

# Answered! Questions to the Federal Board

Questions 1-3 are on a similar topic so have been grouped together, they were also answered orally during Conference.

## **Q1. Submitted by Prue Bray**

I like the disciplinary proposals, but the system still does not deal satisfactorily with complaints about councillors. Will you discuss this with local government representatives?

## **Q2. Submitted by Cllr Alan Connett**

Why does the disciplinary system allow complaints about London Assembly members to be referred initially to their group but not allow the same for councillors?

## **Q3. Submitted by Cllr Joe Harris**

How will you deal with the bad feeling about the disciplinary system because of its failure to understand or value council groups or council issues?

## **Answer to 1-3**

Thank you to Prue, Alan and Joe for raising this issue. As your questions point out, it is important that the party's own independent complaints process works sensibly alongside those of other organisations, including that of councils and council groups.

There are some decisions that only the party's own processes can make, such as whether to expel someone from the party, but the rules set out in the Board report rightly provide for items to be handled primarily where appropriate by the existing external processes that govern, for example, MPs or London Assembly members.

Local government isn't included in this at the moment for a couple of reasons:

First, when we consulted with local government organisations in preparing the changes to these rules, we got some feedback requesting the removal of reference to referring matters back to council groups from them, so that was done in good faith. But clearly from these questions and other feedback, there's more to discuss.

Second, many Lib Dem council groups use model standing orders which state that, where a matter relates to a question of whether behaviour could bring the party into disrepute (which is also the test in our complaints procedure) it should be referred for investigation by the party and internal group procedures should be suspended until the external review has been completed.

So we didn't want to create a circularity in our rules by having the independent process refer something to a council group that then refers it back to the independent process and so on. Conversations have already started with ALDC to see what we can do to align these rules and avoid any endless loops.

So, I've consulted with the chairs of the Disciplinary Subgroup and they have already been in discussions with our local government community on how to address these issues – and thank you Prue in particular for your part in those.

I'm glad to say that based on that the DSG co-chairs have told me they are happy to commit to recommending updated rules in order to address this issue.

And I will do my best to follow up on that too, so I hope we will have a positive outcome to report back on at conference next year.

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Questions 4-12 were not answered during Conference and so are being responded do in written format now.

#### **Q4. Submitted by Adam Robertson**

How is the Federal Party engaging with SocialMediaCheck.com regarding the issue of GDPR and Security regarding Social Media Checks on Prospective Parliamentary Candidates?

#### **Answer to 4**

The party uses this firm as part of our due diligence checking so that, for example, if someone is wishing to stand in a Parliamentary election for us and has a track record of making anti-Semitic tweets, then this can be spotted and dealt appropriately in advance, rather than become something where the first thing the party knows about it is when a journalist rings up with questions in the middle of a campaign.

We carefully selected this supplier to ensure that we are using a reputable firm, which fully complies with legal protections over people's data such as GDPR and has appropriate levels of security. We've been working closely with them to address any teething issues as this new system gets up and running.

Their service also allows us to be restrictive in what is looked at, so that we can ensure we are combining necessary due diligence with our liberal values around people's privacy and freedom of speech.

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#### **Q5. Submitted by Adam Robertson**

How do the Federal Board intend on tackling the lack of Disabled Candidates, especially at Parliamentary Level, when Scope are saying that 20% of the population is considered Disabled, and only 0.5% of MPs consider themselves

as Disabled?

### **Answer to 5**

It's an important point that we need to continue our efforts to improve the diversity of our candidates and our elected public officials, both so that we are giving every member an equal opportunity to play their part in our party and also so that we better reflect the communities we seek to serve. We have had, and do have, some brilliant candidates and elected public officials who have disabilities, but we need to increase their numbers.

Our party has consistently supported the restoration of the government's access fund to provide help to candidates with disabilities for the extra costs they incur in running for election. There was promising news on this from the government over the summer.

We run an extensive range of training to support would-be candidates and I hope that the changes to how party bodies operate being debated at this conference will help with that, by strengthening the role of party bodies that work to improve diversity, and improving our diversity is a consistent priority of our federal party staff team.

I'm always very happy to hear suggestions on other steps we can take, and if anyone listening has some by all means drop me an email on [president@libdems.org.uk](mailto:president@libdems.org.uk).

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### **Q6. Submitted by Cllr Oliver Jones-Lyons**

Given the advent of the Maraphone, would the Federal Board consider a whole party effort to complete a membership census to improve member engagement?

### **Answer to 6**

This is an excellent idea, and indeed such an excellent idea that the Federal People Development Committee (FPDC) is already working on a series of phone calls to randomly selected members in order to better understand what is and isn't working with our general efforts at membership engagement. If anyone is happy to help with making those calls, please do let me know and I can put you in touch with the team.

The Boost Guide does contain details of how local parties can organise their own member engagement calls and the FPDC & membership team is always happy to help support local parties that want to do these to build engagement by forming local connections.

We also have a regular schedule of email surveys of party members, such as to gather important data on how we are doing at improving our ethnic diversity. If anyone gets one of these surveys or calls, I'd really encourage you to take part.

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**Q7. Submitted by Cllr Oliver Jones-Lyons**

What progress, if any, has been made towards decarbonising party operations?

