

**A New Purpose for Politics:
Quality of Life**

Policy Paper 102



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Executive Summary

For most of us, achieving the best possible quality of life that we can, for ourselves and others, is our main aim in life. Liberal Democrats believe that it is of course for people to take their own decisions about their lives, but there are things that public policy can do to support us in doing that (1.1).

- We welcome the growing ability to measure people's quality of life or wellbeing (terms which we use interchangeably), and the power this gives both individuals and policy-makers to make decisions which can help increase it (1.2)
- Promoting economic prosperity in a conventional way remains a crucial way of increasing quality of life (1.1.2)
- However the limits of this approach are becoming increasingly clear – including through the financial crisis (1.1.9)
- This paper therefore sets out additional proposals to support increased wellbeing in areas which conventional economic approaches affect little (1.1)

Liberals have believed for centuries that empowering people to take control of their own lives is the best way of improving their lives. Research evidence now reinforces this with the finding that the extent of personal control is a key determinant of wellbeing (2.1).

- Supporting people to take their own decisions about their quality of life – not simply taking decisions for them – should be the Liberal Democrats' distinctive approach to this area (2.1)
- Our central tool in helping them do this should be the traditional Liberal weapon of information and education (2.3)
- A key principle must be that large organisations which have a major impact on our daily quality of life, including government, should be accountable to us (2.4)

Equipping people well to take decisions to maximise their quality of life is important (3.1).

- We should create a National Institute for Wellbeing to collate evidence, make it accessible, and promote best practice in increasing quality of life. It should comment on the success of government policies and others in doing so, in a manner analogous to the IFS for taxation (3.2.2)
- It should create a Wellbeing Index which allows the public to compare the performance of large organisations and areas in achieving high wellbeing, as an important tool to increasing quality of life (3.2.4)
- We welcome the government's action to increase relevant information collection by the ONS, and suggest how it should be developed (3.2.7)
- The EU and OECD also have important roles to play in collecting useful information and exchanging good practice, which they should take on (3.2.8)
- Informing the public is crucial to their ability to make effective decisions about their quality of life, and public health education should be re-focused to include also public wellbeing education (3.3)
- PSHE education in schools and colleges should cover equipping young people to make decisions about their quality of life; PSHE education should become a core part of the national curriculum (3.4)

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- Emotional intelligence and 'resilience' skills are important to quality of life and should also be promoted through these routes (3.5)

Government should make it a central aim of policy to support quality of life (4.1).

- Government should develop a framework, based on proposals we make, for ensuring quality of life is considered in policy-making (4.1.3)
- New policies should go through wellbeing impact assessments before being finalised (4.1.5)
- We welcome the government's introduction of Health and Wellbeing Boards, which should use their Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategies to mainstream quality of life or wellbeing factors in local services and policy-making (4.2.2)
- Central government should create a Cabinet Champion for Wellbeing, supported by a small unit within the Cabinet Office (or equivalent), and scrutinised by a House of Commons Wellbeing Audit Committee (4.2.3)
- The European Union should designate a European Commissioner Champion for Wellbeing, supported by a small unit (4.2.4)
- Public bodies' existing suite of statutory Plans should include a plan for promoting wellbeing (4.2.5)
- Liberal Democrats should take into account the impact on quality of life in policy-making. Future Liberal Democrat manifestos should consider including a Wellbeing Thread, outlining the impact of policies on improving quality of life (4.3)

We make proposals in a range of individual policy areas for helping individuals achieve better quality of life.

Public services

- Public services should be accountable to the people they serve (5.1.2)
- Local public services should take action to present a more joined up face to users (5.1.3)
- User feedback should be incorporated in the routine management of local public services (5.1.5)

Health & Mental Health

- We welcome the government's commitment to Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT); the government should promote better mental health for all by making access available to a wider range of therapies which significantly improve people's quality of life (5.2.4)
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) should be reviewed to ensure they provide a sufficient service (5.2.7)

Life at Work

- Many employers are already actively concerned to maximise their employees' wellbeing; we seek to extend this to more workplaces, especially to the lowest-paid (5.3.0.2)
- Employers should take actions which we know make workplaces better places to

- work, and measure this through employee satisfaction (5.3.1.2)
- Flexible working is very important to quality of life: employers should support it, and we welcome the government's action to extend the right to request flexible working to any employee (5.3.1.3)
- We do not believe it is for government to set targets for employers to meet these challenges; but we do believe it is a liberal approach for employers to provide information on them (5.3.2.1)
- By 2014, the 9,000 or so large organisations which together employ 50% of the UK workforce should report on employee satisfaction and the extent of flexible working (5.3.2.2)
- The National Institute for Wellbeing should create a way for reporting this information in an accessible way so that it is actually used (5.3.2.5)
- Control over our workplaces increases our quality of life, and we encourage the creation of more mutuals (5.3.3.1)
- The existing power to disqualify someone from being a company director for financial impropriety should be extended to serious failure to protect employees' wellbeing (5.3.3.2)
- As well as seeking to help them back into employment, actions should be taken to increase the wellbeing of the unemployed (5.3.4)

Life outside Work

- Activities outside work such as sport, other physical activity, the arts, and voluntary activity are all valuable in promoting wellbeing and should continue to be supported (5.4)
- Adult education is important to fulfilment as well as bringing economic benefits, and should also be supported (5.4.8)

Families & Early Years

- Our experiences in the first three to five years of our lives are crucial to our future quality of life, and should continue to be a priority for investment (5.5.3)
- Counselling and other similar support can significantly increase very low wellbeing and should be more widely available (5.5.4)
- The Family Justice Review under way should create a less adversarial and more family-friendly process (5.5.4.7)
- Government should provide more help to improve the quality of life of carers (5.5.6)

Our Surroundings

- Promoting a high quality of life should lie at the heart of the planning framework (5.6.3)
- Planning frameworks should generally promote open space and exposure to the natural environment, which we know increase wellbeing (5.6.3)
- Local people should have the ability through a petition to call a referendum on the proposed sale of any public open land, including school playing fields (5.6.5.3)

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Our Communities

Our communities are crucial to our quality of life and we should take a range of actions to support them, including:

- Greater use of civic awards to recognise contributions to the community (5.7.3)
- Other measures which promote social engagement, including timebanks (5.7.3)

Advertising

- We should take actions to educate and inform people to understand and handle advertising (5.8)

Why Quality of Life Matters and What It Is

1.1 Why Quality of Life Matters

1.1.1 Most people's aim is to have a good quality of life. A life which they find rewarding, fulfilling and satisfying in the broadest sense, for themselves and their families.

1.1.2 For many people in many circumstances, the best way they can achieve that is to increase their income. The economic power which comes from greater wealth increases their options and ability to enjoy the lifestyle that they would like. And historically this has been a particularly powerful means to improving the quality of life of those who are least well off: it means we can meet some of our basic needs, which are crucial to our quality of life, such as food, shelter and clothing. Helping people to increase their income as a way of taking greater control of their lives has been a liberal and Liberal Democrat aim for centuries. It is the realm of conventional economics, and it remains a crucial insight.

1.1.3 Government too has a crucial role to ensure that we can meet our basic needs through, among other things, promoting economic prosperity, ensuring a good healthcare system, ensuring adequate housing, and providing benefits to those who need them. Liberal Democrat commitments to doing so are set out fully elsewhere in all these and many other areas.

1.1.4 The aim of this paper is to set out other ways in which public policy can help people achieve the lives they want, in areas that conventional economics and traditional policy-making scarcely touch.

1.1.5 For although economic prosperity is central to meeting our basic needs, it is only one of many elements that determine whether or not we enjoy a good quality of life. The quality of our relationships with family and friends, the extent to which we feel in control of our own lives, our leisure activities, and many other factors, are equally important to our overall wellbeing. Indeed there is now good evidence that, once basic needs are met, greater economic prosperity does not promote greater wellbeing. Since the Second World War, our average income has continued to grow strongly, but we are on average no happier¹.

1.1.6 Many of these other factors which affect our wellbeing are areas where liberals instinctively recoil from government involvement. Surely government should not be seeking to interfere in people's personal relationships? This is certainly correct. People's personal relationships - and indeed all other areas of their lives - must be under their own control.

