

LIBERAL REFORM CONFERENCE BRIEFING



GLASGOW
CONFERENCE
BRIEFING

TUESDAY

AM

PM

F30 Preventing and Tackling Sexual and Domestic Violence

An excellent motion but it should include reference to the horrific practice of female genital mutilation. An amendment has been submitted which we hope will be taken.

WEDNESDAY PM

F41 Human Rights

This is a good motion which reaffirms our party's commitment to human rights generally, and the Human Rights Act in particular. We see no urgent need to reform the Act itself, though the call for the processes to be improved is welcome, as it is the delays in the system which often lead to an undermining of the principles of the Act with the public. The proposal to incorporate the Act into a written constitution is, though, an interesting one and we have no objections.

CONFERENCE SNIPPETS

Our friends in the Social Liberal Forum are hosting an event titled "Whose Party is it Anyway?" We're sure this is asked with their characteristic sense of humour, but we know what answer they'll get if they ask their Liberal Left comrades: Labour's!

We see that a surprising number of people are flying to Glasgow from London. Perhaps any speakers on the motion on zero carbon Britain should be asked to state how they got to Glasgow?

F33 Dignity at Home: Transforming Home Care

Norman Lamb has proved one of our most effective ministers and we support this excellent motion.

F35 Prosperous, Sustainable and Secure (Europe Policy Paper)

This motion is right to say that the EU has been a force for good, creating prosperity through trade, freedom, and security. But just as Liberal Democrats are keen advocates of political reform here in the UK, so too must we push to ensure the EU's institutions are as democratic, accountable and efficient as possible, and that they concentrate on the things that are best done at European level.

F37 High Street Gambling

It seems odd at a time when lack of demand for shops in high streets is a big problem that we'd want to give councils power to ban a whole class of business, particularly when online gambling is so easy. The motion fails to recognise that the increasing number of betting shops is driven by controls on the number of fixed odds betting machines that each shop can contain: lifting that restriction would likely be the most effective way of reducing the number of shops.

We were intrigued by this from the motion on Lifelong learning: "Considering offering a time-limited employer NI rebate from 13.8% to zero for all age adult apprenticeships when public spending is exhausted to help make the jobs sustainable in the longer term."

We are pleased to see Conference recognising that public spending can be exhausted!

Mike Thornton MP: My First 6 Months in Parliament & Liberal Reform Publication Launch



Sunday 15th September, 20:00 - 21:15
Room: Dochart Two, SECC

Mike Thornton, who won a spectacular victory in the Eastleigh by-election, talks to the Spectator's Isabel Hardman about his first six months in Parliament. Liberal Reform will also launch its latest publication – pick up your free copy.

The next time we meet at an autumn conference we will be only a matter of months from the 2015 general election. This conference is therefore the right place to take some big decisions about our approach to the election and to any post election discussions with other parties.

The background is a rapidly improving economic situation with confidence and (modest) growth returning. The underlying picture though

We must not forget that we are still borrowing a huge amount each year, the

From Borgen to Britain: a How-to Guide to Coalition Government



Monday 16th September, 13:00 - 14:00
Room: Aish Two, SECC

Ed Davey chairs a panel of liberal parliamentarians and advisers from across Europe who will share their experiences of coalition and their tips on how the Liberal Democrats can succeed as a party of national government.

interest on which will be a continuing burden. The amount of interest on just the additional borrowing in 2013 for example is almost exactly the same as we will raise from the mansion tax: £3bn.

There are huge uncosted spending commitments in the motions at Conference and we wonder where the money to pay for them will come from.

The most important debate will be that on the

economy - at the time of writing we don't know what amendments will be taken but we are concerned that any attempt to repudiate the basis of coalition economic policy will backfire in the election. We cannot fight an election on the platform of disowning the Coalition's approach to the economy. What we can and should do is present a distinct, liberal alternative for the next parliament.

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Promoting Four-Cornered Freedom in the Liberal Democrats

LIBERAL REFORM CONFERENCE BRIEFING

SATURDAY

PM

MONDAY

AM

F4 A Balanced Working Life (Low and Middle Income Households Policy Paper)

Overall this motion is fine but there are parts which read like a completely random collection of ideas without any structure or flexibility. Do we really think that every team leader in a Child and Family Centre must have a degree by 2015? Are we going to fire the experienced

and highly competent person with no degree in favour of the person with a third class degree in Shoe Design? Do we really need a national policy on having mandatory work/life balance councils in firms?

