

Restoring Trust in Politics

Ever woken up and had an odd feeling of déjà vu?

Surely there can't be yet another Conservative scandal dominating the headlines?

From Suella Braverman to BBC Chair Richard Sharp; from Nadhim Zahawi to Nadine Dorries, **it feels like the sleaze and standards scandals never stop.**

The promises of "integrity, accountability, and professionalism" made by Rishi Sunak lie in tatters. He refused to stand up for Parliament when Boris Johnson lied to the Commons and the public. He refused to sack his pals Dominic Raab, Nadhim Zahawi and Gavin Williamson until he had no other choice.

The Conservative Party has torn up the standards that should underpin public life in the UK. **The very values of integrity and accountability that are fundamental to the functioning of our democracy are being discarded by those in power.**

Today, Liberal Democrat members have passed new policy to restore standards in public life and uphold the principles of transparency, accountability, and integrity.

Ethics Adviser: The Independent Adviser on Ministers' Interests should be truly independent. This means they should have the authority to initiate investigations without requiring the Prime Minister's permission. And Parliament should be granted the power to appoint the adviser if the government fails to do so.

Ministerial Code: Enshrining the code in law to strengthen its provisions and hold Prime Ministers accountable for changes they want to make.

Ex-Prime Ministers: Only allowing former Prime Ministers the £115,000-a-year allowance if they have served in the role for more than a year.

Anti-Sleaze Training: Ensure that Ministers receive annual training to prevent further standards scandals.

Public Appointments: Establish a rigorous and independent process for public appointments like the BBC Chair – involving a Select Committee hearing and vote.

Register of Interests: To enhance transparency, the Ministerial Register of Interests should be brought in line with the House of Commons equivalent register, with more frequent publication.

Rishi Sunak: The Prime Minister should issue a public apology for the Conservative sleaze scandals that have eroded public trust and deliver on his promise of integrity, accountability and professionalism.

Read the motion in full

All too often with these Conservatives, it feels like one rule for us, no rules for them. It's time to show them the door and get on with the work of restoring standards in our public life.

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Author:

Ending Period Poverty

Periods are not just a monthly inconvenience, but they can be painful, unpleasant and expensive.

And it is the cost, perhaps the most straightforward of things to address, which is putting millions of families under unnecessary strain in the midst of a cost of living crisis.

For those already grappling with economic barriers like the gender pay gap and 'motherhood penalty', the estimated lifetime costs of £5000 can be overwhelming.

There are an estimated 2.8 million women and girls coping with period poverty across the UK. A number that has only grown thanks to the cost of living crisis.

That is not acceptable. We can fix it – and we must.

Period products are not a luxury but a basic necessity. Nobody should find themselves unable to access the products they need simply because of their financial circumstances.

But the Conservative Government's current provisions for free period products in England fall woefully short of the mark. These products are currently available only in schools, leaving countless others without support.

Liberal Democrats are committed to taking action, standing up against period poverty, and working towards a more equitable future.

Our new policy, endorsed by Liberal Democrat members today, outlines a **comprehensive plan to improve access to free period products** across England, eradicating period poverty and fostering a more inclusive society.

- **Right to Access:** Introducing a right in England to access a choice of

free period products, ensuring that no one is left behind.

- **Wider Availability:** Expanding the reach of free menstrual products to vital institutions such as homeless shelters, women's refuges, foodbanks, NHS GP surgeries, and universities.
- **Broader access:** Placing a duty on local authorities and education providers to make period products freely available in their buildings, and ensuring they have the necessary government funding to do so.
- **Inclusivity:** Improving access for marginalised groups, including people with disabilities, asylum seekers, homeless individuals, and those in remote areas, to ensure they have improved access to free period products.

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All of this will be made possible by reinstating the public health grant. The grant has been steadily reduced by the Conservatives year on year. Liberal Democrats would reinstate the grant to a minimum of its 2015 per capita level, in real terms.

We will also emphasise the importance of education around menstruation to change attitudes and dismantle stigma. By addressing this issue at its core, we can create a society that is not only period-poverty-free but also informed and understanding.

Whether on combating violence against women and girls, expanding childcare and parental leave, ending the gender price gap, or tackling period poverty, I'm proud that Liberal Democrats are continuing to lead the way on issues affecting women.

So please, join us in the fight to end period poverty – and together, we can pave the way for a more just and inclusive future.

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Author:

[A Better Start in Life for Every Child](#)

A child's first few months are crucial for their development. Studies show that children from poorer backgrounds are already months behind their classmates on their first day of school.

So early years education is the best possible investment we can make in the future.

It matters for parents too. Well-paid parental leave helps parents to spend more time with their kids. Affordable and flexible childcare gives parents choice over their lives. It helps them to return to work if and when they want to, and it fights against the huge gender pay gap.

Liberal Democrats have long been fighting for a fair deal for families. We increased the number of free hours when we were in government and proposed a substantial, well-funded expansion of high-quality childcare in our 2019 manifesto.

Rishi Sunak doesn't understand what families want. He wants to do childcare on the cheap, cutting ratios and underfunding nurseries by billions. Parents won't thank him for more free childcare if their local nursery can't afford to stay open.

So Liberal Democrats will fix the mess he's created. We will pay childcare providers properly and ensure the most disadvantaged families benefit.

Plus, we'll revolutionise parental leave, by doubling pay and helping more families, particularly dads, to take more time off to be with their children.

