

Liberal Democrats



Safer Streets More and Better Police



Safer Streets – More and Better Police

Foreword

There is still too much crime, particularly violent crime. It can ruin lives. Far too many people don't feel safe in their own homes, neighbourhoods and town centres. Yet at the same time too many criminals are getting away without being caught or punished. When only in 100 crimes ends with a conviction in court, it is time for things to change.

The best way to cut crime is as simple as it sounds – to catch the people who commit crime and set them on the straight and narrow. Labour and the Conservatives prefer instead to posture on penalties, but that's not much of a deterrent if there's little chance you'll be caught. That is why the Liberal Democrats are committing at this election to putting more police out on the streets, to catch criminals. And it's why we are challenging the other parties to do the same.

Our promise is this: over the course of a Parliament, we will put 3,000 extra officers on the beat across every area of England, Wales and Scotland.

On top of that commitment, we will make the police work better and more effectively. The Liberal Democrats will cut police red tape and give local people a bigger say in policing in their area. And we will take big decisions about reforming the police too, with new fitness tests and action to attract the very best professionals to this vital area of public service.

This paper sets out the Liberal Democrat approach in three key areas:

- Police Numbers
- Local Accountability
- More Effective Policing

We hope that, reading through this document, you get a sense of how your safety would improve with a Liberal Democrat Government. We can and will cut crime – making the police better, and ultimately, your streets safer for you and your family.

Nick Clegg MP, Leader of the Liberal Democrats
Chris Huhne MP, Liberal Democrat Shadow Home Secretary

1. Police Numbers

This is a time of huge strain in the public finances. The Liberal Democrats have led the debate in calling for action to tackle the enormous budget deficit. Our approach is simple: it is time to take a close look at everything the Government does and work out what is effective, and what is not, so that we can reduce spending without compromising the most important services people need.

At this time of crisis, much spending will need to be cut. But in key areas of public policy where more investment is needed, the money must be found. **That is why we have decided to prioritise a limited commitment to increasing police numbers by 3,000 over the course of a Parliament.** We believe this is vital if we are to build a strong, fair and secure society as we emerge from recession.

This kind of commitment is only possible because we have led the way in identifying wasteful and unnecessary spending elsewhere in government. In particular, we believe the illiberal and unnecessary Identity Card scheme must be immediately scrapped. This will free £575m over the course of the Parliament, enabling us to make this vital investment in police numbers.

Details of the additional officers to be recruited in each Police Force area can be found in Appendix 1. There will be 2,700 more officers in England and Wales and 300 in Scotland.

- **Putting 2,700 more police on the beat in England and Wales would lead to more than 27,500 more arrests each year and an extra 24,500 crimes being solved.**

Why this commitment is needed

The Liberal Democrats are making this commitment to expanding police numbers because many forces across the country are losing officers even against the backdrop of a recession and predicted rises in acquisitive crime.

Today we publish a detailed analysis of this worrying trend. In the summer of last year alone (between March and September), police numbers fell in more than half of all police forces. Outside London, which has had a disproportionate increase in officer numbers, the total police force in the rest of England and Wales was reduced by 184.

And this cannot be dismissed as a recent trend. Between March 2005 and September 2009, police numbers fell in nearly half of all forces in England and Wales (18 out of 43 forces). The biggest loss in numbers was in South Yorkshire (308 fewer officers) and in percentage terms in Durham, which has lost more than 11% of the force. Full details of changes since 2005 and during 2009 can be found in Appendix 2.

Two thirds of the forces which have cut officer numbers since 2005 are controlled by Conservative police authorities. The remainder are controlled by Labour. It is for this reason that we issue a challenge to the other parties today: will you halt this trend and commit in your manifesto to maintaining police numbers across Britain?

2. Local Accountability

Police forces should be free from arbitrary central targets and the meddling hand of Whitehall to concentrate on what matters most to the communities they serve. Centralised targets, such as the ridiculous 'offences bought to justice' targets introduced by Labour have distorted police priorities. It is right that they have been scrapped but as a result, local accountability must be strengthened.

The Liberal Democrats would give far more power to police authorities. They should have the sole right to sack and appoint the Chief Constable, set local policing priorities, agree any national minimum standards, determine budgets, and not have their council tax precepts capped by Whitehall.

We would give local people a real say over their police force through the direct election of police authorities by fair votes. Where council and police force borders are the same, the council would be the police authority. In the other 35 police forces in England and Wales, two-thirds of members would be elected by Single Transferable Vote and one-third nominated from councils. Authorities would still be able to co-opt extra members to ensure diversity, experience and expertise.

The public should know and be able to hold to account their police authority representatives in line with the liberal principle on no taxation without representation. Until voters can hold decision-takers directly to account, there will be overwhelming pressure on central government to interfere. Fair votes would ensure that all the strands of opinion, minorities and the quirks of geography are represented.

Police authorities need to be able to take a proactive role in challenging their local force to meet their priorities. They must have access to the resources to research the performance of their police force, and to allow for the full range of factors determining performance. Local people must also have more information to allow them to assess police performance, which is why the Liberal Democrats suggest that detection data, as well as crime data should be published at ward level.