**Answer to 7**

Our move to a smaller London office means lower energy bills, while the shift towards more home working by party staff and remote meetings for many committees has also cut down on carbon emissions from travel.

Initiatives such as the one by Halifax Liberal Democrats to plant trees to balance the paper used in Focus newsletters are a very welcome grassroots accompaniment to this and I encourage other local parties to think about taking similar measures.

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Questions 8 and 11 are on a similar topic so have been grouped together.

**Q8. Submitted by David Grace**

The President agreed with my question at last conference but the party website remains unfit for members' use. There is no search facility and it is difficult to navigate. Will anything be done?

**Q11. Submitted by Suzanne Fletcher**

When will work on the party website be completed so that both public and party members can find up-to-date information that they need, with ease?

**Answer to 8 and 11**

Improvements to the website's content have continued to be made since last conference, including the additional transparency around the work of the Federal Appeals Panel mentioned in its chair's report. However, we also need better technology behind the scenes to further improve the site and so are currently tendering for an alternative content management system. Decisions on this will require careful consultation and communication given the knock-on effects.

It's likely we'll move the existing site to an archive and start building up a simpler site to replace it. This helps improve search and helps make sure we get it right. This will be a continuing process rather than a one-off process that's complete when done.

In the meantime, the Join and Donate pages are being refreshed in the next few weeks.

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**Q9. Submitted by Suzanne Fletcher**

When press releases are launched, can they be put onto the party website at

same time so it is possible for links to them be used on social media?

**Answer to 9**

Advice before from the party's press and digital teams has been that doing this is of very limited benefit given that, for example, press releases are not designed to be effective digital content in their own right. Therefore the previous conclusion has been that the resources for doing this are better spent on directly producing digital content. However, I'm happy to ask them to consider the issue again in case the balance of factors has changed.

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**Q10. Submitted by Suzanne Fletcher**

Will those developing the website ask for views on how it works from party members who haven't been part of its development before launching?

**Answer to 10**

Yes. We'll test and iterate as we go.

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**Q12. Submitted by Suzanne Fletcher**

When consultation was undertaken for the Thornhill Review some made detailed submission on phone banking. What is the latest progress on this and is there feedback?

**Answer to 12**

The Thornhill Review published its findings based on the consultation it undertook and the Board continues to prioritise implementing its recommendations. We have used and developed phone banking capacity a lot during the pandemic. In the year since our last autumn federal conference, volunteers have made more than 500,000 phone contact attempts through phone banking, speaking to more than 180,000 people. Innovations such as the Maraphone formats have greatly helped with this and will continue to be developed.

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**[Privacy Changes to Email in IOS 15](#)**

## **Your email open rates are about to go up – and this is a problem (sorry!)**

Yesterday, Apple released iOS15, the latest version of their operating system for iPhones and iPads.

In that is a new feature called “Mail Privacy Protection”. (MPP)

It’s a very sensible and reasonable change that will improve your online experience and privacy and is something to be welcomed.

But for people sending email in the party, it’s going to mean rethinking some of how we measure success in emails.

If you’re currently using email opens as a metric for an email being successful, you should probably stop.

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## **[Autumn Conference 2021 Recapped](#)**

Autumn Virtual Conference 2021 was a smorgasbord of policy-making, debate, fringe sessions, training and incredible speeches. So you’d be forgiven for missing something or other. Catch up on all the weekend’s major events with our Autumn Conference 2021 Recapped.

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## **[Facebook Ads Bulk Buy – Education Film](#)**

In our new film, Ed Davey sets out a vision for a fair deal for future generations.

Boris Johnson’s failure to defend children’s education meant that his Government spent the same amount in one month on Eat Out To Help Out as in a whole year for our children’s school catch-up.

We're offering a new bulk-buy deal for England on digital advertising to show the film to voters in your area.

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## [WATCH: Making education our priority](#)

Boris Johnson's failure to defend our children's education meant that his Government spent the same amount in one month on Eat Out To Help Out as in a whole year for our children's school catch-up.

Imagine a future where our children's education is a priority. Where schools raise their mental well-being and their maths grades. Where they can excel at English and find their talent for music or sport. Where they grow into happy, healthy, adults.

We all fear that in the end, it will be our children who have paid the price of this pandemic."

Ed Davey

The Liberal Democrats are calling for a £15 billion package of education catch-up funding, as recommended by the Government's former Education Recovery Commissioner, Sir Kevan Collins.

As part of this, the party is calling for a £5 billion programme of Catch-Up Vouchers for every school child, putting the money directly into parents' hands to spend on whatever their children need most: tutoring in reading, writing or maths; music lessons; swimming classes or other physical education.

We heard that loud and clear on the doorsteps of Chesham and Amersham – a typical "Blue Wall seat." They told us that too often this Government hasn't listened, has taken people for granted, has ignored the people who work hard, and pay taxes.

When we won the Chesham and Amersham by-election, people told us Boris Johnson was taking them for granted. They told us our victory was the first time in years they'd been listened to. Britain needs a party prepared to listen.

It is time Boris Johnson's Conservatives stopped taking people for granted, time people got a fairer deal, time we guaranteed a better life for future generations.

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