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The World after COVID-19

Consultation Paper 143

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The World After COVID-19

Background

This consultation paper is presented as the first stage in the development of new Party thinking on the World After COVID-19. It does not represent agreed Party policy. It is designed to stimulate debate and discussion within the Party and outside; based on the response generated the Federal Policy Committee will develop proposals for debate at future conferences. Some of the issues explored in this consultation have been debated through PolicyLab, a new online debate platform that has been running in parallel with the development of this consultation paper and provides a space for members to debate ideas on the world after coronavirus. Views and ideas from PolicyLab will be collated and fed into this consultation process.

The paper has been drawn up by the Federal Policy Committee.

Comments on the paper, and requests for speakers, should be addressed to: Christian Moon, Policy Unit, Liberal Democrats, 8 – 10 Great George Street, London, SW1P 3AE. Email: policy.consultations@libdems.org.uk

Comments should reach us as soon as possible and no later than Friday 30th October 2020.

Further copies of this paper can be found online at www.libdems.org.uk/policy_papers

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1. Introduction

COVID-19 has fundamentally changed the UK. The human and economic cost of coronavirus has forced us all to reconsider whether we wish to return to the way things were before March 2020.

The events which have unfolded over the past few months have shown that there is a strong appetite amongst the public to tackle economic inequalities and to provide a more generous and fast-acting welfare safety net.

At the same time there is a growing consensus that critical public services, such as the NHS and social care, should be funded at a higher level to ensure frontline workers have the resources they need to treat patients, support people to live healthier lives, and to care for our loved ones at home or in care homes.

The early weeks of the pandemic also showed the positive impact that lower carbon emissions from vehicles and air travel could have on air quality and fighting the climate and nature emergencies.

Since March, Liberal Democrats have advocated effective and rapid responses to tackle the immediate crisis, and have led calls to start learning now the lessons from the government's initial actions in preparation for a second wave this winter.

But it is vital now to also begin long-term planning for a post-covid world. Coronavirus has created unique circumstances through which we can address longstanding flaws in our economy, tackle inequality, fight climate change, and create a new settlement between individuals and the state.

To stimulate this debate and new ideas we have split this consultation paper into six areas: social justice, the economy, the role of the state, the environment, the health and care system, and our international relationships.

This paper highlights the key challenges that the UK, its nations, and regions face in building a new economy and new society post-COVID. Underpinned by our core beliefs in liberty, equality, community, the environment and internationalism, the paper offers suggestions as to how we might move forward on these big issues.

Critically this is a document which is designed to be debated and discussed, drawing in ideas from across the party, and the country.

The people of the UK deserve a freer, fairer and more resilient society. They need your ideas. They need Liberal Democrat answers.

2. Social Justice

The challenge

COVID-19 has highlighted the stark gap between the more financially secure and those who are either just about managing or already fall below the poverty line. While many office workers have been furloughed or work from home, many on lower incomes continued to travel to work, often to do jobs which put them at risk of being infected with coronavirus. At the same time, thousands of young people have been left without access to their primary or secondary education as schools have largely remained closed and access to internet-based learning is far from universal.

What could the Liberal Democrat approach be?

Community, equality and liberty must be at the heart of the post COVID-19 recovery. Child poverty, the use of foodbanks, and levels of homelessness are at their highest levels for decades. Over that same time period the delivery of truly affordable homes has failed to keep pace with demand, driving rents ever upward. According to the Resolution Foundation real incomes for the poorest were higher in 2004/05 than they were in 2018/19, and the key workers we have come to rely on more than ever remain chronically underpaid.

Benefits and low-paid work

In 2019's A Fairer Share for All, the Party argued for a range of improvements to Universal Credit to increase incomes for the poorest. In response to COVID-19 the government has implemented some of those recommendations for a 12-month period including through increases to Universal Credit and returning housing benefit to the 30th percentile of local rents. Claimant conditionality was also initially suspended, dropping the requirement for unemployed people to actively search for work – something our party has long called for.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has developed a Minimum Income Standard and estimates that, excluding housing costs, an individual requires £11,501 per year and a couple £16,114. Under Universal Credit, over-25s can currently claim £4,918 per year, a couple £7,128.

Post COVID-19, it is clear that we need a much stronger safety net that can withstand both the usual economic cycle and economic shocks. At minimum, we should increase the Universal Credit Standard Allowance and change the benefits taper to allow people to retain more of their benefits as they get into work. Child benefit should be reinstated and increased, benefit rates for under-25s equalised with that of their older peers, claimant conditionality ended.

Beyond changes to the current benefits system the party should consider the introduction of a Universal Basic Income. Such a system would provide the same income to every resident of that country, and replacing the current systems of pensions, income tax thresholds, and some or all tax credits.