Given how important it is that councils and the police work together in crime and reduction partnerships, **police command units should be aligned with such council boundaries to encourage dialogue and co-operation between the commander and the council**, as is already the case in London. No-one should underestimate the impact that an enlightened council can have in preventing crime. Since recorded crime figures peaked, total crime has fallen by 20% in Liberal Democrat controlled areas but only by 16% in Conservative controlled areas. For violent crime, it is 14% and 6% respectively and for robbery, 25% and 8%.

The Liberal Democrats believe that the needs of the community a police force protects is best served by a continued emphasis on neighbourhood policing.

3. More Effective Policing

The Liberal Democrats believe that meaningful reform of the police is long overdue. These issues have been ducked by Labour and the Conservatives on numerous occasions. We will address three key areas to make the police more effective at doing their job: catching criminals and deterring crime. Our focus is on reforming the career path and structure of the profession, on cutting red tape and bureaucracy and on encouraging forces to share best practice on what really works to cut crime.

The Policing Profession

If Chief Constables and other senior officers are to be held to account by stronger police authorities, they in turn must be able to manage their forces, decide on key staff changes and reward key specialisms.

There should be an urgent review of whether the very restrictive terms and conditions for police officers – a single point of entry into the force, 30 or 35-year lifetime employment and pay determined by seniority – are still appropriate. The police contract must be modernised.

There should be more routes out of the police force when officers are no longer motivated or even physically fit. A job for life, regardless of aptitude or effort, is no longer acceptable.

The Liberal Democrats propose annual fitness tests for police officers. Those who fail should be moved to a desk role or civilian position in the force.

The Government should treat the police better as well. As they are not by law allowed to strike (and have restrictions on taking second jobs), **Ministers should always respect and implement in full the recommendations of the independent Police Arbitration Tribunal.**

Red Tape

There have been countless reviews into police red tape in recent years but nothing seems to change. **Everyone is agreed there is a problem; it's time to act to actually reduce bureaucracy in the police service.**

The Liberal Democrats believe there should be a renewed effort to cut unnecessary police paper-work, and to replace form-filling with voice-recognition technology, hand-held computers, and civilian keyboard operators who could take details over the radio.

The Liberal Democrats supported moves to scrap the stop and account form and slim down the stop and search form but some data (such as ethnicity) should still be recorded as a safeguard against disproportionate use of police powers.

The Law Commission should be asked to advise on how legal checks and balances could be made simpler, and the Plain English Campaign should be asked to advise on simplifying police forms.

Renewed efforts should be made to properly implement the “streamline process” across all forces, in which smaller case files are prepared (thus saving large amounts of time) if a guilty plea is expected.

One force should be given a role as a pioneer force for IT to lead the way in establishing the best way for forces to use new technology, both in terms of use and efficiency.

In the long term, efforts must be made to develop an integrated case and custody transmission system, which is fundamental to achieving a streamlined and efficient flow of information between the police, the courts and the CPS.

Best Practice

Detection rates have fallen back sharply from 34% at the end of the 1980s to 28% today. They also vary substantially from force to force. This is partly due to recording differences and differing priorities but even for crimes as serious as violence against the person, there is an astonishing difference in detection rates, with the best forces (Cumbria and Dyfed Powys on 67%) clearing up twice as many crimes as the worst forces (Leicestershire and Staffordshire on 34%).

Much more needs to be done to improve the spreading of good practice to raise detection rates across police forces.

The National Police Improvement Agency should be given a wider remit and more resources to test scientifically what works. The new National Crime Reduction Agency should aim to do for policing and criminal justice what the National Institute for Clinical Excellence does in the health service.

In policing, its research should gradually build up a core of professional expertise around policing techniques that are proven to be effective. It should also have a key role in publishing comparative performance indicators, and reporting on and encouraging best practice.

Appendix One – Additional Officers per Force

Police Force	New Officers
Avon and Somerset Constabulary	65
Bedfordshire Police	24
Cambridgeshire Constabulary	27
Cheshire Constabulary	42
City of London Police	17
Cleveland Police	32
Cumbria Constabulary	24
Derbyshire Constabulary	40
Devon and Cornwall Constabulary	65
Dorset Police	28
Durham Constabulary	33
Essex Police	62
Gloucestershire Constabulary	25
Greater Manchester Police	155
Hampshire Constabulary	73
Hertfordshire Constabulary	41
Humberside Police	43
Kent Police	69
Lancashire Constabulary	69
Leicestershire Constabulary	44
Lincolnshire Police	24
Merseyside Police	83
Metropolitan Police	595
Norfolk Constabulary	30
Northamptonshire Police	25
Northumbria Police	78
North Yorkshire Police	30
Nottinghamshire Police	48
South Yorkshire Police	63
Staffordshire Police	44
Suffolk Constabulary	25
Surrey Police	37
Sussex Police	59
Thames Valley Police	80
Warwickshire Police	19
West Mercia Police	46
West Midlands Police	156
West Yorkshire Police	109
Wiltshire Police	24
Dyfed Powys Police	23
Gwent Police	28
North Wales Police	32
South Wales Police	63
Total England and Wales	2,700
Central Scotland Police	15
Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary	9
Fife Constabulary	19
Grampian Police	26
Lothian and Borders Police	53
Northern Constabulary	13
Strathclyde Police	144
Tayside Police	22
Total Scotland	300
Total UK	3,000

Unfortunately, it is not possible in the current financial climate to bring officer numbers up to 2005 levels in the 18 forces that have experienced losses, as that alone would require an additional 1,769 officers.

