

HILLINGDON LIBERAL DEMOCRATS



Autumn Conference
Report 2020



Record Attendance at First Virtual Conference

In a series of firsts, the Liberal Democrats have held their first virtual party conference under a new Leader elected after virtual hustings and with its first shot at policies needed to cope with a new pandemic.

Conference also debated and agreed important new policies on Europe and Universal Basic Income. Altogether twelve policy motions were decided in addition to

speeches from the Party leader, the leaders of the Welsh and Scottish Liberal Democrats and leading party spokespersons.

Opportunities were taken to hold party officers to account, for training, for the new thinking of fringe meetings and a virtual exhibition. More than 3000 party members attended.

Our New Approach To Europe



What should be the party's policy for Europe when the Brexit transition ends in December 2020? That was the key and most hard fought debate at conference this year.

Christine Jardine MP introduced the 'official' motion condemning a no-deal solution to Brexit and calling on the party to campaign vigorously against measures that harm British agriculture or industry. It demanded that the government stick to its legal commitments in the withdrawal agreement, sought the maintenance of the existing rights of EU citizens within the UK but concluded with the suggestion that the party keep 'all options open' for the long term including membership of the EU.

This sparked a battle of amendments to strengthen the motion which dominated the debate. The more radical amendment, calling for an immediate campaign to re-join, was defeated by the party establishment which put its weight behind a softer but definite commitment to 'support a longer term objective of UK membership of the EU'. The amended resolution is now party policy.

Universal Basic Income

A Radical Social Security Policy

Conference committed the party to campaign for a radical change to our social security guaranteeing all long term UK residents a minimum level of income, recovered from those earning above the UBI through the tax system.

Ed Davey and Layla Moran both included UBI in their leadership campaigns. As Ed Davey said ‘our economic system leaves too many people without enough money to meet their basic requirements and fails to value properly vital unpaid work like caring’.

Policy details and integration with the rest of the tax and social security system including pensions and support for students has been left to the Federal Policy Committee.

This policy is likely to prove controversial. If UBI is set too low it won’t be worth the complications to our benefit system; if too high, taxes will rise substantially. Although the idea, which dates back to Thomas More’s *Utopia*, has been piloted in other countries it has not been adopted on a large scale.

A Green Recovery From Covid



The Party passed 3 resolutions to deal with Covid, to cope with its economic fall out and remedy the impact on public debate.

Conference commended the health and other workers managing the crisis, condemned the government failures, particularly track and trace, and called for an enquiry into government policy including the letting of Covid contracts without tendering. The motion called for recognition of long Covid, more spending on mental health support and extra help for the disabled and BAME people most vulnerable to Covid.

The disruption to the economy gives an opportunity for rebalancing in favour of a better future. Government spending should be refocused on green projects with suitable retraining for those made unemployed during the crisis. Encouragement should be given to new ways of working from home and to walking and cycling. In return for government aid, companies should give binding commitments to reducing emissions. Enhanced international co-operation with the EU and at CoP26, the UN climate conference, would allow more ambitious targets for reducing greenhouse gases.

Conference noted the fall in public trust in government during the pandemic and called for better press supervision as recommended by Leveson, the use of citizens’ juries to influence the choices government makes on Covid policy and greater weight for the Chair of The UK Statistics Authority.



‘I will be the voice of the 9 million carers’

Ed Davey used the opportunity of his first leader’s speech to introduce his background as a carer, first during his childhood for his mother and more recently as a father for a son with disabilities. As part of promising to be the party for carers he backed Universal Basic Income. Carers would be the biggest beneficiaries, he said.

In response to the recent general election Ed stressed the need for the party to listen and

respond to the day to day needs of the people while remaining strongly pro-European and Internationalist. **‘We must also lead the way to a new economy.** One that’s fairer. And greener. An economy offering real hope and opportunity for everyone.’

He also stressed the importance of next year’s Scottish Election which could determine whether we remain a United Kingdom. **Tony Little**