

# **REPORTS TO CONFERENCE**

**AUTUMN 2024**

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# **Federal Committee Reports**

## **Federal Conference Committee - Nick De Costa (Chair)**

The Federal Conference Committee (FCC) is responsible for organising our two annual conferences, including selecting items for the agenda.

I am delighted we are back in Brighton after many years! This is a long-term favourite conference venue of ours and the team in Brighton has been doing a great job in supporting us.

Things are very different to our last Autumn Conference in Bournemouth, and also since our last Spring Conference.

During the last six months, we have seen some great things happen to our party - in May we beat the Tories into second place in the local elections, and in July we elected 72 Liberal Democrat MPs (and Jennie, of course!). We now have the largest Liberal Democrat / Liberal Party in over a century, and the largest third party in the House of Commons.

It is a huge testament to all of our members and supporters up and down the UK for being able to make this happen.

Many of you have benefited from training at our Conferences, which has helped you in your campaigning, and I hope that you continue to be able to take advantage of those opportunities.

Thank you also to those of you who have already registered for Conference, and if you have not - please do!

This Conference will be huge! We've got the most MPs registered to attend Conference, EVER. We have also sold out of fringe spaces and exhibition spaces, and I am delighted to see so many party bodies taking part in our Conference. I would also like to extend my thanks to all of the external organisations who are taking part in our Conference; either by holding exhibition stands or by the fantastic selection of fringes across the Brighton Centre and in the Grand Hotel.

We've got an amazing selection of training available, delivered by our brilliant staff and volunteers. I really recommend trying them out, and brushing up your skills, whether it is campaigning, canvassing, being agents, treasurers, fundraising and much, much more. Of course, I also recommend attending the two FCC-led training sessions on Saturday.

Similar to previous years, we also have an online offering, which means for a small fee you can watch the sessions in the auditorium and vote online. Whilst this

doesn't fully replicate the hybrid experience, this is all part of us exploring further opportunities around innovations at Conference.

We understand that Conference is costly to attend, and to help with that, we administer the Conference Access Fund. This provides a means by which people can attend Conference who might not be able to attend. The Conference Access Fund can assist with a range of things, including grants towards accommodation, travel, and assistance with childcare costs. We are reliant on

generous donations from members for this, and we are always impressed by the generosity of our members. If you are able to contribute to the fund, you can do so via: [Donate to access fund](#)

We also provide complimentary carers passes which members can request if they have a carer with them, or if they are coming with a partner who might not usually attend Conference and is assisting with childcare.

## **The Agenda**

Understandably, many members, Affiliated Organisations and other party groups have been busy with the General Election, so we have seen a reduction in motions submitted from across the party - therefore, the FCC has also made time in the auditorium for some different types of sessions; including a panel discussion on Defence and Veterans, the General Election Review, and a consultation on our New Policy Agenda. We have also got a number of set-piece speeches and probably quite a few chances to celebrate our election wins.

We received a large number of motions from across the party, and are extremely grateful for the time and effort that members made in formulating policy motions and ideas for debate at Conference. We really wish that we could select so many more than ended up on the final list, but as always time at Conference is at a premium, and a large number of motions, although selected in the first round, did not make it through the second round when we then started to look at reducing timings.

As regularly mentioned, time is tight at Conference, and we are unable to take all motions submitted. Regarding the motions which were not selected, we have provided a summary of reasons why motions have not been submitted, and have provided further information to those people whose motions were not selected. I have tried to keep this succinct for the purposes of the list of motions.

Furthermore, I would also like to mention the drafting advice service that the Federal Conference Committee offers. This service is provided by the Committee to offer drafting and language advice on motions submitted to Conference and

cannot always cover advice on policy matters; I would, in these instances, recommend reaching out to members of the Federal Policy Committee, spokespeople, and party Affiliated Organisations, who may have people within their groups with specific policy expertise and would be able to assist with formulating policy. If you also want to find out more about how to write policy, the FCC will be undertaking a training session at Conference on how to write a good Conference, and this information will be published in the Conference Directory.

From the submitted motions we selected 15 policy motions, 1 business motion and one standing order amendment. The committee went through various rounds of selection, and it is always a very challenging decision to select which motions should or should not be added to the agenda. I would like to thank the staff who attended the full-day meeting and also the members of the committee for their contributions and hard work.

Every policy motion and constitutional amendment can be amended. The deadline for submitting amendments is 9 September at 13:00 and can be done via: [https://www.libdems.org.uk/conference\\_submissions](https://www.libdems.org.uk/conference_submissions).

Deadlines for questions to reports are the same as per the amendments deadline and this can be done via: [https://www.libdems.org.uk/conference\\_submissions](https://www.libdems.org.uk/conference_submissions).

