

Liberal Democrat's Manifesto 2024



Key Pledges for our Nation's Children, YP & Families Health & Wellbeing

Families, Children & Young People:

• Appoint a Cabinet Minister for Children and Young People.

- Extend free school meals to all children in poverty, with an ambition to extend them to all primary school children when the public finances allow.
- Give parents genuine flexibility and choice in the crucial early months by doubling Statutory Maternity and Shared Parental Pay to £350 a week and introducing an extra use-it-or-lose-it month for fathers and partners, paid at 90% of earnings.
- Make all parental pay and leave day-one rights, and extend them to self-employed parents.
- Expand opportunities for young people to study, teach and volunteer abroad by returning to the Erasmus Plus programme as an associated country.
- Protect and support the rights and wellbeing of every child by:
 - Incorporating the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child into UK law.
 - Setting up an independent advocacy body for children's safety online.
 - Addressing the underfunding and neglect of children's mental health services, youth services and youth justice services.
 - Tackling child poverty, as set out in chapter 10.
 - Giving 16- and 17-year-olds the right to vote, as set out in chapter 20.
- Ensure that all parents can access childcare that is flexible, affordable and fair by:
 - Reviewing the rates paid to providers for free hours to ensure they cover the actual costs of delivering high-quality childcare and early years education.
 - Developing a career strategy for nursery staff, including a training programme with the majority of those working with children aged two to four to have a relevant Early Years qualification or be working towards one.
 - Including a specific emphasis on identifying and supporting children with special educational needs and disabilities in the new training programme for early years staff.
- Restore childminding as a valued part of the early years system by:
 - Replacing the three different current registration processes with a single childcare register.
 - Commissioning a practitioner-led review to simplify regulation, reduce administrative burdens and attract new childminders while maintaining high standards.
- In the longer term, when the public finances allow, our ambition is to give all families (including self-employed parents, adoptive parents and kinship carers):
 - Six weeks of use-it-or-lose-it leave for each parent, paid at 90% of earnings.
 - 46 weeks of parental leave to share between themselves as they choose, paid at double the current statutory rate.

- Give parents genuine flexibility and choice in the crucial early months by:
 - Making all parental pay and leave day-one rights, including for adoptive parents and kinship carers, and extending them to self-employed parents.
 - Doubling Statutory Maternity and Shared Parental Pay to £350 a week.
 - Increasing pay for paternity leave to 90% of earnings, with a cap for high earners.
 - Introducing an extra use-it-or-lose-it month for fathers and partners, paid at 90% of earnings, with a cap for high earners.
 - Requiring large employers to publish their parental leave and pay policies.
 - Introducing a 'Toddler Top-Up': an enhanced rate of Child Benefit for one-year-olds.
- Introduce paid neonatal care leave.
- Support children in kinship care and their family carers, as set out in chapter 7.
- Provide free access to sign language lessons for parents and guardians of d/Deaf children.
- Tackle the backlogs in the family courts that leave children and families waiting nearly a year for cases to be resolved, by making the legal aid system simpler, fairer and more generous as set out in chapter 19.
- Fully review and reform the Child Maintenance Service to ensure it works for all children and parents, including removing the Collect and Pay charge for receiving parents and ensuring that payments cannot be used as a form of coercive control over domestic abuse survivors.

Economy:

- Increasing the Digital Services Tax on social media firms and other tech giants from 2% to 6%.

Business & Jobs:

- Expand parental leave and pay, including making them day-one rights, as set out in chapter 9.

Health:

- Guarantee access to an NHS dentist for everyone needing urgent and emergency care, ending DIY dentistry and 'dental deserts'.
- Improve early access to mental health services by establishing mental health hubs for young people in every community and introducing regular mental health check-ups at key points in people's lives when they are most vulnerable to mental ill-health.
- Help people to spend five more years of their life in good health by investing in public health.

- Help people spend more years of their life in good health by:
 - Increasing the Public Health Grant, with a proportion of the extra funding set aside for those experiencing the worst health inequalities to co-produce plans for their communities.
 - Establishing a 'Health Creation Unit' in the Cabinet Office to lead work across government to improve the nation's health and tackle health inequalities.
 - Introducing regulations to halt the dangerous use of vapes by children while recognising their role in smoking cessation for adults, and banning the sale of single-use vapes.
- Introducing a new kitemark for health apps and digital tools that are clinically proven to help people lead healthier lives.
- Introducing a new levy on tobacco company profits to help fund healthcare and smoking cessation services.
- Protecting children from exposure to junk food by supporting local authorities to restrict outdoor advertising and restricting TV advertising to post-watershed.
- Extending the soft drinks levy to juice-based and milk-based drinks that are high in added sugar.
- Tackling air pollution and poor air quality in public buildings with a Clean Air Act, as set out in chapter 12.

- Take action to prevent tooth decay by:
 - Providing supervised toothbrushing training for children in nurseries and schools.
 - Scrapping VAT on children's toothbrushes and toothpaste.

