



Cutting Crime

People's lives are being ruined by crime and they don't feel safe in their own homes or their neighbourhood. Yet too many criminals are getting away without being caught or punished – and those who are caught are sent to prison and come out, unreformed, ready to commit more crimes. There's an endless cycle that makes us all less safe. Governments are always talking tough but nothing seems to change. The Liberal Democrats are the only party which will cut crime because we will focus on what works. That means catching more criminals and making them pay for what they have done. It means making prison work to put them back on the straight and narrow, and involving communities in the fight against crime and anti-social behaviour. It means improving crime prevention and crime detection, which we know work to cut crime.

Catch criminals with 3,000 more police on the beat. Everyone knows the way to cut crime is to catch people who commit crime – and we need more police out on the streets to do it. By scrapping pointless ID cards, we will pay for 3,000 more police, and cut bureaucracy so they're out fighting crime not filling in forms. We will stop posturing on penalties and concentrate on catching criminals. We will also make police work better by giving local people a direct say in policing and by tackling outdated or bad working practices.

Give local people a say over their police. The Liberal Democrats would give far more power to police authorities – the power to sack and appoint Chief Constables, choose local policing priorities and set budgets. More power, however, must mean more local accountability. We will give local people a real say over their police force through the direct election of police authorities by fair votes. If authorities are to be able to properly challenge forces, then better information must be made available to them and to local people.

Make the police work better. The Liberal Democrats believe that meaningful reform of the police is long overdue. We will cut red tape to allow police officers to spend more time out on the street doing what they are paid to do – catch criminals. We will also review the whole structure of the policing profession, looking at the restrictive terms and conditions for police officers. We will establish a National Crime Reduction Agency to share best practice between forces on what really works to cut crime, and bring poorly performing police forces up to standard.

Crack down on gun and knife crime. We will make hospitals share information with the police so they know where gun and knife crime is happening. The police can then target these "hot spots" for stop and search to find these illegal weapons and destroy them. In Cardiff, where this model has been piloted, this practice has reduced violent crime by 40%.

Make prisoners work to pay compensation to victims. It is only fair that criminals pay for the damage they cause. We will make prisoners work and contribute from their prison wages to a compensation fund for victims. At the moment, prisons are just colleges of crime. Making prisoners work (as well as educating and training them) will give them the skills they need to 'go straight' when they are released.

Make prison work to turn people away from a life of crime. Prison isn't working. Our prisons are bursting at the seams, with more people in prison than ever before, who just get out and commit more crime. The Liberal Democrats will make prison work to turn people away from a life of crime. We will take steps to stabilise the prison population in the short term and reduce it in the long term. We will rehabilitate those still in prison through education and hard work. We will move drug addicts and the mentally ill into more appropriate secure accommodation.

Justice in your neighbourhood. We will give people a direct say in how petty criminals and those who engage in anti-social behaviour are punished in their area by setting up Neighbourhood Justice Panels, like the one run by Liberal Democrats in Somerset where 95% of offenders have been turned away from further crimes.

Base drugs policy on scientific evidence. The Liberal Democrats will always base drugs policy on the independent scientific advice of experts. This will involve making the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) completely independent of Government. We will also spend less police and court time on the unnecessary prosecution of users and addicts, with a focus instead on getting addicts the treatment they need. Police attention should focus on drug pushers, who will be made easier to prosecute by the introduction a new offence of "drug dealing".