

Fair Devolution for the North West of England

Proposer; Andrew Haldane

Summator; Bill Winlow

Preamble:

- i. The Conservative government is in the process of decentralising decision making rather than truly devolving power to City Regions and this process has the following serious flaws:
 - a. It is creating an asymmetric, and incoherent pattern of decentralisation, divorcing our major Cities from their wider hinterland, failing to address the needs of more rural areas and enforcing the adoption of elected mayors as a pre-condition for decentralisation
 - b. Local Authority elected members within City Regions will have negligible influence over actions taken by elected Mayors which impact directly on those they represent as they have no meaningful mechanism for scrutinising the actions of Mayors or holding them to account.
- ii. The Government is seeking major constitutional change; English Votes for English Laws (EVEL) as its answer to the “English Question”, which would be gift to those promoting Scottish separatism. A clear and credible alternative is therefore necessary.
- iii. Liberal Democrats have long espoused Federalism and called for a Constitutional Convention, but have not developed a detailed model for a Federal Constitution. We will need to consider how our region would fit into a Federal model, including whether current regional boundaries would apply and how the structures proposed for local government would fit within it.

Conference proposes:

- i. That the Federal Party should begin work immediately on developing a more detailed model of a Federal Structure for the UK and the North West Regional Party should commence work on its input to this process
- ii. While taking account of different needs of different parts of the UK, and historic differences such as the legal system in Scotland, this structure should be as symmetrical as is practicable, and recognise that citizens of the English Regions are as capable of taking on devolved powers as those resident elsewhere in the UK, including legislative, financial and fundraising powers
- iii. That regionally and nationally the Party should use all means at its disposal to forestall the implementation of a major constitutional change; EVEL, by a government that commands the support of only 37% of voters (24% of the electorate).
- iv. North West Liberal Democrats, will campaign for current proposals for devolution within the region to be revised based on the following principles:
 - a. That all devolved and decentralised powers, including the setting of Business Rates, should be distributed fairly and uniformly across all parts of the Region.
 - b. That, in the allocation of devolved powers, no county or district should be disadvantaged by the pre-emptive actions of neighbouring large or combined authorities which isolate other authorities too small to become viable devolved bodies.
 - c. That North West Liberal Democrats, while supporting in principle the devolution of power and finance, (1) regard the imposition of elected mayors without the consent of the electorate as a pre-condition for conferring devolved powers as unacceptable, (2) believe the structure proposed fails to incorporate adequate measures to ensure democratic scrutiny, proper accountability, and transparency of decision-taking; (3) insist upon the introduction of appropriate mechanisms to guarantee these fundamental requirements as the price of our support for the proposed arrangements.
 - d. Where possible North West Liberal Democrats should collaborate with others to achieve our goals, for example via the North West Regional Convention proposed by Lancashire County Council.