Instead of, or in addition to, a Universal Basic Income, free Universal Basic Services such as water, energy and broadband could be introduced to reduce the cost of living and improve access to training and the 21st century economy

In addition to further highlighting the flaws in the current benefits system, the current crisis has brought into sharp relief the value to society of the many jobs which are currently low paid and often undervalued, particularly in the caring professions. For those in high-risk and caring occupations - including NHS and social care workers, those offering in-home care - we should guarantee they are paid the Real Living Wage.

Questions

1. *Given that higher benefits would require higher taxes, are current benefit levels broadly right; too high; or too low?*

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2. *Should additional funding for the benefits system focus on particular groups, such as children or those with disabilities?*
3. *Should there be a role for potential sanctions or bonuses to encourage job-seeking, or should all benefits be unconditional?*
4. *Should benefits to be universal or means-tested?*

Cost of renting and supply of affordable housing

From 1945 to 1980, an average of 126,000 social homes were built every year. Over the past five years, the rate of all house building has averaged 166,000 a year against a government target of 300,000, leading to increasing gaps between incomes and rents in the majority of local areas.

In our 2019 general election manifesto we pledged to deliver 100,000 homes for social rent each year. We should now go further and deliver 150,000 social homes each year for the next twenty years.

We should remain committed to our 2019 pledge to help young people via a new Help to Rent scheme to provide government-backed tenancy deposit loans for all first-time renters under 30; and should expand build to rent schemes. In addition, we would ensure that Local Housing Allowance rates remain at the 30th percentile of local private rents and provide full funding for local councils to meet their duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act.

Questions

5. *Should private rents be capped, either across the board or in certain areas of the country?*
6. *Should keyworker rents be subsidised? Should keyworkers be prioritised for affordable housing?*
7. *What measures would be most effective in reducing the value of land for residential development?*

Supporting children to learn at home

The closure of schools to the majority of young people during COVID-19 has highlighted the lack of opportunities for many students to learn or further their studies at home.

There has been cross-party consensus calling for the government to ensure that all homes have access to a computer and the internet to ensure that all children can access online resources. Similarly, there have been calls from across the political spectrum for funding to be allocated to enable students to catch up.

We have rightly seen the prioritisation of support for the children of keyworkers; we have also seen the prioritisation of certain age groups for an earlier return to school.

This may well not be the last health crisis which forces our schools to close so we must prepare now to ensure that in the next crisis no child is left behind.

Questions

8. *How can we most efficiently ensure the sourcing and distribution of computers to those students who require them? And how should internet connectivity be provided for those who do not have access to broadband?*
9. *Should we prioritise certain age groups during future school closures, and how should we grade students if they are unable to sit exams?*
10. *If we are to fund a catch-up premium, how many hours would need to be provided and for what duration?*

3. Economy

The challenge

COVID-19 has created an economic climate in which unemployment across the UK could reach levels not seen since the early 1980s, and highlighted once again the precarious employment situation faced by many on low paid, zero-hour contracts, and in the gig economy – including a disproportionate number of women and people from BAME communities.

At the same time the current health crisis has accelerated conversations about the need for de-globalisation, the scale of government borrowing to grow the economy, the quality and security of employment, and how as a nation we boost productivity, train people for the new economy, and meet our climate change obligations.

What could the Liberal Democrat approach be?

COVID-19 has laid bare the deep flaws in the UK economy. Alongside highlighting the huge pay inequalities between sectors and the impact insecure, low-paid work has on the choices of individuals, we can also see how a centralised and nationalist protectionist approach by the current government to restoring sustainable economic growth will not address these flaws.

We must seek to transform and rebalance our economy – both sectorally and geographically, and it is the Liberal Democrats who are best placed to address the structural problems which have left too many people in low-paid, insecure work and unable to fulfill their potential.

A Liberal Democrat approach to a post COVID-19 economy would be underpinned by our five values: liberty, equality, community, internationalism, and environmentalism.

We would disperse economic decision making to the cities, regions, and nations of the UK to create a new economy which delivered sustainable growth, where long-term investment and decision-making is the norm, and where companies are judged as much on the social and environmental capital they create in local communities as on returns to shareholders. Above all we would fulfil the UK's obligations under COP21 and transition to net zero carbon by 2045.

Creating a framework for long-term, sustainable, and regional growth

The Liberal Democrats would take a different approach to the current government in terms of borrowing to fund future green growth. With interest rates at historic lows, there is a huge opportunity to borrow now to create the infrastructure we need to establish long-term growth across all the regions and nations of the UK.

