

A Liberal Wales

Purpose

This paper portrays our vision of a Liberal Wales. It aims to begin a conversation within the Welsh Liberal Democrats and beyond about our aspirations for Wales.

The paper addresses, as did Beveridge, those key areas of our lives which are essential to Liberal Democrat aspirations of an open, tolerant and united society where nobody is enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity.

This paper will not deal with detailed policy solutions. It intends to outline those key areas of policy that the Welsh Liberal Democrats will seek to develop before the next Welsh General election, and the 'frame' through which we will develop policy in coming elections. It is intended to provide context and set out the challenges facing the development of a truly Liberal Wales.

This paper will inform our policy development plans from 2018 onwards. Further details can be found at the end of this document.

Who we are

The Welsh Liberal Democrats exist to build and safeguard a fair, free and open society, in which we seek to balance the fundamental values of liberty, equality and community, and in which no one shall be enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity.

We champion the freedom, dignity and well-being of individuals, we acknowledge and respect their right to freedom of conscience and their right to develop their talents to the full. We aim to disperse power, to foster diversity and to nurture creativity. We believe that the role of the state is to enable all citizens to attain these ideals, to contribute fully to their communities and to take part in the decisions which affect their lives.

We need a Beveridge Report for the 21st Century.

75 years ago, we – our country – made a promise.

It was a promise that each and every one of us would have the opportunity to get on in life; to be healthy, to be well educated, to have a place to call home, and that there would be a safety net for when the going got tough.

We made a promise that we would eliminate five ‘giant evils’ that were holding people back, keeping people poor and shutting people out. These were Want, Squalor, Ignorance, Disease and Idleness. Far from having disappeared, the challenges facing society in 1942 have only changed.

- Nearly 1 in 4 people in Wales are living in poverty, including 200,000 children - 60% of those in homes with parents who work, where households are without the resources they need to live safe, secure and fulfilling lives.
- There is a 15 year gap in healthy life expectancy between those living in the most and least deprived areas of Wales, whilst 800,000 people in Wales living with a long-term illness.
- Rough sleeping has increased by 30%, 42% of the poorest fifth households spend over a third of their income on housing and 9,000 people wait more than 5 years for social housing.
- Around 26,000 children at risk of leaving primary school unable to read well, failing our youngest and limiting their opportunities in life.
- Wales’ Gross Value Added per head is only 73% of the UK average, with Wales’ unemployment rate six points above the UK average at 4.9%. Where people don’t have the opportunities in the job market to build a life for themselves.

And we need to add a sixth,

- Half a million people in Wales reporting feeling lonely, which affects our physical and mental health and wellbeing and holds us back from accessing the opportunities available to us to play our part in our communities and in our economy.

This promise formed the basis of the original Beveridge Report in 1942 which transformed British society. Beveridge said;

The State in organising security should not stifle incentive, opportunity, responsibility; in establishing a national minimum, it should leave room and encouragement for voluntary action by each individual to provide more than the minimum for himself and his family.”
Beveridge Report, 1942.

Many aspects of Beveridge’s diagnoses and solutions have stood the test of time. But the world Beveridge knew is, in many ways, unrecognisable. We need to be ready to think, as he did, about new challenges and new solutions. We need new ideas that will be relevant for the next 75 years.

In 1942 the Beveridge Report considered social security and public services. In a rapidly changing economy with economic stagnation, we must combine social liberalism and economic liberalism.

We need an economy that offers opportunity to all. A resilient, green and sustainable economy which offers everyone the security of well-paid job, that gives each and every one of us the freedom to create and grasp opportunity, to take risks, and to succeed. An economy to sustain opportunity, quality public services, fairness and freedom for every individual.

We should aspire to create an economy that empowers Wales and its people. A society in which power is held in the hands of people and communities to lead and shape change. We must challenge the power of vested interests, whether in our democracy, our economy, or power structures in our society and reject an imbalance of power in our society. We need a society in which power is for everyone, and the powerful are held to account.

The Welsh Liberal Democrats will set out a plan to tackle six evils that hold people back, exacerbate inequality, and restrict access to opportunity. We need liberal solutions which offer hope, optimism, and opportunity to all to shape their own destiny.

Over the coming years, we will set out our blueprint for a socially liberal Wales that creates opportunity, unlocks talent, harnesses entrepreneurialism, and creates a strong, inclusive economy. That way we can realise the radical, liberal Wales we want.

Let it not be forgotten that it was liberals who transformed Britain, paving the way for the welfare state and the NHS as we know it, and it'll be the Liberal Democrats who'll do it again. We will create stronger, fairer economy in a fair and Liberal society.

I look forward to hearing your ideas for how we realise our vision, and hope that all members will take this opportunity to help set out a radical liberal offer to the people of Wales.