We have allocated time for Emergency Motions, and also a late emergency motion slot on Gaza; these are short motions on issues that arise, or where there have been significant developments since the original deadline for motions. This deadline is the same as for amendments and can be submitted using the same web link above. We continue to provide a drafting advice service. Under that scheme, members of the Committee review motions and amendments that are submitted to it and provide comments and suggestions on the drafting.

We do find that people who have used the service tend to be more successful in having their motions and amendments selected. The selected amendments, questions and other information about Conference will be listed in Conference Extra and Conference Daily. Conference Extra will be available the Tuesday in the week before Conference commences. You will also be able to access the same information through the Conference App which can be downloaded from the relevant App stores to your devices. We will continue to allow the submission of speakers cards online and you can find the link for this in the agenda. The FCC is here to help you make the most of Conference; please feel free to approach any of us at any time during Conference about any questions you may have about the agenda, conference sessions or speaking at Conference. You will be able to identify us by the badges we wear with FCC on them. You can also contact us via the FCC Helpdesk and the Liberal Democrat Conference Facebook group.

## **Spring Conference 2025**

I am also delighted to be able to announce our venue and dates for Spring 2025 Conference.

The dates are 21 to 23 March 2025, and we will be heading back to Harrogate. I would like to extend a huge thanks to the Harrogate team for being so accommodating, and I look forward to seeing many of you in Harrogate.

### **Thanks**

The amazing Conference would not be possible without the fantastic support of our dedicated and brilliant conference team. This year, all deadlines have been really tight, and the team have essentially delivered Conference in the space of a few months when usually we work on a 5 month lead time. I would like to, on behalf of the Federal Conference Committee, pass on our huge thanks and appreciation to the whole team: Susie Murray, Wilma Robinson, Amy McClennan and Pilar Maroto Montalvo.

A huge thanks also to the Policy Team: Christian Moon and Joe Wright for their ongoing support in the lead up to and over the Conference weekend, and Will Cowie and the Parliamentary Advisors Unit and the Whips Office - all of whom have key roles throughout and leading up to Conference.

I would also like to thank our amazing suppliers, many of whom have worked with the party for many years - and I know some were out campaigning for us during the General Election too!

I would also like to thank in advance our amazing and brilliant Stewarding Team, led by Jodie Frapple and Mike Ross. They led a wonderful team of volunteer Stewards, who are around all of Conference to be able to support and assist you.

Finally, none of this would be possible without the brilliant members of the Federal Conference Committee. Thank you for being such an amazing group.

## **Federal Policy Committee - Lucy Nethsingha & Jeremy Hargreaves (Vice Chairs)**

The Federal Policy Committee (FPC) is responsible for researching and developing policy and overseeing the Federal Party's policy-making process. This includes producing policy papers for debate at Conference and drawing up (in consultation with the parliamentary party) the Federal election manifesto for Westminster elections.

### **General Election Manifesto**

The last two years have seen the committee's work increasingly dominated by the party's most high-profile statement of policy, our manifesto for the recent General Election. This draws extensively from all the other policy development work the party has done, such as members' motions and policy papers approved by Conferences throughout the 2019-24 Parliament, with many specific policies from them featuring in the final manifesto. The process of writing the manifesto has therefore been primarily distilling, collating and presenting those, more than creating new policy.

To do this we developed and presented "pre-manifesto" papers for Conference to debate in autumn 2021, 2022 and 2023. In addition, in spring 2023 11,000 party members contributed to a short online survey about its priorities, and about 750 members participated in 7 online consultation sessions.

We also consulted widely with specialist groupings outside the party, with the Chair of the Manifesto Writing Group, Dick Newby leading more than two hundred individual meetings to hear their thinking and help to explain ours.

Important priorities for us following previous manifestos were ensuring a clear focus on our overall narrative, and on identifying top priorities in each departmental policy area, while also ensuring we had sufficient detail to explain how we would achieve those and to answer the questions of influential sectoral lobby groups. We did this by including a short chapter at the start (Chapter 2 – Our Fair Deal) setting out our overall story and priorities. By then focussing on a short one-page statement for each area comprising three or four short explanatory paragraphs and about five specific concrete policies, then backed up by further detail for those who wanted it.

We also recognised, with advice from party staff, that most people wanting to read our policies during the General Election campaign would be doing so on a mobile phone. The manifesto's presentation was therefore based around this and can be seen at <https://www.libdems.org.uk/manifesto>. Staff also arranged for it to be published in a variety of accessible formats, including Braille, Audio, BSL, Easy Read, and Clearprint.

