

Murphy launches new Canadian Advisory Council as he hails successful US/Canada visit

Economy Minister Conor Murphy has launched a new Canadian Advisory Council as he concluded a successful five-day visit to North America, where he led a delegation of Northern Ireland businesses to Chicago and Toronto.

Minister Muir attends National Ploughing Championships

Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Minister Andrew Muir has made his first official visit to the National Ploughing Championships in Ratheniska, County Laois.

Farmer sentenced at Antrim Court

Maurice Rainey (62), Church Road, Randalstown, Antrim was sentenced at Antrim Court on the 20 September 2024 of six charges of causing unnecessary suffering to bovine animals and one charge of failure to hold a carcass, that had not been slaughtered for human consumption, in such a manner as to ensure that any animal or bird would not have access to it.

Restoring the UK's Reputation on the World Stage

The former Conservative Government's reckless decision to slash the UK's international development budget has caused harm far beyond our borders. It has damaged our country's proud reputation as a global leader in humanitarian aid and left vulnerable people without crucial support.

The consequences of this decision are devastating: thousands of preventable deaths among the world's most vulnerable populations, from conflict zones to areas struck by natural disasters. The UK, once a beacon of hope for countries in crisis, is no longer able to match the generosity of its people in times of need.

The Liberal Democrats have always believed in a strong, compassionate, and outward-looking Britain. That's why we are the only party committed to **reversing this cruel aid cut** and restoring our country's place on the world stage. We will bring back international development spending to **0.7% of national income**, ensuring the UK once again leads the way in saving lives and reducing poverty worldwide.

The gap left by the UK's retreat from international development is being filled by powers like China and Russia, who are using their aid budgets to further their own geopolitical interests. These countries are not stepping in out of compassion—they are exploiting our absence to gain influence and push their own agendas, often at the expense of global stability and human rights.

The Liberal Democrats have a clear, forward-looking plan to reverse the damage done by the Conservatives and restore the UK's leadership on the world stage. Here's how we'll do it:

- **Restore Aid to 0.7% of National Income:** Return the UK's Official Development Assistance (ODA) spending to 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI), ensuring that our aid efforts are properly funded and can have the maximum impact.
- **Establish an Independent Department for International Development:** The Conservatives dismantled the independent Department for International Development (DFID), weakening our ability to effectively manage and deliver aid. We would re-establish DFID as a separate department, giving international development the attention and focus it deserves.
- **Put Poverty Reduction at the Heart of UK Aid:** Ensure that our aid policy is consistent with the rules set out by the OECD/DAC and remains focused on helping the world's poorest people.
- **Champion the Sustainable Development Goals:** Ensure that the SDGs are at the core of the UK's international development policy by creating a dedicated SDG Tsar to oversee their implementation.
- **Rebuild the Humanitarian Relief Fund:** In the face of increasing global conflicts, such as those in Sudan and Ukraine, and natural disasters caused by climate change, we must be ready to respond quickly and decisively. We would restore the UK's humanitarian relief fund, ensuring that we are equipped to provide aid wherever and whenever it is needed most.
- **Address Global Debt Distress:** Many developing countries are struggling with crippling debt, which undermines their ability to invest in education, healthcare, and infrastructure. We must work with international partners to address these challenges and support countries in overcoming debt distress.

Read the policy motion

The Liberal Democrats are committed to rebuilding the trust and compassion that the UK was once known for. We believe that our country has a responsibility to support those in need, no matter where they are in the world.

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[Fixing Our Broken Prison System](#)

For too long, years of neglect and mismanagement by the previous Conservative Government have pushed our prison system into a deep crisis.

Overcrowded, understaffed, and unable to properly rehabilitate offenders, the system is now at breaking point.

This crisis didn't appear overnight. The Conservatives should never have allowed it to get to this position, and now it falls on the new government to take urgent action to fix it.

Liberal Democrats have a clear plan to tackle this crisis, and it starts with focusing on the root problems: cutting reoffending rates and eliminating the criminal courts backlog.

A Broken System in Need of Urgent Action

Right now, the prison population in England and Wales is at a dangerously high level. With 87,453 people behind bars and a maximum capacity of just 88,864, we are teetering on the edge of a complete collapse of our prison system. Overcrowding means that our prisons are not just places of punishment—they have become places where offenders cannot be properly rehabilitated, leading to high rates of reoffending.

Shockingly, **3 in 4 ex-inmates reoffend within nine years of their release**, and 4 in 10 do so within the first twelve months. This reoffending epidemic costs our society £18.1 billion every year. It is clear: the current system isn't working.

The situation is even worse for those on remand, with the population of those waiting for trial hitting a record high of 16,458 as of March 2024. These individuals now make up 20% of the entire prison population. Much of this is

due to the criminal court backlog, which means that people are left languishing in prison without a trial, contributing to the overcrowding crisis.

A Liberal Democrat Plan for Change

The current government must act now to tackle these issues and prevent our prison system from becoming completely unsustainable. That's why today we have passed new policy for fixing our broken prison system:

- **Cut the Court Backlog:** We need to reduce the number of people in prison on remand by addressing the criminal court backlog. This means prioritising case hearings where defendants are on remand, getting justice served quicker and easing the pressure on our prison system.
- **Protecting the Public:** It is critical that violent prisoners, including perpetrators of domestic abuse, are not eligible for early release. Public safety must always come first.
- **Properly Fund Probation Services:** Any early release schemes must be paired with additional resources for probation services, so they can handle the increased workload. Releasing prisoners without the support they need is a recipe for disaster.
- **Rehabilitate, Don't Reoffend:** We need to end the cycle of reoffending. That's why we are proposing a presumption against short sentences of 12 months or less, with a focus on rehabilitation in the community instead.
- **Better Training and Rehabilitation:** For those who do serve time in prison, rehabilitation must be at the heart of our approach. That means investing in better training, education, and work opportunities, alongside introducing a "through the gates" mentorship programme to support prisoners as they transition back into society.
- **Recruit More Prison Officers:** Finally, we need to address the staffing crisis in our prisons by bringing forward an urgent plan to recruit and retain more prison officers. Overworked and overstressed staff simply cannot manage the current situation, let alone one where the population continues to rise.

Read our new policy in full

This is not just about fixing a broken system—it's about building one that works for everyone. Our proposals are rooted in common sense and fairness. By cutting the reoffending rate and clearing the courts backlog, we can ease overcrowding and create a prison system that truly rehabilitates offenders.

The Conservatives have left us with a mess, but we don't have to continue down this road. The Liberal Democrats have a plan that will fix our prisons and give offenders a real chance at rehabilitation—helping to create a safer, fairer society for us all.

It's time to stop talking about fixing the crisis in our prisons and start taking real action. The solutions are clear. Let's get to work.

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