At the same time, we must fundamentally change the way we economic decisions are made. We would begin by reducing the role of the Treasury by adding responsibility for creating economic growth and delivering a new industrial strategy to a new Department for Business and the Regions.

To support this approach would be the creation of detailed and properly funded local economic plans created by a broad range of stakeholders, crucially including local people through a national programme of community-based consultations. We must ensure future local economic resilience in our globalised world.

To complement these wide-ranging changes to funding and decision-making we would create a ring-fenced National Infrastructure Fund focusing on physical infrastructure alongside an expanded National Productivity Fund focusing on research and innovation clusters in every region, with universities at their heart. As many decisions as possible will be delegated to cities, regions, and nations to identify and manage how that investment should be deployed.

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Questions

1. *What should the government's attitude to borrowing and servicing long-term debt be when seeking to promote economic growth (for example, by creating a National Infrastructure Fund) across all the regions and nations of the UK?*
2. *How can we ensure any stimulus/innovation funding gets to where it can have the biggest impact on the economy and local communities?*
3. *How can the state best support innovation?*
4. *Should the UK create a sovereign wealth fund?*
5. *If the state is going to 'pick winners' as part of an industrial strategy on what criteria should it do so?*
6. *How can we best empower communities to define their own economic strategies and execute them?*
7. *How can the UK and its regions and nations capitalise on any de-globalisation of supply chains, and what would be needed to facilitate those efforts?*

Creating sustainable employment and training people for the new economy

Building on a fully-funded new industrial strategy focused on innovation, regional growth and economic resilience, we would continue the Liberal Democrat-focus on lifelong learning and vocational education to ensure people of all ages and backgrounds can access the training they need to make individual choices and have equal access to jobs in the new economy.

We would work with a broad range of stakeholders to define targets for social inclusion and equality within the economy. A Liberal Democrat government would also promote and encourage new and flexible ways of working, for example home-working and a 4-day week.

Questions

8. *Should there be a role for zero-hour contracted employment, particularly in the gig economy, and if so how do we support workers' rights?*
9. *How do we create a culture of lifelong learning and flexible working among individuals and employers?*
10. *How do we create aspirations and expectations for a high-skilled labour force? Do the attitudes of business leaders need to change?*
11. *How do we ensure underrepresented groups are equally positioned to take advantage of opportunities in the new economy?*

Making markets and businesses work for local people and communities

As part of our commitment to equality and environmentalism we would ensure that companies fulfil their wider obligations to society, to their employees, and to their environment. In return for creating the infrastructure for economic growth we would strengthen the focus on a business' value to society and foster a culture of social value/capital where individuals and stakeholders work together to actively contribute and invest in local communities and their residents.

To facilitate this change in ethos we would make governance of companies more inclusive, incentivise long-term planning and investment, and attach targeted and rigorous conditions to any state bailouts or investments in companies to ensure a focus on sustainability and a more equal society.

Questions

12. *How can we encourage new forms of social ownership to support innovation and growth?*
13. *How do we create a long-termist culture amongst both institutional and individual investors?*

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14. *How can we ensure that corporations – including technology companies and online retailers - pay their fair share?*
15. *How do we reform competition policy for the digital era?*
16. *What should key criteria be for conditions attached to any state support for companies?*

4. The Role of the State

The challenge

The COVID-19 pandemic has confronted the UK state in a way not seen since the Second World War. The role of the state has changed rapidly, without any chance for real scrutiny or public discussion. As the pandemic recedes, we need to reflect on the action taken and on how the state should be remodelled going forward.

What could the Liberal Democrat approach be?

This pandemic won't be the last such challenge the UK faces so our state needs to be much better prepared to deal with future health, economic and political crises. Balancing our values of community with our belief in individualism will be key in establishing a new settlement for the state and its citizens.

Making the case for civil liberties

The overarching question that comes out of the pandemic is where does the balance lie between individual liberty and the collective good in a situation like this? Liberals tend to apply the harm principle to judge when civil liberties need to be curtailed by the state. However, when the harm an individual may cause is very remote or theoretical, that judgement is difficult.

The lockdown and social distancing restrictions have reduced individual liberties. They have also increased the chance of other types of harm, including increased domestic abuse, educational inequalities, and health problems left untreated. This begs the question of where the balance lies between individual wellbeing and the broader economic good.

Enforcement of the lockdown measures has created new challenges. In a country where policing is conducted on a model of consent, this has been controversial, in particular in the early weeks. Before government

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advice developed, some forces and individual officers clearly got it wrong, endangering public trust.

We need robust public debate on where the balance of civil liberties, individual freedom and wellbeing, and the common good lies. Liberal Democrats should offer a strong defence of the principles of civil liberties and the Human Rights Act.

