

THE NEXT LEADER SPEAKS

Ed Davey and Layla Moran answer Liberator's questions on how they would approach being Lib Dem leader

Liberator has sent a questionnaire to Liberal Democrat leadership contenders ever since 1988.

A year ago, whoever won was expected to have a lengthy tenure and this year's contest arises from Jo Swinson's unforeseen loss of her seat.

This time, whoever wins can at least expect a decently long innings. Ed Davey and Layla Moran get to answer the questions, and the former must be surprised to get a second chance at the job, while the latter cannot have expected the opportunity to come so soon.

It's common for people to want to put very specific policy questions to would-be leaders.

We've tried though to get both contenders to think about what the party is for, and what it should do now that it has lost a general election badly and faces a government whose majority means that barring something remarkable it will run a full term.

Whoever wins will inherit a record membership, but only 10 MP colleagues, dire poll figures and the need for a lot of thought about where the party should go, why, and how it should get there.

Each candidate was given the same maximum word count to distribute between the questions as they chose, plus a brief biography, and their responses have not been edited.

These are the questions. We hope you find the answers illuminating.

I BY WHAT CRITERIA WOULD YOU JUDGE YOUR LEADERSHIP TO BE A SUCCESS?

Ed Davey: Winning elections. Winning is our passport to power in town halls, council chambers and Parliaments across the country. There are lots of things we need to do to win seats, like building a coherent message, addressing the structural issues identified in the Thornhill Report and working with local campaigns to understand what they need. Ultimately, those things are steps to deliver winning seats, and that is how any leader should be judged.

Layla Moran: Under my leadership I want the party to:

- * Define what we are for, with a clear vision and a message that's widely known, easy to explain and understand and that offers a distinctive alternative to Labour and the Conservatives.
- * Hold the government to account, for example by running campaigns to help the most vulnerable (such as the Coronavirus Compensation Scheme I campaigned for) and by using media coverage (e.g. my 'Brexit before breathing' attack, which forced the government to U-turn on the EU ventilator scheme).
- * Live our values, by increasing our party's diversity. I would start by assessing the diversity of our members and those in leadership roles,

including local party executives, HQ leadership and candidates, and then work with the Racial Diversity Campaign, LDCRE and the FPDC to put tangible actions and plans in place to follow up.

- * Start winning elections again at all levels, by rebuilding our grassroots campaigning strength, listening to communities and taking action on their behalf.

2 THE THORNHILL REPORT SAID THAT IN FUTURE "NONE OF THE LEADER, CEO AND PRESIDENT SHOULD BE ABLE TO UNILATERALLY OVERTURN AGREED STRATEGY, MANIFESTO, MESSAGING OR BRANDING". DO YOU AGREE, AND WHY?

Layla Moran: I agree. Hasty decisions, particularly when made by a small group, are always likely to be worse than those subject to wider scrutiny. As the report made clear, two of the biggest failures of the 2019 campaign were the presidential-style 'your candidate for Prime Minister' strategy and the 'Revoke Article 50' pledge, which was confusing and hard to explain. Both were the result of snap judgements based on an overly optimistic interpretation of the summer and post-conference poll bounces.

One of my strongest attributes is my ability to listen. As leader, I recognise the importance of a careful and deliberate decision-making process, where all opinions are considered and taken into account. Meetings and discussions should be seen not as an irritating obstacle to get round but as a valuable way to explore options.

Ed Davey: Yes, I do. As liberals we inherently push against concentrations of power, so I don't think it's right for any one person to have that much control.

On a pragmatic level, our party is best when various parts of it work together. The Thornhill report was very clear that we need change right across our party and I am very keen to work with the new CEO and party President, and every part of our wider party, to deliver this.

It is vital that we implement all the recommendations of the review. I am delighted we have already made a very good start in doing that, with some of the immediate recommendations. There are many things that will take longer to deliver, so this is very much a marathon not a sprint but it is vital we do that so that we can help our campaigns across the country in winning elections.



style levels of public services can be paid for with US-style levels of taxation.

