

**Party
Governance
Consultation
Paper**



**Autumn
Conference
2015**
Bournemouth
19th - 23rd
September



Party Governance Consultation Paper to Federal Conference Autumn 2015

Introduction

Over the last two years members have made it clear that they feel that the party is out of touch, often unaccountable and our complex structures unintelligible to all but those heavily involved in them. Reform was a key issue raised by members in the Presidential campaign in 2014 and again in the Leadership campaign earlier this year.

Federal Executive, now chaired by Sal Brinton (who took up her elected role as President in January 2015) agreed that there would be a major constitutional and governance review after the General Election. Feeding in to this would be the usual post General Election and local election review, and they also wanted to look at two other key reports: the findings of the post-2014 election review, also known as the 'Gurling Review' (www.tinyurl.com/ldvgurlingreview), and the 'Bones Review' of 2008 (www.tinyurl.com/ldvbonesreview), both of which proposed changes to the way the party worked and structured itself. There was real concern that previous recommendations, endorsed by members, had not then been implemented.

Federal Executive is clear that the party needs to reform the way that it works and is structured, but we should go back to our values and first principles before the party decides what it wants to do. Sal Brinton commented "Every party committee I have attended since January has proposed the abolition of another committee believing that theirs is absolutely fine." Federal Executive believes that it is important that this review does not become about which committee does what, but looks at how the members can have confidence in their elected representatives, feel that they hold them to account, and understand what each group can and cannot do.

Federal Executive has set up a small task and finish group elected from its members. The 'Governance Group' will steer the detail and arrangements for the review. Its members are Sal Brinton, Antony Hook, Dawn Barnes, Dan Farthing-Sykes, Rodney Berman and Al Ghaff.

The questions listed throughout this consultation document are recommended thinking points. We want to hear from all party members - please feel free to answer as many or as few of them as you wish.

Autumn 2015 consultation

This consultation is the first step in this review. In addition to the consultation session at Federal Conference, Federal Executive welcomes comments from members and you can respond as follows:-

- Come to the Federal Executive helpdesk at Federal Conference and arrange a one to one meeting with a member of the Federal Executive to tell them your views;
- Attend a 'strategic conversation' session chaired by a member of Federal Executive at Federal Conference (to do this please sign up at the Federal Executive helpdesk);
- Federal Executive regional representatives will be at all regional and state conferences in the autumn – please talk to them;
- Email president@libdems.org.uk with your comments.

All comments will be fed into the review, and Federal Executive will meet for an away day early in December to consider all the responses.

Consultation at Spring 2016 Federal Conference

Federal Executive will publish a consultation with some draft proposals for discussion at Spring Conference 2016, as well as discussions at regional and state conferences.

Decision at Autumn 2016 Federal Conference


Following comments from members, detailed constitutional and governance proposals will be brought forward to the Autumn 2016 Conference, in time for party elections in late 2016.

Party Values

The Preamble to our Constitution sets out the party's values:

The Liberal Democrats exist to build and safeguard a fair, free and open society, in which we seek to balance the fundamental values of liberty, equality and community, and in which no one shall be enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity. We champion the freedom, dignity and well-being of individuals, we acknowledge and respect their right to freedom of conscience and their right to develop their talents to the full. We aim to disperse power, to foster diversity and to nurture creativity. We believe that the role of the state is to enable all citizens to attain these ideals, to contribute fully to their communities and to take part in the decisions which affect their lives.



We look forward to a world in which all people share the same basic rights, in which they live together in peace and in which their different cultures will be able to develop freely. We believe that each generation is responsible for the fate of our planet and, by safeguarding the balance of nature and the environment, for the long term continuity of life in all its forms. Upholding these values of individual and social justice, we reject all prejudice and discrimination based upon race, colour, religion, age, disability, sex or sexual orientation and oppose all forms of entrenched privilege and inequality. Recognising that the quest for freedom and justice can never end, we promote human rights and open government, a sustainable economy which serves genuine need, public services of the highest quality, international action based on a recognition of the interdependence of all the world's peoples and responsible stewardship of the earth and its resources. We believe that people should be involved in running their communities. We are determined to strengthen the democratic process and ensure that there is a just and representative system of government with effective Parliamentary institutions, freedom of information, decisions taken at the lowest practicable level and a fair voting system for all elections. We will at all times defend the right to speak, write, worship, associate and vote freely, and we will protect the right of citizens to enjoy privacy in their own lives and homes. We believe that sovereignty rests with the people and that authority in a democracy derives from the people. We therefore acknowledge their right to determine the form of government best suited to their needs and commit ourselves to the promotion of a democratic federal framework within which as much power as feasible is



exercised by the nations and regions of the United Kingdom. We similarly commit ourselves to the promotion of a flourishing system of democratic local government in which decisions are taken and services delivered at the most local level which is viable.

