Standing Orders for Liberal Democrats South Hams Council Group

1 AIMS

The aims of the Liberal Democrat Group on South Hams District Council shall be:
a) To advance collectively the aims and objectives of Liberal Democracy within South Hams Council.
b) To secure the implementation of Liberal Democrat policies and principles applied to local needs.
c) To increase the effectiveness of members as representatives of their constituents.
d) To work with Liberal Democrats on other Councils and with the Local Parties on the fulfilment of local needs, the development of policy and the election of candidates.

2 MEMBERSHIP

A) Full voting membership of the group is open to:

i) All Councillors elected to South Hams District Council as Liberal Democrats (under the terms of the 1998 Registration of Political Parties Act) with the support of the Local Party.

ii) Other Councillors who apply to join, who are accepted by a majority of the Group, and who are accepted as members of the Liberal Democrats by the Local Party. Both conditions must apply.

B) Non-voting membership is open to:

i) One or more representatives of each Local Party within the Council's area. The Group may invite other members of the Local Party(ies), either for a particular item, a meeting or indefinitely.

ii) Duly approved and/or selected prospective candidates for the Council.

iii) Prospective Parliamentary Candidates or MPs, MEP's or elected members of National and Regional Assemblies and Parliaments from within the Council area.

C) All members of the Group are expected to be members of the Liberal Democrat Party at all times.
D) Any member who has doubts about his/her future commitment to the Liberal Democrat Group should discuss the matter with the leader or

other members at a Group Meeting. A decision to resign from the Group should be notified to the Group Leader and to the Group Members before the appropriate Council Officer is informed or any public statement made.

E) All Group Members shall ensure that they do not fall into arrears with Council Tax and do not incur any other debts that may cause political embarrassment to the group. Any councillor who finds themselves in such a position should notify the group leader of the circumstances at the earliest opportunity.

F) A member shall be excluded from the Group if s/he has persistently conducted himself or herself in a manner seriously in conflict with the provisions of Paragraph 1 (Aims) or Paragraph 7 (Group Loyalty) of these Standing Orders. A motion to exclude a councillor from the group must be passed by a two-thirds majority of the voting membership (as defined in 2A above) of the group present when the motion is debated. The motion must appear as a notified agenda item for the meeting. The councillor concerned has a right to attend and address the meeting and may be accompanied by another person (who must be a party member) as advisor if they desire.

G) A Group Member charged by the police with a Criminal Offence shall automatically be suspended without prejudice from Group membership. If subsequently acquitted or the charges are dropped they shall be automatically reinstated. A group member found guilty of a criminal offence, or who accepts a caution, which does not disqualify them from council membership may be reinstated if a simple majority of the group present vote in favour of their re-admission on a notified agenda item.

H) Where a member is under investigation by a Standards Committee the group should take action as they feel appropriate following the disciplinary procedure in Section 9.

I) All group members shall consider setting up a voluntary direct debit /standing order to their local party to facilitate campaigning of the party.

J) All Group members shall complete and keep up to date their registrations on the councils register of interests.

3 OFFICERS

The Group at the Annual Meeting shall elect
A) A Leader
B) A Deputy Group Leader

4 DUTIES OF OFFICERS

a) The **Group Leader** will be responsible for the general co-ordination of Liberal Democrat initiatives and Group activity. The Leader will be the spokesperson for the Group where necessary and the Group's nominee for Council Leader. The Leader will be the Group's spokesperson on the Executive Committee of the Council, if the Group has members on that Committee.

b) The **Deputy Leader** will undertake all the duties of the Leader in the absence of the Leader.

5 ELECTION OF OFFICERS, SPOKESPERSONS AND OTHER COUNCIL NOMINATIONS

A) All officers shall be subject to Annual election at the Group's Annual Meeting.

B) Where there are more than two candidates for a position, voting will be by the Single Transferable Vote method.

C) In the event of a tied vote, when there are only two candidates, lots will be drawn to achieve a result.

6 GROUP MEETINGS

Members are expected to attend all whole Group meetings. If they are unable to attend they should inform the Group Leader.

A Quorum at any group meeting shall be one third of the voting membership of the group rounded down.. Agendas and any relevant papers for group meetings should be circulated in advance of the meeting; no items for decision can be taken under AOB, except in exceptional circumstances with the agreement of two thirds of the group.

A) Annual Meeting

The Group will hold an Annual Meeting prior to the Annual Meeting of the Council:

i) To elect Group Officers

ii) To determine the membership subscription for the ensuing year.

B) Ordinary Meetings

i) The Group will meet at least once prior to every meeting of the Council to discuss the Agenda for the Council Meeting and other business brought forward by Group Members.

ii) The Group will ensure that members present a united public face on matters of concern to Liberal Democrat policy and principles in so far as may be compatible with individual conscience.

iii) The Group will prepare for Liberal Democrat initiatives at future meetings of Committees or Council.

C) Special Meetings

Special Group Meetings may be called by not less than one third of the voting group membership (or two members - which ever is larger) who shall submit a duly signed request to the Group Secretary, or at the request of a majority of Officers of the Group. Seven days' notice of the meeting must be given to the rest of the Group.

D) Declarations of Interest

The Group will operate the National Code of Local Government Conduct, in respect of all formal Group Meetings, particularly in regard to the declaration of pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests of members. Members (both voting and non-voting) declaring a pecuniary interest in a matter should leave the room during its discussion at group meetings.