1.1.7 But in the economic field, even though we believe that people should control their own personal economic situation, we do believe that government has a role to encourage a benign general economic environment: indeed the perceived ability of the different parties to do so is perhaps the biggest factor in how people decide which way to vote.

¹ Veenhoven, R., World Database of Happiness, Distributional Findings in Nations, Erasmus University Rotterdam. Available at: <http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl> (2009)

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1.1.8 Similarly, we believe that government should accept responsibility to do what it can to promote conditions which enable people to make their own decisions about their quality of life. If having a good quality of life is indeed most people's principal long-term objective in life, it is surely odd that government should not see it as its responsibility to support them in doing so.

1.1.9 The events of the last few years also provide another important new stimulus to this work. The financial crisis of 2008 marked an important moment of wider crisis for the view – until then not so much accepted as simply assumed – of economic success as the principal legitimate goal of government. Although that crisis was clearly part of wider international events, successive Labour and Conservative British governments have certainly been much more than passive spectators in developing the systems which ultimately led up to it. For many people the financial crisis has clarified the view that excessively single-minded pursuit of economic growth was the wrong central aim for public policy, and caused them to seek a more sustainable and justified basis for politics. Putting wellbeing at the heart of policymaking is a more desirable, attractive and philosophically justified alternative.

1.2 How Quality of Life Can be Measured

1.2.1 One of the practical reasons that government has focussed on the economic side of improving people's lives is that, while measuring people's enjoyment in an objective fashion has been nigh-on impossible, income is a simple feature to measure. And since historically income has indeed been the best way of raising quality of life, it has by no means been an irrational thing to do.

1.2.2 However two things have now changed. First, with increasing prosperity in the developed world, the limitations of conventional economic indicators as measures of wellbeing have become clearer. While GDP, for example, is still a useful measure of development in many parts of the world, it is strictly an "input measure" of how much money people have and how happy we might therefore suppose them to be. If it is possible to devise an "output measure" which captures how the quality of life that people actually have, then we should use that instead. And there are indeed many ways in which GDP measures as positives things which are actually negatives to our quality of life. Bulldozing a rainforest, for example, is economic activity and therefore appears in GDP figures. Conversely, if someone chooses to spend more time with their family and less time at work, that puts a dent in GDP and other economic measures. This is obviously an extremely limited - many of us would say completely wrong - way of measuring the value to humanity of these activities.

1.2.3 Secondly, we have now developed ways of measuring people's quality of life which are robust, consistent and scientifically valid². There is now good evidence that groups of people do report accurately the extent of their wellbeing, which correlate to a variety of other measurements³. These include assessments of their wellbeing by both friends and colleagues, and by clinical psychologists, as well as links to physiological measures^{4 5}, and growing evidence of the link to neural activity in brain areas associated with feeling good.

² A thorough outline of the consistency, robustness and validity of wellbeing measures is in Diener et al. *Well-being for Public Policy* (Oxford 2009) pp 67-95.

³ Richard Layard: *Happiness: Lessons from a new science* (2005)

⁴ David G. Blanchflower and Andrew J. Oswald, *Hypertension and Happiness across Nations*, Journal of Health Economics (2007)

⁵ Stefania Mojon-Azzi & Alfonso Souza-Poza: *Hypertension and Life Satisfaction* (University of St Gallen, 2007)

1.2.5 The arrival of ways of measuring and reporting people's quality of life opens up exciting opportunities for developing policy which focusses relatively accurately on improving it. We welcome the government's plans for the Office of National Statistics (ONS) to ask questions about life satisfaction and happiness, which will help to develop a significant evidence resource on which to base future policy development towards maximising quality of life.

1.2.6 Our central assertion is that a policy should be judged good or bad, on the basis of whether or not it helps to improve people's quality of life. It may in many cases do so by promoting prosperity, but policies do not have to justify themselves by reference to a "business case" that implementing it will necessarily produce some kind of economic return in the short or long term. The simple fact of whether a policy will increase or reduce wellbeing is the right framework within which to judge it.

1.3 Factors Which are Important to Quality of Life

1.3.1 Alongside the development of much more direct measures of quality of life, we have developed a clearer understanding the factors that drive it. Economic factors are important, of course, but they are only part of the story.

1.3.2 Social science and psychological research has identified many important non-economic factors which are important to wellbeing, which accord well with our personal experience. Three groups are particularly important:

- Personal factors: Important elements are the extent of our sense of control over our lives, having a sense of purpose and meaning in our lives, and our degree of self-esteem. A further important element is our sense of security, both physical and psychological: our freedom from fear, and assurance of available support if necessary.
- Social factors: Good, positive relationships with others: our family, friends, neighbours, colleagues and everyone else we come into contact with, are critical to good wellbeing.
- Environmental factors: Our surroundings are major determinants of our quality of life. This includes the natural physical environment and the extent of our contact with it, and the pleasantness of other aspects of our surroundings, such as the built environment.

1.3.3 These key factors underlie our analysis, and in particular the proposals we make for policy changes in later chapters.

1.3.4 There are good reasons for believing that social inequality has an impact on levels of wellbeing, and work being undertaken by the party on inequality will address this.

1.3.5 There is good evidence that religious belief is positively associated with life satisfaction (even beyond the social effects): a belief in God does appear from the evidence to contribute to happiness⁶. We do not seek in any way to encourage anyone to believe (or not) in God: among other considerations, it is also the case that many things have been done in the name of religion or other values systems which have reduced wellbeing, particularly of non-conforming

⁶ Richard Layard: *Happiness: Lessons from a new science* (2005), pp 64, 72, 192-4

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minorities. However the wider message is that people having a clear sense of their place in the world is important to wellbeing.

How does the UK compare to other countries?

A number of organisations have attempted to compare the relative wellbeing of different countries. The UK generally performs quite well in these surveys, but not as well as Scandinavian countries. One often quoted survey is the Gallup World Poll, drawing data from the period 2005-09. In this the UK came 17th out of 155 countries, with 54% of people considered to be “thriving”. Denmark (82%), Finland (75%), Norway (69%) and Sweden (68%) took the first four places along with the Netherlands (68%). The United States (57%) came 14th, and Germany (43%) 33rd, Italy (39%) 40th and France (35%) 44th. Togo (1%) was last.

The Liberal Democrat Approach to Wellbeing

2.1 Putting People in Control of Their Own Lives

2.1.1 The origins of modern liberalism lie in dispersing power to give individuals and communities greater control over their own lives. John Locke argued that the justification for this placing of personal freedom at the heart of political philosophy was people's natural drive to improve the quality of their lives, saying "the necessity of pursuing happiness [is] the foundation of liberty"⁷. John Stuart Mill stressed that it was the judgements of individuals which defined their happiness, and that the way to promote it was to enable people to pursue their own aims, through which "they find happiness by the way"⁸. More recent liberal thinkers have built on this to create an even richer view of how people's control of their own lives affects their wellbeing: Amartya Sen, for example, has argued that an individual's quality of life consists not in their wealth but in their capacity to function in ways that are meaningful to them, something that may be threatened by poverty, oppression, ignorance or illness.

2.1.2 So giving citizens freedom to direct their own lives as far as possible, both economically and socially, remains at the heart of the modern Liberal Democrat vision. We believe that this principle should be the basis of the distinctive Liberal Democrat approach to improving wellbeing.

2.1.3 This philosophical approach is reinforced by the strong research finding that a major factor in quality of life is the extent to which people feel in control of their own lives. It is now widely recognised that the most sustainable method of achieving wellbeing is the pursuit of personal goals in life, often termed 'flourishing'^{9 10 11}. There is strong evidence that a person's wellbeing depends on their perceived ability to affect events that matter to them, known as their "locus of control"¹². There is also evidence that a person's perceived or actual degree of control over their life can greatly improve their quality of life, regardless of how well things are going for them measured in other ways. For instance, it has been found that the extent of a person's financial literacy has a greater impact on their wellbeing than their actual income¹³ and that, independently of outcomes, people are happier in countries with effective, transparent and democratic governments¹⁴.

2.1.4 Equipping individuals to direct their own lives as far as possible is therefore both the best way of them achieving the objectives they want, and of improving their wellbeing as they are pursuing them. We set out proposals for how we can best equip citizens to do this in the next chapter.

