Protecting and Investing in North East Fire and Rescue Services

Proposer: L John
Seconder: M Waqas

Conference notes that:

1. Fire and rescue services across the North East provide an essential emergency service, protecting residents, businesses, communities and the environment.
2. Firefighters respond not only to fires, but also to road traffic collisions, flooding, rescues, hazardous materials incidents, water rescues and a growing range of other emergencies.
3. Fire and rescue services also play an important role in prevention, including home fire safety visits, community education, business safety advice and work with vulnerable residents.
4. The North East faces particular challenges, including industrial sites, major transport infrastructure, coastal and rural communities, high-rise and older housing, and areas experiencing deprivation.
5. Maintaining an effective emergency response requires sufficient firefighters, appliances, stations, specialist equipment, training and properly maintained facilities.
6. Decisions about station locations, appliance numbers and crewing arrangements can have a direct impact on emergency response times and the resilience of the wider fire and rescue network.
7. Firefighters and other fire and rescue staff work in physically and psychologically demanding environments and deserve appropriate pay, training, equipment and occupational support.

Conference believes that:

8. Fire and rescue services should be properly funded to provide a resilient emergency response across the North East.
9. Decisions about fire cover should be based on risk, population, geography, travel times and demand, rather than simply short-term financial savings.
10. Investment in fire prevention and community safety can reduce the number and severity of emergencies while helping protect the most vulnerable members of society.
11. Fire and rescue services should have the resources necessary to respond effectively to emerging risks, including climate-related flooding, extreme weather, wildfires, industrial incidents, electric vehicles and renewable energy infrastructure.
12. Local communities should have confidence that sufficient emergency resources are available when they need them.

Conference calls for Liberal Democrats in the North East to:

13. Campaign for increased and sustainable investment in North East fire and rescue services, ensuring that funding keeps pace with population, risk, inflation and changing emergency demand.
14. Oppose reductions in fire cover where they would create unacceptable risks to communities or reduce the resilience of the emergency response network.
15. Support a comprehensive review of fire cover across the North East, examining:

* appliance numbers and availability;

* firefighter establishment and crewing levels;

* station locations;

* emergency response times;

* population growth;

* housing and industrial development;

* road and transport networks;

* flood and wildfire risks;

* specialist rescue requirements; and

* the cumulative impact of neighbouring fire service reductions.

16. Call for greater transparency when proposals are made to close, relocate or reduce the operational capacity of a fire station, including publication of the evidence and risk modelling used to justify such decisions.

17. Support investment in modern fire appliances, specialist rescue equipment, communications technology, personal protective equipment and station infrastructure.

18. Support increased investment in fire prevention and community safety, particularly targeted work with older people, disabled people, children, vulnerable households and communities experiencing higher levels of fire risk.

19. Encourage greater cooperation between fire and rescue services, local authorities, NHS organisations, police and other emergency services where this can improve emergency preparedness and community resilience without compromising the independence or core role of each service.

20. Support appropriate investment in training and specialist capabilities to ensure that North East firefighters can respond to new and emerging risks.

21. Recognise the contribution of firefighters and fire and rescue staff by supporting fair employment conditions, effective occupational health provision and access to appropriate physical and mental wellbeing support.

22. Ensure that major housing, industrial and infrastructure developments across the North East properly consider the additional demands they may place upon fire and rescue services, with appropriate contributions towards necessary infrastructure and equipment where justified.

Conference therefore resolves to:

24. Reaffirm the Liberal Democrats' commitment to strong, properly funded public services and resilient local communities.

25. Campaign for a long-term funding settlement for North East fire and rescue services which allows authorities to plan staffing, stations, appliances and equipment over multiple years rather than relying on short-term funding decisions.

26. Ensure that every resident of the North East can have confidence that when they call the fire and rescue service, the resources they need will be there to respond.

Closure of Derwentside Immigration Removal Centre

Proposer: O Temple
Seconder: D Simpson

The North East :

1. With reference to 3 fact sheets: 'Location of Derwentside Immigration Removal Centre for Women Leading to Inequalities', 'Mental Health: No to Hassockfield Response to Derwentside Immigration Removal Centre Report by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons 15th September -3rd October 2025' and No To Hassockfield Derwentside IRC Factsheet 2026:

a. Hassockfield/Derwentside Immigration Removal Centre is situated on a windy hill between Durham and Consett, outside the relatively remote rural village of Medomsley.

b. Hassockfield Detention Centre was a secure training centre for boys, and before that was the nationally notorious Medomsley Detention Centre for Young Offenders., It was purchased by the Home Office and refurbished, opening in December 2021 as an Immigration Detention Centre for Women.

