

[Liberal Democrats hit highest ever membership on eve of local elections](#)

The Liberal Democrats have hit their highest ever number of members, eclipsing the high watermark of 101,768 set in 1994.

The landmark comes as Liberal Democrat leader Tim Farron heads to Oxford to rally activists for the party's final push of the local election campaign.

More than 14,000 new members have joined the Liberal Democrats in the two weeks since the General Election was called. More than 50,000 members have joined since last year's European referendum and nearly 70,000 since the 2015 General Election.

Tim Farron pledged to build the party to 100,000 members by the end of the parliament as a key pledge during his 2015 leadership campaign – but at that point everyone expected the end of the parliament to be 2020.

Liberal Democrat leader Tim Farron said: “We are going into these local elections bigger than ever before, with a clear message and a growing sense of momentum.

[Join the Liberal Democrats](#)

“In many of the counties where these elections are taking place it is the Liberal Democrats who are the main challengers to the Conservatives. Liberal Democrat councillors are the strong opposition to the Conservatives across the country, standing up to them on cuts to schools and elderly care.

“You don't need to agree with us on everything to agree that Britain needs a strong opposition to fight for you and your communities against Tory cuts to our schools, our NHS and our social care services. In county halls just as in Westminster, Liberal Democrats are that strong opposition that Britain needs.”

[Brexit should be a democracy – Nick Clegg's speech outlining our position on Britain and the EU](#)

Nick began by setting out his key points...

My argument today is simple: our country cannot thrive without a strong economy.

And a strong economy is incompatible with a hard Brexit.

The pound has been falling since the prospect of the referendum was announced in mid-2015, and with average earnings growth set to stall later this year, consumers are inevitably going to feel the Brexit squeeze.

When prices go up and wages do not, millions of people are going to be poorer.

A lot poorer.

The average household is likely to be £500 worse off in 2017 compared to 2016 – and that's before the Brexit negotiations have even started in earnest.

...and explaining the impact of Brexit on our public services...

Over a five-year period, Brexit will have dented the public finances by £59bn.

Money that could have been used to cut waiting times in A&E, keep beds open, and pay for vital medicines.

Money that could have been used to ease the intense pressure on local care services for our ageing population.

Money that could have been used to stop the shameful cuts to school budgets.

The government has effectively maxed out its credit card on Brexit.

Leaving you to pick up the cost.

Nick went on to describe how Brexit could affect our businesses...

The Brexit squeeze is already being felt in the world of business, through higher import prices, a shortage of EU workers, and reduced investment.

Some companies that rely on imported ingredients are already trying to disguise the impacts through creative repackaging, as we've seen with the reduced chocolate in Toblerone.

Others are struggling to find staff: the food and drink industry is more reliant on EU workers than any other sector in the UK. Around 29% of our food and drink manufacturing workforce are EU nationals.

The fall in the value of the pound is already causing some EU workers to consider leaving the UK, as their wages are now worth significantly less back home.

In some cases jobs have already been lost, including 300 in Newcastle and

York, following Nestle's decision to move production to Poland.

So the immediate impacts of the referendum have been much worse than the Conservatives want you to think.

...then turned his attention to Brexit's long-term impacts...

Make no mistake: our economic future is hanging in the balance.

Theresa May could have chosen to remain in the Single Market, as have three other EU countries: Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein.

She could have chosen to be in the Customs Union. One non-EU country, Turkey, has done so.

She could have tried to persuade the EU to reform the free movement rules to re-focus them on work, instead of giving up without a fight.

Instead, she shunned all of these, elevating immigration over the long-term needs of millions of hard pressed families.

...and the Tories' specious justifications...

This can only be understood as a political decision based on the pressures from the Conservatives' right wing and the Brexit press.

But the Brexit squeeze won't be felt by the Prime Minister and her supporters in the right-wing media; it will be paid for by ordinary people out of their wages, by sick people needing treatment on the NHS, by elderly people needing care, and by children who won't receive the education they deserve.

At this election, the Liberal Democrats are the only major national party that is sounding the alarm against hard Brexit.