Yours,

Jane Dodds
Leader, Welsh Liberal Democrats

Our vision for a Liberal Wales

Liberalism is optimistic, hopeful, and believes in the power of people. It exists to build a fair and free society where nobody is enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity. A Liberal society is one where opportunity and power is for everyone, and where no one is held back by their upbringing. It seeks to create a society in which people have the power to change the shape their own destiny, and that anyone who struggles gets a helping hand.

This is the Wales we will create.

We will create a fair and Liberal Wales where each of us has the **freedom, the opportunity, and the security to shape our own destiny**, to take risks, and to achieve our potential. This will be a Wales that has a **strong, resilient, and inclusive economy** which harnesses potential, creates opportunity, and offers each of us a decent standard of living.

It will be a Wales where **entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation** are central to our economy. Our economy will support individuals to grasp opportunity, to take risks and to succeed in life. Our **economy will be built on diversity and creativity** to create opportunity and sustainable growth for each of us. Our communities and workers will have a stake in an economy that is responsive to local needs and harnesses community resources. It will be an inclusive economy which offers us all hope and where nobody is left behind.

It will be a Wales that champions **quality public services which support thriving, creative and diverse communities**, enabling everyone to lead fulfilled lives with the support they need to get ahead. A Liberal Wales will give people and communities the power and freedom to shape and deliver services that support strong, healthy, and inclusive communities.

We will be an open, tolerant and inclusive Wales where each of us is **free to be ourselves**. Opportunity will be for all and no one will be held back by their upbringing, and our diversity is celebrated. Every aspect of our lives, our economy, our public services and our democratic institutions will **be inclusive and accessible to all**, responsive to the needs of every individual.

A Liberal Wales will recognise the transformative power of education to provide everyone with a fair start in life. It will be a successful, globally-recognised and **inclusive education system which enables and inspires individuals to shape their own destiny**. It will be a truly lifelong education system which empowers people from cradle to grave. Our education system will **eliminate disadvantage** based on income, race, or ethnicity so nobody is held back by their background or upbringing.

Good health is essential to living a free, fulfilling and successful life. Poor health holds people back and limits our ability to grasp opportunity. To create a fair, Liberal Wales we must **promote and enable people to lead healthy lives**; including our **housing**, our **environment**, and access to **health and social care services**. It will be a system where everyone can access the care and support services they need to be **independent and play a part in their communities** for as long as they want. It will be a health service that not only gets the basics right but gives staff the **freedom to innovate, to be creative**, and deliver the patient-centred care they want to provide.

Ours will be a global Wales. A connected, outward looking Wales, playing our part in **creating a fairer, more tolerant and inclusive world**. A Wales recognised on the world stage for our culture,

language and heritage, our entrepreneurialism, and our education system. Every child will have the **opportunity to be a global citizen**, valuing not only our own culture and heritage but those from across the world. We will be the internationalist Wales we need to create a fairer world.

A Liberal Wales will have the power it needs to create opportunity; where our **communities and our people have the power to shape their own destiny**. We will create a truly democratic Wales where power lies in the hands of people and communities. We will create a society where **power is for everyone, and the powerful are held accountable**. We will break down monopolies of power to create opportunity and fairness for all. Wales will be one nation in a federal state, with power vested in people and communities across the United Kingdom.

Never again will the next generation be left worse off than we were. **Living standards** have stagnated, **poverty** has grown and an increasing number of individuals and communities feel left behind by the global economy. People are **disillusioned with a political process** that has seemingly forgotten them, and a UK that has left Wales behind. We must leave a better, more prosperous Wales to the next generation. We must create a Wales where everyone has a stake in our economy and a voice in our society.

We will create a Wales that is **hopeful**. We will be an **open, tolerant and fair** Wales that provides a home and a sanctuary to people fleeing persecution. We will be **forward thinking and radical** about how we address the challenges of the present, and meet the challenges of the future.

Poverty (Want)

Poverty is antithetical to Liberalism. It destroys opportunity, restricts the freedom of those it afflicts and entrenches inequality. We believe that society should guarantee a basic standard of living, a safety net for its citizens, and opportunity for self-improvement and advancement.

We will provide the opportunity for individuals to break the cycle of poverty that has held too many people and communities back. We will create an economy and a society of opportunity which provides a genuine route out of poverty, and enable people and communities to build a better future together.

We will create opportunity so everyone has the opportunity to escape the economic poverty and the poverty of ambition which has held our communities back. We will give people and communities the resources and the confidence to grasp opportunity and lead fulfilling lives.

No generation will be worse off than their parents. Everyone should be able to provide for themselves and their families, even while our economy and society exclude individuals and communities from accessing opportunities.

Health and Social Care (Disease)

Poor health limits our freedom to live our lives to the fullest.

In a fair and Liberal Wales individuals will enjoy seamless access to a range of health and social care services accessible in the right place and at the right time to deliver high quality services and person-centred care. Our health and social care systems will enable people to live healthily and live independently for as long as possible, not held back by poor health. Our social care system will provide individuals with support and equal access for all, regardless of their background. It will not discriminate on sexuality, gender, ethnicity, income, or geography; ensuring everyone has an equal right to live a long, healthy life.