Building on the last pre-manifesto which Conference approved last autumn and which was very much the basis for the final paper, the committee then held a series of meetings reviewing each chapter in detail. This process considered more than six hundred specific proposed amendments culminating in an all-day session in the spring to agree on the final manifesto, subject only to final updating which took place a few days after the General Election was eventually called.

As always, considerable effort went into ensuring the manifesto was fully costed, with all our spending commitments accompanied by an explanation of where we would raise the money from. It was notable how much more ambitious our plans to change government spending were than Labour's.

We have been particularly grateful throughout the process for the collaboration of the party's communications and campaigns teams to ensure that the manifesto formed part of the party's overall integrated presentation to the electorate.

Once published on 10 June we were very pleased with how well it was received. YouGov polling showed that of the most popular policies from any party, all of the top seven were from our manifesto. Care England explicitly welcomed our commitment to the social care sector, and Friends of the Earth gave us the second highest rating (after the Greens) for our range of environmental policies, well ahead of Labour.

Remarkably, research from More in Common found that our policies on the NHS were a significantly more important reason for voting for us even than getting the Tories out, with three other policies also featuring in the top nine reasons for voting Liberal Democrat.

We are deeply proud that the manifesto played a significant part in the party's most successful General Election campaign for more than a century. We hope that you found it useful in helping to win votes in your area. We of course welcome any feedback on it and will be holding a session to gather this in Brighton.

### **Future policy development**

Before the election was called we already had in train a number of working groups developing policy to bring to future Conferences.

We had been intending to bring to this Conference policy papers on Opportunity & Skills, the Future of Work and Science and Innovation. These are at an advanced stage but their period for finalisation in May and June was completely overtaken by the General Election. We will therefore plan to bring one or two of these to Spring Conference next year, with the remainder coming to Autumn Conference 2025.



When the election was called we were also in the process of setting up two more working groups to lead to papers for Autumn Conference next year (indeed our key meeting for this was scheduled for 45 minutes after Rishi Sunak got drenched in Downing St, so was cancelled).

We have appointed Duncan Brack to chair a working group developing policies on Climate Change.

And we have appointed FPC's Chair, Ed Davey, to chair a major policy review exercise. Following similar exercises after the 2005, 2010 and 2015 General Elections, this will review the new political landscape, assess our policy approach to it in conjunction with our wider political strategy, and then set out a programme for major areas of policy development through this Parliament.

Applications to be part of both these groups were open both before and after the election campaign and we will shortly be appointing their members from among the more than 400 party members who have applied. We are also expecting to hold consultation sessions on them in Brighton, open to all.

### **Supporting members' discussion of policy**

FPC is always keen to do as much as possible to engage more members in policy-making and we are continuing to consider further initiatives. We would be very happy to receive any suggestions, comments or requests to [policy.consultations@libdems.org.uk](mailto:policy.consultations@libdems.org.uk)

Thanks to the party's digital staff team, the webpage [libdems.org.uk/members/make-policy](http://libdems.org.uk/members/make-policy) now offers an excellent up to date picture of current party policy development and we urge interested members to take a look at it. In addition, the pages at [libdems.org.uk/conference/papers](http://libdems.org.uk/conference/papers) show all policy motions passed by Conference over the last fifteen years, as well as all policy papers. We hope this will be a helpful resource for the many party members who want to look up existing policies in specific areas. For those interested in following the ongoing work of the committee, we recommend [facebook.com/groups/federalpolicycommittee](https://facebook.com/groups/federalpolicycommittee) which offers the chance to ask questions of the committee as well as see regular reports from our meetings.

### **Conclusion**

All this is happening thanks to the work of many hundreds of party members who give their time to support policy development, including members of the committee and our working groups. Working group chairs in particular devote a huge amount of time to take on very significant roles and we want to thank Rosie Shimell, Jonathan Everett, Vinous Ali, and especially Dick Newby, chair of the manifesto

writing group. A large bulk of all this work is of course carried by policy staff and the committee is very keen to thank them warmly, especially Christian Moon, Joe Wright and the Parliamentary Advisers Unit.

## **Federal Board Report - Mark Pack (Party President)**

The Federal Board (FB) is responsible for directing, coordinating and overseeing the implementation of the Party's strategy and the work of the Federal Party.

### **Success**

May and then July brought brilliant election results for the party: more councillors, more MPs, winning more seats than the Conservatives in the May local elections and then regaining our third party status in the House of Commons in July.

The General Election gains were our best result for a century. That local election performance made it six rounds of local elections in a row that the party has made net gains, an important parallel growth to go alongside that dramatic scale of the General Election gains.