7 Locke J: *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* Book 2, Chapter 17, Section 51

8 Mill JS: *Autobiography* Chapter 5

9 Little B: *Personal Project Pursuit: On Human Doings and Well-beings* (2006)

10 Huppert F: *In search of sustainable well-being* (2010)

11 Seligman M: *Flourish* (2011)

12 Pannells T and Claxton F: *Happiness, Creative ideation and Locus of Control* in *Creativity Research Journal* 20.1 (2008)

13 Financial Services Authority Occasional Paper No.34: *Financial Capability and Well-being: Evidence from the BHPS*

14 Helliwell J and Huang F: *How's your government? International Evidence Linking Good Government and Wellbeing* in *British Journal of Political Science* 38 (2008)

2.2 Flourishing Communities

2.2.1 Liberal Democrats also recognise the importance of social and environmental factors to quality of life, and promoting flourishing communities is an important part of our approach to improving it. Such communities breed good-neighbourliness and give people a sense of place. Strong, democratic local government also plays a central role: externally-imposed one-size-fits all solutions often undermine local communities and have a harmful effect on quality of life, however good the intentions. The Liberal Democrats have also long recognised the value of non-commercial activities in building trust within and between communities.

2.3 Predicting Wellbeing Outcomes

2.3.1 One clear theme from the research, which is a challenge to this view, is that people are in many circumstances in fact quite bad at assessing correctly whether a particular choice will actually increase their wellbeing. Quite often, actions which the citizen believes will improve their lives, we know from clear evidence will in fact not have that effect, and may have the opposite¹⁵. This is unpalatable to liberals but a fact. Equally, we now know that some actions that people might not necessarily realise would increase their wellbeing does in fact do so: for example giving money measurably increases the reported wellbeing of the donor¹⁶.

2.3.2 Making information available to people is therefore crucial to facilitating them to make their choices for their own wellbeing. Knowledge and information are well established liberal tools for equipping citizens. If evidence shows that a course of action is good or bad for you, then there is an important role for public agencies to inform the public so that they can make informed choices. But if someone, informed by the risks and evidence, still wishes, for example, to continue to smoke, then the state should not seek to stop them (subject of course to the liberal constraints of causing harm to others).

2.3.3 The Liberal Democrat approach to public health and wellbeing is to inform people to take the decisions they wish to about their own lives, even where we might personally take a different decision. This approach strongly informs our approach to promoting quality of life.

2.4 Achieving Control of Organisations Which Affect Our Lives

2.4.1 An important element of people feeling in control of their own lives is feeling that they can affect and control the organisations that have an impact on their lives.

2.4.2 This has several important consequences. Firstly, many large organisations which have an impact on our day to day lives are private sector companies. It is important that these are responsive to us, if necessary through market mechanisms such as our ability to move to a different provider. Competition policy which ensures a well functioning market and which prevents monopolies and oligopolies is important to our quality of life.

2.4.3 Secondly, it is important that we feel that public sector organisations, which in many cases are monopolies, are responsive to us. Too many large public sector bodies are not

15 Michaelson J et al. *National Accounts of Well-being* (New Economics Foundation 2009)

16 Dunn E, Aknin L and Norton M. *Spending Money on Others Promotes Happiness in Science* 319: 1687-8 (2008).

accountable to those they serve, and implementing Liberal Democrat policies to ensure they become so is important to quality of life. The lack of accountability of local NHS organisations is a good example.

2.4.4 Thirdly, it is important when dealing with large organisations in any sector that we are able to interact in a way which we are comfortable with. For many people this will mean being able to speak to another human being face to face rather than only over the phone or through a computer system. Liberal Democrats believe that this personal option must continue to be available to all, especially in sensitive personal areas such as health and education.

2.4.5 It is also important that the political system through which we hold Ministers and councillors to account is responsive. Implementation of Liberal Democrat political reforms to ensure that governments reflect much more accurately what the public voted for, will also be significant contributors to increasing our quality of life. Similarly, achieving an upper chamber of Parliament that is based on the public's votes will increase the public's sense of owning the political and government system. And at a local level, Liberal Democrat commitments to devolving power as close as possible to those it affects have long been aimed at increasing people's ownership of public decision-making that affects them.

2.4.6 Further Liberal Democrat policies for increasing people's control over big organisations which have a big impact on our lives are set out in *Are We Being Served?* (2009).

Equipping Citizens to Make Informed Choices About Quality of Life

3.1 Helping People Make the Best Choices

3.1.1 Empowering individuals to make choices through providing information and education has been a liberal tool for centuries, and giving people the knowledge and skills to make the best choices for their wellbeing is a central theme of our approach. As our understanding of quality of life, what it is, and how we can maximise it, grows relatively rapidly, we believe we should support individuals to make the choices they wish to.

3.2 Developing Knowledge and Best Practice

3.2.1 If we are to succeed in making promoting wellbeing a key policy objective, then there is a major task to gather together evidence and present it in a way which is helpful for policy makers and other organisations whose actions will have an impact on wellbeing.

3.2.2 We propose the creation of a National Institute of Wellbeing (NIWB) who will have a key role in gathering and disseminating research evidence and best practice in promoting wellbeing. The Institute should also have an important role in independently assessing and auditing the actions of government and others as they impact on wellbeing (similar to the role played around taxation by the Institute for Fiscal Studies). Research into factors affecting quality of life should become an important focus for social science research.

3.2.3 Much research evidence is by its nature complex and obscure, and a key role for the NIWB will be interpreting wellbeing information, and presenting it in a manner which is publicly accessible and usable by government bodies and others.

3.2.4 We propose that a central task of the NIWB be to create a Wellbeing Index which will allow people at a glance to see how organisations, individuals, public bodies and others compare to each other in the impact of what they do in promoting wellbeing. This will draw on the work that ONS has already begun to collect relevant data. By allowing the public to compare between different organisations and locations, we believe this will be a powerful tool in driving improved impact on quality of life. The Wellbeing Index should draw together wellbeing evidence to allow the publication of headline Wellbeing Index figures for localities (for example counties); large organisations (especially government organisations); large workplaces, and policies. These should be as clear and useful to people considering where to live as, say, the comparative levels of council tax between different areas.

3.2.5 We propose that the NIWB takes on a particular role in relation to making wellbeing information about workplaces accessible and available, as set out in chapter 5.3.2.5.

3.2.6 In order for government agencies to promote quality of life effectively, it is vital that wellbeing is robustly measured. Measurement of wellbeing provides a headline measure of progress; allows the identification of groups in society with low levels of wellbeing; provides a

tool to aid research; and allows the impact of policy changes on wellbeing to be tracked. We strongly welcome the government's decision to include measures of subjective wellbeing in large-scale surveys through the Office of National Statistics (ONS). European institutions should also co-ordinate data collection so that consistent data are gathered at European level.

3.2.7 The most important measures are people's overall wellbeing, captured by subjective questions on life satisfaction and happiness. As resources permit, the ONS should broaden the statistics they collect, and do so more frequently, with a sample size allowing more detailed analysis, and with additional questions on the suspected factors that influence wellbeing. These should include data on critical personal, social and environmental drivers of wellbeing, including especially on autonomy and relationships. This allows for better tracking of the impact of key events or policy changes; finer grained analysis of individual sub-populations; and allows the drivers of wellbeing to be better understood.

3.2.8 There is much to learn from comparisons between European and other countries; in some ways even more than can be learnt from intra-UK comparisons. Some global development institutions are already leading work around the non-economic promotion of quality of life, and we believe that the NIWB will maximise its value if it becomes part of a European and global network of similar centres of excellence. The European Union and OECD in particular should consider what element of their funding it is appropriate should support research in this area.

3.3 Public Wellbeing Education

3.3.1 If the public are to make use of the information about the impact that different choices will have on their wellbeing, then there is an important role in making the information available to them in a form that many people will actually find useful.

3.3.2 We propose that existing public health education capacity, as it moves into local authorities and re-shapes its objectives, broadens its remit to inform people also about wellbeing factors affecting their lives.

3.3.3 As with health education, it may be most useful to provide wellbeing information to people at moments of major change in their lives (such as divorce or leaving prison).

