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# LIBERAL REFORM

## SOUTHPORT 2018 BRIEFING



**WERA HOBHOUSE MP**



**LAURA GORDON**



**STEPHEN SMITH**

**Fringe event - Saturday 10th March 9.30-11.00pm Ramada Plaza, Hesketh 2**

## **THE NORTHERN POWERHOUSE: LIBERALISM ENACTED, STATISM WRIT LARGE OR A VACUOUS SLOGAN?**

Whilst the political establishment has had its eyes firmly fixed on the challenges, debates and issues of Brexit, the Northern Powerhouse has silently fallen down the agenda of both the Government and its opposition. But where do the Liberal Democrats find themselves on this policy agenda? Join Liberal Reform with DCLG Spokesperson **Wera Hobhouse MP**, Sheffield Hallam PPC **Laura Gordon** and **Stephen Smith** from Transport for the North. Chaired by Liberal Reform Board Member, **Tom Morrison**.

### **LIBERAL REFORM DRINKS**



**Saturday 10th March 8-9pm**

We will be meeting for informal drinks in the bar of the Ramada Plaza in the Marine Brasserie area from 8 - 9pm on Saturday. Please come and say hello. We would be interested in your thoughts on the party's position and the role LR can play in its future.

## **LIBERAL REFORM SOUTHPORT CONFERENCE BRIEFING**

### **F4 Local Government and Housing**

This is a call for councils to be allowed to borrow more to build more social housing. While it's good to see the Party acknowledging that housing affordability is a big issue in many parts of England, the motion does not provide a programme that would deliver the scale of change required. Liberal Reform has submitted an amendment to address this, and we'd encourage supporting this (if accepted) as well as any other amendments that give the motion more teeth.

### **F5 Exit from Brexit**

It's not entirely clear why we are yet again passing a motion condemning Brexit, the negotiations around Brexit, and stating that the Party believes a referendum on the final deal is necessary. While still the biggest issue in British politics, and one that as negotiations narrow might finally see the Liberal Democrats attract significant electoral support, we cannot allow ourselves to become a 'reverse UKIP' party.

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# LIBERAL REFORM SOUTHPORT BRIEFING

## **F7 Every Child Empowered: Education for a Changing World (Education Policy Paper)**

While there is much to welcome in this paper, we have our doubts regarding what appears to be a weakening of the accountability framework for schools and teaching. Ditching standardised testings (SATs) in favour of teacher assessment at KS2 would remove any check on school performance from Primary. Though the motion states that all teacher assessment would be moderated, this risks overburdening our already stretched teaching workforce.

## **F8 A Rural Future: Time to Act (Rural Communities Policy Paper)**

This motions puts forward what appears to be a sensible approach to ensuring our more rural communities are not left behind due to infrastructure and housing challenges.

## **F15 Ambitious for our Country, Ambitious for our Party: Liberal Democrat Party Strategy**

We have submitted an amendment removing a reference to the Party working as part of a 'progressive alliance' in favour of a commitment to working with like minded groups. Situating the Liberal Democrats as a party that will only work with progressives ignores the party's foundation as a force for radical liberalism, a philosophy that has no time for the statism of Labour and the anti-free trade isolationism of the Green Party.

## **F18 The NHS at 70**

A positive contribution to the debate on the future of the NHS. We have some doubts about the existing policy, reaffirmed here, of 1p on tax to go to the NHS, given how temporary a fix a permanent tax increase is. Too little is said about the ongoing challenge of delivering NHS services efficiently and effectively; about the Sustainability and Transformation Plans; of lessons that can be learned from previous attempts at NHS reform, and what reforms we believe may be effective in the future.

## **Consultation Paper 132: Immigration, Refugees and Identity**

We welcome the aim of the working group to construct a liberal and humane immigration and refugee policy; we recognise the integral role migrants play in both the UK's economy and its culture, and believe that the party should continue to make the case for immigration in the absence of strong leadership on this issue from Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party.

The working group is also right to ensure that future party policy seeks to alleviate the concerns that many voters have with the current immigration system. Primarily this should be achieved by ensuring the adequate supply of housing and public services, however we also suggest investigating market based solutions, such as auctions for Tier 1 visas to both businesses and individuals. This would both improve efficiency and ensure that migrants who are likely to contribute most to our economy receive them.

## **Consultation Paper 133: Power for people and communities**

Devolution and dispersion of power is at the heart of liberalism, and as such we welcome this new consultation paper. We agree that the economic development of regions outside London has been held back by the central control of both structures and investment, and as such the Liberal Democrats should support not only the devolution of decision-making but also spending and revenue raising. This would give regions the power to innovate in order to attract investment, jobs and prosperity.

However, while it is clear that "Community Politics", as referred to in the second half of this paper, plays a key role in how the Liberal Democrats operate, this should not go as far as to stand in the way of liberal ideals. Too often Liberal Democrat campaigns seek to embrace conservative NIMBYism for short-term political gain, in spite of the pain caused to many by the ongoing housing crisis.

## **Consultation Paper 134: Tuition fees in higher education**

As requested by Vince Cable MP, this paper discusses a possible higher education financing system without tuition fees. Instead it proposes a graduate tax, and more specifically a private-law form 'income sharing agreement' that would entitle the government to a proportion of a graduate's income under set terms. This is an idea originally conceived by Milton Friedman in the 1950s, but which has not taken off globally due to difficulties in working out the specifics.

