

# Proposals for the future of the Liberal Democrat Party in England for English Council Meeting: 2 December 2017

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## 1. Executive Summary

The English Council Executive set up the English Review Group to consult with members of the English Party and bring forward proposals for reform of the English Party structure. The consultation proposals covered 4 differing visions of the future structure and members were asked to rank the options in order of preference. Overwhelmingly, 70% of those who responded voted to retain the English Party in some form; however, many expressed a desire to see changes. This proposal sets out the future structure and management of the English Party; it is supported by the Chair of the English Party, Liz Leffman, and ECE.

The two proposals to Abolish the English Party received 30% of the first preference votes; on a response rate of 2% of the membership, this represents just 0.6% of the membership expressing a strong desire for this option. Despite this, and aware that it has generated strong feelings, the English Review Group considered this option but concluded that it could not be achieved without a major change to the federal constitution, which is beyond their remit.

The key changes are as follows:

1. The English Council is dissolved and replaced by an AGM which will take place in the main hall at the Autumn conference.
2. The English Council Executive is replaced by an English Board consisting of the Regional Chairs and the Chair of Young Liberals. Directly elected members will be the English Party Chair, English Party Treasurer, Vice Chair Candidates and Vice Chair Standards. There will be no other directly elected members.
3. English Party representatives on Federal Board committees will report to the English Board but will not be voting members.
4. At the moment, each Region has a different number of officers; – there will be a core of 5 elected officers, one of which will have responsibility for Standards (disciplinary and local party matters) and each Region will be required to have an executive member with responsibility for Compliance. Regions will be able to customise the other positions on their executive and there will be a list of mandatory roles to be fulfilled.
5. Terms of office will be two years.

6. The proposals have been discussed with Compliance and they are happy that this is workable and deliverable in terms of One Member One Vote elections.
7. Overall, the changes result in a streamlined and more transparent and accountable structure for the English Party, with regions having a greater say in the key decision-making processes. Campaigning and Policy are both strengthened at the regional level, as is the provision of training.

## 2. Context

The Liberal Democrat party has been striving to reform and improve its governance structures to simplify the way in which it works, improve transparency and accountability and to ensure both that the party is in touch with its members and that the members understand better how the party operates. The Federal Executive, chaired by President Sal Brinton, undertook a major constitutional and governance review of the party, commencing after the 2015 General Election and reporting back to Autumn Conference in 2016. The results are detailed in the paper [Towards a More Effective Party Governance](#).

The consultation process conducted by the Federal Party yielded over 5000 responses and revealed a considerable level of dissatisfaction with the English Party, particularly concerning the lack of transparency and accountability; many of these comments and reflections lay outside the remit for the federal party review, as a result of which, the President, Sal Brinton, suggested that the party in England carry out its own more extensive governance review. This paper is largely in response to this but also in recognition of the need to move to One Member One Vote within the English party.

The English Party's own review, initiated in 2015 but put on hold during the Federal Party's review, was revisited. In Autumn 2016, the English Council Executive agreed to set up a review group with representatives from each of the eleven regions. The English Review Group (ERG) was given the remit to consult with members on the structure and roles of the English Party and bring forward a proposal aimed at creating a viable structure that addressed not only the issues raised by previous federal party consultation but also looked to how One Member One Vote might be applied/ enacted within the English Party. The ERG looked at all the roles carried out by the English Party, those carried out on its behalf by the Federal Party and the roles performed by the Regions and produced four workable alternatives for the future of the party in England. These formed the basis of the consultation put to all members of the English Party. Two proposals involved retaining the English Party: Evolution and Transformation; two proposals covered Abolition, one with powers to the regions and one with powers to the federal party. The results were intended to give an indication of the preferred 'direction of travel' by the members.

The English Review Group held a public consultation at Spring Conference and a web-based consultation which closed on 27 March 2017 with 1652 web-based responses, of which 355 included comments, and an additional 13 detailed written responses; this represents an approximately 2% response rate from the English Party membership. The consultation was intended to give an indication of the 'direction of travel' preferred by the members and not as a poll or referendum on a final solution. The results showed that the most popular scenario was 'Evolution' with 39% of respondents placing this as their first choice, 30% placed 'Transformation' first and the two scenarios involving Abolition of the English Party received first preferences of 17% and 13% for Abolition with powers going to the Regions and Abolition with powers going to the Federal Party respectively. In total, 30%

of those responding expressed a preference to abolish the English Party; this amounts to 0.6% of the of the English Party membership favouring Abolition.

The English Review Group has had considerable input and support from the Compliance Officer, Darren Briddock, and the proposals aim to address a number of compliance, constitutional and internal election issues that have been raised, with a view to facilitating more effective implementation and strengthening areas of weakness.

