

Press Release

**From Councillor Barry Stamp
Stafford Liberal Democrats**

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Use: Immediate

MP CONDEMNED OVER BROKEN PROMISE

Local MP David Kidney has today been attacked by Stafford Liberal Democrats for breaking a clear election promise to local people by voting in favour of student top-up fees.

Commenting after tonight's House of Commons vote on the Government's Higher Education Bill, Stafford Liberal Democrat Spokesperson Councillor Barry Stamp said, "Two and a half years ago David Kidney was elected on an election manifesto specifically opposed to top-up fees¹. Now he has turned round and voted for them. Even Labour MPs said that the Government's proposals would create a two-tier higher education system, with the best universities filled mostly with the richest students. Having benefited from free universities themselves, Government ministers, with the support of the Stafford MP, are now denying the same opportunity to a new generation of young people. No wonder so many people feel betrayed by this Government when they let them down and break their promises as blatantly as this! 71 Labour MPs did have the courage to stand by the policy they were elected on and join the Liberal Democrats in voting against the Bill. It would have taken just three more for this unfair and ill-judged Bill to have been defeated!" said Councillor Stamp.

Councillor Stamp also pointed out that having passed its second reading the Bill is now almost certain to become law. However top-up fees will not be introduced until 2006 – after the next general election. That means that if the Liberal Democrats gain another three seats in Parliament this proposal could still be reversed.

"I do think both David Kidney and the Chairman of the Stafford Constituency Labour Party owes the voters of Stafford an explanation as to why the manifesto pledge made such a short time ago was disregarded," added Councillor Stamp.

ENDS

Note to editors:

1. In their 2001 Manifesto Labour said: "We are against top up fees and have legislated to prevent them".

2. For example: Top-up fees are "a really bad idea. [They would create] Real two-tier universities and the rich would pay extra fees and go to the classy, elitist universities, rather like the US." (Clare Short MP, The Independent, 18/11/02) "The Labour party has no business putting obstacles in the way of working class youngsters going on the very best courses if they can pass the exams and have the ability." (Nick Brown MP, 27/09/03) "Raising the price of intellectual aspiration will only reinforce its perception as a luxury of the few, rather than the right of all.' (Ian Gibson MP, 16/09/03) "What we are doing here is setting up two tiers of universities" (Jeremy Corbyn MP, The Guardian 26/01/04)

3. Liberal Democrats would stop top-up fees, scrap existing tuition fees and bring in fair grants for poorer students. This would cost £2 billion a year. We would pay for it by taxing incomes over £100,000 a year at 50%. This would raise £4.7 billion a year. The remainder of the money would be spent on free personal care for the elderly, and on keeping down council tax bills.

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