



Federal People Development Committee Consultation: Creating a supporter scheme for the Party

Thank you for coming to this meeting. This paper lays out a short bit of background and explains the recommendation we are going to discuss today.

How we got here...

The Party strategy document passed at Southport Conference earlier this year asked the party to become a “political and social movement”. Vince has also spoken repeatedly of his desire to “open up the party”.

The idea of creating a supporter scheme, where people could become part of the Liberal Democrat movement without taking the step of joining as members was proposed at Federal Board. The Board asked FPDC to look at this idea, make a recommendation and hold a fringe meeting at conference to get some feedback.

Recommendation from the Federal People Development Committee (FPDC)

After looking at data provided by Lib Dem HQ, some donor-funded research and considering a lot of different opinions, we recommend the following:

- That the Party should introduce a registered supporters scheme
- That the scheme should not have any joining fee – it should be free to register
- That we allow supporters to join the Party’s affinity deals (like signing up with Ecotricity)
- That we send supporters regular, high quality email communications that include invitations to actions (attending marches, signing petitions), fundraising appeals and political news
- We will regularly invite supporters to join the party as members

Earlier this month, Vince Cable made a speech that endorsed this recommendation, but asked the party to go a bit further. Vince wants to give supporters a vote in Leadership elections. You should know that he did feed that in to the committee when we considered this. In line with his request, the committee discussed whether any voting rights should be given to the new supporters. The kinds of elections supporters might vote in could include:

- Leader of the Party
- Internal party positions (Party President and Federal Committee elections)
- Selecting Westminster/Scottish Parliamentary candidates/Assembly candidates

Vince was only advocating for supporters to be allowed to vote in Leadership elections, but the committee discussed all three options. We talked this over in some detail and the committee felt that at the moment, they did not feel they could endorse extending any voting rights. However, we recognise that this debate may move on, and the feedback exercise we are undertaking now may show that members are willing to consider this idea, so this is your chance to say what you think!

Summary of the key arguments being put forward

On whether to introduce a supporter scheme:

We need to grow the party and become a movement, as agreed in our strategy motion. Introducing a supporter scheme will bring in a large number of new, keen people into our Liberal Democrat family and improve our diversity. Around 10,000 people have already indicated their interest by pre-registering, and donated over £15,000.

On whether to charge a registration payment, or allow supporters to register for free:

Allowing supporters to register for free removes any financial barrier to becoming associated with the Liberal Democrats. It means that people on low incomes can register without having to budget for membership subscriptions. Research indicated that a free scheme will attract the greatest number of registrations (and common sense agrees!).

We can raise money from supporters in other ways – appeals, events, merchandise etc. And the more supporters we have, those fundraising targets could become more ambitious.

Any payment at all sees the number of people who are interested drop sharply. If the idea is to encourage people to associate themselves with the Party, we want to have the largest possible audience. Volume will also help to dilute any cyber trolls/saboteurs. And it is unlikely that we would set the payment level high enough to seriously deter anyone who wanted to lurk/make trouble – we would be putting off genuinely interested voters instead.

The argument in favour of having a small fee to register is mainly that it makes it harder for one person to register multiple times. But there are other ideas that can be looked at to reality-check registrations.

On whether to extend voting rights in Party Leadership elections:

This would be seen as a huge signal of change, and that we are opening ourselves up as a Party. It is a bold move that would allow a lot more Lib Dem voters to choose our next Leader, and hopefully one day our next Prime Minister.

By allowing a more diverse electorate, (including those who might not be able to afford a membership subscription, or have cultural reasons why they don't want to be members) we might also elect leaders who appeal to the largest possible cross section of voters.

Under Vince's proposals, members and MPs would still nominate the Leadership candidates, and only members could stand. Supporters would only be able to vote for the people that members put on the ballot paper.

Discipline and complaints

FPDC has passed a resolution to say that any version of a supporter scheme must include a supporter code of conduct. There must also be a clear, cut down, version of the member's disciplinary process to use for complaints about supporter's behaviour. FPDC has also agreed that no person who has had their party membership suspended, refused, or been expelled will be able to be a supporter at the same time.

Local, Regional and State parties

Supporters will be listed in Connect, so that everyone can see who is a supporter in their patch. If any subscription fee is implemented for supporters, we will need to negotiate with State parties to determine how those fees should be divided. The Federal Party will produce a toolkit of guidance to help local and regional parties to understand how to engage and interact with the new supporters. The intention is to encourage engagement.

Principles for success

Mark Pack in his "Liberal Democrat Newswire" e-newsletter, suggested the following principles which we could use to judge whether the supporter scheme we create will work as we hope. These have been seen as being quite helpful in this debate, so they are included here to help you think through the discussion. If you feel there is a principle missing, or that seems wrong to you, please do let us know!

1. It must be a scheme **for the whole party**, maximising its impact and its benefits by being a scheme all parts of the party can feel part of and participate in.
2. It must be designed to **boost our capacity (people and money) and our campaigning** - because each is mutually supportive and aiming to do one without the others means you end up with a scheme that is less than the sum of its parts.
3. It must **improve our diversity**, taking the opportunity of building something new to do better than we have done in the past at fully including the range of different people found amongst our voters, our supporters and our volunteers.
4. It must **build on the success we already have had** with running variations of such schemes, both in the federal party and in local parties.
5. It must be **digitally native**, not only because of the importance of the digital world but also because that would make it a stronger complement to our existing wide-scale use of geographically-focused organising (think of the local, regional and state party structures along with council-level organising too).
6. It should **not be set in stone**, because only the blindly arrogant think they can come up with a new plan and get it all perfect first time around - instead we need a flexible approach that adapts as we learn what is and isn't working.



How this meeting will work

We only have an hour this evening. We are going to start by explaining the proposals and data, and then open up to questions.

Please understand that although we want to hear your comments, we want to prioritise your questions today.

To let us know your comments, please fill in the feedback sheet you have been given, or email consultation@libdems.org.uk making the subject line of your email “FPDC” so that it gets shared with the Federal People Development Committee.

We would be particularly interested to know if you feel your opinions are changing (either making you feel more or less supportive). If that is the case, we would also be interested to understand what it is that has made you change your view.

With all contributions to this meeting, please keep your questions brief, and to the point. This will help us to hear more people’s questions tonight.

Please also listen with respect, and allow people to talk without interruption. We are all committed party members in this room, and we all want a constructive discussion on the best future for our party.

Thank you for coming along tonight, and for your participation. All of these discussions are a consultation, and your views will be important in deciding how we move forward from here.

Miranda Roberts, Chair of the Federal People Development Committee