...Nick also outlined two Lib Dem manifesto commitments...

Labour's disastrous failure to do the most basic job of an opposition party: holding the government to account, has given the Conservatives a clear run at their extreme version of Brexit.

We will do what Labour have failed to do, and hold the Conservatives' feet to the fire.

Today, we make a commitment to do two things:

First: to fight to secure terms which retain as many of the benefits of EU membership as possible.

Second, to secure a referendum on the final agreement, so that the people can decide the future for the country.

That referendum will offer two choices; accept the deal, or remain in the EU.

Liberal Democrats will campaign for a remain vote.

And reflected on the dishonesties of the Conservative Brexit campaign...

Hard Brexit is the latest in a series of con tricks.

The Conservatives were tricking you when they said there would be £350m a week for the NHS.

They're tricking you by pretending there's no Brexit squeeze.

And they're tricking you when they claim they can secure a deal with the exact same benefits as EU membership.

This trickery is the personal responsibility of Theresa May.

She deserves remorseless, unforgiving scrutiny for the decisions she is seeking to impose upon the country.

... Before launching into his closing statement...

By choosing to be careless with your future, the Conservatives have placed party before country, themselves before all else, politics before the nation.

Don't let the Conservatives get away with making this happen.

Don't let Labour get away with letting this happen.

Britain needs an effective opposition to hard Brexit.

That is why I urge you to vote for a real opposition – the Liberal Democrats.

[Liberal Democrats commit to ending rough sleeping in Britain](#)

The Liberal Democrats have committed to ending the scandal of rough sleeping in Britain, as the Homelessness Reduction Bill enters into force today.

Following a campaign visit to the Hundred Houses Society, a charitable housing association in Cambridge, Tim Farron announced a series of measures the party would put in place to help end rough sleeping.

These include introducing a Housing First provider in each local authority, to put long-term homeless people straight into independent homes rather than emergency shelters. Other policies include increasing funding for local councils for homelessness prevention, reinstating housing benefit for under-21s and reversing planned cuts to Local Housing Allowance rates.

The number of people sleeping rough rose to 4,134 in 2016, up 16% on the previous year. The Government has estimated that homelessness costs the state up to £1 billion a year.

The news comes as a coalition of charities, including Centrepoint, Crisis, Homeless Link, Shelter and St Mungo's, have called on political parties to commit to end rough sleeping in Britain.

Liberal Democrat Leader Tim Farron said: "It is a national scandal that so many people are sleeping on the streets in 21st century Britain.

"By increasing support for homelessness prevention and properly funding emergency accommodation, we can end rough sleeping across the country.

"We will also ensure each local authority has at least one provider of Housing First services, to allow long-term homeless people to live independently in their own homes.

"The evidence suggests that supporting people and giving them long-term, stable places to stay is far more successful in tackling homelessness than constantly moving them to different temporary accommodation.

"Under this government, homelessness has soared and the stripping of young people of housing benefit threatens to make matters even worse.

"This election is a chance to change the direction of this country and stand up for a Britain that is open, tolerant and united."

Benefit cuts and Brexit squeeze to leave 3 million families £2,500 worse off

Planned benefit cuts by the Conservative government combined with soaring inflation will leave nearly 3 million working households an average of £2,500 a year worse off, according to analysis by the Institute of Fiscal Studies.

Low inflation over the last two years has meant the government's freeze on most working-age benefits has only amounted to a 1% real cut so far.

But rising inflation from the falling pound is now set to reduce the value of these benefits by 5% between now and 2020, with total cuts of over £5 billion a year in the long run.

Liberal Democrat Shadow Chancellor Susan Kramer commented: "Theresa May's plans for a divisive Hard Brexit and savage cuts to benefits will leave millions of working families worse off.

“Three million households will be hit to the tune of £2,500 a year as a result of cuts to tax credits, rising prices and the falling pound.

“The Brexit squeeze will hit people in the pocket across the country, with the poorest families hit hardest.

