

Weekly Whip

Welcome to the Weekly Whip. Your one-stop shop for Lib Dem Parliamentary updates, covering the week that was and the week to come.

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Author:

Boris Johnson's promises to EU citizens are in tatters

Remember all those promises made by Boris Johnson, Priti Patel and Michael Gove to EU citizens living in the UK? That there'd be "no change" to their rights? That they'd be given "absolute certainty" and "automatically be granted indefinite leave to remain"?

Well, those promises lie in tatters.

Under the new laws passed by the Government, citizens who have applied for Settled Status but not received a decision will lose their rights

The Conservatives are ending free movement on 31st December, and today they are pushing through a piece of legislation to make that happen – under very broad "Henry VIII" powers they awarded themselves in the Immigration Act last month.

After a six-month "grace period", EU citizens in the UK will see their right to stay taken away at the end of June, unless they have been granted "Settled Status".

The problem is, **the Home Office's Settled Status scheme is anything but automatic.** EU citizens have to apply for the right to stay by the arbitrary 30th June deadline. Many are given "Pre-Settled Status", which only gives them a temporary right to stay.

And under the new laws the Government is has passed, **even EU citizens who have applied for Settled Status but not received a decision yet will lose their rights at the end of June** – a clear breach of the Government's

commitments on citizens' rights under Article 18 of the Withdrawal Agreement.

The Windrush Scandal should have been the end of the Hostile Environment, but Priti Patel has kept it in full force

No one seriously believes that the Home Office will be able to grant Settled Status to everyone who's eligible by June.

Thousands will be left effectively undocumented and subject to the Tories' Hostile Environment.

The Hostile Environment effectively turns teachers, doctors, landlords and bank clerks into border guards. For example, the "Right to Rent" scheme has been proven in court to cause racial discrimination in access to housing.

The appalling Windrush Scandal demonstrated how people who have every right to live in the UK are wrongfully denied healthcare, made homeless, detained and even deported.

It should have been the end of the Hostile Environment, but – despite her apologies – Priti Patel has kept it in full force.

Liberal Democrats voted against this new legislation and will continue our fight for EU citizens to be given the automatic right to stay in the UK. Rather than enlarging the Hostile Environment to the EU citizens, the Government should be scrapping it altogether.

Europeans who've made their lives here contribute enormously to our economy, our public services and our society. They must not become the victims of a new Windrush-style scandal.

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Author:

[Our human rights are under attack](#)

The Conservatives are at it again. **Trying to strip away the protections that stop governments from trampling on people's rights.**

First, they launched their review of judicial review in the summer. And now – before that one's even finished – they've launched a second review, this time of the Human Rights Act.

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Author:

Local Government brilliance

In reading this report, you may notice a certain similarity with previous reports. That is deliberate and, I hope, welcome. Because a relentless focus on priorities is required to ensure our party best helps people win, taking political power to turn our policies into improvements in people's lives. Trying to do too much means you end up doing nothing much at all.

So I hope regular themes such as the importance of our local government base, the value of investing in technology and the imperative of improving our record on diversity come through repeatedly. Starting off with the first of those...

Award-winning councillors

Many congratulations to our seven Liberal Democrat colleagues who were shortlisted in the Cllr Awards 2020, and especially to Niknam Hussain, Raj Khan and Waheed Raja who jointly won an award:

- Niknam Hussain, Raj Khan and Waheed Raja, Buckinghamshire (collaborative working award) – winners
- John Leech, Manchester (lifetime achievement) – highly commended
- Bridget Smith, South Cambridgeshire (leader of the year) – highly commended
- Mandy McNeil, St Albans (finance and economic development) – shortlisted
- Peter Taylor, Watford (innovation and service transformation) – shortlisted

More brilliance came with Liz Barrett's [fantastic victory](#) in the last round of by-elections for the year meant we ended on a winning note. Through the whole year, [we had the best overall result of any party](#).

Reducing intimidation in public life

The [Jo Cox Foundation](#) and the Committee on Standards in Public Life are promoting cross-party action to reduce intimidation and bullying aimed at those in public life, such as people running for election or in elected office.