It has been a huge collective effort by the party, one in which the Board had a strategic role but for whom the credit goes to the staff, members and supporters all around the country for pulling off such an impressive double.

Thank you - and thank you also to all the family members, colleagues and friends who supported those who put so many hours into securing those successes.

### **Election reviews**

One important post-election task for the Board is setting up a General Election review. This should be a happier affair than our 2019 review, but it is still important that we learn from both what went well and what could be improved.

Much of our success in the last Westminster Parliament came from our willingness to change. It would be foolish and complacent to assume that we have now maxed out all the progress we can make.

The review is being chaired by Tim Farron, and the other members of the review team are Ade Adeyemo, Paul Farthing, Donna Harris, Emma Holland-Lindsay, Mike O'Carroll and Sally Pattle. The team brings extensive experience from different perspectives, and is also made up of people who were not key decision makers on the campaign itself so that they can properly evaluate - and hold to account - those who were.

The review has been asked to report by the end of the year so that if any recommendations need to come to Conference they can be submitted for Spring next year (subject of course to the Federal Conference Committee's decisions on the agenda). Thank you also to FCC for providing time at the Autumn Conference for the review to get feedback.

This timetable combines the need to have enough time to do a proper review, consult with members, with moving quickly enough that related important decisions, such as over target seats, do not get unduly delayed in this Parliament.

The Board has also asked this review to consider some of the recommendations from the review of our last internal elections kindly conducted by Nick Manners. He reviewed how our last big round of internal elections for party committees and President was conducted. His recommendations fell into three groups:

Operational recommendations, such as over the information provided to candidates about the process, which the Board has agreed to give the green light to;

Suggested changes to the election regulations, such as over nomination thresholds and the circumstances in which the election timetable can be altered, which the Board agreed to bring to Spring Conference for party members to decide on; and

Suggestions to consider the phasing and scale of internal elections in light of the number of complaints from members about how many posts were up for election in one go. As the frequency and scale of elections is not only a matter of how elections are run but also a matter of what pattern produces the best governance outcomes, the Board has asked the General Election review to also consider these matters before coming to any decisions on whether to put any proposals or options to Conference.

The internal election review was based on significant consultation with members, candidates and those involved in the administration of the elections. Thank you to Nick for all the work put into it and everyone who responded to him.

## **Strategy**

The Board is required - and keen! - to put to Conference at least once a Westminster Parliament a strategy for the party. A major criticism running through our 2019 election review was the way the party across all our different parts did not operate in a joined-up way, to a common plan. We made big progress on that in the last few years.

To continue that in this Parliamentary cycle, the Board is planning to make this time's strategy process a much more continuous process, rather than a one-off run into a debate at Conference, and then that's it.

So we will be starting to draw up the initial outlines of a strategy later this year and then use Spring Conference next year as an important staging post, rather than the end of the process.

As well as a more iterative process being one that engages the whole party more, it will also allow us to see how some of the basic political shape of the next few years pans out. Will the Conservative Party head off to the extremes, for example, and how much of a political honeymoon will the Labour government in Westminster or the new Labour First Minister in Wales have?

## **Financial plans**

Having started the last Westminster Parliamentary cycle with a large surplus from the 2019 General Election, we deliberately planned annual deficits in the Federal Party's budget, using up the surplus to invest early in the cycle in our campaign support.

This meant that we reached the end of the Parliament with our finances nearly exhausted, but those local and Parliamentary wins showed the value of that approach. In addition, our General Election success is bringing financial benefits, both directly and indirectly.

Over the coming months, the Board will make decisions on our budget for next year, including what level of financial reserves we should seek to have, and what levels of surplus or deficit is appropriate.

Important elections for the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Senedd, along with local elections, will happen in the first half of this new Westminster Parliament. We need to be running a full operation all through this new cycle.

As an immediate step, however, the Board agreed to prioritise retaining our most skilled staff when deciding how to use our remaining financial headroom this year.

## **Federal Appeals Panel**

There is currently one vacancy among the Federal Party appointees to the Federal Appeals Panel (FAP). At the time of writing this report, the process is underway for selecting a name to recommend to Conference for filling this vacancy. The Board hopes to complete this process before we meet in Brighton, and if so an update with a recommended name will appear in the Conference paperwork.

## **Complaints process**

General Election campaigns are often the most testing period for our complaints process due to a surge in complaints, the extra publicity around particular cases and the pressure that produces quick decisions. Details are included in the statistics reported to Autumn Conference by the Lead Adjudicator, but the Board

would like to record its huge thanks to all the volunteers and staff involved who ensured the system ran smoothly and fairly through such an intense period.