We also need legislation to set the framework for scrutiny and accountability in similar situations and a clear process for ensuring any new powers for the police are properly defined and monitored.

We should extend our defence of the Human Rights Act to incorporate new digital rights for individuals. The Government has taken a centralised approach to data, including in the way the NHS app was originally developed, putting the UK more in line with authoritarian countries, such as China. Is the trade-off acceptable? The science must demonstrate a real requirement and useful outcomes and, to date, it is far from clear it has. Liberal Democrats should lead in being sceptical about government collection and use of data.

Questions

- 1. How do we define where the balance lies between individual liberties and the collective good? How should we apply the harm principle in today's society?*
- 2. How do we create a broader public debate on the balance of liberty, health and economic activity?*
- 3. What measures are needed to secure a model of policing by consent?*
- 4. What could a digital rights charter look like?*

A more active state

Polling shows that, by and large, in the early days the population supported government action to tackle the pandemic, including the lockdown. Has the pandemic changed the narrative on the role of the state? Are people more willing to pay higher taxes for the NHS – or does the ‘Captain Tom’ narrative give people an opt-out from paying higher taxes?

The pandemic changed the nature of the relationship between business and the state. We need a new model for that relationship, including addressing the concern that state action can cause moral hazard in company behaviour. Many are asking if society is happy to support businesses that avoid paying tax, under-pay their workers or fail to protect the environment. However, that needs to be balanced with the interests of the individual workers employed by those companies.

We need to ask if the state should intervene to distort markets in certain areas, eg food supplies and medical equipment production. Does the state need to secure national production rather than the lowest price, more often?

Civil society has moved quickly, even remarkably, to support those in need. Liberal Democrats should lead campaigning to say the state, as well as civil society, needs to do more to help those locked out from support, education and other networks by poverty, poor internet, a lack of education etc.

The high death rate amongst people from certain BAME communities is truly shocking. The Liberal Democrats must support investigations into why this is happening, including to what extent institutional racism impacts on the provision of public and health services.

Questions

5. *How do we reframe the relationship between the state and business?*

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6. *What level of state intervention to distort markets is appropriate, for example in securing food supplies and medical equipment?*
7. *What is the right balance between state and civil society in supporting those in need due to poverty, poor internet, a lack of education etc? What more should the state be delivering?*

Stronger and more resilient communities within a federal UK

The pandemic has exposed the flaws in the devolved constitutional structure, as disagreement and divergence has grown. It is time to move to a full federal structure for the UK, and the Liberal Democrats should champion that cause.

A decade of under-funding of local government has left a hole in councils' ability to respond. Despite this, local authorities have, in many cases, still performed extremely well, because understanding local needs is best achieved at a local level. The long-term financial consequences will come later. This may require innovative ways to raise taxation, including tourist taxes.

Resilience and flexibility require spare capacity. Over the last 50 years the mantra of efficiency has minimised unused capacity. Now may be the time for society to accept that the state needs to spend more to build its own capacity, including a level of spare capacity within public services.

In many cases civil society has filled gaps left by the state, and Liberal Democrats' belief in the power of community has been justified. But some of those volunteer efforts were wasted due to a lack of structure and it may be time to develop a structured citizens' service. Liberal Democrats should continue to champion both effective local government and community-based action.

The state needs to do more to build individual, family and local resilience. Individual resilience requires an understanding of risk and

we need to develop education to help people better understand the nature of risk, considering how it can be built into curricula.

Questions

8. *What should the Liberal Democrat approach be to developing a full federal structure for the UK?*
9. *How do we best make the case for building spare capacity within public services and secure the necessary funding?*
10. *How can we best harness the willingness of communities to help, in productive, safe and useful ways? Do we need a structured citizens' service and what could it look like?*
11. *How can we improve the national understanding of, and level of public discourse about, risk?*

5. The Environment

The challenge

The urgency of tackling the COVID-19 pandemic must not obscure the accelerating climate and nature crises. But action to recover from the economic impact of the lockdown, together with the willingness people have shown to change their lifestyles for the greater good, gives us a major opportunity for public intervention to rebuild the economy on environmentally sustainable lines. The current style of government in the UK, however – centralised, secretive, short-termist and resistant to scrutiny – is wholly unsuited to meeting this challenge.

What could the Liberal Democrat approach be?

Liberal Democrats must continue to champion the green approach: integrating environmental factors into decision-making; ensuring that environmental policy is fair and equitable; decentralising political and economic power, to enable appropriate local responses; and supporting international cooperation and strong institutions – including the EU – to tackle global challenges. Above all, we must aim to build an economy and society properly prepared for – and therefore resilient to – future shocks, whether caused by environmental change, economic instability or further pandemics.