3.3.4 One key moment of intervention when we specifically recommend expanding the wellbeing angle is ante-natal education. This should cover wellbeing aspects of the practicalities of looking after a child.

3.3.5 Ante-natal classes are also a useful example for other public health interventions, which should similarly expand their role to cover wellbeing aspects. They are also a rare successful example of providing support to people at key moments of their lives in a way which does not attract stigma, and successfully engages a relatively large proportion of people. We would like to see other areas following their lead wherever possible. Relationship and parenting education, for example, can both have major impacts on quality of life. They are not widely taken up but we would like to see them made available more widely on a pre-emptive educational basis, as well as crisis therapy response when a problem has already arisen. We outline this further in chapter 5.5.4.

3.3.6 As part of this programme we specifically support the provision of greater consumer financial education to the public generally, which can have a major impact of people's quality of life.

3.4 Wellbeing Education in Schools and Colleges

3.4.1 Much of the foundation of our understanding of what is important is of course laid at school. We believe that the importance of wellbeing and happiness should be a key element of what is set out to young people, alongside other values. As they get older this should also include equipping young people to make their own judgements about the relative value they want to place on broad life satisfaction and economic success as life objectives.

3.4.2 Much of this broader perspective and emotional education will sit within the Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) curriculum, which should itself be made a core (i.e. compulsory) part of the national curriculum. The PSHE curriculum has made positive progress in recent years, but we believe it should now go further, and specifically education in financial management, and in media literacy, should form part of the PSHE curriculum.

3.4.3 Schools and colleges should also promote the broader education of their children to emphasise the wider appreciation of quality of life through activities such as music, drama, art and physical activity. These improve the quality of life of young people at the time, and most importantly equip them to consider how much weight they want to attach to them, and the social engagement associated with them, in later life. Separately, these activities are also known to help develop the non-cognitive skills which are key factors in finding a job.

3.4.4 The Government should reverse its decision to end Ofsted reporting on pupils' wellbeing within their reports on schools and reintroduce the Tellus Survey which included important questions about children's wellbeing.

3.4.5 We also strongly encourage the expansion of programmes outside the formal curriculum which help children to develop life skills which will help them to improve their quality of life. Good current examples include the programme of Relate, who deliver relationship education and counselling to 15,000 young people a year from Key Stages 1 to 4; and the UK Resilience Programme (UKRP).

Wellington College

Wellington College has pioneered the introduction of wellbeing and happiness classes into their curriculum in 2006. Its wellbeing syllabus focuses on six elements:

1. Physical health
2. Positive relationships
3. Perspective (developing a psychological immune system)
4. Strengths
5. The world (living sustainably).
6. Meaning and purpose

The classes have been popular with young people and the school says that they are linked to improved academic performance.

3.5 Emotional Intelligence and Resilience

3.5.1 Two key elements of equipping people to maximise their quality of life are promoting emotional intelligence and helping people to develop their 'resilience' (or 'coping skills').

3.5.2 Emotional intelligence is the ability to understand and manage our own and others' emotions. Doing this effectively has both a direct impact on quality of life, and also on our ability to form strong positive relationships, which itself has a significant impact on wellbeing. The NIWB, public wellbeing education strategies and wellbeing elements of school curricula should all promote activities which help people to develop their emotional intelligence. Others in a position of leadership, such as employers, should also support its development.

3.5.3 Similarly, developing resilience skills can help us to cope in a crisis, preventing or reducing the adverse effect on wellbeing that these often have^{17 18}. These effects can sometimes be catastrophic, leading to mental illness or addiction, as well as imposing costs on society at large. Similarly, the NIWB, public wellbeing education strategies, wellbeing elements of school curricula (where it is particularly relevant to bullying) and employers should also consider promoting the development of resilience skills.

17 The Young Foundation: *The State of Happiness* (2010), pp 49-54

18 Department for Education: *UK Resilience Programme Evaluation: Final Report* (2011)

What Government Should Do to Help Citizens in Their Wellbeing Choices

4.1 Changing the Focus of Government

4.1.1 Although Liberal Democrats believe that the best way of improving lives is to empower individuals to choose their own ways to maximise their quality of life, there is much that government can do to support them. We believe that policy-making and other activities of government should be re-oriented towards supporting individuals to maximise their own wellbeing.

4.1.2 Government will find this difficult. It requires a significant shift in what established cultures think is important. However we believe it is possible, and that the move of environmental concerns from the periphery into the mainstream of government thinking over the last twenty years or so, offers some important lessons in how such a shift can be achieved.

4.1.3 Firstly, government should develop a clear framework for how policy-makers should seek to meet wellbeing objectives. It should be informed by the evidence to date and in time by the work of the NIWB and others. Important elements will be:

- Using measures of self-reported wellbeing as evidence for assessing success.
- Empowering individuals to make their own decisions, not simply making decisions for them.
- Valuing non-economic elements such as good relationships, which do not show up in conventional indicators but which we know improve wellbeing.
- Promoting the environmental factors which we know to improve wellbeing, such as self-esteem, security (both physical and psychological) and surroundings.
- Developing alternatives to GDP to measure advances in the prosperity and wellbeing of the country as a whole – incorporating, for example, measures of environmental quality, natural resource depletion and social factors such as standards of health or literacy, many of which already exist.

4.1.4 Policymakers should aim to ensure that both they themselves and policies they propose, as well as being 'economically literate', are also 'wellbeing literate'. No government would propose something which would reduce general prosperity, at least without very careful consideration. The same should become true of making proposals which might reduce wellbeing. Policymakers should ensure they are familiar with the relevant evidence relating to wellbeing and their policy areas, and monitor and understand the impact of policy changes, especially on those most affected.

4.1.5 In the environmental field, the carrying out of impact assessments has been a very powerful tool which has helped achieve the very difficult task of mainstreaming a factor previously considered as peripheral. New policies and proposals in future should be accompanied by a Wellbeing Impact Assessment. These should of course assess the likely impact of the new proposal on the wellbeing both on citizens generally, and any specific groups who are likely to be particularly affected by it. We ask the NIWB to provide guidance to support this process.

4.2 Proposals for Government at Local, National and European Level

4.2.1 At local level, the government has made great steps forward in this area by creating Health and Wellbeing Boards (HWBs) to set out the agenda for services locally. As currently proposed these will focus primarily on health services. We believe that this is an exciting opportunity to embed actions which will promote wellbeing in local policy-making.

4.2.2 In the objectives and criteria for local services that they set out, HWBs should include a range of wellbeing objectives, drawing on research in this area, especially from the NIWB. Specifically their Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNAs) and their Joint Health and Wellbeing Plans should be significantly expanded to set clear objectives for wellbeing as well as health. These should not be Labour-style targets for achieving change in public behaviour, but for empowering citizens to take their own decisions about their own quality of life. They should be able to draw support in doing so both from national government and from the NIWB, and also learn from wellbeing indicators already used by some philanthropic and private sector funders.

4.2.3 To ensure that this agenda is effectively driven across government, we believe that government at UK level should do a range of things, operating at several levels. Firstly, there should be a cabinet level role of Cabinet Champion for Wellbeing. Secondly, they should be supported in driving this across government by the creation of a cabinet committee, containing Ministers from departments most affected, and with the job of ensuring they do mainstream quality of life considerations into their work. And finally there must be sufficient dedicated support at official level, through a small unit based in the Cabinet Office, to ensure that this agenda is carried through. This must include, for example, providing sufficient guidance and support to local Health and Wellbeing Boards to ensure that they promote wellbeing objectives effectively within their work. Independent scrutiny of how well the government is doing this should take place through a Wellbeing Audit Committee of the House of Commons, modelled on its Environmental Audit Committee.

4.2.4 Much of the European Union's legislation and activity can have an impact on quality of life. We similarly propose the appointment of a member of the European Commission as Commissioner Champion for Wellbeing, supported by a cross-service committee to drive action across the Commission, and by a small official team with the job of doing so and also of promoting the objective of wellbeing with member state governments.

4.2.5 When public bodies at any tier are preparing their existing suite of Plans to guide their work, they should similarly include within this a Wellbeing Plan to outline their objectives and activities to improve quality of life.