The Disciplinary Sub Group (DSG) is now chaired by Prue Bray and has not recommended to the Board any changes to the procedure to report to Conference. Many thanks to the previous DSG chair, Candy Piercy, for all her hard work in the post, and for playing an essential role in getting our independent complaints process up and running.

### **Affiliated Organisations**

There are no new applications for Affiliated Organisation (AO) status to report to Conference. The Board has previously asked the FPDC to carry out the required annual review of AOs and this is expected later this year.

### **Thank you**

Thank you also to our staff under the leadership of our Chief Executive, Mike Dixon, who the Board works with and without whom our work would not be possible.

Thank you also to all our members and supporters, for all the work you put into making the period since our last Conference a record-breaking one for our party: second place in the local elections in May and then the best General Election result for a century in July.

## **Vice President - Amna Ahmad**

The Vice President responsible for working with ethnic minority communities is elected by all Party members and is a voting member of the Federal Board. They champion the voices of ethnic minority communities within the Party.

As a party, we have much to celebrate after the tremendous resurgence in our Parliamentary Party in this year's General Election. This was the result of years of work for many candidates, councillors, local parties and volunteers, and wonderful to witness after my own years in frontline politics. Hearty congratulations to you all. This is an opportunity to serve our communities and expand the membership and volunteers of our party, including ethnic minority communities, and I am here to support those efforts, wherever they happen in the country.

As always, it is an honour to continue to serve as your Vice President. I look forward to working with our new MPs and hearing your ideas on how we continue to maintain and expand a more diverse winning party which looks more like the nation we want to represent.

### **General Election**

The General Election was called earlier than many of us were expecting. This led to a quick turnaround, and from a diversity perspective, it was important to rally support for our Tier 1 and Tier 2 candidates in the first two weeks where donations make a big difference. This is where I focused my efforts working with others in the space to ensure that those candidates, and particularly our Project Stellar candidates, were supported.

We worked with a group of people within the party, including the President and members of the FPDC Working Group, to creatively offer solutions to diverse candidates who faced more prejudice and abuse than others. I worked with Liberal Democrat Women to create a candidates' guide to advise on social media abuse and allyship. This was distributed to all candidates and their teams. I would like to thank Eleanor Kelly for her commitment and work on this.

### **FPDC Working Group on Diversity & Inclusion**

The Board level responsibility for the party continues to focus on three areas:

1. increase the number of ethnic minority people elected as councillors, while maintaining our progress on Tier 1 and Tier 2 seat PPCs;
2. increase canvassing in target seat wards with high ethnic minority populations; and

3. increase the number of ethnic minority people becoming members by creating, and championing an inclusive environment.

This work is being carried forward by a working group of the Federal People's Development Committee (FPDC). This Committee includes representation from relevant AOs, such as LDCRE and Plus, and they are, in turn, invited to meet with us. The Committee's bi-monthly meeting schedule was interrupted by local elections and the General Election but will resume after August 2024. The meetings held this year agreed to Terms of Reference, discussed upcoming issues and heard from Liberal Democrat Deputy Leader, Daisy Cooper MP, on how to support Parliamentary candidates from minority communities. The outputs of the meetings are then reported to the FPDC and Federal Board.

The next meeting will discuss how the diversity and inclusion work can include our new MPs and support them to meet our targets (above). I would like to thank Nicole Turner for her work supporting the group as Secretariat.

### **Liberty Network Chair**

I chair the Liberty Network. This is a party donor network with a monthly commitment. If you, or someone you know, would like to support the party in this way then you can find out more on the Liberal Democrat website.

### **Diversity work on Federal Board**

It has been a pleasure to work with the Federal Board, and Federal Council, this year, and to provide input on how we can improve the diversity of our party so it reflects our country. I am a Board officer in my role as Vice President.

The election of our new MPs means that progress has been made on the racial diversity of our Parliamentary Party but more needs to be done for us to meet our targets on membership and the local government base. These continue to be areas which I champion at the Federal Board, via work on FPDC (as above).

I work with organisations across the Party so please get in touch at [vice.president@libdems.org.uk](mailto:vice.president@libdems.org.uk) if you'd like to discuss anything relevant.



## **Federal Finance and Resources Committee – Mike Cox (Chair and Party Registered Treasurer)**

The Federal Finance and Resources Committee (FFRC) is responsible to the Federal Board for planning and administering the budget and finances of the Federal Party, as well as overseeing the administration of the Federal Party. FFRC presents audited Annual Accounts to Conference and oversees the Party's compliance with external regulatory bodies, including the Electoral Commission. The FFRC is chaired by the Registered Party Treasurer, a statutory role under electoral law, with responsibility for money out. This role is distinct from the Party Treasurer who has responsibility for money in.