We will foster a strong and sustainable economy which encourages the necessary wealth creating processes, develops and uses the skills of the people and works to the benefit of all, with a just distribution of the rewards of success. We want to see democracy, participation and the co-operative principle in industry and commerce within a competitive environment in which the state allows the market to operate freely where possible but intervenes where necessary. We will promote scientific research and innovation and will harness technological change to human advantage.

We will work for a sense of partnership and community in all areas of life. We recognise that the independence of individuals is safeguarded by their personal ownership of property, but that the market alone does not distribute wealth or income fairly. We support the widest possible distribution of wealth and promote the rights of all citizens to social provision and cultural activity. We seek to make public services responsive to the people they serve, to encourage variety and innovation within them and to make them available on equal terms to all.



Our responsibility for justice and liberty cannot be confined by national boundaries; we are committed to fight poverty, oppression, hunger, ignorance, disease and aggression wherever they occur and to promote the free movement of ideas, people, goods and services. Setting aside national sovereignty when necessary, we will work with other countries towards an equitable and peaceful international order and a durable system of common security. Within the European Community we affirm the values of federalism and integration and work for unity based on these principles. We will contribute to the process of peace and disarmament, the elimination of world poverty and the collective safeguarding of democracy by playing a full and constructive role in international organisations which share similar aims and objectives. These are the conditions of liberty and social justice which it is the responsibility of each citizen and the duty of the state to protect and enlarge. The Liberal Democrats consist of women and men working together for the achievement of these aims.

Q1 Are these still our values?

Q2 Are these values embedded into our party structures at all levels, members, volunteers, elected office holders and paid staff?

Q3 What does the party do well to live its values?

Q4 What does it need to improve?

We tend to resolve problems by creating extra layers of complexity, whether reporting structures, approval processes etc.

Q5 What should the party stop doing or do less of?

Q6 What should the party start doing or do more of?

Q7 If we believe in power being exercised at the lowest level possible, how do we make sure that decisions are made as close to members as possible?

Governance Values

We need to consider what values should underpin how our organisation is structured.

Key Liberal Democrat principles include subsidiarity – decisions being taken at the most local level that is practicable and as near as possible to the people whom the decisions affect – and federalism – where as much power as feasible is exercised by the nations and regions of the United Kingdom.

Liberal Democrats are committed to upholding standards in political life, commonly known as the Nolan Principles, which are:

Selflessness – Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other benefits for themselves, their family or their friends.

Integrity – Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence them in the performance of their official duties.

Objectivity – In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

Accountability – Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

Openness – Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

Honesty – Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

Leadership – Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

It seems to be common sense that holders of party office in the Liberal Democrats should comply with these principles, as is expected of holders of public office.

Our governance arrangements need to ensure that people elected or appointed to party positions will act with selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and show leadership and to provide checks and balances to ensure that they do so.

Q8 What should our strategic priorities be in determining the party's structure?

Q9 What powers or decision making within the party could be placed at a more local level than at present?

Q10 How can we ensure that there is, in our governance, greater:

- a) selflessness
- b) integrity
- c) objectivity
- d) accountability
- e) openness
- f) honesty

Q11 Are there any other principles that should underpin our governance?

Transparency and Accountability

Transparency is also important. As a general principle party members should be entitled to know clearly who took a decision, what decision was made and on what basis. Having said that, we are an organisation in a highly competitive political system. There may be situations when we do not wish information to become known to other political parties, as it would give them a campaigning advantage against us (for example details of our future campaign plans).

Q12 How do we balance the ideal of transparency against the need to prevent information useful to our opponents reaching them?