“This election is a chance to change Britain’s future and stop a disastrous hard Brexit that will leave us all poorer.

“Every Liberal Democrat MP elected is a challenge to Theresa May’s Hard Brexit agenda.”

Tim Farron: ‘I do not think gay sex is a sin’

Tim Farron has opened up publicly for the first time about his Christian faith and in a candid interview with the BBC has said that he does not believe gay sex is a sin.

The Liberal Democrat leader has very clearly said he does not believe being gay is a sin, and nor is gay sex.

He makes no secret of his private faith but believes political leaders should not make theological pronouncements or declare what people’s personal faith should be.

But why is he speaking out now? Whilst he does not believe politicians should declare what is or isn’t sin he was concerned some people were forming an impression of him that is not accurate.

Tim’s impressive LGBT+ record

Mr Farron has an impressive record on LGBT+ issues, both at home and abroad.

At Home

PrEP

The Liberal Democrats believe that Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) available on the NHS to those at high risk of HIV infection.

Norman Lamb, as Health Spokesperson and with the full support of the Leader has supported this campaign in and out of Parliament.

Gay Blood Ban

In 2014 Tim Farron added his name in support of a Private Members Bill [Blood Donation (Equality)].

In 2015, Tim endorsed the Freedom to Donate campaign and strongly welcomed the review of the ban on gay and bisexual men donating blood.

Tim has said that the ban is “scientifically and socially outdated, deeply and unjustly stigmatising, and urgently need to change.”

In 2016 Tim tabled a parliamentary bill that would end the ban on blood donations from men who have sex with men.

The Liberal Democrats have been campaigning for the end of the blanket ban since 2006 and in Coalition in 2011 we won a partial victory which removed the restriction on gay men – but only if they had been celibate for 12 months.

Turing Law

Thousands of gay and bisexual men convicted of now abolished sexual offences have been posthumously pardoned thanks to Liberal Democrat pressure.

Liberal Democrat peer John Sharkey, whose Private Member’s Bill was instrumental in securing a pardon for Alan Turing, reached an agreement with the Government in November 2016 to grant a posthumous pardon to thousands of gay and bisexual men convicted under long-abolished sexual offence laws.

Tim Farron said: “The Liberal Democrats continue to be the strongest voice on equality in Parliament.

“Although it comes too late for those convicted, the friends and relatives of the thousands of people who suffered under this unfair and discriminatory law will now have a weight lifted off their shoulders.”

X-passports

Gender is listed on all passports issued worldwide that meet International Standards. The use of “X”, meaning “Unspecified” as a gender marker is enshrined in the standards, but few countries currently issue new passports with these markers.

An increasing number of people in the UK identify as neither male nor female, or live part time in various gender roles. As well as giving people the ability to identify as they choose and not have the state impose an identity upon them, a perceived mismatch between gender roles and official ID can cause problems dealing with official organisations such as the DWP, Police or Border Agency.

Julian Huppert during the Coalition and Norman Lamb since have advocated for the introduction of x – passports.

Tim has said: “Our party conference introduced the Transgender and Intersex Charter with astounding support from party members. This called for the phased removal of gender markers in documentation unless it is absolutely

necessary, and the introduction of an 'X' gender option and 'Mx.' title option on the remainder and a streamlined simplification of the Gender Recognition Act 2004 to allow individuals to change their legal gender at will amongst other things. And we are leading the way, our own party documentation is changing to phase out gender wherever possible. Something as small as not having to choose whether to tick the male or female box on applications can make a huge difference. In the last Parliament we desperately tried to get the Tories to agree to introducing gender neutral passports. This is not as radical an idea as it might seem – other countries like Australia have already introduced it and it is accepted by the International Civil Aviation Organisation. It is frankly ridiculous that even on something this small the Tories have refused to act.”

Trans Prisoners

Liberal Democrats have strongly advocated on behalf of the rights of individual trans-prisoners. Tim Farron has been at the forefront of this work in Parliament. In 2015 he took up Tara Hudson’s case, he said:

“There is a clear need for a policy change in this area. It looks like the Ministry of Justice needs be dragged kicking into the 21st century.