As part of this, we have agreed to a cross-party statement on standards expected of parties. It reflects the standards we have already adopted on bullying, harassment and similar behaviour, and so we have been happy to add our voice to it.

We will make sure that we continue to use and improve our new disciplinary

system, introduced last year, in order to ensure that the behaviour of our party members contributes towards the improvement in political debate in this country.

A sad reminder of the importance of this comes with the news this week of the [jailing of a Brexit campaign worker for threatening Jo Swinson last year.](#)

I would like to thank the hard working volunteers and staff, especially those involved in our complaints and membership systems who dedicate themselves to ensuring that the Liberal Democrats stand, in word and deed, for a better kind of politics.

Implementing the Thornhill Review

The [independent review](#) we commissioned into the 2019 general election has given us a very large list of things to fix in the party. It was, frankly, a stark verdict on how we used to run the party, and all of us involved in running the party at whatever level need to learn the lessons.

One key element is the relationship and relative roles of the party leader, president and CEO. A new set of definitions of the roles, including clarity over where decision making power lies on key points, has now been produced after an extensive series of consultations and discussions. Thank you to all the party members who have responded.

The text to have come out from this will be reported to our spring federal conference as part of the Board report, that way rightly giving party members the chance to confirm how you wish us to run the party on your behalf.

The Board and Steering Group continue to monitor implementation of the Thornhill Review, and our December Steering Group is looking at whether a form of committee self-appraisals will help committees ensure we are addressing rather than repeating the sorts of governance mistakes set out in the report.

Another element we need to fix is the role of party bodies. These should have a crucial role to play but often feel under-valued and sidelined. The final report from the [Party Body Review Group](#) is therefore also coming to the December meeting with a challenging set of recommendations on how we need to change.

It includes a change I talked about during my President election campaign – finding a way to allow party bodies to recruit new members to the party, getting a flow of income from such recruitment and an ability to contact them. I very much hope we can make that happen.

That meeting will also consider the implementation of the difficult [budget choices](#) we had to take for next year. It's vital that decisions over where to save and where to invest are driven by a properly strategic view of the party's needs and our political opportunities. Without getting into micro-managing the work of staff, there is an important job for the Steering Group in ensuring that the spending and staffing plans match up with priorities. In

particular, frontline elections support through an expanded network of field support staff, investing in improving our technology and raising our game on diversity.

On the first of those, thank you to the three state parties, regional parties and ALDC for the way we've all been able to take a much more coordinated approach to getting campaign support staff in place across the country. As a result, there is a much larger network of staff than we'd expect otherwise at this point in the elections cycle.

Given the importance of technology, the Steering Group will be hearing from our new Chief Technology Officer, Duncan Gough, including on how his role fits into the party's governance structures. Technology cuts across so much of what we do, so the proposal includes having one of the Vice Chairs, Elaine Bagshaw, act as the technology project champion on the Board. She has significant experience of managing technology projects in her professional career.

Finally, on diversity we are employing a specialist advisor to help us put together an effective and practical plan. Due to the Black Lives Matter movement, such skills have been in unexpectedly high demand this year. That is overall a good thing, though it has delayed our own ability to get on with this work. The importance of the work remains as high as ever, however.

Improving the way we fill posts in the party

A consistent theme of my work, and that of the Board, through this year has been about improving the way we fill posts in the party. That is important so that we can run the party to the high standards that members rightly expect – and so that we properly bring to life our belief in diversity and equality.

Steps taken so far have included improving the ways we advertise posts, broadening the reach of the adverts and also, where appropriate, highlighting them to relevant external bodies and networks too.

We have also improved the filtering and checking processes so that we better protect both the party – and individuals themselves – against problems when previous behaviour or comments come to light after appointment.

But there is a long way to go, and this will be a major priority for me in 2021. Members have a right to expect quality and potential to trump connections when posts are filled.

