

40 New Hospitals – The Government's Broken Promise

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Author:

Tackling Persistent Absence

The number of children persistently absent from school has doubled, with around one in five young people now missing 10% or more of their lessons. And rates of persistent absence are even higher among disadvantaged backgrounds, children with mental health conditions, and those with special education needs. **This is not a problem that can be ignored or swept under the rug.**

This alarming trend not only impacts their immediate education but also has far-reaching implications for their future opportunities and life chances.

The Conservatives have consistently let down children and parents, neglected schools and colleges, and failed to grasp the scale of the pandemic's damage to children's learning and mental health.

Liberal Democrats understand that education is the best investment we can make in our country's future. The reasons for absence are complex but we must make getting children back in the classroom a priority.

That's why, today, Liberal Democrats have passed new policy to encourage school attendance and support children who are struggling:

- **Understanding the scale of the problem:** Place a duty on local authorities to maintain a register of children who are not in school, providing funding for them to do so. This will provide crucial data to understand the extent of the issue and target interventions effectively.
- **Mental Health Support:** Provide a dedicated mental health professional in every school, ensuring that every child and parent has someone to turn to for help and support.
- **Expansion of Free School Meals:** Expand Free School Meals to all children on universal credit, addressing the link between poverty and school absence.
- **SEND Funding:** Tackle the crisis in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) funding by providing extra funding to halve the amount that schools pay towards the cost of a child's Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan. Establish a National Body for SEND to fund support

for children with high needs.

- **Young carers:** Improve identification of and support for young carers, helping them balance their caring responsibilities and their education.
- **Permanently Excluded Pupils:** Introduce a commitment that permanently excluded pupils must be placed with a registered provider.
- **Clear Guidance for Parents:** Give clear guidance to parents on when their child should be off school due to illness, helping to reduce unnecessary absences.
- **Direct support:** Roll out of a programme of education welfare officers and attendance hubs across England to work closely with families and schools.
- **Teacher Home Visits:** Train more teachers to undertake home visits, addressing underlying barriers to school attendance and providing targeted support.

Making school somewhere children want to be: A new commitment to sports, music, drama, and art will make school a place that pupils want to go, fostering a positive and engaging learning environment.

Read our new policy

Every child can achieve great things. By investing in education, supporting families, and prioritising mental health and wellbeing, we can ensure that every child has the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential.

Let us commit to building a future where every child feels safe, supported, and valued in our schools.

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[Are you drinking what we're drinking?](#)

Untreated sewage is pouring into UK waters more than 1,000 times a day. Between 2020 and 2022, England's water companies used storm overflows over a million times, totalling a shocking 7.5 million hours. Millions of litres of water are lost to leaks each day. Just 3 in 20 of England's rivers are in a 'good' ecological state.

How did it get to this?

Since the Conservatives privatised English water companies, those companies have piled on £54 billion in debt and handed out £66 billion in dividends to shareholders. All while failing to properly invest in the infrastructure we need.

And they've been allowed to get away with it – by a toothless regulator and a Conservative government that doesn't seem interested in making polluters pay. The Environment Agency, severely underfunded, has struggled to enforce the law effectively.

The status quo is simply not working, and it's time for a new approach.

That's why today, Liberal Democrats have passed new policy to address this national scandal. Our plan is comprehensive and ambitious, aimed at transforming our waterways, protecting our environment, and holding water companies accountable for their actions.

- **Ending Sewage Dumping:** Set meaningful targets and deadlines for water companies to end sewage discharges.
- **Sewage Tax:** Introduce a tax on water company profits to fund the cleanup of waterways.
- **Robust regulation:** Abolish Ofwat and establish a new 'Coastal, Rivers and Lakes Authority' with strengthened regulatory powers to issue fines to the top executives of water companies and initiate prosecutions in extreme cases.
- **Reform water companies:** Turn water companies into public benefit companies so that particular economic and environmental policy objectives must be considered.
- **Increase monitoring:** End the current system of "self monitoring" and ensure unannounced spot checks are part of the new regulatory framework. Mandate that new monitors cover designated bathing waters and sites of environmental importance such as SSSIs.
- **Local Empowerment:** Give Local authorities increased powers to hold water companies accountable, with new water boards and catchment partnerships.
- **Protecting Citizens:** Extend the Freedom of Information Act to cover water companies and introduce a new 'Sewage Illness Victim Compensation Scheme'. Permit citizens, charities and other groups to take water companies to court.
- **Promoting Transparency:** Require consumer representatives to be included on water company boards, and ensure bills clearly show where money is spent. Make water companies fund local environmental reporters.
- **Investment and Innovation:** Water companies will have 25-year investment plans, including nature-based solutions and innovative approaches to water management.
- **Clean swims:** Increase the number of designated bathing water sites to 1,500 by 2030. Set legally binding targets to prevent sewage dumping into bathing waters and highly sensitive nature sites.
- **Eliminating water poverty:** Create a new water social tariff, aiming to eliminate water poverty by the end of the next parliament. Ensure that energy retrofitting programmes also include measures to improve water

resilience and cut bills.

Read our new policy

Liberal Democrats are leading the charge to clean up our rivers, lakes and coastlines. It's time to put an end to sewage dumping, protect our precious waterways, and ensure a sustainable water system for generations to come.