E) Conduct of Members at Group Meetings

All members of the group shall behave towards each other with respect and civility. Any member who fails to conduct themselves appropriately in a group meeting may be excluded from the remainder of that meeting by a simple majority of those present.

7 GROUP LOYALTY

A) Members are expected to publicly support all Group decisions, except where those decisions are exempted under Paragraph 7(E) below.

Decisions are of three types:

i) Members are expected to support Group decisions on "organisational matters" such as the appointment of members to Committees, nominations of members as Chairs, Vice-Chairs of Committees and appointments to outside bodies.

ii) On matters of policy fully discussed and agreed by the Group, members are asked to support the Group. The Group recognises the impossibility of preventing any individual members opposing the group on matters of deeply held conviction or conscience, but members are required in these circumstances to inform the Group Leader in advance.

iii) Members are asked to support Liberal Democrat Councillors on local ward matters that have little or no impact politically on other areas of the Council. Before raising matters in a Committee relating to an area without Liberal Democrat councillors, members are asked

to find out the nearest Liberal Democrat councillor's views, or failing that, the relevant Local/Ward Party's views.

B) Group members who fail to attend a Group meeting**,** and who do not make their intentions known on matters discussed at the Group Meeting, are expected to abide by Group decisions. It is not sufficient to abstain from voting in these circumstances.

C) All Notices of Motions for the council should be agreed by the group before submitting them. In an emergency, consultation with the Group Leader is sufficient.

D) Members of the following committees will not need to follow a Group line:

1. Planning committees or the Executive Committee if and when it acts as the Planning Committee;
2. Licensing committees and panels;
3. Standards committees;
4. Scrutiny committees; and
5. Other committees with a quasi-judicial function

Members of Scrutiny Committees are expected to consider their actions in the light of Paragraph 7(A) and the Group's Aims (Para 1).

E) Group Members (both voting and non-voting) shall respect the confidentiality of any politically or personally sensitive information they receive from other members of the group or from Council Officers. In particular all Group agendas, minutes and reports shall be treated as confidential. This confidentiality provision shall not apply to any information that is already in the public domain, where the person from whom the information came has given express permission for disclosure or where the information would be available under any Freedom of Information legislation in force at the time.

8 ATTENDANCE AT COUNCIL AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS

All members are expected to attend full Council Meetings.
Any member who cannot attend a Council Meeting must inform the Group Leader before the meeting. Any member who cannot attend a Committee meeting must inform the Leader.

9 DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURE

If a member of the Group breaks these Standing Orders or brings the Liberal Democrat Party ("the Party") into disrepute by their words or actions the following procedures will apply. Where the member is

accused of serious misconduct or behaviour serious enough to warrant expulsion from the party then it may be appropriate to move straight to step two or three.

Step 1: The Group Leader will meet with the member to discuss their actions and possible reasons for them. After investigations they shall make a factual report of their findings to the Group and they or any two group members may propose that one of the following actions be taken at the subsequent meeting:

- Find no fault
- Issue a verbal warning (minuted in writing) or
- Issue a written warning

Any decision must by passed by a majority of group members present.

Step 2: If either a verbal or a written warning has been given as set out in Step 1 above and the action recurs within four years from the date of the warning or is considered so serious that expulsion from the Group or the Party is being considered, then the matter will be referred to a panel consisting of the Group Leader together with two members of the Local Party Executive from the Constituency containing the ward represented by the Councillor. When the Group Leader is the subject of the disciplinary procedure then the Deputy Group Leader shall act in his or her place. This panel may hear from witnesses and must allow the member to make representations in person and to be accompanied by another person (who must be a member of the party) as advisor if they require. After investigations they shall make a factual report of their findings to the Group and they or any two group members may propose that one of the following actions be taken at the subsequent meeting:

- Find no fault, or
- Issue a written warning, and/or
- Require compliance with a stated contract of behavior the breaching of which will result in the immediate reconvening of the panel to recommend further action, or
- Suspend the member from the Group for a stated period not exceeding one year from the start of the suspension, or
- Exclude the member from the Group in which case the procedure set out in Clause 2(F) of these Standing Orders shall apply

Step 3: If the action persistently recurs or is considered so serious as to warrant expulsion from the Party the matter will be referred to the appropriate constituency executive to be dealt with in accordance with the Constitution of the Liberal Democrats and they will be suspended from the group pending the outcome.

10 NEWSLETTERS/FOCUS LEAFLETS

All Liberal Democrat councillors are expected to keep in touch with their local residents by means of newsletters. Newsletters should be issued regularly outside election periods and copies of all newsletters should be sent to the Group Secretary who shall maintain a file available to all group members.

12 ELECTION PREPARATIONS

The Group shall make arrangements to act in conjunction with the local Parties in the approval and selection of candidates for Council elections and by-elections and in the preparation of a manifesto for the Council elections.

13 AMENDMENTS TO STANDING ORDERS

Amendments and additions to these Standing Orders can only be made at Group Meetings and by a two thirds majority of the voting membership present. Notice of amendments must be received in writing by all Group members a minimum of seven days before consideration by the Group.

14 INTERPRETATION of these Standing Orders

On items where these Standing Orders are silent the provisions of the Federal Liberal Democrat Constitution shall apply. Where there is a need to interpret these standing orders the decision of the Region shall be sought and be final.

THESE STANDING ORDERS WERE ADOPTED AT A GROUP MEETING ON 2 AUGUST 2007

AMENDED 10 MAY 2012 and July 2015 and 20 July 2019