The climate emergency

It is clear that recovery from the recession induced by the lockdown will require extensive government intervention, but the investment needed to accelerate the transition to a net zero economy can also kick-start economic activity, boost productivity and, in turn, restore the public finances. The emergency ten-year programme of home energy efficiency proposed by the Liberal Democrats will create tens of thousands of new jobs at the same time as reducing emissions and cutting fuel bills. Investment in renewable electricity, zero-carbon heating and zero-carbon transport will increase the demand for skilled labour in manufacturing enterprises and their supply chains. The

adoption of 'circular economy' models will increase employment, cut resource use and emissions and reduce the need for imports, relieving pressure on vulnerable international supply chains.

Climate objectives must lie at the heart of any economic recovery plan, and significant resources and powers, for example over planning, housing and local energy and transport solutions, must be decentralised to local government and local communities. Green taxes should be considered for a role in funding the recovery, as long as they do not impact low-income groups unfairly.

It is essential that the recovery package does not extend a lifeline to high-carbon industries. Airlines in particular have been quick to call for government support to avoid collapse, even though aviation is the fastest growing source of carbon emissions, and the industry has been very slow to put in place any kind of climate policy framework. Government recovery packages for fossil-fuel-intensive sectors must be conditional on companies' acceptance of legally binding obligations to assess their level of climate risk and to reduce their emissions, with both short and long-term targets which do not depend simply on carbon offsetting. Since many high-carbon industries are major employers, it will also be essential to put in place 'just transition' mechanisms for workers, sectors and regions particularly affected by the transition to net zero.

Questions

- 1. What new climate policies should be put in place as part of recovery from the pandemic?*
- 2. What climate and other environmental conditions should be placed on high-carbon industries in receipt of recovery packages?*

Human health and the local environment

One of the few benefits of the crisis and the lockdown has been the sharp drop in levels of air pollution; it is estimated that lower emissions during April, mainly from transport, have led to 11,000 fewer deaths

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from pollution in Europe, including 1,750 in the UK. The evident improvement in air quality in major cities may help to build support for more ambitious policies in the future.

Yet the easing of the lockdown threatens to return pollution to its former levels, as transport use and industrial output both rise; and any long-lasting increase in the degree of home working (reducing the need to travel) may be offset by people's reluctance to use public transport for fear of infection, and the probable increase in home deliveries. Actions to increase cycling and walking, including the redesign of city centres, should be prioritised; the transition to electric vehicles should be accelerated; and policies should be developed to support public transport and encourage its use.

The lockdown has also highlighted the importance of nature – including gardens, parks and green spaces – in maintaining physical and mental health, and at the same time significant inequalities in access to it, particularly for poorer individuals and communities.

Questions

3. *What policies are needed to support walking and cycling, and public transport, and accelerate the phase-out of petrol and diesel vehicles?*
4. *What should we argue for to protect and expand access to nature and green spaces?*

The nature emergency

The pandemic has also helped to highlight the nature emergency – which, while just as critical as the climate emergency, has tended to receive less attention. World-wide, deforestation and other forms of land conversion are driving wildlife out of their evolutionary niches and into human environments, where they interact and breed new strains of disease; three-quarters of new or emerging human diseases are thought to originate in animals. It is therefore essential to halt and reverse deforestation, protect biodiversity and habitats and end the trade in wildlife – but in general, national and international policy and

legislative frameworks are weak or lacking. The UK should take the opportunity to argue for a much tougher international framework, and for strict environment and climate conditions in its post-Brexit free trade agreements.

The UK, along with other rich nations, shares responsibility for the global nature emergency through its consumption of tropical commodities such as timber, palm oil, soya or cocoa, whose production helps to drive forest loss. Legislation should be introduced to break the link, including a 'due diligence' obligation on companies to avoid environmental destruction – and also human rights abuses such as child labour – throughout their operations and supply chains.

Intensive farming also provides ideal conditions for bacteria and viruses to spread between animals and humans, increasing the risk of diseases, such as the swine flu epidemic of 2009–10. It also has major environmental impacts, including greenhouse gas emissions from cattle and sheep, waste management and the use of fertilisers. The impacts of climate change are highly likely to disrupt farming and food production, and UK land use patterns will also need to change to see a significant expansion of natural carbon sinks such as forests and peatlands.

There is therefore an urgent need for radical reform of policies governing land use, farming and food production and consumption. We should aim to capture greater value for farmers; the rerouting of restaurant supply chains to homes during the epidemic may have a lasting effect. Subsidised farming may not be the only route to food security; we should consider the potential for synthetic meat and other foodstuffs.

