

2008 will be a momentous year for the Liberal Democrats.

We have before us an unparalleled opportunity. We must reach beyond the stale two-party system to the millions of people who share our liberal values, and change Britain for the better. Let us show what that means in the local elections that face us this spring.

Putting British families back in control of their everyday lives will be at the heart of everything we stand for.

In control of their time, not fighting to make space for family life between the demands of work and the burden of bills.

In control of what their children are exposed to on TV, not constantly struggling to protect toddlers from the pressure of advertising.

In control of their own privacy, not forced to submit personal information to a massive government identity database.

Giving power and responsibility to families – of every shape and size, of every background – is the only way to make sure everyone has a fair chance in life.

I will not tolerate a country in which the poorest people die 13 years sooner than the richest, lone parent families are twice as likely to get attacked or burgled, and the poorest pupils are twice as likely to fail their GCSEs.

I believe no-one should be condemned by the circumstances of their birth. And I am certain that is what the British people believe, too. We are a nation with a strong sense of fair play, and natural justice.

The challenge for our party is to persuade those people that their home is with the Liberal Democrats. We will do it by putting social mobility – a fair deal for every family – at the heart of our message.

That means investment in education, so every child gets the best start in life. I will campaign relentlessly for a “pupil premium” to bring spending for the poorest children up to private school levels.

It also means cutting taxes for low and income families, and reforming tax credits so that no family is ever again plunged into debt by crippling repayments enforced by an incompetent government.

We all know the Conservatives don't have the answers. They would block opportunity, not promote it.

They talk about social justice, but want to return to a Victorian-style voluntary system. They talk about families, but only want to help married couples. They talk about tax cuts, but don't say where they'll find the money.

The Liberal Democrats are different. Under my leadership, we will campaign for opportunity for everyone, with people, families, and communities in control of their destinies.

So we will campaign for flexible working, shared parental leave, and flexible benefits for all families. We will campaign for sensible restrictions on advertising aimed at toddlers – my own children remember the adverts far more clearly than any of the programmes they watch. We have lost the virtue of cherishing innocence, as childhood becomes ever shorter.

Protecting very young children from unwanted commercial intrusion into their lives is part of the same instinct that seeks to protect adults from unwanted state intrusion into theirs.

So we should campaign tirelessly to stop the expensive, invasive and unnecessary Identity Cards scheme in its tracks.

The child benefit and learner drivers' data loss scandals mean there is a looming crisis of public confidence in the government's capacity to look after their personal information. So let 2008 be the year we bring down the Identity Cards scheme.

I urge you to join with me to make this happen: so we can truly give British families control over their own lives this year.

Together, we can make Britain the liberal country the British people want it to be.

Yours,

Nick Clegg
Leader, Liberal Democrats