c. It has accommodation for around 80 women. It has a constantly shifting number of occupants, detained for different reasons having been refused the right to remain in the UK. They are all held on indefinite detention. It has poor public transport connections, is a distance from Newcastle where such as legal advice, limited as that is, is centred and has poor phone and Wi-fi connections.

d. Vulnerable women are held there, some of whom have been tortured, trafficked, are pregnant, have serious mental and physical health issues and are at risk of self-harm. They are often transported overnight to this very remote location and detained without time limit, isolated from their children, family, friends and community. As many as 59% of these women are discharged from detention into the community (some as homeless) as they continue to seek Asylum. The fact that they are not being removed but released brings into question the poor initial decisions to detain them at a Removal Centre. They should not have been detained in the first place. Both the Independent Monitoring Board and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons have been highly critical of the Centre in their reports.

e. The Independent Monitoring Board Report of 2024 also found that "the location of Derwentside, together with its inadequate communications infrastructure, was unsuitable" and concluded that "these factors have led to the treatment of detained women that was, in some respects, inhumane and unequal and unfair compared with the treatment of detained men".

2. Well established Liberal Democrat Party Policy is clear:

a. Detention to be subject to judicial review within 72 hours, and to be no more than 28 days overall.

b. Detention to be used as a last resort and for the shortest time possible. There should be a presumption of community-based alternatives.

c. An end to the detention of all vulnerable people. This includes children; victims of torture; those with mental illness and PSTD; victims of gender based violence; pregnant women, and people with learning disabilities.

d. A drastic reduction in the detention estate from what was then 10 sites to 2, using community alternatives to detention such as more case work in the community.

e. It is the policy of the North East Region Liberal Democrats that this reduction should include the closure of Derwentside Immigration Removal Centre in County Durham. The Independent Monitoring Board "expressed the view that the location of Derwentside, together with its inadequate communications infrastructure, was unsuitable for use as a detention centre"

f. Better conditions in detention.

This regional party believes that:

1. Whilst welcoming and supporting any moves to improve conditions within detention centres, Liberal Democrats should continue to argue that Government must not allow small improvements in this area to distract attention from there being very little need at all for immigration detention.

North East Region Liberal Democrats therefore call on our members to support the 'No to Hassockfield' Campaign in securing:

1. Improved initial decision making in the detention of undocumented migrants – recognising that it is a last resort.
2. Improved treatment of all persons detained, especially women with vulnerabilities.
3. Use of community-based alternatives to detention, rendering the existence of Derwentside IRC redundant
4. The closure of Derwentside IRC

Bus Services in the North East

Proposer: C Tynan
Seconder: P Raghvani

Conference notes:

A. Bus services in the North East are currently delivered by private operators, with most routes being operated on a commercial basis, and others delivered either partially or fully through local authority funding

B. Three bus companies, Arriva, Go North East and Stagecoach occupy approximately 98% of the market by ridership, often occupying an effective monopoly in areas of the region

C. Since 2009/2010 bus route mileage across the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority (NEMSA, formerly known as North East Combined Authority) has dropped by 32%, and passenger numbers have dropped by over one third.

D. Young People are the most likely to travel on buses nationally, with those aged over 65 being the second largest group

E. Passengers travelling between NEMSA and the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) often face higher fares due to differing fare structures between the combined authorities, especially impacting those in the south of the region whose bus routes may be mainly/exclusively across Combined Authority borders. Other services that cross administrative borders include routes into North Yorkshire, Cumberland and Scotland.

F. NEMCA has announced plans to franchise buses, and has held a public consultation. TVCA has not announced plans for franchising.

G. Between 2018/19 and 2024/25 the number of bus passengers in the NEMCA Area fell by approximately 18.5%

H. Bus Franchising involves public control of buses, it does not include public ownership

Conference Believes:

1. Buses should form part of a transport system that is fast, frequent, reliable and integrated

2. Buses are key to the decarbonisation of transport alongside reducing traffic

3. Buses help secure independence, especially for Young People and the Elderly

4. No-one should be unfairly penalised by a transport system based on where they live in the region.

5. In the Liberal Principle that decisions should be made as close to the people they affect as possible

Conference calls for:

1. NEMSA to work together with TVCA in any franchising process to help ensure a fair deal for all in the region, including on services and fares.

2. Bus Franchising to ensure that bus services are improved throughout the region, not just focused on major population centres, with a particular focus on improving speeds, frequency and comfort.

3. Bus routes to be improved with electric vehicles, improved standards of comfort, and improved evening services when funding allows

4. Buses to integrate more effectively with other transport modes in the region, e.g. more bus routes that run via Railway Stations, alongside integrated ticketing with the Tyne and Wear Metro and local railway services.

5. The possibility of a regionally owned bus company to be investigated as part of franchising, to consider any potential savings.