Questions

- 5. What policies are needed to protect national and global wildlife and habitats?*

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6. *What farming and food policies will best restore nature, combat climate change and promote the production and consumption of healthy and sustainable food?*

6. Health and Care

The challenge

The COVID-19 crisis has placed unparalleled stress on our health and social care services. While health and care staff have risen to the challenge and performed miracles, it has exposed some deep-rooted problems in terms of the resilience of our systems, the legacy in particular of long-term underfunding and staff shortages, and in particular the neglect of social care and public health by government. There is a heavy backlog of treatment for non-COVID conditions which will place continuing strain on provision. The crisis has also had serious consequences for the mental wellbeing of many of our fellow citizens.

What could the Liberal Democrat approach be?

Liberal Democrats recognise that the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities has to be addressed in the round. This is why we have always championed parts of our health and care services which have sometimes been regarded by others as ‘Cinderella’ services, such as social and mental health care. We will argue very strongly for these crucial areas to be given their rightful priority and necessary funding. Local and community-based approaches are often best for tackling many of these challenges, and this will be a strong emphasis in the development of our health and care policy.

Social care

Adult social care has been neglected for a long time, but the coronavirus crisis has particularly highlighted how the government has mishandled the sector, and the problems that still need resolving. We must make the case for increased funding from the taxpayer, with a standard of care free for all.

Priorities within the current health and care system are too focussed on hospital-based care. However, there are no shortcuts to improvement in a wide, disparate sector. The government’s response to coronavirus

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around issues such as testing has highlighted the difficulties of enacting rapid, responsive change from the centre. Local government should have a greater role to play, helping to further decentralise social care. It must work with public health and primary care to head off the need for hospital admission.

Any reform should also address the needs of social care staff. The social care workforce needs to be increased in number and made more professional, particularly given the shortfall in staff and the effects of Brexit. Allowing non-UK staff to easily enter social care will be important.

Currently healthcare is largely free at delivery with 'risk pooling', while social care typically requires a substantial personal contribution. Introducing some risk pooling in social care, where broadbased contributions reduce excessive costs to individuals, is essential for greater equity of access.

There is promising evidence of a national consensus emerging to make older adult social care largely free at the point of delivery, funded through general taxation, like the NHS. The House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee's social care inquiry proposed a free-at-use system funded by taxation. The IPPR has also proposed that social care should be free at use, ensuring that no one would have to sell their home to pay for care (a pledge with 94 per cent public support). Independent Age found that 69 per cent of adults in England were prepared to pay more tax to provide free personal care for all. The pandemic has highlighted how the health of the NHS is dependent upon the health of social care. It has shown that the public is willing to accept sacrifices for the greater good. This is an opportune time to get ahead with difficult conversations around social care and make the case for a reasonable standard of at least older adult social care being free, funded out of taxation.

Questions

1. *What model of funding for social care should we support?*
2. *How can we combine a stronger national funding stream for social care with local delivery?*
3. *How can we achieve a stable long-term settlement for social care which will not be subject to destabilising change every time there is a change of government?*

Mental Health

The Coronavirus lockdown has trapped millions of people at home alone for months, with only minimal human contact. Millions more have suffered terrible loss, are anxious about the health of their loved ones, or are struggling with the impact of the pandemic on their jobs, their finances and their way of life.

NHS staff themselves are among the worst affected. COVID-19 will leave a deep scar on our health and care workforce, who have gone above and beyond to tackle this dreadful virus. Thousands have lost colleagues, endured serious illness, or faced significant trauma.

Given the unprecedented events we are living through, the need for mental health support could not be clearer. But mental health is still not treated with the same urgency as physical health. Not enough resources reach the frontline and access to services is still far too limited. Liberal Democrats set out a range of policies for improving mental health care on policy paper 137 *Save the NHS and Social Care* (2019).

Questions

4. *How can we secure adequate levels of funding for mental health services?*
5. *Where do we need to go beyond the policies set out in policy paper 137?*

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6. *How can we improve occupational health provision to NHS and social care staff? For example, how can we improve occupational health questionnaires so they aren't so stigmatizing?*

Public Health and Citizen Response

Generally the public have responded very positively to the crisis. Most are actively engaging in behaviour change to managing the crisis and have shown high compliance with Government requests. There has been an encouraging amount of community volunteering, and public gratitude expressed for the efforts of NHS staff.

The negative side of the coin during the crisis has been a level of fear for some people disproportionate to the risk, which kept many away from seeking necessary medical help. People have poor understanding of the level of risk to different parts of the community and for individuals; the Government adopted a one-size-fits-all approach to risk. Knock on effects of isolation and fear of contagion will have long term deleterious effects particularly on children and on people with mental health issues.