We can use this process to address inequality in both income and wealth. We knew already that Britain was one of the most unequal societies in Europe, but the pandemic has exposed this even more starkly. In principle I favour increasing taxes on wealth, which has been becoming steadily more concentrated since the 1980s. However, taxing people's homes (most people's main asset), particularly give the huge regional variation in house prices, is fraught with difficulty, as we saw with the 'mansion tax' proposal. For the richest 1%, however, second homes, financial assets and pension wealth are more significant, and we must be able to devise fairer means of taxing these. I would ask the FPC to explore this and present proposals to conference for debate.

Ed Davey: I think we always need to strive to make the tax system fairer, whether that is reducing the tax burden at the bottom or better targeting taxation at those who can afford to contribute more. I'm a huge proponent of a land value tax, and have been for decades, and I also support reforming Capital Gains Tax so that wealthy people don't get twice the tax allowance than most of the population gets.

5 HOW DO YOU ENVISAGE FIXING THE ECONOMY AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND CAN THIS BE DONE WHILE SEEKING TO TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE?

Ed Davey: It's not a question of 'can this be done', it has to be done. We are facing a jobs crisis and an environmental crisis and we have to tackle both at the same time, and the size of our response has to meet the size of the challenge.

That is why I am calling for a £150bn investment in the green economy, the largest programme ever, to insulate every home, provide a green jobs guarantee, re-wild our countryside and electrify our transport network with electric cars, bikes and scooters.

I used my training as an economist and my background of creating green jobs and trebling renewable energy as the inspiration for that plan. While I know it is ambitious, I believe it would help rebuild our economy post-Covid and also tackle the huge challenges we face on the climate emergency.

Layla Moran: We need a package that simultaneously triggers economic recovery, contributes to meeting the climate and nature emergencies and rebuilds public services, especially health, social care and education.

Happily, all the evidence suggests that this can be done: a green stimulus package will trigger a faster recovery, see larger returns on investment, generate more jobs and can be enacted more quickly than one focusing on traditional high-carbon sectors. I support the conclusions of a recent study by the Smith School at Oxford, which proposed as top priorities: investment in building efficiency retrofits (which reduces emissions, cuts fuel bills, generates jobs and tackles fuel poverty); green infrastructure (renewable electricity generation and storage and zero-carbon heat); investment in education and training; investment in natural capital (upgrading and expanding green spaces, tree planting and conservation initiatives); and support for green innovation and R&D.

3 THORNHILL ALSO SAID RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE LEADER, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE "HAVE FREQUENTLY BEEN DYSFUNCTIONAL". HOW WOULD YOU REMEDY THIS?

Ed Davey: As acting leader I've established a strong working relationship with the new CEO and President, with a joint approach to problem solving and tackling the problems identified in the Thornhill Report.

I've a long track record of building winning teams from my time in Kingston and I am confident those same skills would help solve this issue.

Layla Moran: I agree with the report's conclusion that the roles and responsibilities of the three posts need to be clarified; I want to see this completed by the end of September, as the report recommended.

Once the roles are clear, the three must build a genuinely collaborative relationship, developing shared goals, having clear responsibilities and leading on them, but feeling free to challenge one another. That's my natural style; I want members of my team to be comfortable in challenging my and each other's views and I always listen to them when they think I'm wrong. Constructive criticism and successful cooperation are key.

4 DO YOU WANT TO INTRODUCE WEALTH TAXES TO HELP ADDRESS THE INEQUALITY BETWEEN THE TOP 1% AND THE REST OF THE COUNTRY? HOW WOULD YOU PREVENT EVASION OF THIS TAX?

Layla Moran: As the economy recovers, taxes will need to rise, to repair the hole in the public finances, to rebuild desperately overstretched public services, to prepare for future pandemics and to tackle the climate and nature emergencies. We need to be honest with the electorate, and not pretend that Scandinavian-

6 IF THE NEXT GENERAL ELECTION LED TO COALITION NEGOTIATIONS WHAT WOULD BE YOUR MINIMUM DEMANDS FOR SUPPORTING ANOTHER PARTY IN GOVERNMENT? WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO WORK WITH THE TORIES?

