



## **The Liberal Democrat Structure and Organisation**

# **A Party for all its Members**

The Liberal Democrats' organisation and structures reflect the values that we wish to foster within the country as a whole. The Party's Structures:

- Guarantee one member, one vote, for the election of the Party's Leader and President.
- Ensure the representation of both genders on the Party's decision-making bodies.
- Ensure that decisions are taken at local level, wherever possible, through the decentralisation of power.
- Require the use of single transferable vote in Party elections.

***"The Liberal Democrats exist to build and safeguard a fair, free and open society... we aim to disperse power, to foster diversity and nurture creativity. We believe that the role of the State is to enable all citizens to attain these ideals, to contribute truly to their communities and to take part in the decisions which affect their lives."***

Preamble to the Constitution of the Liberal Democrats

### **A Federal Structure**

The Party has a federal structure, comprising three 'State' Parties, one each for Scotland, Wales and England.

The Federal Party is responsible for the preparation of UK-wide policy, Parliamentary elections and fund-raising. England, Scotland and Wales separately are responsible for the operation of local parties, selection procedures for prospective parliamentary candidates, the arrangements for collecting and renewing Party memberships and policy matters relating specifically to their State - though they can request the Federal Party to look after the development of policy matters in particular fields.

The Party in England is further divided into 12 regional parties, each of which appoints representatives to the English Council. This is the sovereign body of the Party in England and elects an executive to manage its organisation. All English policy-making powers have been passed up to the Federal party.

In Scotland, the main organs of the Party are the Conference, Executive and Policy Committee. In Wales, the main organs of the Party are the Council, National Executive and Policy Sub-Committee.

### **Leader of the Party**

A one-member, one-vote ballot of all members elects the Leader of the Party. Candidates in leadership election must be MPs. Nominations must be proposed and seconded by other MPs and supported by at least 200 Party members in not less than 20 Local Parties. Under normal circumstances, a leadership election must be held at least once in each Parliament.



# The Liberal Democrats

## Party Membership

Every person joining the Party becomes a member of the Federal Party, the relevant State Party and the relevant Local Party. There is no system of constituency affiliation. The Federal Conference and the relevant State Conferences determine the division of subscription income between the Federal Party and the State and Local Parties.

## Local Party Organisation

The basic unit of local organisation is a single constituency, known as the Local Party. It is open to any Local Party that wishes to combine with the adjacent Local Party (Parties), subject to a ballot of members in favour. Local Parties are responsible for selecting Parliamentary and local government candidates. Parliamentary candidates must be drawn from a list of approved candidates, drawn up by three State Parties.

## Federal Conference

The Federal Conference of the Party meets at least twice yearly, and is composed of representatives from each Local Party, elected every year by vote of all Local Party members. Local Parties with less than thirty members are required to combine with adjacent Local Parties in order to obtain representation at the Conference. The Federal Conference is the final, sovereign decision-making body of the Party at federal level.

## Federal Committees

The Federal Conference elects the majority of the members of the three Federal Committees (Executive, Policy and Conference). Each of these committees also includes representatives of the Parliamentary Party, Councillors and Scottish and Welsh Parties. Election procedures ensure that there is an acceptable gender balance on all these committees: at least a third of all those directly elected must be women, and at least a third men.

The Federal Executive is responsible for directing, co-ordinating and implementing the work of the Federal Party and is chaired by the President, who is elected for a two-year term by all members of the Party. The Conference Committee is responsible for organising the two annual conferences, including selecting their agendas. The Policy Committee is responsible for initiating and developing policy proposals and, in conjunction with the Parliamentary Party, for drawing up the Party's general election and European election Manifestos.

## Procedure for Policy Making

Conference determines Party policy. The Policy Committee, local, regional and state parties and Conference representatives submit motions containing proposals for policy for debate at the Conference. If Conference accepts the suggestions, then they become formal Party Policy.

Development of policy on major topics is overseen by the Policy Committee, which usually sets up working groups to examine the subjects in depth. Each working group produces an initial consultation paper outlining the main issues and areas of controversy, and circulates this widely inside and outside the Party. After several months of meetings and consultations with experts and Party members, the working group presents its proposals to the Policy Committee in the form of a policy paper. After further amendment, this is submitted to the conference, which can amend any part of the policy paper, or ask the Policy Committee to reconsider particular proposals. If Conference approves, the policy paper becomes Party policy.