Many aspects of the Government's public health response have been criticised for being overcentralised, for example in testing and tracing, with unflattering contrasts drawn with Germany's more decentralised system.

Looking forward, we should think radically about improving public spaces for wellbeing either locally or nationally to, for example, address overcrowding on public transport, redesign architecture standards for major public meeting places to facilitate natural physical distancing, and look at ways to reduce spitting, coughing, and yawning in public without covering the mouth.

Questions

7. *How can we improve public understanding of risk?*
8. *How should we reform the approach to public health in England?*

9. *How can we reshape the environment and public spaces to be better for wellbeing?*

A more resilient NHS and Care System

The COVID-19 crisis has obviously been a huge shock to the NHS and has exposed problems of both under resourcing and misallocation of resources. According to the OECD, In 2017, the UK spent £2,989 per person on healthcare, the second-lowest of the G7 group of large, developed economies, with the highest spenders being France (£3,737), Germany (£4,432) and the United States (£7,736). The NHS in England had lower numbers of doctors per patient, and lower numbers of ICU beds, than many comparable countries.

Not surprisingly perhaps against this background, the NHS has been run with a strong focus on 'efficiency', with bed occupancy rates kept as high as possible. A lack of spare capacity in the system however carries obvious vulnerabilities during a pandemic, with routine treatments having to be suspended to allow COVID-19 cases to take priority. Working in a 100% occupancy environment also adds additional stress to staff who continually feel on the brink of emergency and not able to respond.

We need to find ways of moving away from a system solely built for 'efficiency' based on under resourcing and sweating both physical and human assets, towards one that is also built for resilience.

This means finding more money, and it may also mean configuring services differently. There is a common complaint that the current system focusses too much priority on hospitals and not enough on primary services and public health. The crisis has forced changes like a greater use of telemedicine and people relying on NHS 111 rather than going to A & E or the GP surgery, and although remote working is not always desirable this may be a change which needs to become permanent.

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Better workforce planning will be crucial for a more resilient service, and we need to tackle the bias against women and BAME staff in career progression.

The risk register, modelling and similar work should be more transparent and detailed, with annual reporting to a Parliamentary committee.

Questions

10. *How should we find greater resources for the NHS?*
11. *How should we reconfigure the NHS to meet the needs of the Post-COVID world?*
12. *How can we change the culture and incentives to promote a greater emphasis on resilience?*
13. *Which of the changes introduced during the crisis such as more telemedicine should we seek develop further? Is there a long-term role for a returning retiree reserve?*

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7. International

The challenge

The COVID19 pandemic has sharpened and exacerbated many trends about which Liberal Democrats were already concerned: the rise of authoritarianism, the worldwide and often deliberate spread of disinformation, the persistence of poverty and inequality within and between countries, the loss of trust in key international institutions (sometimes deliberately stoked by populists) and the disruption of multilateral and other trade agreements and free trade areas.

Before the pandemic, even as global trade talks had stalled and violent conflict, poverty and epidemics stubbornly persisted in the world's poorest regions, liberal democracy was clearly still the favoured governance model. In a post-COVID world that consensus is now at risk.

What could the Liberal Democrat approach be?

As the UK's party of internationalism, equality and freedom it is vital that post-COVID 19 we continue to argue the case for global trade and institutions such as the UN and WHO, for renewed action to tackle poverty and promote human rights, and to retain our cultural and economic ties with the UK's nearest neighbours in Europe.

China

China's power and influence in the international system has dramatically increased since it joined the WTO in 2001 and became a dynamic economic superpower. Britain has since maintained a mixed and ambivalent relationship with China— admonishing it on human rights violations at some moments and at others, welcoming it with open arms as the number one destination for Chinese investment in Europe. Liberal Democrats have traditionally recognised the need to be supportive partners on issues like climate change where there is common cause for cooperation, while still reserving the right to speak out on China's human rights record (Xinjiang, Tibet, Hong Kong, human

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rights defenders), its disinformation campaigns (e.g., on the origins of COVID-19), and its aggressive regional posture (militarisation of the South China Sea, Taiwan), and its role in illegal wildlife trade. China is using its 'success' in managing the pandemic response to sell its model of techno-authoritarianism to other nations.

The longer the COVID-19 pandemic persists, the more likely it is that power will be reconfigured into two blocs of alliances, with liberal democracies on one side and authoritarian regimes— led by China— on the other. Even the Conservatives' traditional enthusiasm for trade and investment is being eclipsed by nationalist distrust (e.g., Huawei). This global crisis has crystallised pre-existing issues of distrust between the West and China, accelerating US-China confrontation on trade, international relations (e.g., Taiwan), and the UN (e.g., the World Health Organisation). In a world after COVID, how should a Liberal Democrat government engage with China?

