

**Summary of substantive policy discussions**  
**at Liberty Council meeting**  
**March 2010**

Libel law and human rights

Council discussed the current state of libel law, the approach that Liberty should take and the potential for reform. Some of the points made in the course of the discussion were:

- Libel law is a blunt instrument trying to deal with issues that are huge in their scope and variety.
- The internet makes the issue even more complicated. 10,000 downloads can equate to 10,000 individual libel cases and it is almost impossible to ascertain the reach of a single published article. It also means that jurisdiction can move across different countries when downloads take place.
- It is difficult to gain access to justice unless you are a wealthy/high profile individual. However reducing the percentage of costs that solicitors can take as fees will simply discourage solicitors from taking on smaller cases and decrease access to justice even more.
- While reform was required there was no case for abolishing libel law. The impact of doing this would be to make it possible to tell lies about others for the purpose of destroying them or even to tell truths that would have the same effect but are not in the public interest.
- The pressing need is often for a speedy retraction rather than costs, although these too are important - particularly if, for example, you lose your job as a consequence.
- Liberty should focus on strengthening the public interest defence to libel and increasing access to justice in this area.