### **2024 Financial Progress and 2025 Outlook**

The 2023 financial results were very good, recording a surplus for the 1st time since 2019.

The Federal Board has consistently placed significant importance on keeping the budgets balanced as much as possible. The Party's financial procedures have allowed us to monitor and control our finances in good time.

I am again pleased to report that our performance against the budget has been on target save for two exceptional items. During the year the Party was notified of a legacy from a member, John Faulkner, who left just over £1m to the party. This was fully accounted for in 2023 although not all of it had been received in the year. In the latter half of the year a claim emerged by a member of staff on long term sick leave which was resolved only at a significant cost. The bulk of this is related to previous years and has been accounted for as a prior year adjustment.

Tremendous thanks must go to Mike Dixon, our CEO, his team of staff and directors, Fern McLurg, our Financial Controller, and the HQ finance department for their continuing hard work and close attention to the financial detail. They have all helped the Party to achieve a better outcome than 2022 and more importantly better than might have been expected.

Whilst we finished the year with net cash outflows we have continued to maintain a positive, though reduced cash balance which helped us as we prepared for the General Election in July 2024 and the various political events in the run-up to it.

Our financial surplus for the year reflected in part the return of Conference and the significant legacy by John Faulkner. It justifies the brave decision to continue to invest in people and technology which has modernised and rejuvenated the Party's processes and its ability to win.

As a Party, we are indebted and grateful for the generosity of our loyal members and supporters who have continued to support us throughout the last few difficult years. For that, I want to express my most sincere thanks. I would also like to add an additional note of gratitude to members who were able to increase their annual membership fee. We have tried to do this in a way that was efficient to run in order to keep costs to a minimum but also give members who may not be able to spend more the option to opt out.

A very special “Thank You” must go to Tilly McAuliffe and her fundraising team who have worked tirelessly and with significant success to get Donors and Supporters back on board which has already reaped huge political rewards.

The FFRC committee has dedicated members who have a formidable skill set and they have also been very active in working groups focusing on membership income, donations, data protection and compliance to name just some of the areas they have been looking at. My sincere thanks must go to David Collington, our former FFRC secretary, and the entire FFRC committee for their continuing hard work and dedication to keeping us out of the red.

Our notable political successes over the last three years in both local elections and the three tremendous by-elections in Chesham and Amersham, North Shropshire and Tiverton and Honiton contributed significantly to our ability to fundraise. This has continued in 2024 with the local elections in May being our fifth consecutive increase in Councillors year on year and amazing General Election success in July 2024 giving the party the best result for over 100 Years.

The spectacular General Election result has justified the investment undertaken over the last four years and will set the Party on a more sustainable path for the next 4 years. In order to plan and continue to monitor our finances and budget carefully FFRC has developed a Medium Term Financial Plan looking towards the next General Election in order to continue to manage our Party resources in a prudent fashion.

Our 2024 budget will stand us in good stead as we finish this year and look to 2025 and beyond.

## **Compliance**

Kerry Buist and the entire compliance team have done a great job in keeping our reporting up to date and running training and compliance ‘clinics’. The investment Kerry and her team made with Agent training led to a huge improvement in compliance during the General Election

I urge all treasurers to take advantage of additional training and Compliance clinics if you have not done so already. We continue to suffer as some accounting units are reporting donations, loans, and loan repayments after the legal deadlines leading to Electoral Commission investigations. This involves the compliance team in a significant effort to close these down, wastes hundreds of hours, and risks fines. All local Parties and Treasurers, in particular, must place a particular focus on timely reporting to reduce our financial exposure, and the burden on the HQ compliance team. Fines will be passed on to the relevant accounting unit responsible for any breach. It is in all our interests to get it right. Thank you in advance.

All donations are checked for legal permissibility by the Party's compliance officers and by the Registered Treasurer. Donations are also assessed for reputational risk by the Party Treasurer and approval for donations above £25,000 from a new donor is sought from the Chair of the Federal Audit and Scrutiny Committee. Should there be any negative comment then the decision to accept or not is passed to the following four people who must agree unanimously to proceed: the Party Treasurer, the Registered Treasurer (Chair of FFRC), the Chief Executive and the Chair of the Federal Audit and Scrutiny Committee. If unanimity is not agreed, then the matter is remitted to the Party Leader for a final decision. Declarations of donations, statements of accounts, and Party campaign expenditure are on the Electoral Commission website.

## **Party Business**

As usual, a motion has been submitted to Conference, and you will find the text in the agenda. Conference is also asked to adopt the audited accounts for 2023, detailed over the next two pages.

## **Financial review**

Financially 2023 was another good year for the Federal Party assisted by the return of Conference and a generous Legacy.