Questions

1. Can we reframe our relationship with China without being sucked into a new cold war?
2. On trade and investment, should the UK restrict takeovers of key companies in high-tech areas such as digital communications and artificial intelligence?

A global outlook

Liberals have traditionally advocated a light touch state to varying degrees with international trade and free-flowing investment helping to stimulate the economies of all parties. Global trade, complex, interlocking supply chains and energy interdependence were supposed to underpin the cooperative globalist political model. Yet we see cracks in this interdependence, even in the EU, as Member States closed borders, secured their own critical supplies, adopted diverging lockdown policies, and disagreed deeply over the composition of loans vs grants in any EU-sponsored stimulus package.

There is a clear risk that the EU, WTO, World Bank system, OECD and G20 will fail to align the biggest economies on an agreed trade and development path, and may fragment, or even collapse under the pressure. The import-dependent, service-oriented, post-Brexit UK looks particularly vulnerable in this context. This raised the question of what does a responsible vision for internationalist trade look like. After critical shortages of migrant labour, food supplies, testing kits, PPE, face masks, and ventilators, some argue that Britain should reconfigure or nationalise supply chains for critical goods (such as PPE) to ensure resilience in times of crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic provides the opportunity for the world to rethink economics, security and geopolitics. The crisis is global. As Liberals and internationalists we believe this requires collaboration on regional and global responses. The crisis has revealed how much we depend on international institutions for coordinating a global response, even while highlighting the need for reform in some cases. While some countries have looked outward to multilateral organisations like the UN's Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to help them through the crisis, many countries have turned inwards, rejecting international institutions explicitly, as with President Trump's disavowal and defunding of the World Health Organization. Some leaders have gone a step further, eschewing the liberal democratic values to which Western institutions have been wedded since the end of World War Two.

Questions

3. *Is this a turning point for the UN and other global institutions? Has their status been further eroded? Will they be revived, reinvented or reinforced?*
4. *How will these changes impact parallel processes on trade, climate change, migration and refugees, peacekeeping and conflict resolution? How will these changes to international organisations affect the ability to enact global solutions for problems like climate change?*

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5. *How should we engage vulnerable but less economically powerful states in these global conversations?*
6. *Will the UK's need for instant post-Brexit trade deals force us to compromise on human rights and environmental standards?*

Tackling global poverty

In the late 20th century, trade and international investment helped lift millions out of poverty, especially in China. Over recent decades (and thanks in large part to the Liberal Democrats), the UK has championed more generous and transparent overseas aid, open trade and generous debt forgiveness-- all targeted at those who have been most at risk of being left behind in our globalised world. With that vision, the Liberal Democrats have supported the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. Our ambition is to strengthen the economic, political and medical infrastructure of the poorest countries in ways that would jointly benefit donors and recipients. However, COVID-19 has led to developing country debt rising to unsustainable levels and a global recession will inevitably compound existing economic and financial instability, which itself will have spillover effects for political stability and insecurity. At home, we are facing a massive debt burden and questions about our commitment to overseas development assistance and cooperation have resurfaced even as our prestige and competence are taking a hard reputational hit. All of this puts the liberal, Western development cooperation model – rooted in human rights and sensitive to environmental consequences – in doubt, just as China attempts to offer a different model of political and economic development.

Questions

7. *Can the liberal model still serve as a viable model of governance, despite the weaknesses exposed by the pandemic?*
8. *How can we finance a global economic stimulus without breaking the banks and the international financial system?*

9. *Will political pressure to prioritise 'helping our own' through times of crisis undermine support for liberal trade and development aid?*
10. *Do we need a new Liberal vision for international trade and development?*

How will COVID-19 impact Brexit?

In the short-term, it appears implausible that we will be able to agree a deal with the EU and end the transition period by December 2020 based on the current rate of progress in the trade talks. Nevertheless, there is a set of Ministers lobbying for a 'clean break' with the EU. If negotiations run late into the winter, businesses and organizations who are already reeling from the lockdown will need to prepare (again!) for a possible hard Brexit. In the medium term, COVID-19 will likely be used to mask the economic damage of Brexit and the resulting political fallout. At the same time, it is also possible that voters compare our response to COVID-19 side-by-side with our continental allies, and find that EU cooperation on everything from vaccine manufacturing and approvals (if one is developed) to food production to NHS staffing are helped by EU membership.

Questions

11. *How can we influence the negotiations and the ending of the transition period, beyond calling for the closest possible links, the freest movement possible and continuing membership of as many European agencies as possible?*
12. *What are the greatest risks of a no-deal crash out? How should we be seeking to prepare against them?*