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4.2.6 Nudge theory¹⁹ may have something useful to contribute to the way that government supports individuals taking control of their own lives to maximise their wellbeing. This sets out how citizens often effectively take decisions by default when they do not take a close interest in an issue (like whether or not to save for their pension scheme). Governments can influence these choices for the better by considering which way this default is set. It always remains fully possible for a citizen who wishes to do so to change this, but those who do not may benefit from government taking an interest in how the default is set.

4.3 Liberal Democrat Policy-Making

4.3.1 This paper sets out a distinctive Liberal Democrat agenda for promoting quality of life, centred on giving the individual the greatest control and understanding of the factors that affect their wellbeing.

4.3.2 Seeing the promotion of wellbeing as a central consideration of public policy should be a distinctive feature for us as a party. To make this clear and help embed it, we should consider future Liberal Democrat manifestos including a Wellbeing Thread, showing how each set of policies do not simply promote economic prosperity or other objectives, but how they will empower citizens to improve their own wellbeing. Doing so will be a clear statement that we as a party see improving quality of life as the most important framework in assessing the worth of a policy. Policy working groups should also consider evidence for the impact on wellbeing in proposals and areas they review.

19 Thaler & Sunstein: *Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth and happiness* (2008)

Policy Proposals

5.0.1 Almost every policy area has an impact on quality of life. In this final chapter we set out areas where the insights generated by quality of life research so far enable us to make specific policy proposals.

5.1 Public Services

5.1.1 Public services, from the NHS, social care and benefits offices, to housing, job centres, the police and the courts, have a major impact on the quality of our lives, especially of course those who use them most. They exist in order to improve our quality of life and of course in general they do that, but sometimes the way they act can seriously reduce wellbeing. The growing insights from wellbeing research should be used to guide the re-design of the way services work.

5.1.2 One of the best ways that services can be more responsive and easier for those who use them is to ensure that those who lead them are accountable to local people. In general as far as possible local public services should be led by people whom local citizens can sack at the ballot box if they are unhappy with the quality of service. Experience shows that this is the most powerful way of ensuring that services are more responsive. Too many of the public services listed above, although they spend very large sums of local people's money, currently have little or no accountability to local people.

5.1.3 One of the major ways in which public services reduce their users' quality of life is through their lack of integration from a user perspective – they are not “joined up”. They need to become more so. Too often people require support from more than one agency, but these fail to work together to deal with problems that don't fit convenient administrative boundaries. Together with the importance of accountability, this leads us to reassert the importance of local councils sitting at the heart of local service commissioning (even if provided by other organisations) across as wide a range of public services as possible. Councils should also make sure that organisations do not become so large that their sheer scale alienates users from them.

5.1.4 Providing a more joined-up service is a key contributor to quality of life for users of public services, and to help promote it we encourage the NIWB and others to consider how the extent of integration of services from a user perspective can best be monitored.

5.1.5 Some public services now make increasing use of customer experience evidence (for example through surveys) to improve what they offer. We advocate the extension of the integration of customer feedback within the main management frameworks of all public services locally, whoever manages them.

5.1.6 The party's existing policy on customer service, *Are We Being Served?* (2009) sets out significant further proposals in this area which will make major contributions to improving quality of life in this area.

5.1.7 Public bodies' plans for improving wellbeing which we have set out above in chapter 4.1 should include the following elements to improve quality of life:

- Making services more focused on the whole person, through co-ordination of

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- services, rather than seeing individuals as a series of problems for different specialists.
- Changing the ethos of services to one of helping people to help themselves as far as possible.
- Providing a stronger focus on making the user experience better.
- Making services more proactive rather than, for example, waiting until an individual has experienced a serious health crisis, before providing support.
- Ensuring it is possible for users who wish to speak to someone face to face, as well as enabling telephone and online services for users who prefer those.
- Ensuring that services do not feel so large that they give a very depersonalised experience.
- Improving the wellbeing of public service employees. Employees with better wellbeing are more likely to care about the user experience, and more enthusiastically take the initiative to deal with problems.

5.1.8 People who depend most upon public services often have very low quality of life. This includes people who are severely and multiply disabled, elderly people with significant social care needs, and looked after children (children in care). As well as being adversely affected by their situation these people's quality of life is also reduced by the lack of choice and control they have over their lives, the lack of attention paid to their wishes and the prioritisation of meeting a few basic needs over providing them with the means to enjoy life. Policies focused on providing people with greater choice and control, such as individual budgets for social care, have proved effective at raising quality of life²⁰ and we recommend their roll-out across care services, including health care and nursing care, wherever practical, alongside measures to ensure that they do not lead to isolation of the recipients.

5.1.9 However these policies do not work where users lack either the capacity or the confidence to make use of them. We therefore recommend a greater role for independent advocacy in all institutional environments in order to give those who have been institutionalised voice as well as choice. This could involve a greater role for the Care Quality Commission as a national advocate for people who are dependent upon state provided care services and who are either institutionalised by them, or at risk of becoming institutionalised.

5.2 Health and Mental Health

5.2.1 All aspects of our health have a major impact on our quality of life. In addition, the research shows that two factors are particularly influential:

- (a) The extent to which people feel healthy (rightly or wrongly); in particular if they feel fit and in good shape;
- (b) The extent to which they feel in control of their own health, i.e. empowered to make decisions about the maintenance of their good health and physical fitness, and the treatment of any ill health.

Policies for achieving all these goals are set out fully in our proposals *Empowering, Fairness and Quality in Healthcare* (PP84, 2008).

²⁰ Parvaneh Rabiee, Nicola Moran and Caroline Glendinning. *Individual Budgets: Lessons from Early Users' Experiences* (2009) British Journal of Social Work 39(5): 918-935

5.2.2 Mental health is an area which has traditionally been the 'poor relation' of health policy, but which an explicit public policy focus on wellbeing and quality of life should make a higher priority. Quite simply, many of those who have some of the lowest quality of life are those who have mental health conditions, either serious and diagnosed, or less serious but still with an ongoing constant reduction in quality of life.

5.2.3 We welcome the investment made by government over the last few years in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) which has shown its ability to have a significant impact on improving quality of life. We support an increasing focus on mental health, and closer integration of mental health with other health services.

5.2.4 We would like to see government making available a wider range of psychological therapies, based on evidence of their value.

5.2.5 As in other areas, patients and mental health service users should be given as much control over their own treatment as possible. This helps them to meet their own needs, and the greater sense of control also enhances wellbeing.

5.2.6 We welcome efforts to de-stigmatise mental illness, and therapies which can help address it such as CBT, by talking publicly more about it. Wider public understanding of how to stay mentally well, and general emotional self-awareness, will help people to understand better choices they can make to improve their quality of life. Organisations such as employers can also do a lot to help improved mental health, and we welcome initiatives such as Mindful Employer group's *Charter for Employers Who Are Positive About Mental Health*²¹.

5.2.7 Where mental health issues are identified early in a person's life, effective, early intervention can make all the difference to their later life. We believe that Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are often not given enough priority to do this properly, and that this contributes to many wider problems in communities, such as crime and antisocial behaviour. We recommend that Government should review this area to ensure that it is sufficiently funded and available to those who need it.

5.3 Life at Work

5.3.0.1 For most people, life at work is very important to their quality of life. It absorbs a high proportion of our waking hours, and provides a sense of purpose. And we now have a lot of research evidence about what makes a good place to work. These factors improve people's quality of life, and separately also tends to make them more productive.

5.3.0.2 Many of the features below are now quite common because employers understand this, and their need to provide good quality workplaces to attract the best staff. However this is much more common in organisations which are 'people businesses'. Many of the specific policy proposals we make below are intended to extend the protection which some of the better paid people in the employment market already enjoy, into other workplaces, which are often those where staff require fewer qualifications and are less well paid.

²¹ www.mindfulemployer.net

5.3.0.3 People who are self-employed often face a different set of challenges. They can sometimes have a higher degree of control of how they work, but face other difficulties, such as greater isolation at work. We would like to see as many of the proposals below as practicable become more common also among the self-employed.