Stop Sewage Dumping

Tax water companies' huge profits and fix our sewage system.

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[Share Buyback Tax Scheme – why we are doing it and how it would work](#)

Some of the biggest and most profitable companies in the world are listed on the London Stock Exchange, every year they spend tens of billions of pounds doing nothing more than buying back their own shares.

Rather than reward shareholders by paying a dividend, a company can achieve the same result through share buybacks. The stock price goes up; investors receive a premium; and remaining shareholders get a bigger stake in the company.

But share buybacks are controversial.

Every pound spent inflating share prices is a pound that could have been spent to grow our economy and tackle the climate emergency. And at a time when the UK is near the bottom of the table for business investment among major economies, that's a problem.

Take BP for example. Last year, they raked in a massive, unexpected £11 billion, off the back of Putin's illegal invasion of Ukraine. They spent less than £1 billion of that money investing in low carbon energy, and more than £5 billion buying back their own shares – five times more.

In the last two years, share buyback programmes from the 100 biggest firms on the Stock Exchange reached record highs, exceeding 50 billion pounds a year.

That's why the Liberal Democrats are calling for a 4 per cent tax on share buybacks, which would incentivise proper business investment, spur economic growth and raise funds fairly for our public services. At current buyback levels, it would raise £2 billion a year.

Liberal Democrat Leader Ed Davey said:

"Neither the Conservative government or Labour Party have explained how they will fund public services fairly after the next election.

"The Liberal Democrats led the way in calling for a windfall tax on oil and gas giants making eye-watering profits from soaring prices. Now we are leading the way again, with a bold call for a new tax on share buybacks that could raise £2bn a year to fund our public services.

 <https://twitter.com/GeorgeDibb/status/1768914358711484454>

Companies already pay huge fees to intermediaries when they do share buybacks which are often a lot higher than 4%. In 2022 Royal Mail paid double that with an 8.5% fee and still went ahead with its buyback.

 <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/are-companies-being-ripped-off-by-big-banks-over-share-buybacks-k6dzk08t2>

That is over double what our new policy would levy, showing that companies are more than willing to push ahead with buybacks in order to boost their share price, despite the added cost.

Over the last two decades, there has never been a year where companies didn't do share buybacks. Even in the depths of the financial crisis, listed firms spent billions of pounds buying back their own shares.

And if companies decided to increase dividends instead of doing buybacks, this would lead to higher revenue from dividend tax, which is levied at a top rate of 39.35%.

This bold new policy will incentivise productive investment and promote economic growth while raising additional revenue for our public services.

Ed Davey said:

"Large corporations from fossil fuel giants to banks are making huge profits off the back of families facing soaring energy bills, mortgage payments and food prices. It is only fair that we ask these companies to pay more in tax.

"This new levy would not just not just raise much-needed money for public services, it would encourage investment, help create jobs and boost growth including in the green industries of the future."

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[Standing Tall: Liberal Values in a Dangerous World](#)

In a world fraught with uncertainty and conflict, with war raging on our continent, the UK needs to take decisive action to uphold peace, security, and democratic principles throughout the world.

Yet, under the current Conservative Government, our once-strong standing on the world stage has sadly diminished.

Our country's reputation has suffered – inward-looking political chaos and disregard for our allies have tarnished our image. The Conservatives have neglected national security, prioritising soundbites and flash announcements over keeping our country safe. The result is low morale amongst service personnel, failing equipment, and an Army which is being cut by 10,000. Our status as an international development superpower has also been lost – thanks to Rishi Sunak's shortsighted and cruel aid cut, which is not in the UK's national interest.

That's why today, Liberal Democrats have laid out a comprehensive plan to restore the UK's diplomatic credibility, promote security, and uphold liberal values on the global stage:

- **Supporting democracies:** We stand with [Ukraine](#), supporting democratic nations in their time of need. We will begin to seize Russian assets to support Ukraine.
- **Investing in development:** Liberal Democrats will return international development spending to 0.7% of national income, restoring our status as a development superpower and saving lives around the world.
- **Defeating people traffickers and providing sanctuary:** Adopting a [fair and humane approach](#) to global refugees and asylum seekers, creating safe and legal routes for sanctuary in the UK and curbing the demand for people smugglers.
- **Supporting our Armed Forces:** Meeting all of our NATO commitments and reversing the cut of 10,000 soldiers from our Army. We are committed to delivering a [fair deal for our armed forces community](#).
- **Cooperating with our neighbours:** Signing a comprehensive security treaty with the EU and collaborating with European and NATO partners on new defence technologies to bolster stability in the region.
- **Tackling Organised Crime and Terrorism:** Properly resourcing the National Crime Agency, working with Europol and Eurojust, and ensuring the independence of the Intelligence and Security Committee from government interference.

- **Promoting Soft Power:** Protecting the BBC and Channel 4, ensuring they remain pillars of our soft power, and properly funding the BBC World Service to reach audiences globally.

Read our new policy

Liberal Democrats are unwavering in our commitment to liberal values and international cooperation. We believe in a United Kingdom that stands tall on the world stage, promoting peace, security, and democracy.

It's time to reclaim our place as a global leader, grounded in the values of fairness, compassion, and respect for human rights.

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