Businesses and public bodies tend to distinguish between which parts of the organisation are 'public-facing', and which are not. Such a distinction often affects how organisations train or resource each component part. In our organisation certain bodies such as the Federal Party, local parties and the Welsh and Scottish Parties for example are public-facing, whereas most regional parties and the English Party by and large are not.

Q13 Which levels of the party should have public-facing activities and which should not? What are these activities?

Q14 Should the party consider having more direct public (i.e. non-member) input into the organisation, and if so what form would this take?

Members have reported that they find the party structures are often opaque and difficult to follow unless you are involved in the committees at the relevant level. Some Federal committees put reports of their meetings on the members section of the website and some do not. Some representatives on those committees report back to their respective body, and some do not.

Q15 Are there some basic principles we should use when amending our governance structure? Please note this is not a request for which committee to abolish! We want to understand what members want to know or monitor, and how you can feel that this is your party.

Q16 Do you want to see minutes of every meeting on the party website, reports on Lib Dem Voice and other blogs of party meetings? How should the party manage this openness of information with the few matters that are genuinely confidential?

Effective working

Over the last fifteen years, with the growth of the parliamentary party in the House of Commons, much of the focus has been on target seats for parliament. With the loss of 48 Westminster seats it is clear that the party will need to reposition its focus to maximise the more limited resources into winning seats at local, regional and state elections as well as for the European Parliament and Westminster.

It has been noticeable that over recent years many more tasks have been carried out by paid staff (whether permanent, or on short term contracts for elections) than in the past. Some have said this has led to a de-skilling of our activist base. In the current climate, it is essential that activists regain those skills and take up the roles again. This will change the nature of the distribution of resources to a much more facilitative and capacity-building role.

Additionally, staff development and skills diversity seems to have been put under pressure in recent years. This means that certain staff may have not been helped to develop the transferrable skills required as they progress.

Q17 Should the party devolve more resources to ensure effective capacity-building and campaigning skills in states and regions?

Q18 Will activists return to a more active role in local parties and regions, and how do we ensure that they have the right skills?

Q19 How do we best maximise the wide range of diverse skills which members have?

Q20 Should we look at a clear career pathway and progression for staff, giving them an opportunity to work in a range of areas and fostering transferable skills?

Q21 The party has members with a range of skills and experience. How can the party encourage the sharing of knowledge and skills among and between volunteers and staff to ensure that the party and both its paid and volunteer workforce benefit?

Q22 What do members and the party need to do to increase the level of skills of activists?

Respect for each other

Some of the issues raised during both the Presidential and Leadership campaigns include the move away from a limited number of voting conference representatives per local party to one member one vote at conference and for elected posts, due to be debated at Federal Conference this September. On the less positive side, there have been problems with respect and behaviour, including online, which have on occasion resulted in high profile disciplinary cases. Following the Morrissey Report, the role of Pastoral Care Officer was created and has made a start in helping to mediate earlier on in these cases. Helena Morrissey noted that the party was improving, but needed to embed new behaviours and processes throughout the party, challenging inappropriate behaviour and mediating between people at an early stage. Training for Unconscious Bias has already happened for parliamentarians, senior staff and some senior activists.

Q23 What more do we need to do to embed a new culture within the party?

Q24 Should we change the way our discipline structures work to streamline and simplify them?

Q25 How do we make sure that systems of accountability are properly in place at a local, regional, state and federal level, so that reporting and monitoring procedures work for members?

Q26 What do members want from the complaints and disciplinary processes? Should there be a stronger focus on early mediation and speedier resolution of problems?

Diversity

The party office holders, candidates and parliamentarians do not reflect the make-up of the UK as a whole. This is most visible in the House of Commons, where the parliamentary party is now 8 white men, but it is also not diverse among local and regional party officers, or candidates in the Westminster election in 2015. That said, the Leadership Programme provided the party with the most diverse set of candidates in seats where MPs were standing down in 2015, with the loss of 48 seats in parliament.

	Female	BAME	Disability	LGBT+
ONS Figure	51%	14%	18%	2%
Westminster Candidates	26%	9%	5%	6%
Federal Conference	34%	5%	13%	15%
Regional Conference	35%	8%	14%	11%
Local Party Officers	26%	7%	13%	18%

The party has duty to comply with equality legislation, ensuring it prevents discrimination, direct or indirect, to anyone who shares one or more of the protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex, sexual orientation). In addition, the Equality Act 2010 allows political parties to take positive action to support candidates from groups that are underrepresented in parliament (disability, gender reassignment, race, sex, or sexual orientation).