- Improve early access to mental health services by:
 - Opening walk-in hubs for children and young people in every community.
 - Offering regular mental health check-ups at key points in people's lives when they are most vulnerable to mental ill-health.
 - Putting a dedicated, qualified mental health professional in every school, as set out in chapter 8.
 - Ending out-of-area mental health placements by increasing capacity and coordination between services, so that no one is treated far from home.
 - Extending young people's mental health services up to the age of 25 to end the drop-off experienced by young people transitioning to adult services.
 - Increasing access to clinically effective talking therapies.
 - Taking an evidence-led approach to preventing and treating eating disorders, and challenging damaging stigma about weight.
 - Making prescriptions for people with chronic mental health conditions free on the NHS, as part of our commitment to review the entire schedule of exemptions for prescription charges.
 - Transforming perinatal mental health support for those who are pregnant, new mothers and those who have experienced miscarriage or stillbirth.
 - Tackling stigma through continued support for public education including Time to Talk.
 - Cutting suicide rates with a focus on community suicide prevention services and improving prevention training for frontline NHS staff.
 - Recognising the relationship between mental health and debt, and providing better signposting between talking therapies and debt advice.
 - Ending inappropriate and costly inpatient placements for people with learning disabilities and autism.

- Combat the harms caused by drugs by:
 - Moving the departmental lead on drugs policy from the Home Office to the Department of Health and Social Care.
 - Investing in more addiction services and support for drug users, including specialist youth support services.
 - Freeing up police time, reducing court backlogs, tackling prison overcrowding and reducing the harms of drug misuse by diverting people arrested for possession of drugs for personal use into treatment where appropriate.
 - Protecting young people, tackling the criminal gangs and taking 'skunk' off the streets by introducing a legal, regulated market for cannabis. Sales will be restricted to over-18s only, from licensed retailers with strict limits on potency and THC content.
 - Treating Scotland's drug deaths crisis as a public health emergency, and devolving powers for tailored solutions where necessary.

Care:

- Introducing a Young Carers Pupil Premium as part of an 'Education Guarantee' for young carers.
- Support children in kinship care and their family carers by:
 - Introducing a statutory definition of kinship care.
 - Building on the existing pilot to develop a weekly allowance for all kinship carers.

Education:

- Expand provision of extracurricular activities, such as sport, music, drama, debating and coding, starting with a new free entitlement for disadvantaged children.
- Tackle persistent absence by setting up a register of children who are not in school, and working to understand and remove underlying barriers to attendance.
- Tackle bullying in schools by promoting pastoral leadership in schools and delivering high-quality relationships and sex education.
- Introduce a Young People's Premium, extending Pupil Premium funding to disadvantaged young people aged 16-18.
- Support the education of children in care, extend Pupil Premium Plus funding to children in kinship care, and guarantee any child taken into care a school place within three weeks, if required to move schools.
- Introducing a statutory Student Mental Health Charter and requiring universities to make mental health services accessible to their students.

We will:

- Put a dedicated, qualified mental health professional in every primary and secondary school, making sure all children and parents have someone they can turn to for help, funded by increasing the Digital Services Tax on social media firms and other tech giants.
- Increase school and college funding per pupil above the rate of inflation every year, and end the scandal of crumbling school and college buildings by investing in new buildings and clearing the backlog of repairs.
- Introduce a 'Tutoring Guarantee' for every disadvantaged pupil who needs extra support.
- Invest in high-quality early years education and close the attainment gap by giving disadvantaged children aged three and four an extra five free hours a week and tripling the Early Years Pupil Premium to £1,000 a year.
- Reinstate maintenance grants for disadvantaged students immediately to make sure that living costs are not a barrier to studying at university.
- Create new Lifelong Skills Grants, giving all adults £5,000 to spend on education and training throughout their lives, and aim to increase them to £10,000 in the future when the public finances allow.

Crime & Policing:

- Free up local officers' time to focus on their communities by:
 - Creating a new Online Crime Agency to effectively tackle illegal content and activity online, such as personal fraud, revenge porn and threats and incitement to violence on social media.
- Improve the police response to mental ill-health by:
 - Introducing a target of one hour for handover of people suffering from mental health crisis from police to mental health services.
 - Ensuring that all forces have a mental health professional in the control room at all times.
 - Supporting the police to achieve adequate levels of training in mental health response.
- Address youth violence and combat knife crime by:
 - Adopting a public health approach to the epidemic of youth violence which identifies and treats risk factors, rather than just focusing on the symptoms. This means police, teachers, health professionals, youth workers and social services all working closely together to prevent young people falling prey to gangs and violence.
 - Investing in youth services that are genuinely engaging and reach more young people.
 - Making youth diversion a statutory duty so that every part of the country has a pre-charge diversion scheme for young people up to the age of 25, ensuring better outcomes for young people and less strain on police resources.

Food & Farming:

- Introduce a holistic and comprehensive National Food Strategy to ensure food security, tackle rising food prices, end food poverty and improve health and nutrition.

Communities and Local Government:

- Work with communities to tackle the alarming rise of antisemitism and Islamophobia.

Transport:

- Transform how people travel by creating new cycling and walking networks with a new nationwide active travel strategy.

- Make public transport more affordable for young people by:
 - Extending half-fares on buses, trams and trains to 18-year-olds.
 - Working with operators to introduce a 'Young Person's Buscard', similar to the Young Person's Railcard, giving 19- to 25-year-olds a third off bus and tram fares.

Culture, Media & Sport:

- Boost participation in sports and physical activity by investing in leisure centres, swimming pools and other grassroots facilities and supporting community sports clubs.
- Support and encourage campaigns to improve equality, diversity and inclusion in sport.

Political Reform:

- Strengthen democratic rights and participation by scrapping the Conservatives' voter ID scheme and giving 16- and 17-year-olds the right to vote.
- Introducing public awareness campaigns about emerging threats and misinformation campaigns online.

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