**Liberal Democrat Conference 2023 round-up**

Overview

The Liberal Democrats Autumn Conference was held in Bournemouth 23 – 26 September at the Bournemouth International Centre. In the midst of the battle between Rishi Sunak and Kier Stamer for control of Number 10, it is easy to overlook the significance of the Liberal Democrats in the next election. Over the past two years, the Liberal Democrats have been rebuilding their parliamentary representation winning four by-elections in traditionally Conservative strongholds in the South of England.

The key strategy for the Liberal Democrats in the next election will be to breakdown the Conservatives ‘Blue Wall’ in the South of England which could pave the way to Labour victory. However, if the Conservatives manage to hold a respectable showing in the Blue Wall, it could result in an unexpectedly good result for Rishi Sunak and even provide some hope of holding on to power. This situation leads to the core challenge faced by the Liberal Democrats; who to work with? A good performance in the next general election could once again result in their campaign revolving around addressing hypothetical questions about future government formations.

Key figures

* Sir Ed Davey MP (Kingston & Surbiton): Party Leader
* Daisy Cooper MP (St. Albans): Deputy Leader, Spokesperson for Health & Social Care
* Sarah Olney MP (Richmond Park): Spokesperson for Treasury and Business & Industrial Strategy
* Tim Farron MP (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Spokesperson for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
* Helen Morgan MP (North Shropshire): Spokesperson for housing, Communities & Local Government

Policy motions and papers

Liberal Democrat policy is determined during conference, members engage in debates and vote on policy motions put forward by members, party organisations, regional and state parties, as well as the Federal Policy Committee. Motions that get passed by conference become party policy. One of the main policy papers that were approved and passed at conference was the Liberal Democrats Pre-manifesto Policy Paper: For a Fair Deal, which crosses over with many Trading Standards responsibilities.

Pre-manifesto Policy Paper: For a Fair Deal – headline proposals

**Economy**

* Invest in infrastructure, innovation and skills to create jobs and prosperity in every region and nation of the UK.
* Help people with the cost of living and their energy bills by implementing a proper, one-off windfall tax on the super-profits of oil and gas producers and traders.
* Ensure that tax burdens don’t fall disproportionately on low earners, reversing the Conservatives’ tax cuts for big banks, and abolishing the separate Capital Gains tax-free allowance, to tax income from wealth more similarly to income from work.
* Clamp down on tax avoidance and evasion, narrowing the tax gap, and giving HMRC more resources to properly tackle tax fraud.
* Ensure that day-to-day spending does not exceed the amount of money raised in taxes over the medium term, with additional flexibility during periods of economic crisis.
* Uphold fiscal responsibility by ensuring that all fiscal events are accompanied by forecasts from the Office for Budget Responsibility.

Most relevant to Trading Standards:

While not specifically mentioned in the paper, increased investment in skills and job creation could mean better resources allocated to apprenticeships. Moving towards the election, CTSI will approach Liberal Democrat MPs to ensure apprenticeships are included in any skills, training and education investments.

**Business and Trade**

* Develop an industrial strategy that will incentivise businesses to invest in new clean technologies in order to grow the economy, create jobs and tackle the climate emergency.
* Ensure Parliament is consulted on and signs off on negotiating mandates and any completed international trade agreements.
* Change the law so that flexible working is open to all from day one in the job, unless there are significant business reasons not to.
* Introduce a general duty of care for the environment and human rights in business operations and supply chains.
* Negotiate reciprocal deals on low-cost, fast-tracked work visas for key economic sectors.
* Provide incentives for businesses to invest in training, take up digital technologies, and become more energy efficient.
* Ensure that the UK’s net zero commitments are at the forefront of any international trade agreement.

**Local Government and Devolution**

* Enhance powers on community assets to help local authorities protect vital infrastructure.
* Give local authorities a key role to cut emissions in their own area.
* End top-down reorganisation of councils and the imposition of elected mayors on communities who do not want them.
* Transfer greater powers away from Westminster and Whitehall to the nations and regions.
* Introduce a written constitution for a federal United Kingdom.
* Enhance and strengthen the powers and standing of local government in England in the new federal constitutional settlement.
* Oppose both a second Scottish independence referendum and independence.

Most relevant to Trading Standards:

A commitment to enhanced powers for local government could result in better resources for local authorities and in turn Trading Standards Services. With the core aim of strengthened powers for local authorities being to enhance infrastructure and cut emissions, there may be a role for Trading Standards in this moving forward.

**Energy, Climate and Net Zero**

* Cut greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2045.
* Invest significantly in renewable power so that 80% of the UK’s electricity is generated from renewables by 2030.
* Provide free retrofits for low-income homes and generous tax incentives for other households.
* Restructure national and local government to deliver net zero by creating a Net Zero Delivery Authority.
* Strengthen the powers and resources of local authorities to cut emissions in their area.
* Require all new homes to be fitted with solar panels.
* Plant at least 60 million trees a year.
* Ensure that the UK’s net zero commitments are at the forefront of any international trade agreement.
* Implement a proper, one-off windfall tax on the super-profits of oil and gas producers and traders.
* Place tackling the climate crisis at the heart of the Lib Dem agenda, including investing in renewable power and home insulation, driving a strong economic recovery, bringing down energy bills, creating clean, secure, well-paid new jobs and leading international efforts to address the emergency globally.

Most relevant to Trading Standards:

With any net zero developments, Trading Standards would be at the heart of ensuring consumers safety in the transition with new products being regulated. CTSI will be approaching politicians to ensure Trading Standards role is not forgotten in any net zero work.

**Food and Farming**

* Keep payments in full to family farming businesses while accelerating the rollout of the better Environmental Land Management schemes, while increasing the farming budget by £1 billion a year to support nature-friendly farming and bring down food prices.
* Ensure that all future trade deals will maintain high health, environmental and animal welfare standards for food production, ensuring that Britain’s farmers and food manufacturers are not put at an unfair disadvantage. Will renegotiate the Australia and New Zealand trade agreements in line with these objectives, withdrawing from them if that cannot be achieved.
* Give British farmers the ability to trade with our European neighbours with minimal need for checks by negotiating comprehensive veterinary and plant health agreements, guaranteeing access for UK food and animal products to the European market.

Most relevant to Trading Standards:

With the cost-of-living crisis and wheat price increases hitting British farmers hard, it is important to that they are properly supported to ensure animal welfare standards and food standards are kept. Trading Standards would have a critical role in safeguarding standards for food production and animal welfare.

**Housing**

* Give local authorities the powers to end the right to buy in their areas, and require them to have a landlord licensing scheme.
* Allow councils to buy land for housing developments based on current use rather than on a “hope value” based on planning application by reforming the Land Compensation Act 1961.
* Improve standards for new homes to ensure they are warm, cheap to heat and produce zero emissions.
* Ensure leaseholders do not have to pay towards removing dangerous cladding from their buildings.
* Strengthen rights for renters in the private sector by banning no-fault evictions and making longer tenancies the default, and for social housing tenants by giving them more powers over the management of their homes and estates.