Q27 What can members and the party do to embed our values about diversity into the party?

Q28 What more should the party do to support and help those from groups with protected characteristics and those underrepresented in parliament?

Q29 What should the party do to make this happen?

Q30 Should the party look at specific arrangements to ensure that party bodies, candidates and the leadership of the party are more diverse?

- (a) For example, should the party ensure that committees at all levels have at least one third women members, and a percentage of BAME members that reflect the community at that level (e.g. Federal Committees: 15%, England 13% Scotland 5% Greater Manchester 21%)?**
- (b) Should the party return to the 'zipping' mechanisms for list elections used in England and Wales for the European elections in 1998, which gave us 50-50 gender breakdown in the European Parliament?**
- (c) Should the party look at all women shortlists, and BAME shortlists in areas with higher levels of BAME residents?**
- (d) How do we encourage, mentor and support people from underrepresented groups in politics to put themselves forward for roles in the party?**
- (e) How do we make democracy in the party available to all members? (For example some local parties provide grants to members on low incomes to help them attend conference; in the past grants have also been available for disabled people to help with the extra cost of accessible hotel rooms)**
- (f) How can the party best use former MPs, candidates and Leadership Programme members to improve the public perception of diversity in the party?**

Leadership of the Liberal Democrats

The Leader, all Westminster MPs, the Leader of the Scottish Party, the Chairs of the FPC, FCC, FFAC, the Party Treasurer, the three state party chairs and most of the regional chairs are male and white. By contrast only the President (& Chair of Federal Executive) and the Leader of the Welsh Liberal Democrats are female, and there is only one BAME regional chair.

Currently, the Leader has a Deputy Leader of the Commons Parliamentary Party, elected by the MPs under their standing orders. There are proposals that there should be a Deputy Leader of the party, elected by all members, who could be a woman and/or BAME person.

Q31 Should the party ensure diversity in the senior leadership roles of Leader, President and Deputy Leader?

Q32 If yes, should this just reflect gender diversity, or other under-represented characteristics as well?

If this role is created at a wider party level, there are some issues that needed to be discussed and decided.

- 1. The current constitution has very little detail on the roles and responsibilities of Leader and President. Adding a Deputy Leader means we should be clearer about the roles for all three.*
- 2. Currently the Party Leader appoints their spokespeople, and the Deputy Leader would be expected to be a key part of the team.*
- 3. At present, the President does not have any form of remuneration. Current and past Presidents have added it to their parliamentary duties, but for non-parliamentarians who have to work, the full-time nature of the Presidential role can be problematic. The same would also be true for a Deputy Leader. Only recently has the President had expenses paid, but the party expects them to raise money for this and for their part-time office support.*

Q33 Should a Deputy Leader be elected by the members or appointed by the Party Leader?

Q34 If the Deputy Leader is elected, should the election for Leader and Deputy Leader be on a joint-ticket basis where possible?

Q35 Should remuneration and expenses be made available to the President and/or Deputy Leader?

Structures

The current structures of local, regional, state and federal parties are complex, with some people being elected directly and others elected by bodies to sit on committees (see organograms at the rear of this booklet).

Roles and responsibilities for each tier appear self-contained, but there is often confusion between committees on decision making. For example, (a) the constitution is not clear on whether the Federal Executive or the Federal Finance and Administration Committee lead on finances and (b) in England the English Candidates Committee has no overlap with campaigns committees, whereas in Scotland and Wales there is a joint campaigns and candidates committee.

Q36 Are party committees organised in such a way that all members who want to are able to take part? Can we use technology to help (as with telephone conferencing or Skype)?

Q37 Should we highlight the areas of responsibility for certain committees more clearly, and encourage members standing for committees to highlight their expertise in those areas, rather than the tendency to focus on campaigning experience?

Q38 Should we actively encourage progression in party roles, especially for those from underrepresented groups?

Q39 If you have never stood for a committee, please tell us why.

Q40 Should we consider reducing the tiers of structures to simplify accountability? Should members be more than two steps away from voting for representatives? For example, at present members vote for their regional representatives, who in turn vote for their English Council representatives, who in turn vote for their English Council Executive members, who vote for their English Treasurer and Vice-Chair? Without going in to proposals for cutting specific committees, what should the basic principles be?