Layla Moran: I support collaborative, cross-party working, and I would work closely with anyone who shares our liberal values. This already happens nationally in areas of shared interest (such as the cross-party coalition to prevent a no-deal Brexit last October) and locally and regionally.

It would be foolish to lay out specific coalition red lines now, several years before the next election, and in any case they need to be debated within the party, but I feel strongly that they should include a commitment to PR for national and local elections.

However, we shouldn't leave this to the last moment; we need to start laying the groundwork now for building a wide cross-party movement for PR. Possible models we can learn from include the Scottish Constitutional Convention of the 1990s, and the Cook-Maclennan agreement between the Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party in 1997. This government's appalling record over the pandemic and Brexit, and its constant attempts to avoid scrutiny and suppress dissent, provide us with, potentially, much greater public support for political reform than we usually see.

It goes without saying that I would absolutely rule out any coalition with Johnson's Conservatives: the most narrow-minded, populist, bigoted, right-wing – and incompetent – government in living memory.

Ed Davey: The lesson from the Thornhill Review is that few people understand what the Liberal Democrats are for, so my first priority is establishing a clear message and strategy for our party rather than thinking about coalitions that may or may not emerge in 2024.

With any arrangement, I would want to see our values at the heart of what we are able to deliver and I think changing the electoral system would be high on my agenda. It is a grossly unfair system, and it needs to change.

Boris Johnson is doing an appalling job handling Covid, and is pursuing an agenda which is a million miles away from where my centre-left politics are and where our parties values are. I can't see that changing, so there is no chance I'd work with them.

7 SHOULD THE PARTY SEEK TO ESTABLISH A CORE VOTE AND IF SO FROM WHERE, OR SHOULD IT CONTINUE TO ACT ON THE BASIS IT CAN 'WIN EVERYWHERE'?

Ed Davey: I'd actually challenge the question here. I think setting it up as 'core vote' vs 'win everywhere' is a slightly false choice.

I want us to represent everyone who shares our open, internationalist values and believes we need a more caring, greener and fairer society. By building a coalition of voters that includes Labour voters but crucially also moderate Conservatives we can move forward in the 91 seats where we are in second place.

We obviously need to target our resources effectively given the challenges of our electoral system, but I am

also not going to write off particular places because they do not fit a demographically defined 'core vote.'

When I won Kingston in 1997, it wasn't even a target seat, and being competitive in every election right across the country is how we build infrastructure, local campaigning expertise that we can then target when it comes to a General Election.

Liberal Democrats have always been the champions of community politics, and I want to make sure we foster that everywhere across the country because it has always been at the heart of who we are.

Layla Moran: The 2019 campaign revealed the limitations of too narrow a definition of a core vote strategy, in its belief that the 'stop Brexit' message that was successful in the Euro elections would transfer over to the general election.

Liberal Democrats should always aim to widen and broaden our support base, appealing to a greater diversity of voters. We can do this by making sure we listen to voters and campaign on the issues that affect them, such as education, a fairer economy and tackling the climate emergency. By working on local, grassroots issues we can show voters that we understand and address the things that matter to them.

But we can't stop there. That approach gives us permission to engage with voters; we must then take the opportunity to put over the liberal message on other topics, such as addressing equality, and political reform. Only in this gradual way can we build a core vote that will stick with us.

8 THORNHILL SAID THAT AMONG OTHER FAILINGS IN 2019 THE LIB DEMS "HAD NOT TRANSLATED THEIR BELIEFS INTO A CLEAR AND RELEVANT VISION OR THE STRATEGY TO PUT IT IN PLACE". WHAT IS YOUR VISION AND STRATEGY?

Layla Moran: We must make the case for a compassionate and cooperative society, in which every individual is free to realise their dreams and live the life they choose. But this needs to be illustrated by talking about practical issues that voters worry about every day. I want to focus on the three pillars that voters told me were most important as I travelled across the country after the 2019 election: education, economy and environment.