5.3.1 Workplace Factors Affecting Quality of Life

5.3.1.1 Some of the key workplace factors in determining quality of life are:^{22 23 24 25 26}

- Staff feeling a sense of control over how they carry out the task they are doing, and an understanding of why the task is important
- Flexibility over working arrangements, including fitting working hours around other commitments
- Having the appropriate level of skills: being consistently asked to carry out tasks beyond an employee's level of confidence, or that under-use their skills, both undermine wellbeing.
- As outside work, good relationships with those around us are crucial. This includes good relationships with managers and with peers. A range of 'social capital' at work factors here are important, including the role played by trades unions in making workplaces better places to work. Workplace bullying can also of course significantly reduce wellbeing at work.

5.3.1.2 Good workplaces should seek to promote all these factors. The overall impact of these and the other factors which can contribute is best assessed through carrying out employee satisfaction surveys. Again, many organisations already do this, and carried out over time they can prove very useful tools in identifying problems and means of addressing them.

5.3.1.3 Our working life does not only affect our wellbeing at work, of course, and a key factor in improving our overall quality of life is the ability to work flexibly if we wish to do so: for example to balance with bringing up a family or other caring responsibilities. The evidence is clear that more flexible working promotes higher quality of life. We believe that a very important element in moving towards a society with greater wellbeing will be much more widespread flexible and part-time working patterns. We welcome the government's commitment to extend the right to request flexible working to everyone in employment, not only parents and others in certain categories. Employees should be entitled to expect that such a request will be reasonably considered, and they should be empowered to bring the matter to an Employment Tribunal if they believe it has not been.

5.3.2 Empowering Employees to Choose Higher Quality of Life at Work

²² *Promoting mental wellbeing at work* (Public Health guideline 22, 2009), National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence

²³ *How's the Job: Well-Being and Social Capital in the Workplace* (Industrial & Labor Relations Review, 63.2 2010),

²⁴ Helliwell J and Huang F: *How's your government? International Evidence Linking Good Government and Wellbeing* in British Journal of Political Science 38 (2008)

²⁵ Foresight Review into Mental Capacity and Wellbeing (2008), Department of Business, Industry and Skills (2008);

²⁶ War P: *Work, Happiness and Unhappiness* (2007)

5.3.2.1 In keeping with our general approach, we do not believe it is right to seek to achieve these twin objectives of higher employee satisfaction and greater flexibility by compulsion, for example by setting targets for companies to reach in these areas. Employers exist in a market, and their attractiveness to potential employees in something they need to consider in that context.

5.3.2.2 However, also in keeping with our general approach, we do believe that individuals need to be fully equipped so that they are in a position to take choices which maximise their own quality of life. We therefore do believe that organisations, starting with the 9,000 or so large organisations who together employ more than 50% of the UK workforce, and therefore set the tone for the employment market more generally, should be required to report on both employee satisfaction and the extent of flexible working.

5.3.2.3 A range of external frameworks for evaluating employee satisfaction already exists, such as the Sunday Times Best Companies to Work For scheme, and the Great Place to Work Institute. By 2014, all those organisations who are large enough to qualify should report with their annual financial accounts, or equivalent reports, the results of internal employee satisfaction surveys which have been externally validated by an appropriate recognised organisation in this field.

5.3.2.4 These organisations should also by 2014 report with their annual accounts on the extent of their flexible working. This should include the number of flexible working requests accepted or rejected, and their externally-validated performance against one or two other headline flexible working measures that we ask the NIWB to define.

5.3.2.5 Companies' annual reports are not necessarily the first place that a prospective employee looks for relevant information. The NIWB and public wellbeing education infrastructure that we have outlined in chapter 3.2 and 3.3 should find a way of making this Wellbeing Index of employers available in a way that is both useful to potential employees, and also a spur to employers to improve their performance in supporting quality of life. This should build on successful examples of the publication of headline figures which have been relatively widely accepted into the public consciousness improving the performance of organisations, such as Ofsted ratings of schools, star ratings of hospitals and CPA ratings of Councils.

5.3.2.6 We believe this reporting framework, with an ample lead in time, is the right way to balance organisations' autonomy to operate as they wish, and the provision of information to potential employees to equalise the power balance between them. More information about employers and sectors will also help young people and others as they consider their future options for their careers.

5.3.2.7 We expect public sector employers to take a lead in implementing this agenda, and those which qualify by their size should include the same information in their annual reports. They should also explore options for including wellbeing factors among suppliers in their procurement.

5.3.3 Management Structures at Work

5.3.3.1 A significant way of enhancing people's control of their work and their work satisfaction is by increasing the number of employers which operate as mutuals of their staff, an approach

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which has had Liberal support going back to at least the century before last. The party should do further work to develop proposals in this area.

5.3.3.2 We believe it is anomalous that people can be disqualified from being a company director for reasons of financial impropriety, but not for even very serious cases of failing to protect their employees' wellbeing. This should be made possible, for example for serious breaches of their legal duties to staff as an employer.

5.3.4 Life for the Unemployed

5.3.4.1 Many people outside work would like to be in work. Research has consistently shown that unemployed people suffer poor wellbeing – much worse than can be explained simply by their loss of income. They suffer from isolation, low social status, and, frequently, from repeated failure and rejection that challenges self-esteem. It is all too easy for this to become a vicious circle – as de-motivated people are less likely to find work. Too many people are dropping out of the labour market, claiming disability or mental illness.

5.3.4.2 The reduction of the level of unemployment is already a high priority for all political parties. Reform to Job Centre Plus would both help achieve this, and stop some of the ways in which it currently operates, and relates to its clients, reducing quality of life of people while they are unemployed. We recommend that unemployed people should have better access to help for emotional and motivational problems, and to schemes that allow them to do voluntary work without prejudicing their rights to benefits.

5.4 Life Outside Work

5.4.1 Leisure and other non-work activities are important to everyone, in work or unemployed, active or retired. Our life outside work is of obvious importance to our quality of life.

5.4.2 Many activities that people choose for their leisure are available within the ordinary sphere of commercial choice. These include for example the holidays people take, the television and cinema they watch, the restaurants they visit. However a wide variety of non-work activities, from charity volunteering to amateur sports, are outside the commercial sphere, and contribute much to the wellbeing of individuals and communities. Such activities are difficult to value in conventional economic terms, so the use of a more explicit focus on quality of life is useful.

5.4.3 Sport and physical activity provide a series of benefits, including physical fitness, social relationships and personal focus. There is a wealth of evidence that physical fitness is of assistance in maintaining wellbeing as well as health²⁷. Team sports are important to developing a sense of community and shared endeavour as well as fostering friendships. Club membership at sports clubs of all types often provides the type of support within a community that many find they need.

5.4.4 Participation in and enjoyment of the arts have similar benefits. The increasing availability of the arts to a wide audience, with many prominent and less prominent²⁸ performing arts companies giving a high priority to outreach programmes has been one of the

²⁷ *Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise*, in the journal of the American College of Sports Medicine

²⁸ For example the London Children's Ballet's LCB2 programme of taking a children's ballet performed by its 2nd company of children to hospitals, care homes and other institutions.

great successes of arts policy over recent years. They provide an opportunity for performers to bring their performances to wider audiences and for new audiences to experience the performing arts, when they otherwise would not do so.

5.4.5 Amateur participation in both the performing arts, including music and singing, and fine art improves confidence and self-esteem, fosters community endeavour and disseminates a love of the arts among those who take part. The involvement of young people in these activities can be an important driver of wellbeing²⁹.

5.4.6 Existing Liberal Democrat policy on sport and culture (for example *Personal Best* (PP66, 2004), or *Art Figures* (PP38, 2000)) is generally supportive of the wellbeing agenda, and encourages wider participation. The link should be made explicit, however, and we recommend that local and national governments should be wary of cutting budgets for sporting and cultural activities in this time of austerity. Spending decisions should be made having regard to the wellbeing benefits that spending in these areas brings, not merely by reference to a "business case". Sporting and cultural activities should therefore be supported even if they are not commercially viable, if they bring substantial social benefits, by promoting healthy communities and the widest possible opportunities for self-fulfilment.