At present terms of office vary between one, two, three and five years.

Some roles are time limited (local party Chairs have a three year time limit before having to stand down for a while, the President is a two year term, with the possibility of one further two year term; many state and Federal committees have no term restrictions on the terms served before standing down or standing down for a while.

Q41 Should terms of office be streamlined, so that they are consistent within the party? If yes, what should the term be?

Q42 Should all elected officers and committee members have a time limit before they have to stand down for a period before putting themselves up for election again, or be time limited?

How to Respond to this Consultation

This consultation will continue throughout the autumn and submissions are very welcome throughout the process. Below are the essential details you will need, including the deadline and where to send your submission.

What should I submit?

Members are welcome to submit views on Party structures, and the principles that should underpin these, in answer to the questions listed above. If you feel your comments do not fall into any of the categories listed above please do get in touch with the review via president@libdems.org.uk with your views and comments.

Where can I send my submission?

Submissions are welcome either by email or by post to the following addresses:

Email president@libdems.org.uk

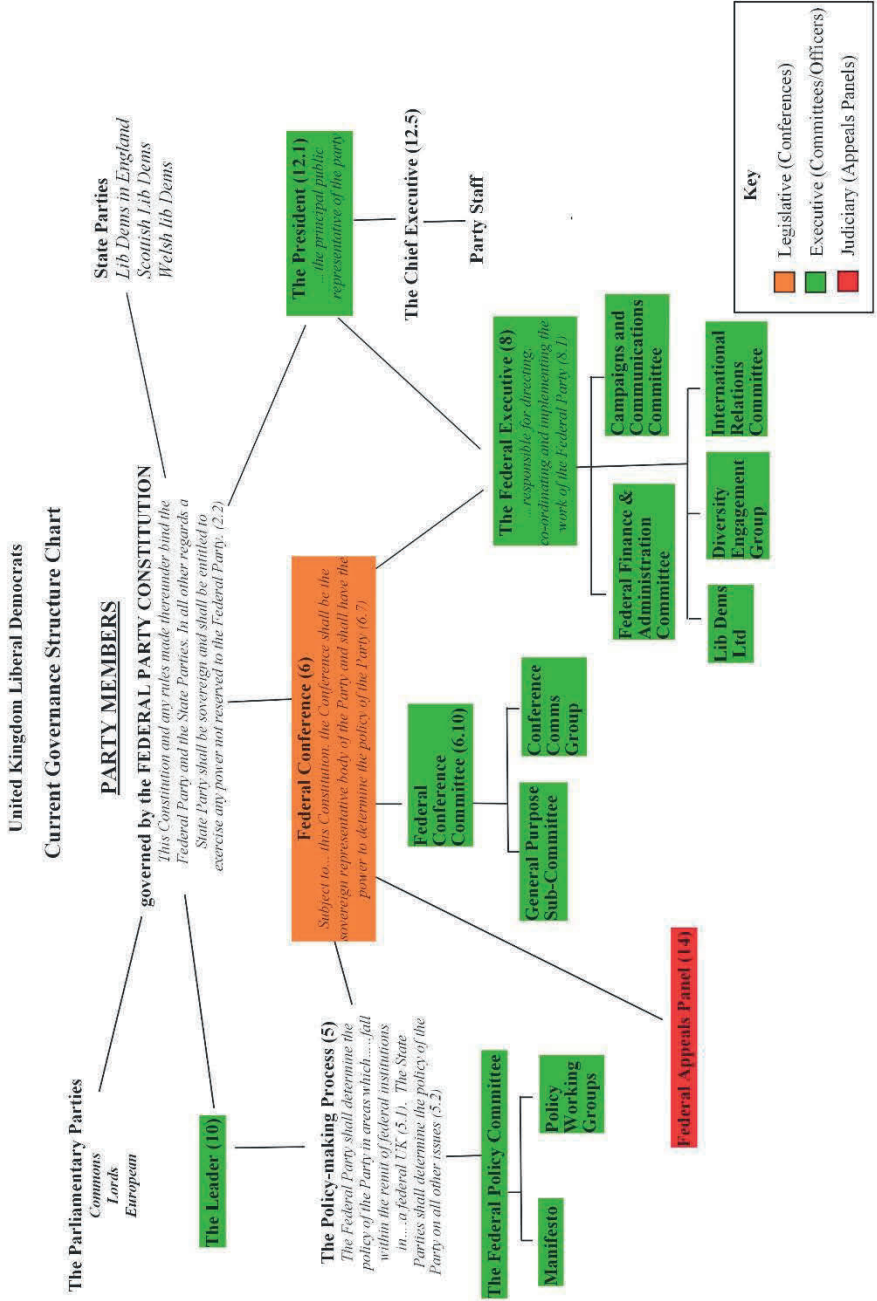
Post Party Governance Review
c/o Chris Adams
Governance Officer
8-10 Great George Street
London
SW1P 3AE