### 3. Response Themes

The members who put Option 1, Evolution, first and made comments tended to fall into a small number of groups. First there were a few members who admitted that they didn't know enough about the existing system and so could not make a judgement. An additional few members questioned why we were making changes to party structure at all, rather than concentrating on campaigning. However, most of the supporters of Evolution recognised that change was needed, but were concerned that the other options could be too drastic. In particular, some were concerned about the weaknesses in smaller regional parties if any other approach were chosen.

The members who put Option 2, Transformation, first and made comments, paralleled those who chose option 1 first. There were several who did not understand and others who asked why we were changing at all instead of concentrating on campaigning. Of those with a strong view, a number felt that OMOV needed to be applied to decisions that currently are taken 'in a completely hidden and undemocratic way' by the English Council and that as members of the Party they 'should be entitled to take part in decisions, such as appointments of officers and policy setting on internal party administrative matters, as well as national public policy'. These reinforced the view held by many that there should be an English Conference. Some members agreed that the English Party was needed to carry out many of the 'behind-the-scenes' activities, but that it did not require a huge structure to perform them effectively. Newer members, in particular, called for the simplification of an overly complicated structure.

Although options 3, 4 and 5 were presented as separate options in the survey, the responses that put these first showed a fair amount of overlap, particularly in their criticism of the current state of the English Party. There is also some evidence that respondents envisaged a hybrid of options 3 & 4 with some of the English Party's responsibilities going up to the Federal Party and some down to the Regional Parties, or even some regions having powers that other regions left in the hands of the Federal Party.

Some thought that an English party needed to be retained in the event of the breakup of the UK, or because there were already Welsh and Scottish State parties, or to co-ordinate the work of the regions. Many of the comments in this group expressed opposition towards the English Party as it is presently configured.

### 4. Core Themes and Proposals

As a result of the consultation, the English Review Group concluded that, with only 30% of respondents and just 0.6% of the membership expressing a preference for this option, the English Party should be retained but reformed. The proposals concentrate on how that is best achieved. They go as far as possible to streamline and slim down the structures; improve transparency and accountability whilst

ensuring key functions, such as candidate selection rules and upholding standards, are performed uniformly across the regions. As a state party the English Party remains one of the fundamental building blocks of the Federal Party.

- a) The proposed structure results from extensive discussions between the regional representatives of the English Review Group and inputs from the wider English Party membership; it contains elements of all four proposals with the aim of increasing clarity, democracy and constituency of structure at English, regional and local party levels.
- b) It is proposed that the English Council Executive is replaced by a smaller English board whose functions are clearly articulated and differentiated from those carried out at federal and regional level. The English board will comprise the Chairs of each region (or another regional officer delegated by the regional chair) and four directly elected officers:

1. **The English Party Chair**
2. **The English Party Treasurer**
3. **Vice-Chair for Candidates**
4. **Vice-Chair for Standards**

- c) The method of election will be by OMOV and the term of office, 2 years. The Chair of the English Party will be limited to two consecutive two-year terms.
- d) There will be three committees, each chaired by the relevant elected chair on the English Board:

**Finance and Compliance Committee for England** – chaired by the Treasurer of the English Party and comprising the respective regional treasurers and up to four co-opted members.

**Standards Committee for England** – chaired by the Vice-Chair for Standards of the party in England and comprising the elected officer for each region responsible for standards, formerly the Local Parties Committee Chair but for consistency to be re-named Standards, and up to four co-opted members.

**Candidates Committee for England** – chaired by the Vice-Chair for Candidates for the party in England and comprising the respective regional chairs of candidates and up to four co-opted members.

These committees aim to maintain the strong regional representation achieved at the English Board and so there will be no directly elected representatives; all three committees will be able to co-opt four voting members to provide additional expertise; take into account diversity: gender, BAME, disabilities etc., and geographic spread. Appointments to be recommended by the relevant committee, with acceptance or rejection by the English Board only on the basis that the appointments were not considered properly.

- e) **Young Liberals** will be represented on the English Board and each committee as they have the status of a region due to their membership rules.
- f) It is proposed that there will not be a Vice-Chair for Policy or a Vice-Chair for Campaigns at the English Board. These functions are performed at the Federal Party level and motions

on English-only policy are already considered at Federal Conference. The Federal Party committees for these functions, the **Federal Policy Committee** and the **Federal Communications and Elections Committee**, each have a place for an English Party representative. It is proposed that these positions are elected by OMOV and that the relevant elected representative also becomes the co-ordinator for the regional policy officers and the regional campaigns officers respectively.