The Liberal Democrats, however, believe it would be unfair to punish those forces that have lost officers since 2005. Therefore, the number of new officers we are proposing for each force is based on the number of officers they had in 2005.

The 3,000 new officers are then allocated among the forces based on the proportion of the total police strength in 2005. For example, Avon and Somerset Constabulary, who had 2.41% of the total police officers in England and Wales in 2005, will get an additional 65 new officers.

Appendix Two – Changes in Police Numbers 2005 - 2009

Since March 2005, police numbers have fallen in 18 out of 43 police forces in England and Wales. These tables show both the loss in total officers and in percentage terms.

Police Force	Authority Control	Change Mar 05 - Sept 09
South Yorkshire	Labour	-308
Durham	Labour	-193
South Wales	Labour	-187
Humberside	Conservative	-181
Staffordshire	Labour	-131
Surrey	Conservative	-112
Nottinghamshire	Conservative	-111
Avon and Somerset	Conservative	-99
North Yorkshire	Conservative	-92
North Wales	Labour	-81
London, City of	Conservative	-70
Cheshire	Conservative	-55
Suffolk	Conservative	-46
Hampshire	Conservative	-33
Wiltshire	Conservative	-24
Lincolnshire	Conservative	-23
Warwickshire	Conservative	-14
Gwent	Labour	-9

Police Force	Authority Control	% Change Mar 05 – Sept 09
Durham	Labour	-11.1%
South Yorkshire	Labour	-9.3%
Humberside	Conservative	-8.0%
London, City of	Conservative	-7.9%
North Yorkshire	Conservative	-5.9%
Surrey	Conservative	-5.7%
Staffordshire	Conservative	-5.7%
South Wales	Labour	-5.6%
North Wales	Labour	-4.8%
Nottinghamshire	Conservative	-4.4%
Suffolk	Conservative	-3.5%
Avon and Somerset	Conservative	-2.9%
Cheshire	Conservative	-2.5%
Wiltshire	Conservative	-2.0%
Lincolnshire	Conservative	-1.9%
Warwickshire	Conservative	-1.4%
Hampshire	Conservative	-0.9%
Gwent	Labour	-0.6%

Between March and September 2009, police numbers have fallen in 26 out of 43 police forces in England and Wales.

Police Force	Authority Control	Change Mar 09 - Sept 09
Avon and Somerset	Conservative	-56
South Yorkshire	Labour	-54
West Yorkshire	Labour	-54
Durham	Labour	-43
Hampshire	Conservative	-41
Humberside	Conservative	-39
Derbyshire	Conservative	-37
Cleveland	Labour	-35
Staffordshire	Labour	-33
Cheshire	Conservative	-28
Gloucestershire	Conservative	-27
West Mercia	Conservative	-26
Surrey	Conservative	-25
Wiltshire	Conservative	-25
Dorset	Conservative	-23
Cumbria	No Overall Control	-21
Lancashire	No Overall Control	-21
Leicestershire	Conservative	-19
Lincolnshire	Conservative	-18
South Wales	Labour	-17
Suffolk	Conservative	-14
Cambridgeshire	Conservative	-12
Gwent	Labour	-9
London, City of	Conservative	-2
Hertfordshire	Conservative	-2
Dyfed-Powys	Plaid Cymru	-1

Police Force	Authority Control	% Change Mar 09 – Sept 09
Durham	Labour	-2.7%
Wiltshire	Conservative	-2.0%
Cleveland	Labour	-2.0%
Gloucestershire	Conservative	-2.0%
Humberside	Conservative	-1.8%
South Yorkshire	Labour	-1.8%
Derbyshire	Conservative	-1.7%
Avon and Somerset	Conservative	-1.7%
Cumbria	No Overall Control	-1.6%
Dorset	Conservative	-1.5%
Staffordshire	Labour	-1.5%
Lincolnshire	Conservative	-1.5%
Surrey	Conservative	-1.3%
Cheshire	Conservative	-1.3%
Suffolk	Conservative	-1.1%
Hampshire	Conservative	-1.1%
West Mercia	Conservative	-1.1%
West Yorkshire	Labour	-0.9%
Cambridgeshire	Conservative	-0.8%
Leicestershire	Conservative	-0.8%
Gwent	Labour	-0.6%
Lancashire	No Overall Control	-0.6%
South Wales	Labour	-0.5%
London, City of	Conservative	-0.2%
Hertfordshire	Conservative	-0.1%
Dyfed-Powys	Plaid Cymru	-0.1%