5.4.7 Wellbeing considerations should also be taken into account in determining how spending in these areas is allocated. In general, priority should be given to promoting widespread participation, while providing some support for those cultural activities, particularly among the performing arts, which have in the past received financial support, because they cannot be sustained solely through commercial or charitable means. Emphasis should be placed on ensuring that outreach programmes are pursued by cultural bodies, particularly among the performing arts, which receive public support, so as to bring the arts to as wide an audience as possible. Emphasis should also be placed on achieving a regional spread and avoiding concentrating resources in London and other major cities.

5.4.8 A comprehensive programme of adult education has long been at the heart of Liberal Democrat policy. But adult education not only stretches the mind. It also has significant benefits in enabling people to achieve new aims, to acquire new skills necessary to adapt to a changing world and to build confidence.

5.4.9 The value of adult education to personal wellbeing is recognised in *Investing in Talent* (PP90, 2009), but this paper mainly covers formal institutions, qualifications, and economic skills. There is also a role for less formal adult education, perhaps provided by volunteers. We believe that these should be encouraged in local communities as part of the wider development of community activities.

5.4.10 Volunteering and charity fundraising provides strength to the social fabric, by spreading awareness of the needs of others and by increasing the sense of interdependence of those who give and those who need and by fostering a sense of community endeavour, benefiting giver and receiver alike. Recently the party has shown its commitment to the voluntary sector and volunteering through *Community Futures* (PP98, 2011). The party should continue to promote volunteering to help individual wellbeing and community cohesion.

²⁹ Work of the Young Voices Foundation.

5.5 Families and Early Years

5.5.1 Family Relationships

5.5.1.1 One of the greatest determinants of our wellbeing is the nature of our relationships within our family. For example, marriage is associated with improved happiness; divorce the reverse. Having children provides both challenges and rewards to parents. Family experiences are central to children's development, and family break-up tends to affect children more than their parents.

5.5.1.2 As we argue throughout this paper, people must of course be fully in control of their own relationships and family circumstances, and this is clearly not an area where government should seek to compel or even encourage people to follow particular patterns.

5.5.1.3 However it is clear that there are things that public policy can do to support people in the actions they take to improve their own quality of life.

5.5.2 Older People

5.5.2.1 As people age, they often face a range of new challenges to their quality of life. This is an area clearly the government must continue to support. More broadly, concern for maintaining older people's quality of life should be at the heart of any decision taken affecting them, whether by government or other institutions, or those close to them.

5.5.3 Early Years

5.5.3.1 One of the greatest ways of all in which government can promote high quality of life is by investing in supporting development in the early years. The evidence is strong and constantly growing that the way in which children's brains develop, particularly in the 0-3 years age, is strongly influenced by their experiences. Forming positive relationships at that age supports neurological development in ways which help them to develop strong relationships throughout life, which are key factors in wellbeing. We support the continuing expansion of investment in early years as one of the greatest contributions that government can make to future high quality of life. It is no accident that countries such as Denmark and Sweden which invest strongly in this consistently perform well in international tables of quality of life (and this is also more broadly true of countries which place a high priority on family life). Health visitors can provide very useful support which is universally available and not stigmatised: we would like to see them given greater freedom from central government targets, so they can focus on addressing the real needs of the families they work with.

5.5.3.2 Family Nurse Partnerships, a mentoring scheme for new mothers facing any kind of social exclusion, has existed in the USA now since 1977 and is only just being tested out in the UK. We know that this scheme can dramatically cut welfare dependency, produce healthier eating, better behaviour, less crime and less child abuse and that the effects carry on up until the baby is at least 28³⁰. This kind of proven intervention should now become more common.

³⁰ Goodman, A. (2006) *The Story of David Olds and the Nurse Home Visiting Program*, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Princeton. See also www.nursefamilypartnership.org.

5.5.3.3 Children are of course very dependent for their development on their parents and wider family, and the level of priority given to the importance of forming relationships and broader emotional development varies very widely between families. Liberal Democrat policy on supporting children's development is set out in *Stronger Families, Brighter Futures* (PP72, 2006), and we believe government should keep constantly under review the circumstances in which it should consider becoming directly involved in children's lives to help them maximise their own quality of life.

5.5.3.4 We strongly welcome the government's commitment to investing in the early years, and proposals for greater sharing of parental leave, which will also contribute both to child development directly and improved family life more generally.

5.5.4 Counselling and Support

5.5.4.1 The policies we have set out in chapter 3 to support relationship education both in schools and more broadly, including ante-natal and parenting support, should help relationships within families.

5.5.4.2 An important issue surrounding the provision of support and counselling services has been and remains the stigma attached to seeking them out; furthermore, those that most need such services have often been seen as those least likely to find and take advantage of them. To a certain extent this is being alleviated by new ways of delivering the services. Web-chat, telephone and e-mail services can be provided in a less forbidding way than traditional face-to-face counselling. Furthermore, there is some evidence that young people are less reluctant to seek out counselling than their elders. Just as it is perceived to be acceptable to be in therapy, so it may be becoming acceptable to be counselled.

5.5.4.3 Family breakdown and divorce are serious threats to wellbeing. This is particularly true of the effect of family breakdown on the children involved: the breakdown of parental relationships almost always causes children serious distress and in a significant minority of cases is a major cause of long-term unhappiness, with consequences including behavioural difficulties, poor educational achievement, and physical and emotional health problems³¹. One in three children in the UK will have been through their parents' separation before their 16th birthdays³².

5.5.4.4 We believe better and more comprehensive counselling and support services for children are essential, not limited to helping children cope with parental separation, but generally. These need to be more widely available, particularly in schools. Most secondary schools (about 73%) in England have some counselling available to students, but in the other three nations of the United Kingdom counselling is or will shortly be available in every post-primary school³³. Schools in England should make the same commitment.

5.5.4.5 Counselling and support services for separating couples are also essential, both to ease the pain of separation and to enable the process to take place in a more understanding and less confrontational manner. A strong economic case can be made that public money spent on helping to fund counselling and support services at an early stage avoids greater calls on the public purse later as social and behavioural problems become manifest and expensive. Relate

31 Lester Coleman and Fiona Glenn: *The Varied Impact of Couple Relationship Breakdown on Children: Implications for Practice and Policy*, 2010

32 *Kids in the Middle Coalition: Children and Parental Separation: Managing Conflict and Rethinking Support*, 2008

33 Since 2007 in Wales and Northern Ireland; commitment in Scotland for 2015.

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and other organisations in this field should be provided with sufficient funding to help reduce this major contributor to low wellbeing.

5.5.4.6 Investing in support before crisis points are reached can also have significant benefits. Parenting classes, for example, can significantly help, and we would like parenting classes to be more generally available.

5.5.4.7 The family justice system through which many troubled families pass also often contributes further to lowering quality of life. We call for the Family Justice Review to create a more family friendly, less adversarial system, encouraging far more mediation and other forms of alternative dispute resolution.

5.5.5 Whole Families

5.5.5.1 Liberal Democrats have long believed that in considering family policy – and the same goes for wellbeing policy in relation to families – we need to recognise that contemporary families come in all shapes and sizes. A particular concern is that the role of the extended family has been inadequately celebrated and encouraged in recent decades. This is probably truer of indigenous families than it is among immigrants to Britain. It is welcome that the role of the extended family is securing greater recognition as attitudes change.

5.5.6 Carers

5.5.6.1 Those who care for family members with particular needs also often suffer from severely reduced quality of life which is insufficiently recognised and supported by society as a whole. Politicians have repeatedly made promises to improve the lot of carers, but implementing these promises is rarely given priority. The wellbeing of such carers should be given renewed attention. Local governments must lead, but national government can encourage innovation through the use of award schemes, and to disseminate best practice. Local authorities should be more accountable for the quality of services they offer, incorporating direct feedback from their users.

5.6 Our Surroundings

5.6.1 There is now strong research evidence to back up our common sense belief that our immediate surroundings have a strong direct impact on the quality of our lives³⁴. Factors which we know are particularly important are having sufficient personal space; the presence of open space and access to fresh air and sunlight; and the presence of elements of the natural world such as trees, plants and grass, especially in urban areas. There is evidence, for example of a link between green spaces in the vicinity and lower incidence of diseases, including anxiety and depression, particularly for children and less well-off people.³⁵ The presence of intrusive noise, particularly over long periods of time, can also have severe negative impact on quality of life. In general those who live in rural areas enjoy surroundings which contribute more to wellbeing than people who live in urban areas, and our proposals therefore focus predominantly on the latter.

