



Liberal Democrats

Policy: Police and Crime

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The Liberal Democrats believe Peel's Principles of policing should comprise the basis of all police activities.

Policy

The Liberal Democrats believe:

- Repealing victimless crimes and pursuing a more balanced approach to traffic laws will allow more police resources to be used for, rather than against, the public.
- Strict limits on police power, vigorously enforced, will assist police to carry out their duties with the full cooperation and trust of the community.
- The traditional features of criminal law in Western civilisation — including freedom from arbitrary arrest, freedom from 'double jeopardy', the right to silence, the right to a fair, speedy and public trial, and the presumption of innocence— are critical for a free society and must be preserved, including for terrorism offences.
- Rehabilitation, restitution for victims, deterrence and incapacitation (that is, removing perpetrators from society to avoid further harm) are legitimate principles for sentencing. Retribution by the state is not a legitimate principle of sentencing.
- There should be no re-introduction of the death penalty.
- Legal aid for low income defendants and compensation for victims of crime should be maintained.

Discussion

Criminal law exists to serve us, and should be limited to behaviours that cause harm to others without their consent.

Under this approach, all citizens can support and help uphold the law. Indeed, only through widespread voluntary adherence to the law can respect for the law be maintained. The maintenance of public support is integral to effective policing.

Police officers are members of the public we employ to uphold the law. The police are part of the public, not a force separate from and in opposition to the public, and at all times civilians.

The cooperative relationship between the public and police relies not on police being influenced by perceived popular causes and public opinion, but on the police providing impartial service to the law, respecting the role of the legislature and judiciary, and upholding clearly defined and vigorously enforced rules of police behaviour. Coercive powers should be used only to the minimum extent necessary to uphold the law, and police should be accountable for their use of these powers (individually in extreme cases).

Police systems and reporting must have adequate checks and balances to protect individual rights (including those of police officers), and must be independently scrutinised to protect against abuse of power. Peel's Principles of policing should comprise the basis of all police activities.