Liberal Democrat Party Conference: Policy to guarantee contact for non-resident parents agreed Asha Goveas, 20 September 2006

http://www.childrennow.co.uk/news/index.cfm?fuseaction=details&UID=f5a477ef-8854-49e9-9dc7-9af3fea4772b

Parents separated from their partners would have more rights to see their children under plans agreed by the Liberal Democrats this week.

The policy is part of a package of measures for children and families, proposed by the party's children's spokeswoman Annette Brooke MP.

Under the policy, voted in overwhelming by activists at the party's annual conference in Brighton this week, parents who do not live with their children would be guaranteed a fixed amount of time with them. The aim is to ensure children don't lose contact with non-resident parents as often happens during protracted family court cases.

The default contact arrangement adopted by the party would mean children would always have reasonable contact with the non-resident parents from separation until the parents agree an alternative arrangement or the court makes an order.

The move was hotly contested by party members, who called for the whole legal basis of the contact system to be overhauled to give parents equal rights.

During the debate Serena Tierny, a party member from Mid-Sussex, said contact orders meant one parent was deciding whether to allow another parent contact. "One becomes a resident parent, another becomes a second class 'contact' parent," she said. "Sole residency orders have become one of the main obstacles for maintaining relationships with children because they give mothers powers that were never intended."

Party activists also backed the introduction of compulsory meetings to ensure parents considered mediation as an option before applying to the courts for custody.

And they supported a range of proposals for looked-after children, including compulsory registration for foster carers when private fostering has taken place to replace the current requirement to notify local authorities.

Despite concerns about its implications for existing programmes, the party also backed the idea of forming local support networks that would pull together state, private and voluntary services that help parents and their children.

Other proposals accepted by the party included making sex and relationships education and personal, social and health education compulsory.

Greater support for parents 18 September 2006

http://www.libdems.org.uk/news/greater-support-for-parents.html

The Liberal Democrats today passed a set of proposals placing the interests of children at the centre of government policy towards family life.

The debate took place on the same day as the Archbishop of Canterbury warned of a crisis in modern childhood.

'Stronger Families, Brighter Futures' addresses the wide-ranging issues affecting children and families. These include helping prepare people for the responsibilities of parenthood and supporting families suffering the effects of separation and divorce.

Innovative flexible working schemes and a Maternity Income Guarantee will help maintain a family's financial and emotional stability, particularly the formative early years of a child's life.

Liberal Democrat Children Spokesperson, Annette Brooke MP said:

"If we are to provide for the well-being of children, supporting families must be a top priority. Parenting is a skilled job, and preparation and support is vital.

"Up to a fifth of children and adolescents experience mental health problems at some time in their lives and difficulties in family life and relationships are a major contributor.

"Government, rather than interfering in individuals' lives, should support parents as they face the new challenges of modern family life.

"Labour focuses on tackling symptoms rather than causes, stigmatising 'problem' families and driving change from the centre. We believe that support must be preventative, available to all and locally led."

http://www.libdems.org.uk/media/documents/policies/72%20-%20Stronger%20Families%20Brighter%20Futures.pdf