should not

prohibit individual activities that do no harm to others, and that the burden of proof should lie with the government.

- **Protect people fleeing from persecution abroad** by replacing the demeaning voucher system with fair benefits for asylum seekers, while ensuring that applications are dealt with in a speedy and fair way, to minimise any opportunities for the small minority who abuse the system. We will ensure that procedures are non-discriminatory in their application and based on respect for fundamental rights. We would ensure that local services are properly compensated for the costs of asylum support and would work with European and international partners to ensure that responsibilities are sensibly shared.
- **Separate the powers of the court systems and law enforcement in England and Wales** by establishing an accountable Ministry of Justice and ensuring adequate access to justice for all. We will establish a fairer spread of legal aid services, including services in rural areas. We will retain jury trials which are threatened by the Mode of Trial Bill.

### Green action

- Through the Senedd, introduce a 'Right to Environmental Information' in conjunction with Freedom of Information legislation, to cover issues such as local air quality, emissions from local factories, and information held by local authorities relating to the potential environmental risks of genetically modified organisms.
- Protect the right to legal and peaceful protest on all issues, including environmental matters.



## 11. Freedom for communities: rural, suburban and urban Britain

*Local communities are the most important influence on the quality of people's lives, as the places in which they live, work and play. Liberal Democrats wish to build communities which are environmentally sustainable and economically prosperous, and which have a rich and pluralist civic and cultural life.*

Welsh Liberal Democrats celebrate the diversity of our local communities. We recognise the specific issues faced by rural, suburban and urban communities, and the specific actions that are required to deal with these; and we understand when common action is needed to tackle shared and connected problems. We seek to empower and encourage communities to plan and control their own futures, but we believe also that politicians – in Cardiff, in Westminster and in Brussels – have a responsibility to work to improve the quality of life in all communities.

All communities, rural, suburban and urban, should have access to high quality local services and a high quality environment. All communities should benefit from high quality housing and vibrant local economies.

### Action for rural communities

Rural Communities in Wales have faced particular challenges in recent years.

The tenuous position of local shops, services and businesses in many rural communities has been compounded by worsening economic pressures in agriculture. Liberal Democrats believe that vibrant and sustainable rural communities are vital to the well-being of our country.

***Welsh Liberal Democrats in the National Assembly's Partnership Government are working to:***

- **Alleviate the problems of some of Wales's most hard-pressed rural communities**, and to secure investment in the future of Welsh agriculture and food production with a package of farming and rural support worth £60 million over the next three years.
- **Fund additional rates relief** to protect post offices, shops and other rural businesses.

- **Provide a free advisory service to farmers** with the establishment of 'Farming Connect'.

***Welsh Liberal Democrats at Westminster will work to:***

- **Promote the prosperity of agriculture and rural communities** by refocusing the Common Agriculture Policy and fisheries policy on the development of sustainable local communities.
- **Join the euro at the earliest opportunity** to help raise farm gate prices

### Action for urban communities

Many urban communities in Wales have experienced marginalisation and disadvantage for far too long. The lack of economic and social opportunities is often compounded by the poor quality of housing provision and of the local environment. Liberal Democrats believe that Wales needs a renaissance of its urban communities.

***Welsh Liberal Democrats in the National Assembly's Partnership Government are working to:***

- **Target areas of social and economic deprivation** through the Communities First Programme.
- **Promote the revitalisation of urban communities** by encouraging the development of brown field sites wherever possible. Practical mechanisms will be developed to discourage green field development where suitable brown field alternatives exist.

***At Westminster, Welsh Liberal Democrats will work to give a Senedd the power to:***

- **Encourage urban regeneration** through constructive partnership between local authorities and private enterprise. We will do this by creating a fiscal framework that encourages private enterprise in urban areas. This will include encouraging the restoration and re-use of buildings rather than building on new land by equalising VAT at a lower level on new building and renovation, and by allowing local councils to replace the Uniform Business Rate with a system based on the value of each site (Site Value Rating) so that improvements of sites are not penalised, to encourage the development of de-industrialised and inner-city sites. We would also clean up

brown field and damaged wildlife sites using revenue from a green field development levy.

### Action for all communities

Some problems – of poor housing, homelessness and social exclusion – are common to rural, suburban and urban communities. Welsh Liberal Democrats believe that all communities should be entitled to high standards of housing and local environment, and that all communities should have the opportunity to enrich their quality of life through local initiative.

#### ***Welsh Liberal Democrats in the National Assembly's Partnership Government are working to:***

- **Achieve good quality housing for all people in Wales** with more resources for renovation and disabled facility grants, more money to eradicate homelessness, and a Houses in Multiple Occupancy Strategy to improve the standard of private rented accommodation.