- g) The English Party representatives on the **Federal Board** are the Chair of the English Party and one other. It is recommended that this person is elected by OMOV. The Treasurer of the party in England will be the representative on the **Federal Finance and Resources Committee**, as currently and as specified by the federal party.
- h) Three other federal committees require English Party representatives: **Federal Conference Committee, Federal People Development Committee and Federal International Relations Committee**. It is proposed the same OMOV elections as outlined above are introduced for these roles.
- i) The revised constitution should include provision for the establishment of formal English Party Committees covering “policy”, “communications and elections”, and “people development” to be chaired by the elected English party representative on the corresponding federal committee and comprise the appropriately tasked officer from each regional party.
- j) The six persons elected to these federal committees will not sit on the English Board but will report to the board and will be invited to attend as required.
- k) In recognition of the need to connect directly with members to increase openness, transparency and accountability, the appropriate reporting place for the English Party is an English conference. It is therefore recommended that **English Council is replaced by an English Annual General Meeting (AGM)** with voting by OMOV for those attending. The English AGM would be held at autumn federal conference.
- l) **Regions:** It is proposed that there is a standard structure in terms of the titles and functions performed in each region. There will be a common ‘core’ of five officers and the ability of regions to ‘customise’ the other positions. There will be a number of mandatory roles which can be performed by elected or appointed representatives.

<b>Elected representatives:</b>	<b>Mandatory roles:</b>
Chair	Compliance
Vice-Chair Standards	Campaigns
Treasurer	Digital
Secretary	Fundraising
Candidates Chair	Training
	Diversity
Customised reps: x ordinary members elected by region or x representatives from County/ Borough/ Unitary areas/	Membership

Local Party (x is number chosen by region)	
Conference Chair and Policy Chair appointed by region or elected by region	

It is recommended there are job specifications for the Chairs, officers and other named roles and that training is provided.

m) **Proposed Sub-committees:**

Development Sub-Committee comprising Chair plus 6 ordinary members  
 x-person Conference ) Elected by membership or appointed from officers and  
 x-person Policy ) ordinary members  
 x-person Candidates )  
 x-person Standards )

- n) It is proposed there is a maximum of two terms for the Regional Chair (excluding part terms) and no limit for other officers.
- o) Regions will be able to customise their executive and elect, for example, county or local party representatives; other additional elections will be conducted and arranged locally. It is important for the facilitation of effective OMOV regional elections by Head Office that the elected positions are the same across all regions.
- p) It is proposed that **new regional party constitutions** are introduced to take account of the new executive structures and incorporate the condition that elections will be electronic unless notice is given by a member in writing that they would like a postal vote. Note: 90% of membership have working email address. With regards to elections, it is proposed that the Returning Officer will be the Chair of Appeals Panel; the Acting RO: Head of Compliance and the Deputy Acting RO: Rest of Compliance Team.
- q) The capacity to merge regional parties and/or redraw regional boundaries be incorporated into the new constitutional settlements, with Regions enabled to take the lead where appropriate.
- r) The **English Appeals Panel** will remain in place and be strengthened. It is proposed the English Appeals Panel comprises: Chair; 2 Vice-Chairs (elected for 5-year terms); regional person appointed by each region. Using the Federal Party model, Regional Conferences would nominate a candidate and put their selection to a conference motion.
- s) It is proposed that the same rigour and consistency is applied to the **local party constitutions**; in particular it is recommended that we move to one model of electing officers.
- t) It is further proposed that the option for branches to hold their own funds is removed and ensure that branch funds are ringfenced and managed by local party treasurer who is legally responsible.

- u) It is further proposed that the option for new branches to hold their own funds is removed and ensure that branch funds are ringfenced and managed by local party treasurer who is legally responsible.
- v) It is proposed that the **default** preference for local parties should be that they are based on Local Authority boundaries rather than parliamentary boundaries as the latter are subject to more frequent and greater change. Local parties **will still be able to be based on parliamentary constituencies**, but it would no longer be the default.
- w) The issue of **Diversity** was addressed from a number of standpoints. Diversity falls within the remit of the Federal People Development Committee and is also covered by some regions, so far on a trial basis, by a Diversity officer; additionally, the party has appointed a Diversity Champion, Daisy Cooper. It is not proposed to duplicate these functions at the English Party level but to promote and reinforce the work being done at federal, regional and local party level and support the cultural change required to recognise and mitigate the effects of unconscious bias. However, in terms of our proposed board and committees at English Party level, our success in terms of Diversity depends on that achieved in the regions; the English Board and its committees are primarily made up of members elected in other elections, except the four members of the English Board; the three committees have some leeway to address diversity through the co-opted members route, but in all cases co-opted members are less than 1/3 of the existing membership. Up to a point, the English Party is dependent on the success at federal and regional party level and so it is incumbent on us to work with both to achieve success in this area.
- x) It is proposed that **Job Specifications and Key Performance Indicators** are introduced to facilitate both openness and transparency with regard to an elected person's remit and success in achieving their aims, as well as to enable voting members to better match candidates to the roles they are standing for.
- y) The ERG is cognisant of the 2015 Service Level Agreement between the English party and the federal party. However, at this stage it was felt that addressing the issues of accountability, transparency and effectiveness, as well as how to ensure OMOV is implemented, were best addressed through changes to the structure and roles of the English Party. The allocation of resources and discussions with the federal party and head office will be better dealt with once we have effective and transparent governance.
- z) The **membership database** will be held at federal level.

## 5. Proposed Structure