The brilliant work by the Conference team along with the continued generosity of our Party members made Conference both a financial and a political success. Huge thanks to everyone who helped out.

The strategy of rebuilding the party in a managed and sustainable way has paid dividends politically and financially. The 2023 results have benefitted from an exceptional legacy by John Faulkner.

Membership income has recovered from 2021 due to a proactive policy of asking members to increase their contributions.

Sustainable income for the Federal Party in 2023 has continued to rise by circa 15% over the last 2 years excluding one off income.

Expenditure has been tightly controlled with only a 12.8% increase in overall expenditure (excluding Conference) despite increasing staff costs by 16.6% ahead of the General Election, campaign expenditure by 7% and IT expenditure by 27%.

The Federal Party ended the year 2023 with a surplus of £0.27m (2022 - Deficit £0.76m) which increased our brought forward restated reserves to £0.88m (2022 - £0.67m). The strategy of a managed reduction in reserves has been reversed a year early. Whilst this will continue in 2024 it is likely 2025 will require a modest deficit given the election cycle. A return to a balanced budget in 2026 is being planned for.

**The Liberal Democrats (The Federal Party)**  
**Income and Expenditure Account**  
**For the year ended 31 December 2022**

<b>Note</b>	<b>£ 2023</b>	<b>£ 2022 (Restated)</b>
<b>Income</b>		
Donations	<b>4,001,894</b>	2,935,930
Membership and subscription fees	<b>1,611,890</b>	1,486,233
Conference income	<b>842,904</b>	42,450
Notional income	<b>51,899</b>	91,556
Grants	<b>473,425</b>	510,695
Interest & Investment gains & (losses)	<b>23,836</b>	(79,688)
Recharges to party bodies	<b>1,057,869</b>	952,837
Other income	<b>5,568</b>	5,215
	<b>8,069,285</b>	5,945,227
<b>Expenditure</b>		
Rent	<b>158,465</b>	156,063
Other Establishment costs	<b>461,415</b>	347,581
Wages	<b>3,190,818</b>	2,735,603
Social Security	<b>326,433</b>	287,353
Pensions	<b>75,042</b>	65,186
Other Operating leases	<b>3,250</b>	6,943
Staff related costs	<b>355,714</b>	252,386
Fundraising expenditure	<b>124,687</b>	139,668
Campaign expenditure	<b>1,193,164</b>	1,107,631
Notional expenditure	<b>51,899</b>	91,556
IT costs	<b>635,492</b>	499,309
Sundry expenses	<b>1,346</b>	65,472
Grants to party bodies	<b>589,139</b>	580,804
Services to members	<b>31,420</b>	40,399
Auditors' remuneration	<b>20,320</b>	24,996
Depreciation of tangible fixed assets	<b>38,007</b>	35,004
Conference expenditure	<b>462,669</b>	228,289
	<b>7,719,280</b>	6,670,751
Bank Interest	<b>72,905</b>	53,656
(Deficit)/surplus before Tax	<b>277,100</b>	(779,180)
Tax on surplus/(deficit)	<b>(5,842)</b>	14,851
(Deficit)/surplus for the year	<b>271,258</b>	(764,329)

**The Liberal Democrats (The Federal Party)**  
**Balance Sheet**  
**As at 31 December 2022**

	<b>2023</b>	2022 (Restated)
	<b>£</b>	£
Fixed Assets		
Tangible assets	<b>268,591</b>	295,049
Current Assets		
Debtors	<b>330,982</b>	418,104
Investments	<b>0</b>	523,622
Prepayments	<b>562,057</b>	181,722
Cash at bank	<b>318,065</b>	361,542
	<b>1,475,868</b>	1,484,990
Creditors falling due within one year		
Creditors	<b>747,517</b>	911,944
Net Current Assets	<b>737,473</b>	573,046
Total Assets less Current Assets	<b>1,032,522</b>	868,095
Provisions for liabilities	<b>257,000</b>	257,000
Net Assets	<b>775,522</b>	611,095
Reserves		
Reserve Fund	<b>45,000</b>	45,000
General Fund	<b>732,823</b>	732,823
Income & Expenditure Account	<b>104,530</b>	(166,728)
Total Funds	<b>882,353</b>	611,095

## **Federal Communications and Elections Committee - Kath Pinnock (Chair)**

The Federal Communications and Elections Committee (FCEC) oversees the implementation of the Party's strategy in relation to elections, campaigns, and communications. The FCEC also oversees, via the Joint Candidates Sub-Committee, the Party's readiness to field candidates in Westminster elections.

The final sentence of this report to Autumn Conference last year was this: "The next year promises to be busy and full of opportunity." I can safely claim an accurate prediction!