It will harness technological developments to create a truly accessible and empowering system of care where collaboration between services is encouraged, patients and professionals work together to co-produce care, and health and social care professionals are supported to provide the quality care they want to provide.

Our vision is of a truly cradle to grave health and social care system that educates and empowers people to achieve and maintain good health and take control of their health. Ours will be a truly compassionate, properly funded, and inclusive care system that supports healthy lives. Supporting healthy lives will drive wider priorities and developments, from the homes we build, to the environment we build and maintain, and changing behaviours so we all lead healthier lives.

Housing and our Environment (Squalor)

Access to safe, affordable, and good quality housing is an essential part of a fair and free and liberal society.

In a fair and Liberal Wales everyone will have access to affordable good quality housing which supports stable, healthy lives. Everyone will have the opportunity to have a roof over their head. Children and families across Wales will have access to the care and support they need when family and support networks break down.

Scandalously, it is the marginalised who are let down by society when our housing system fails. Whether it is victims of domestic violence, young LGBT individuals, those who've been in care or people experiencing mental ill health. We will ensure that those who we should be doing the most to protect can get the help they need and don't fall through the cracks in support services.

A housing market that provides choice and security will be a central component of ensuring that Wales is a healthy, connected nation; tackling loneliness, creating inclusive and accessible communities, and ensuring that all homes in Wales are habitable.

Everyone will live in clean communities which support a healthy environment and healthy lives. All communities will have access to accessible, welcoming and green public spaces that maintain healthy lives and reduce isolation.

Education (Ignorance)

We know that a good education sets a child up for life. Their achievements, skills, even their future happiness, hinge on giving children the very best start in life. Our educators will have the confidence, the skills, and the resources to prepare our children for life. The next generation will be confident, inspired and well-rounded citizens empowered to shape their own destiny.

In a fair and Liberal Wales education will be accessible for all, meaning our further and higher education systems will connect positively to our economy, to other modes of learning, and will support people of all ages and build on research to help our economy grow. There will be parity of esteem between vocational and academic education, where everyone has the opportunity to improve and put their talents and abilities to use.

We will facilitate lifelong learning to encourage people to embrace the future, allow them to continually improve their skills, and give individuals the ability to maintain competitive and contribute positively to our economy.

Our education system will provide opportunity for all, giving everyone the chance to succeed regardless of their background. Success will depend on an individual's willingness to learn, not their ability to pay. It will be a liberated and inclusive education which all children can connect positively to the wider world. It will be a truly multilingual and multicultural education system which provides every child with the opportunity to meaningfully engage in Welsh language and culture, and with languages and cultures from across the world.

Opportunity (Idleness)

Wales must be a nation of opportunity. An opportunity for everyone to leave free, fulfilling and healthy lives. We will create a dynamic and creative economy which supports good public services, a good quality of life for all, and create a resilient nation.

We will create an economy where small and medium-sized enterprises are supported to grow, flourish and innovate; connecting positively to the global economy. An economy that recognises the vital role these businesses play in their communities.

Everyone will have the opportunity to experience Welsh and global culture and heritage, to be global citizens in an open, tolerant and united Wales which embraces the world around us.

Our economy will promote entrepreneurship, reduce barriers to work, and provide access to skills, advice and training so everyone can be competitive in our economy. It will be a sustainable economy that utilises Wales' strengths, delivers prosperity for Wales today and harnesses the power of our natural environment to protect our environment for generations to come.

Loneliness

Loneliness limits opportunity, impacts on our health, and leads to a less fulfilling life. Loneliness and isolation limit our individual freedoms and liberty. We will create connected and inclusive communities which give people access to public services, accessible public spaces, and promotes a more tolerant society.

Loneliness affects most those who face discrimination and stigmatisation in society, further reducing their individual liberty, and restricting their access to and readiness to take on opportunity. Loneliness affects our physical and mental health, our productivity, and our contribution to communities and society.

A fair and Liberal Wales will ensure that nobody is limited from leading fulfilling, connected, and meaningful lives because they lack the opportunity to remain connected to people, services, and our economy. Our Wales will promote rural and urban connectivity here at home, and global connectivity with communities and people across the world.

What are our next steps?

This vision sets out a starting point for a conversation.

Using the vision we have begun to outline here, we'll consult with members, the public and experts on the six evils holding people back and the problems that drive them. This will help us ensure that we present meaningful solutions in a radical, liberal way.

This paper forms an agenda for future conference motions. We will bring forward detailed policy papers on each of the evils identified in this paper, giving members the opportunity to debate ideas and present their own ideas for tackling social and economic inequality in Wales.

We'll consult with a range of organisations, service users, and the public on the specific areas we've identified to create robust, meaningful solutions which resonate with the public.

Welsh Liberal Democrat Spokespeople will work with members and expert organisations to develop and refine these ideas, ensuring that all solutions we present meet our vision of an open, tolerant and united Wales in which nobody is enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity.