



The Nature of Public Debate Policy Working Group: Remit

The Liberal Democrats' aim is to build a fair, free and open society, and to succeed as a political party to enable to us to help achieve this. The party's strategy sets out that we will aim to gain support by communicating what we stand for based on restoring fairness as the basis for our society and politics, in which everyone plays a fair part and is treated fairly; people and communities increasingly controlling their own lives and the direction of our society and politics; our belief that a better future is possible, if we work together; and the need to heal the nation's divides.

The remit of this group is to research and understand the issues around the developing challenges to high quality public debate, and develop policies in response to them which communicate these values and will attract support for our objective of building a liberal society.

The group will be expected to start from existing party policy on issues relevant to this remit, including on the Leveson inquiry, and then to build on them. The group is expected to consider and address Liberal Democrat principles on diversity and equalities in developing their proposals.

This group will:

- Develop up to three headline policies for a better approach to public discourse and debate which the party can communicate widely to win votes.
- Develop a manageable set of further proposals which will address the key issues in the field and give the party credibility with important stakeholders and interest groups

The group will particularly look at:

- The problem of 'fake news' and its use in shifting the basis of discussion for political objectives
- The role of facts and truth in public debate, and how promoting their central importance can be balanced with freedom of speech
- The role and meaning of public service broadcasting and the concept of 'balance' in the current climate of attitudes to truth and opinions
- The manipulation of news and information as a tool of state warfare, including to undermine countries' basic political structures
- The role and proper regulation of social media companies
- The challenges as well as the opportunities arising from widespread accessible online reporting of events by individual citizens, including the challenges they potentially pose to the 'reporting restrictions' regime
- Extremely hostile online behaviour in debating public issues, especially towards minority groups
- Citizens' control over their personal data in debating public issues online
- The viability and future role of conventional journalism in reporting and campaigning on issues of public concern
- What a liberal approach to promoting open and fair public discussion and debate should be in these circumstances
- Whether and how the UK's public democratic structures and institutions should change in response to these challenges
- Whether and how TV debates between political party leaders during election campaigns should be organised and made a formal part of the campaigns

The group will take evidence and consult widely from both within and outside the party. This evidence should inform the group's proposals, which will be presented alongside an analysis of costs and an Equalities Impact Assessment. A policy paper of no longer than 10,000 words should be produced for debate at Spring Conference 2020. Prior to that a consultative session should be held at Autumn Conference 2019, and a draft policy paper should be presented to the Federal Policy Committee by December 2019.