The motion is, however, correct

in stating that through tax credits and other benefits the state is effectively subsidising low wages, and a higher wage instead of such subsidies is desirable for all. The first step towards this goal should be further tax cuts for low paid (including national insurance contributions).

SUNDAY

AM

F10 Green Growth and Green Jobs (Transition to a Zero Carbon Britain Policy Paper)

This is an ambitious motion and we wonder if the proposers have really thought through its potential implications for increased power costs and fuel poverty.

Our basic approach here is that the Government should not micro-manage how low carbon power is delivered – it should put into place a level playing field by setting the underlying carbon

price and then let the market mechanism deliver the most cost effective low-carbon power. If nuclear power is able to deliver cost effectively on that basis and safety concerns are met then we should support its use.

On fracking we believe that we should take the same science-based approach as we have to global warming generally. The

Royal Society have said in an independent study that with safeguards fracking is safe and we therefore support the motion. However, we believe that local communities should receive a much greater proportion of tax revenues derived from fracking.

We support the removal of lines 77-78 banning all non ultra low carbon vehicles from roads.

F16 Learning for Life (Education and Skills from Upper Secondary to Lifelong Learning Policy Paper)

We agree with this motion that the funding regime currently in place for higher education is the best currently available, and that changing it in the next Parliament would cause undue difficulties to universities and applicants.

We also agree with the motion's emphasis on creating parity between vocational and academic qualifications, and on the need to continue the increase in apprenticeships.

We have reservations about line 38, which requires young people to study literacy and numeracy to the age of 18. There seems to us to be little point forcing a student who has obtained an A* in English and Maths at GCSE to continue studying these subjects if they don't wish to. There is a stronger argument to give those who fail to get a good GCSE in these subjects further opportunities to gain qualifications in them, and we hope there will be an amendment along these lines, or a separate vote.

PM

F17 Protecting Children from Online Pornography

Nobody wants young children to be able to access sexual or violent imagery online, but parts of this motions move too far in the direction of state censorship. The power to decide what children should or should not access and at what age should ultimately lie with parents, and the state can and should empower parents to actively consider those questions.

However, requiring all those with an internet connection to opt in to receiving explicit material goes too far, and we would urge conference representatives support amendments along these lines.

F19 Strengthening the UK Economy

This motion is probably the most high profile that conference will debate. Some readers

may know that Liberal Reform submitted its own motion on the economy, which was not accepted. However, much of the motion before conference reflects our views, and we are

generally supportive of it.

Two criticisms that we would make are that it is not quite ambitious enough and focuses too much on public spending. We have therefore submitted and are supporting amendments

"supply-side reforms", including on immigration, planning and housebuilding, trade and monetary policy.

We would urge representatives to support the substance of the motion, along with amendments that add to rather than alter it.

PM

F26 Fairer Taxes (Tax Policy Paper)

Tax policy is an area where Liberal Democrats can be proud of our distinctive record, cutting taxes for millions of workers during our time in coalition.

This motion rightly goes further, proposing to raise the income tax threshold to the level of the national minimum wage for a full-time worker and holding it at this level. We welcome this proposal, and would also like national insurance contributions to be part of this policy, preferably by merging NICs with income tax.

We also welcome the suggestions for tax simplification, though would have liked to see more specific suggestions to close loopholes to lower rates and the abolition of inefficient taxes.

On the question of the 50p additional rate of income tax, Liberal Reform always thought the rate should be temporary, and now that it has been abolished we have no desire to see it return. We do think the wealthy are under-taxed relative to the low-paid, but we would rebalance through other taxes rather than further taxes on income, which we think account for too high a proportion of the tax take.

F27 Making Housing Benefit Work for Tenants in Social Housing

The Coalition's reforms to the social security system have been some of the most difficult, and Liberal Reform has spoken out against recent further cuts which we think go too far. But introducing parity between housing benefit recipients living in the private and social rented sectors was correct in principle, even if it has proved challenging in practice.

The Government should continue to monitor the implementation of the reduction in housing benefit and ensure that anomalous cases where real hardship is caused are dealt with compassionately.

But all this tackles the symptom rather than the cause. Housing benefit is too high because rents are too high, and rents are too high because there is a chronic housing shortage. We need massive reform of the planning system to get house builders building.

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Liberal Reform exists to promote four-cornered freedom in the Liberal Democrats –
economic, social, personal and political liberalism.”