#### ***At Westminster, Welsh Liberal Democrats will work to give a Senedd the power to:***

- **Promote decent and affordable housing for all** by reforming the housing market to open up conveyancing to greater competition, strengthening leaseholders' legal rights, involving tenants in the management of housing estates and by protecting tenants against landlords' misuse of deposits.
- **Combat homelessness** by giving local authorities greater freedom to invest in housing, and by making health authorities responsible for ensuring that patients discharged into the community have housing available.
- **Boost the economies of local communities** by promoting Local Exchange Trading Schemes (LETS), community banking, time banks, mutual volunteering and credit unions, which enable the most disadvantaged in society to become more included.
- **Support initiatives such as the Community Loan Fund in Wales.** We recognise that the wide variety of voluntary 'third sector' and non-governmental bodies are and will remain an invaluable source of practical ideas and activities that enrich and strengthen rural and urban communities.

### Green action

- Introduce a moratorium, preferably at an EU level, on commercial growing of genetically modified crops until 2003, to allow research into their safety and environmental impact to be completed.
- Through the Senedd boost conservation schemes on land and in marine habitats to protect the environment and create 'green jobs', for example, through the encouragement of organic farming and woodland management. Such schemes would form part of our Wildlife Guarantee to protect endangered species.

## 12. Freedom of expression: arts, culture and the Welsh language

*Welsh Liberal Democrats are committed to artistic freedom, and the pursuit of excellence. We want to see a diverse and dynamic cultural sector accessible to all, with full recognition for grass roots initiatives.*

We recognise also that culture and the arts are a major ingredient in the creation of thriving communities, and constitute an important sector of wealth creation and employment in Wales. Clusters of successful cultural industries provide one of the best ways in which the image of a modern Wales can be conveyed to the wider world.

We are proud of our bi-lingualism and committed to the mutual respect for both the English and Welsh languages of Wales.

We also recognise and celebrate the fact that Wales is a diverse and multicultural society.

***Welsh Liberal Democrats in the National Assembly's Partnership Government have:***

- **Created a new Assembly Secretary for the Arts, Culture, Language and Sport**, reflecting the importance of the cultural sector within Welsh life.

***We are working to:***

- **Make both funding and policy making in this area more transparent and accountable**, whilst maintaining the 'arms length' principle of arts funding.
- **Encourage a thriving and diverse cultural environment** across the many art forms with a strengthened voice for leading artists and arts organisations.
- **Foster and promote cinematic excellence** through the medium of Welsh and English with the establishment of a Welsh Film Fund.
- **Develop the cultural industries in Wales**, as part of our drive to raise GDP, create employment, build social capital, and tackle social exclusion.
- **Promote community usage of the Welsh language** by supporting the local mentrau iaith.
- **Restore the place of sport in schools** and improve standards of training, particularly in primary schools.

***At Westminster, Welsh Liberal Democrats will give a Senedd the power to:***

- Designate St David's Day as a national bank holiday for Wales.
- Vary taxes and provide additional incentives for high value cultural sector activity in Wales.
- Legislate to protect the cultural diversity and freedom of all the people of Wales.
- Restore the place of music in Welsh Schools
- Promote culture and rural/coastal prosperity through the planning system, promoting festivals and businesses

***Liberal Democrats at Westminster will work to:***

- Ensure that Wales and the rest of the UK have a thriving new media sector.
- Protect, and adequately fund, public service broadcasting in the digital age.
- Work to ensure adequate, free access to Welsh Broadcasters
- Ensure that the Welsh have full parity with all other UK nationalities in the next Census collation.

### **Green action**

- Through a Senedd, protect and manage the Built Heritage reflecting the length and diversity of its Welsh history

## 13. Freedom through Europe: Britain's role in the European Union

*Liberal Democrats believe that the European Union plays a fundamental role in guaranteeing freedom from war and discrimination across Europe. That is why we are enthusiastic about enlargement of the EU to include the fledgling democracies of central Europe. We also believe that Wales has a strong interest in Britain working constructively as part of the European Union to exert influence over issues affecting Wales's interests in Europe as a whole.*

Liberal Democrats believe that a strong and effective European Union will help to deliver a stable economy and a clean, safe environment. The European Union has already had major benefits for our citizens, especially in Wales and especially women, families and workers.

We believe that the European Union must have the resources and powers to act effectively in areas where problems cannot be solved at a national level, while keeping out of areas that can.

We believe that EU enlargement, the spread of the single market, and the agreement of a Charter of Fundamental Rights at the heart of a Constitution of the European Union will further these aims, and we will continue to co-operate with our European Liberal Democrat partners to achieve our aims in these areas.