Our new Federal Appeals Panel chair

At our autumn conference, members agreed a [new batch of nominations for the Federal Appeals Panel](#). This process included using some of the progress mentioned above, and as a result we had a set of highly qualified names to put forward, many of whose names are relatively unfamiliar to long-time party activists.

The new panel has now elected its chair, David Graham. He is a barrister

specialising in public and administrative law, practising at Francis Taylor Building chambers in London. His work mostly relates to planning, licensing, education, highways and other government functions, as well as the governance and procedures of public bodies. This includes interpretation of constitutive documents and the conduct of administrative appeals.

Good luck to David and many thanks to the outgoing chair, Alan Masters.

Changes on the Board

Alison Rouse has been elected the new chair of the English Liberal Democrats, and so will also be joining us on the Board and Steering Group from 1st January. As a result, Prue Bray's time as the English Party's representative on the Board will also come to an end, and so I would like to add my thanks for her contributions to our work.

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Author:

We cannot miss the opportunity to end the transmission of HIV by 2030

This World AIDs Day we have the opportunity to set ourselves an ambitious but achievable target: to end the transmission of HIV in England by 2030. Published today, the HIV Commission has outlined 20 measures necessary to achieve this worthy goal.

As Liberal Democrats we have a responsibility to help make sure that we achieve it.

Many do not have up to date knowledge of HIV – risking that HIV indicators go unnoticed, and fuelling concerns among people living with HIV, who may as a result avoid health services altogether

Since 2014 new HIV diagnoses are down by as much as half (2019 data). And the development of PrEP has meant that we have more tools in our arsenal than ever before. After nearly a year of lockdown and restrictions, new cases may be down even further.

But there are still a number of challenges: from delayed PrEP rollout, to COVID-hit local authority budgets, to persisting stigma. This stigma is not just among the public, but among health professionals as well. Many do not have up to date knowledge of HIV – risking that HIV indicators go unnoticed, and fuelling concerns among people living with HIV, who may as a result avoid

health services altogether.

There are bright spots however. For example, in Southwark (which along with Lambeth has one of the highest HIV rates in the country) Liberal Democrats helped make sure that PrEP rollout would begin in October. Providers like Sexual Health London are also showing the way with at home testing – something we could hope to see much more of.

So what needs to be done?

Firstly, the report recommends the adoption of a crucial milestone: an 80% reduction in transmissions by 2025, leading to the end of transmissions by 2030. This would be an historic achievement and we should urge the Government to adopt it – making particular departments responsible and accountable for it. In Parliament we will need to push for the Government to produce a roadmap, and to report back regularly.

Where we are in local government, we should work with experts to produce local roadmaps and demonstrate the leadership needed. We must not let HIV fall off the national agenda.

Testing is a key priority. In the context of COVID, the public have heard more about testing than ever before! We should encourage the application of this mentality to HIV as well. In order to find the estimated 6,000 undiagnosed people living with HIV in England, testing must be normalised. Whether it's by taking part in testing or promoting campaigns like HIV Testing Week – we need to help make sure everyone knows their HIV status, and that access to testing is easy and equitable.

In the spirit of more testing we can also call for an important change: making HIV testing opt-out rather than opt-in.

Just like Liberal Democrats called for with [organ donation](#) back in 2002, **by changing the 'default' we can make a massive impact.** There is no 'neutral' default here. People can still say no – but by making it the default and the norm we can tackle stigma and help equip people with more information about their health.

We have already seen in maternity units how transformative this subtle change is. By switching to default 'opt in' midwifery services have reportedly almost entirely eliminated 'vertical transmissions' to children.

The opportunity to end transmission of HIV is one we cannot miss

As the Commission's report says: "if we get this right... England will stand tall as a global pioneer" by ending "a five decade-long pandemic". The opportunity to end transmission of HIV is one we cannot miss. We must urge the government to adopt a roadmap, must push to keep HIV on the agenda, and must demand the changes we need to see at every level.

We can end transmission of HIV by 2030 – but only if the Government, local authorities and society get it right.

You can read more at hivcommission.org.uk.

LGBT+ Liberal Democrats and the Lib Dem Health and Care Association

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