“As I understand it, Tara has lived all her adult life as a female. I worry potential risk of harm to her in a male prison which was deemed to have levels of violence ‘considerably higher than in similar prisons’ by the prisons inspectorate.” –

Simplifying the Gender Recognition Act

During Tim’s first conference as party leader the Liberal Democrats voted in favour of simplifying the Gender Recognition Act 2004 to allow individuals to change their legal gender at will and for allowing changes to government-issued documentation on the basis of gender reassignment to be provided free of charge.

The Spousal Veto

Before England and Wales introduced same-sex marriage, it was necessary for married trans people to end their marriages in to gain legal gender recognition. Around 30 couples were forced to annul their marriages in this way. They have described it as like having their marriages “stolen”.

Thankfully this is no longer the case. However, instead, when a married trans person seeks gender recognition, their spouse must give permission. If they do not give permission “for the marriage to continue” then the trans person is blocked from having their gender recognised. The marriage continues to exist.

The Liberal Democrats would believe the law should be reviewed with the intention of removing them.”

Sex Education to include teaching about LGBT+ relationships and rights

The Liberal Democrats have long campaigned to make sex education compulsory in all schools. This was repeatedly blocked by the Conservatives during the Coalition government. The Government has finally capitulated thanks to pressure both internally and externally.

Tim has previously said that children must have “access to good sexual health and relationship education and give parents the help and support they need to talk to their children about this issue.”

Liberal Democrat peers recently attempted to amend the Children and Social Work Bill to ensure that sex education would be taught irrespective of the religious background of the school

Deportation of LGBT+ individuals

Liberal Democrats have a manifesto commitment to stop the deportation of people to countries where their sexual orientation or gender identification means that they risk imprisonment, torture, or execution. Over the years Liberal Democrat MPs and Peers have raised the plight of LGBT+ facing deportation.

Abroad

Chechnya

Tim Farron was the first party leader to come out against the outrageous homophobic purge in Chechnya. Tim said: “These reports from Chechnya are truly horrifying, and represent an extreme manifestation of increasing homophobic brutality and intolerance in Putin’s Russia.

“The UK government must strongly condemn this disgusting violence, and use every possibly opportunity to raise this with the Russian government, as well as in the UN and other international bodies.

“The UK must work with those who share our values to stop the mindless targeting of the LGBT community, which is still prevalent in too many countries across the world.

“Only through defending universal human rights will we ever hope to achieve a world in which every person can live, work and flourish without discrimination.

“It is disappointing that Boris Johnson has failed to stand up for these people by not visiting Russia after Trump told him to stay at home.”

Russia

Tim laid the following EDM: “That this House deplores the recent legislation passed in Russia banning the promotion of non-traditional relationships; notes that this is akin to the former Section 28 legislation in the UK; further notes that the new law appears to be part of a wider crackdown on the freedoms of the LGBT community in Russia; believes that we must listen to those Russian LGBT groups and activists who urge very strongly that boycotts

in any form or nature, from sporting, like the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics, to drinking vodka, are not supported by them and only increase the likelihood of harm towards LGBT Russians; and calls on the Government to work through international and diplomatic channels, like the G20, the Council of Europe and the International Olympic Committee and commercial and business interests already involved in sponsoring the 2014 Winter Olympics, alongside indigenous LGBT campaign groups based in Russia itself, to stand up for the human rights of the Russian LGBT community”

Speaking about the EDM he said: “As a long-time supporter of Amnesty International I believe human rights are inalienable and something we must protect and extend throughout the world. The recent laws passed in Russia are the equivalent of the awful section 28 laws we had in the UK. I hope the government will use every avenue of diplomatic pressure possible to make them drop these laws, this is an area we can take a stand and I hope we will.”

Uganda and Nigeria

Tim signed this EDM on LGBT rights in Uganda and Nigeria

Lib Dem MEPs also wrote to the European Commission urging for action to be taken over new anti-homosexual laws introduced in Uganda