34 Diener E et al: *Well-being for Public Policy* 147-160 (Oxford 2009)

35 Maas et al, *Journal of Epidemiology Community Health* 2009

5.6.2 Liberal governments in another era introduced a range of measures, including the world's first Planning Act, to improve people's quality of life by tackling infectious diseases and other factors which reduced health and wellbeing. Liberal Democrats now wish to take the lead in making use of the latest evidence to achieve a new round of improvement in people's quality of life – taking into account always the contribution which conventional economic development properly plays in improving wellbeing.

5.6.3 We will make the promotion of quality of life the central goal of the planning framework. As planning frameworks, at all levels, are reviewed, they should incorporate the consideration of factors which research tells us do have a demonstrable impact in improving wellbeing. These will include:

- Inclusion of sufficient open space, including active open public recreation facilities available to citizens of all ages. Specifically, DEFRA should take forward its previous commitment to the creation of a new designation to protect green areas of particular importance to local communities similar to that used for areas of special scientific interest. Councils should take the lead in identifying appropriate areas and taking forward their designation, which is likely often to be popular within their communities.
- Inclusion of community gardens and allotments providing relaxation, exercise and fresh produce.
- Appropriate consideration for facilities such as local nature reserves and wildlife corridors
- In urban environments, inclusion of trees, which soften the urban landscape and provide improved air quality and protection against noise
- Zoning for a mix of business and residential land use to reduce commuting journeys, which are a significant source of stress.
- Access to good quality, integrated, accessible public transport; our proposals are set out in *Fast Track Britain* (PP85, 2008)
- Explicit action to handle the impact of noise, including as appropriate locally:
 - Zoning of land use to minimise noise effects.
 - Design features such as quieter engines, insulation in buildings and thickly-planted trees along roads and railways.
 - Noise abatement services from local authorities.
- Designing neighbourhoods, streets and outdoor spaces that encourage active transportation and recreation, including walking and bicycling. The New York City *Active Design Guidelines* (published in 2010) provide a model of enlightened ideas in this respect.

5.6.4 Our existing proposals to help protect and promote the natural environment, as set out in *Our Natural Heritage* (PP93, 2009) are also very important in this area.

5.6.5 Role of Community

5.6.5.1 The impact of our surroundings on our quality of life is also related to our sense of link to place, and to communities. This is turn closely linked to maintaining an area in a pleasant condition (evidence of the impact of even minor environmental degradation on a range of

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factors, including quality of life, is well known³⁶). Derelict surroundings, broken windows and graffiti contribute to a sense of hopelessness, which reduces both quality of life and an area's economic prospects. Communities should be empowered to take action in both private and public areas, stepping in if owners fail to maintain their property to the significant detriment of others' quality of life. This should also cover noise pollution.

5.6.5.2 The importance of environmental factors, including noise, to quality of life should form part of the PSHE curriculum covering wellbeing.

5.6.5.3 As outlined above, open space is an important community asset, especially in urban areas. The sale of many school playing fields has had a significant impact on reducing quality of life of local people, both because of the loss of the open space itself, and of opportunities for exercise. A petition of a significant proportion of the local population should be able to call a referendum on any future proposed disposals of public open space, including school playing fields, including Academies.

5.7 Our Communities

5.7.1 Two of the most important factors in wellbeing are strong positive relationships and the extent of our sense of security; strong local communities are vital to both. There is strong research evidence that interactions with family and neighbours, civic engagement, and feelings of trust have all shown strong positive associations with the wellbeing of individuals within a community in a way that levels of wealth do not.³⁷ Such social capital is a critical element of the 'hidden wealth' upon which our society depends, and it generally rests in large part on non-commercial relationships.

5.7.2 More mobile populations, the poor design of living spaces, and the natural reticence of people living in big cities are all challenges to communities and people's sense of community. Modern internet and social networking tools have the potential to break down barriers, but there remains a strong role for local councils and councillors to show leadership in their local communities.

5.7.3 Liberal Democrat policy commitments to support the community are widely set out, but we recommend here specifically the following:

- Councils should support community activity through recognising it by introducing initiatives such as "Mayor's Civic Awards", or similar.
- Councils should support the introduction of systems which then support local community activity, particularly through timebanks.
- Local government should put a more explicit focus on promoting local community networks. The types of action required would clearly depend on local needs, but may include:
 - Greater monitoring of levels of social capital, including the use of survey data, distinguishing geographical areas and social groups.
 - Financial and other support for local community groups working in areas of need, especially poorer communities, or those bridging social divides.

³⁶ John F Helliwell and Robert D Putnam: *The social context of well-being* Phil. Trans R. Soc. Lond.(2004) and Diener E et al. *Well-being for Public Policy* 147-160 (Oxford 2009)

³⁷ For example, see *The social context of well-being* John F Helliwell and Robert D Putnam (2004) Phil. Trans R. Soc. Lond.

- Facilitation of local community groups generally, by providing places to meet and publicity.
- The greater use of online social networking tools to promote local discussion about issues of concern, including planning issues, and to promote open government.

5.8 Advertising

5.8.1 Commercial advertising is widely thought to have a negative effect on people's wellbeing. Although it plays a vital role in informing consumers of available choice, it also promotes unattainable stereotypes and unhealthy lifestyles, pressurises people to borrow and consume more, and ratchets up the race for status. There is also particular concern on the effects of advertising on children, especially the promotion of unhealthy eating and the use of techniques of subliminal suggestion.

5.8.2 Our paper *Real Women* (PP91, 2009) considered the issue of pressure on women, and amongst other proposals recommended strengthening advertising regulations over the use of enhanced body images – 'airbrushing'.

5.8.3 In keeping with our general approach of equipping and informing individuals to make their own choices, we recommend that:

- Advertising and consumerism should be covered in schools' PSHE curriculum. Children should be taught an awareness of advertising strategies, and consider the effect of consumption and the race for status on personal wellbeing.
- Public health and wellbeing education should also cover the harmful effects of advertising. They should also have budgets to conduct advertising campaigns promoting healthy choices.
- The protection of children presents a special case, and in line with the approach to children set out in 5.5.3.3 above, we should keep the development of the evidence base for further restrictions on advertising to children, which would permit more parental control over their children's exposure to advertising, under review.

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This paper has been approved for debate by the Federal Conference by the Federal Policy Committee under the terms of Article 5.4 of the Federal Constitution. Within the policy-making procedure of the Liberal Democrats, the Federal Party determines the policy of the Party in those areas which might reasonably be expected to fall within the remit of the federal institutions in the context of a federal United Kingdom. The Party in England, the Scottish Liberal Democrats, the Welsh Liberal Democrats and the Northern Ireland Local Party determine the policy of the Party on all other issues, except that any or all of them may confer this power upon the Federal Party in any specified area or areas. The Party in England has chosen to pass up policy-making to the Federal level. If approved by Conference, this paper will therefore form the policy of the Federal Party on federal issues and the Party in England on English issues. In appropriate policy areas, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland party policy would take precedence.

Many of the policy papers published by the Liberal Democrats imply modifications to existing government public expenditure priorities. We recognise that it may not be possible to achieve all these proposals in the lifetime of one Parliament. We intend to publish a costings programme, setting out our priorities across all policy areas, closer to the next general election.

Working Group on Quality of Life

Note: Membership of the Working Group should not be taken to indicate that every member necessarily agrees with every statement or every proposal in this Paper.

Jeremy Hargreaves (Chair)
Lord Alderdice
Simon Beard
Jane Chelliah-Manning
Rev Charles Cotton
Matthew Green
Jo Hayes
Eunice Hinds
Peter Kunzmann
Tim Leunig
Lord Marks QC
Jo Swinson MP

Staff:

Debbie Enever

Comments on the paper are welcome and should be addressed to:

Policy Unit, Liberal Democrats, 4 Cowley Street, London SW1P 3NB

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Liberal Democrat Image, PO BOX 443, Farnborough, Hampshire, GU14 4DA

Tel: 01252 510 005 Email: libdemimage@ldimage.demon.co.uk

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