What is the deadline for submissions?

The deadline for submissions is [Noon on Monday 16 November 2015](#).

What if I have further questions?

You are very welcome to arrange to talk with your Federal Executive Regional/State Representative at your regional/state conference, or with any member of the Federal Executive at Federal Conference in Bournemouth. There will be an FE helpdesk by the information desk. For a full list of FE members please visit www.libdems.org.uk/federal_executive. Please also feel free to get in touch via president@libdems.org.uk.

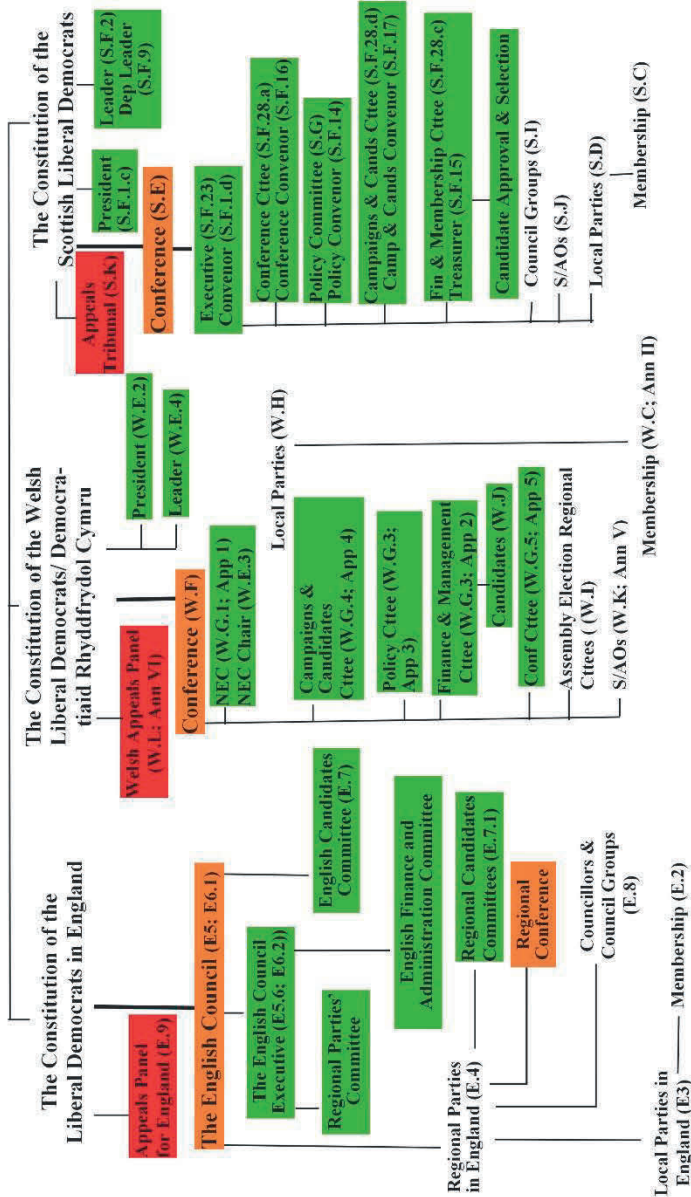


State Party Liberal Democrats

Current Governance Structure Chart

FEDERAL PARTY CONSTITUTION

This Constitution and any rules made thereunder bind the Federal Party and the State Parties. In all other regards a State Party shall be sovereign and shall be entitled to exercise any power not



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www.libdems.org.uk/autumn-conference-2015

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