Our Vision: Transforming Parental Leave and Early Years Education

Today, Liberal Democrat members have backed a new policy developed by our expert working group to transform parental leave and early years education:

Childcare and Early Years Education

- Re-affirming our long-term commitment to delivering free, full-time childcare for all children from age two and those with working parents from nine months.
- Reviewing payment rates for childcare providers to ensure they genuinely reflect the costs of delivering high-quality childcare and early years education.
- Investing to close the attainment gap by:
 - Giving disadvantaged children aged two to four with an additional five free hours a week.
 - Tripling the Early Years Pupil Premium to £1,000 per year.
- Boosting the number of childminders by simplifying regulation whilst retaining high standards.
- Developing a career strategy for childcare staff, including a comprehensive training program so that most childcare staff working with children aged two to four have a relevant Early Years qualification.

Parental Leave & Support

- Giving all workers, including self-employed parents, a day-one right to parental leave and pay.

- Giving all families up to a year of paid parental leave. Each parent will get six weeks of use-it-or-lose-it leave, with 46 weeks of parental leave to share between themselves as they choose.
- Doubling parental pay (after the initial six weeks) to £350 per week.
- Increasing paternity pay to 90% of earnings, with a cap for high-earners.

Toddler Top-up

- Introducing a new “toddler top-up”: an enhanced rate of Child Benefit for one-year-olds to give all parents extra support, no matter whether they decide to go back to work straight away or not.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

- Providing extra funding for local councils to halve the amount that schools pay towards supporting the costs of a child with additional needs, from £6,000 to £3,000.
- Introducing a new National Body for SEND to fund support for children with very high needs, helping to end the postcode lottery in SEND provision.
- Emphasising identifying and supporting children with SEND in the new training programme for early years staff.

Liberal Democrats will provide families with childcare that is flexible, affordable and fair, transform childcare and boost SEND support, to give every child the best possible start in life.

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Author:

Munira Wilson keynote speech: Booster classes for millions

In her keynote speech at Autumn Conference in Bournemouth, Munira Wilson MP accused Rishi Sunak of letting down these children by “pulling the plug” on school-based tutoring. The National Tutoring Programme ends this year.

Analysis shows that more than one in seven teenagers fall behind with English or Maths at secondary school. These 64,000 students meet government reading and maths standards at age 11 but then fail either GCSE English or Maths at age 16.

She compares Sunak to Mr Bumble from Oliver Twist for consistently rejecting cries “for more” investment in education when he was Chancellor. Sunak

rejected bids from Government advisers and officials for greater investment in COVID catch-up lessons, free school meals and new school buildings.

Instead, **Liberal Democrats are calling for tutoring to become a permanent fixture in England's schools**. Schools, sixth forms and further education colleges would receive £390 million a year for intensive small-group sessions for students who have fallen behind in class.

Pupils would receive tailored support over 12 weeks in English, Maths, Science, or another academic subject. Schools and colleges would select pupils who receive tutoring, prioritising children from low-income backgrounds, with low prior attainment or with additional needs.

Schools and colleges could use their own teaching staff, recruit tutors themselves or choose from quality-assured external providers. Classroom teachers and parents would work together to identify the subjects where the tutoring is most needed.

A survey by Public First found that more than 7 in 10 parents whose children received tutoring at school said that it raised their child's attainment. The Government's 'what works centre' for education says that small-group tutoring boosts pupils' progress by four months on average.

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Author:

Bring Back the Industrial Strategy

The Liberal Democrats want to reverse this picture. We know **the UK has huge potential for sustainable economic growth**, which in turn will create good jobs, fund vital public services and build strong communities.

Adopting an industrial strategy is essential to achieving that goal. Yet in 2021, the Conservatives scrapped the UK's industrial strategy and disbanded the independent body overseeing it.

Business organisations labelled the move a **"short-sighted step that ministers will come to regret"**. Businesses view the industrial strategy as a stabilising force that creates certainty for investment and long-term incentives.

Other major economies understand that, and have adopted ambitious industrial policies. For example, the US passed the Inflation Reduction Act which sets out major incentives to develop green industries. And Europe is responding by

supporting its own manufacturing sector.

So today, the Liberal Democrats are calling for the development of a new industrial strategy. This strategy would tackle the big challenges of our time: supercharging the green economy, boosting living standards, addressing regional inequalities, and creating the conditions for sustainable growth.

1. **Rebuild business and investor confidence** by committing to fiscal responsibility, respect of international treaties, and the creation of a stable business environment.
2. **Effectively communicate the objectives and tools of the industrial strategy** to industry, to provide clear signals for investment and business decisions.
3. **Create broad access to training and skills**, by scrapping the lower 'apprentice's wage' band and boosting the takeup of apprenticeships.
4. **Set up effective incentives for R&D investment**, decarbonisation, and the takeup of digital technologies, especially among SMEs; and ensure that the UK's regulatory, R&D and tax frameworks are geared towards fostering innovation.
5. **Set up a plan for investment in key infrastructure** to enable the industrial strategy, covering areas including rail, building insulation, the national grid and EV charging.
6. **Create a thriving manufacturing sector** by investing in the skills of the future; promoting net-zero transport and energy efficiency; harnessing affordable clean energy; and adopting an ambitious international trade policy.
7. **Power scale-up companies**, especially outside of London and the South East, using innovative ways of crowding-in private-sector investment, drawing from successful international models such as the French Tibi scheme.
8. **Reestablish the Industrial Strategy Council (ISC)** and put it on a statutory footing, to ensure vital oversight, monitoring and evaluation of the industrial strategy for the long-term.
9. **Explore new ways to improve interdepartmental work** on cross-cutting policies, such as giving the Cabinet Office more powers to coordinate and implement industrial strategy.

Read the motion in full

The UK faces significant challenges, from the ongoing legacy of the pandemic, to the climate crisis, energy shortages, and a stalling economy. It's time for a proactive stance, to ensure the UK is not left behind. **This new Liberal Democrat policy sets out a vision for the sustainable economic growth we need to create good jobs, fund public services and strengthen local communities.**

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