### **We will work to:**

- **Define and limit the powers of the European Union** by arguing for a Constitution for the European Union that sets out clearly the roles and responsibilities and limits of EU bodies, national governments and regional spheres thereby guaranteeing that decisions are made at the most appropriate level. This would provide a stable and legitimate framework for the democratic development of European politics at all levels and reconnect the European Union to the people it is intended to serve.
- **Remove unnecessary regulations and reduce the administrative costs of Europe** by streamlining the powers of the EU Commission, and strengthening anti-fraud measures. We would also ban 'goldplating' of EU

regulations, where the UK government unnecessarily adds extra requirements to minimum EU standards.

- **Give voters more power over Europe's appointed officials and government ministers** by campaigning for greater accountability of the Council of Ministers and the Commission to the elected European Parliament, and by making more effective use of EU consultative bodies such as the Council of the Regions. In order to make European decision-making more effective, we favour a wider application of majority voting in the Council. However, we would maintain a veto on the constitution, defence, budgetary and tax matters, and regulations on pay and social security.
- **Make sure that all European bodies conform to the principles of open government** by moving ahead with regulations on transparency and freedom of information covering all EU institutions, in particular by opening up the Council of Ministers to the public whenever it discusses legislation, and by improving Parliamentary scrutiny of ministers attending the Council of Ministers. We wish to see greater accountability of the European Central Bank through publication of the minutes and votes of the Board.
- **Develop a fully-fledged European Common Foreign and Security Policy** that includes a significant defence capability consistent with our membership of NATO and other international institutions.

### **To make sure that the voice of Wales is heard by the European Union, we will:**

- Ensure that Welsh Ministers attend and, where possible, lead for the UK, on business in the Council of Ministers
- Take advantage of all opportunities for Welsh people to take up secondments and other vacancies in EU institutions.
- Support the representation of Wales in the Committee of the Regions.
- Support the Wales European Centre in Brussels.
- Support inter-regional co-operation projects with regions and nations of Europe with similar interests to Wales – not least the candidate states of East and Central Europe.

### **Green action**

- Continue to mainstream European environment policy so that proper social and environmental impact assessments are applied to EU policies and EU overseas aid. We will also make sure that EU aid reaches the front line by establishing a specialised European aid agency.
- Implement EU environmental legislation more effectively by pressing the Commission and other member state governments to establish full compliance with EU environmental standards in all European countries. We will make sure that the Commission is resourced so that it can effectively discharge this function, and we will support the Cardiff process of integrating environmental objectives into all EU activities.

## 14. Freedom throughout the world: defence and international institutions

*Liberal Democrats believe that Wales' interests are best served within a Britain working with others, rather than working in isolation. So we will work to build effective international bodies to protect and promote freedom throughout the world and to tackle global environmental problems.*

Liberal Democrats believe that wealthy countries such as the UK have a duty to help poorer ones, both through conflict resolution, opening markets, reforming international institutions and overseas aid. We also believe that Britain should co-operate on defence with other countries, to reduce costs and to promote stability.

### **So Welsh Liberal Democrats will work to:**

- **Tackle dire poverty among the world's poorest people** by redistributing wealth through increasing overseas aid in ten years to the UN target of 0.7% of GNP and leading international efforts to accelerate debt relief.
- **Prevent exploitation in international trade** by ending all links between aid and trade and make sure that aid is subject to an environmental, social and human rights impact assessment. We would also make sure that WTO rules adequately address concerns over public health and labour standards, and seek to establish a Global Competition Authority to instigate and administer an International Code of Practice for transnational corporations.
- **Aim to strengthen the UN** through reform of Security Council and the establishment of a college, based in Britain, to train a UN General Staff for peacekeeping missions. We advocate the formation of a UN Rapid Reaction Force to tackle both natural disasters and those caused by people, utilising the experience of military forces and NGOs. We also urge the British government to move quickly in working to establish the International Criminal Court.
- **Work for the elimination of all nuclear weapons and push for a new round of arms reduction talks.** In the meantime, we will retain the UK's minimum nuclear deterrent for the foreseeable future. We would promote flexibility, mobility, rapid deployment and joint operations as the basis of

Britain's defence policy, to enable the UK to play a part in deploying the EU as a force in world affairs, and to honour Britain's commitments to NATO, the UN and the Commonwealth.

- **End subsidies for arms sold to foreign regimes** by ending the practice of the Export Credit Guarantee Department using British taxpayer's money to support arms exports. We would also make sure that a Parliamentary Arms Export Committee is established to monitor arms export policy and scrutinise individual export licence applications. We will control arms brokers operating in the EU by requiring them to register under a more transparent EU Code of Conduct. Arms brokers found to be breaking this code would have their operating permits revoked.

### **Green action:**

- Promote sustainable development by ensuring that sustainability objectives are fully incorporated into aid and technology transfer policies.
- Introduce clearer environmental objectives into all international institutions such as the EU, IMF, World Bank and WTO, and establish a UN Economic & Environmental Security Council for Sustainability.