We need to invest in early years education to reduce inequality before a child enters a classroom, ensure everyone can access world-class education, and establish a national adult retraining programme. We must support recovery from the pandemic and tackle inequality through investment in public services and a Universal Basic Income. And we should recognise the things we value in society that cannot be measured by GDP, including wellbeing (which should become an indicator of policy success) and care for the environment. The recovery package must focus on green investment, and the UK should aim to become carbon-negative and tackle the nature emergency.

As a party, we need to rebuild our campaigning strength locally and nationally, creating a strong brand with broad appeal. We need to learn and innovate – harnessing the skills, knowledge and experience of our members to ensure best practice in all our campaigns. And we need to live our values – encouraging diversity in the party and respecting a wide range of contributions.



can do this in the short term. As an immediate priority we need to expose the damage the Tories are doing to the country through their approach to Brexit, and to highlight ways in which the UK should be working as closely as possible in cooperation with the EU, for example on climate change, pandemics or cross-border crime. We then need to make the economic case for joining the customs union and single market, and then build on that to make the political case for rejoining the EU.

10 WHO IS YOUR POLITICAL HERO OUTSIDE THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATS?

Layla Moran: Martin Luther King. His ‘I believe’ speech is the only political speech I can remember from my childhood. The idea that a man should be judged by the content of his character and not the colour of his skin is why I am a Liberal today. Injustice for one is injustice for all.

Ed Davey: Nelson Mandela. While that may sound cliché, I always admired his ability to bring people together, and the tremendous personal sacrifices he made in reaching his goals.

My very first ever political campaign, before I joined the Liberal Democrats, was when I was at university. My college was invested in Barclays Bank which, at the time was invested in apartheid South Africa. I led the campaign in our college to get them to disinvest, and they did!

Ed Davey: I think the Thornhill Report is spot on with this, and I am delighted that Dorothy Thornhill is backing me in this leadership contest.

My vision is of a party that fights for a more caring, greener and fairer society. As someone who was a young carer, and fought the Tories to treble renewable power in Government, this is a message I am personally passionate about but also speaks to our liberal values of wanting to fight poverty, and protect our planet.

This is built around my plan for a new deal for the 10 million carers in our country, that gives them an increased carers allowance, the legal status of a protected characteristic and allows them to keep more of their money from work before they lose their carers allowance.

It is also built around my support for a Universal Basic Income, and a £150bn investment in our green economy that I have already talked about.

9 SHOULD THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATS BECOME THE PARTY OF ‘BACK IN’ THE EU? IF NOT, HOW WOULD YOU PREVENT ALIENATION OF THE PRO-REMAIN VOTERS?

Ed Davey: I will always be at the forefront of any campaign for us to be back in the EU. I am a passionate European and I will always believe our best place is in the EU, working with our allies to tackle the big challenges that we face. My priority now is making sure we get an extension to the transition and avoid a no-deal Brexit that would be so disastrous for our economy.

The Liberal Democrats will always be the home for people who believe in liberal, open and internationalist values.

Layla Moran: I firmly believe that Britain’s future lies in rejoining the EU, but we can’t pretend that we

BIOGRAPHY - ED DAVEY

Ed Davey is the acting leader of the Liberal Democrats, and the MP for Kingston and Surbiton, which he first won in 1997 by just 56 votes. He is the party’s economic spokesman, and is a trained economist having studied at night school for his qualifications.

Ed was a young carer to his mother after his Dad died, and is a passionate campaigner for a better deal for carers.

He is an environmentalist with a strong record, having fought the Tories in Government and helped treble renewable power and cut people’s energy bills.

Ed is married to Emily and together they raise their children John and Ellie.

BIOGRAPHY - LAYLA MORAN

The daughter of a Christian Arab from Jerusalem and a British EU ambassador, I grew up in many different countries, from Ethiopia to Greece. After studying physics at university, I went on to be a maths and physics teacher for over ten years. I fought Battersea in the 2010 election and was a London Assembly candidate in 2010. I stood for Oxford West & Abingdon in 2015, winning the seat in 2017 by 816 votes, and converting it into a majority of 8,943 in 2017. I’m currently the Liberal Democrats’ education spokesperson.