

## Lib Dem crime strategy unveiled

### **Youngsters who commit minor crimes or anti-social behaviour should not face prosecution in courts, under a new Liberal Democrat crime strategy.**

The party said it views custody for youngsters as a "last resort".

Children who admit guilt would appear before panels of local people to apologise, with punishment in the form of a "positive behaviour order".

Liberal Democrat home affairs spokesman Chris Huhne said Labour "criminalised a generation of young people".

"It is time for a new approach to youth justice which both prevents crime and confronts young people with their actions if they do break the law," he said.

### **'Face consequences'**

Three out of every four children who were sent to prison went on to reoffend with more serious crimes, he said.

Mr Huhne told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: "We need to make sure they face up to the consequences by having a victim-led system of justice for young people, which is less formal but actually in many ways more more shocking.

"Because it really does change their behaviour if they are confronted with the consequences of their actions early on."

More money needed to be spent on activities for young people to keep them out of trouble, he added.

The government's Asbo regime should be used less frequently, the Lib Dems strategy document stated.

**Nothing is being done do stop young people getting sucked in to a cycle of crime**

Chris Huhne  
Lib Dems

And the party recommended a greater use of so-called "restorative justice" programmes, under which offenders could be forced to meet victims and see the consequences of their crimes.

Community Justice Panels, made up of local people, should be used to deal with low-level crimes, with youngsters explaining their actions and making a "symbolic apology" - such as cleaning up graffiti, for example.

Shops which sell alcohol to under-18s could face being stripped of their licence at the first offence, under the plans.

Meanwhile, cannabis would remain a Class C drug, which the Liberal Democrats argued would allow police to concentrate on more serious crimes.

The youth crime strategy said gun and knife offence hot-spots should be targeted with high-profile policing and the extensive use of intelligence-led stop-and-search powers.

And the party called for one Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) within every neighbourhood team, to be dedicated to working with local youngsters.

Mr Huhne said there was a need to "take action early" to prevent youngsters "embarking on a life of crime".

"The old parties are falling over each other trying to be tough on crime, but nothing is being done do stop young people getting sucked in to a cycle of crime," he said.

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