This has been an exceptional and outstanding year for the Party.

For the sixth year in a row, Liberal Democrats made gains in the local elections in England on May 2. That matches the best ever winning run in local elections. There are now more than 3,100 Liberal Democrat councillors working hard for their local communities. 68 councils are currently led by Liberal Democrats either in outright control or with an agreement with other parties.

Being able to make or influence decisions for local communities as Liberal Democrats enable us to put into practice our policies based on our values. That can only be achieved where we stand candidates. Approximately one third of wards did not have a Liberal Democrat candidate this May. One of the challenges for this Parliament is, therefore, to greatly increase the number of wards where the Party stands a candidate.

The General Election was called on May 22 which was earlier than many commentators predicted. The Party was very well prepared for the campaign. As chair of FCEC, my role then became that of chair of the General Election campaign. Immediately HQ in General Election mode was up and running. Throughout the campaign, the enormous benefit of having developed and agreed a clear strategy (and sticking to it); meticulous planning and preparation for the campaign in terms of resources of people and funding; and having a team of directors who supported each other was absolutely evident. Everyone in the General Election campaign team in HQ and in the field knew precisely what had to be done. The Flying Start leaflets were being delivered on May 23 and that illustrates the degree of planning and preparation that had been achieved.

The outstanding work of the Communications teams both Digital and Media ensured that the "air war" complimented and enhanced the campaigning on the ground.

The Campaign was developed with the recommendations of the Thornhill Report in mind. Every week of the campaign there were opportunities for key members of the campaign to hear from local canvassers, State Party representatives, Local Government leaders, candidates and, of course, FCEC. As Chair, part of my role was to challenge “group think” which had been identified in the Thornhill Report as being a contributory factor to the outcome of the last General Election. I found that questioning and challenging decisions made at the heart of the HQ operation was welcomed. The openness of decision making and the willingness for these to be tested by myself as chair was seen as a strength which added value to the campaign.

FCEC has played a critical role in ensuring the Party was prepared for the election. Since the Report to the Spring Conference, FCEC has met three times for regular meetings. In March FCEC had a report from the Director of Campaigns about the role of the Development and Start Up seats in an election. This included encouraging them to use an election for recruitment as well as being able to play a part in electing Liberal Democrat MPs in the target seats. The May meeting of FCEC focussed on a review of the local elections as well as receiving reports on agent training and candidate selection. Our July meeting enabled every member of FCEC to make initial comments and observations on the campaign. An in depth consideration of the election will be undertaken by the Review team. FCEC also met each week of the campaign to question and comment on the course of the campaign.

The night of July 4 and the early hours of July 5 were a wonderful experience as results flowed in. Party HQ, just as in the Olympics, has a bell and as our team on the ground called the election of a 72nd Liberal Democrat MP the bell was rung by Dave McCobb as Director of Field Campaigns!

72 MPs! Electing the highest number of MPs ever for the Liberal Democrats was achieved because thousands of members and supporters dedicated hours of their lives to winning - whether in their own seat or in another. Thank you. The result could not have been achieved without the skill, professionalism, and absolute commitment from all who worked in the campaign teams at HQ and across the country. Thank you.

I have been very fortunate in chairing such a successful campaign.

There is, though, no resting on our laurels! The task ahead is to maintain and increase our elected presence in every part of the country. Liberal Democrat values in our communities are needed as never before. Let's campaign for them!



## **Federal People and Development Committee - Claire Hudson (Chair)**

The Federal People and Development Committee (FPDC), working with State Parties and other Party bodies as appropriate, has responsibility for coordinating, planning, and supervising the training strategy for the Federal Part, the diversity engagement strategy, membership recruitment, retention and activation strategy and working with Affiliated Organisations.

FPDC has 18 voting members: the Party President; the Vice-President responsible for working with ethnic minority communities, six members elected by the Federal Board; one representative from each of the Scottish, Welsh and English Parties; and the chairs or nominated representatives of the Young Liberals, the Liberal Democrat Campaign for Race Equality, the Liberal Democrat Disability Association, Liberal Democrat Women, LGBT+ Liberal Democrats, the Campaign for Gender Balance and the Racial Diversity Campaign. A representative of Liberal Democrats Abroad attends in a non voting capacity.

The following has been the work of FPDC since Spring Conference. This reflects about 2 months of work as we paused activity during the General Election and this report needs to be written just as the committee is meeting again!

### **Diversity**

The party's Diversity Committee, which is a formal sub-committee of FPDC, was active in the run up to the General Election. Their focus is a clear strategy involving all states and party bodies that the party can collectively get behind, that is embraced, funded and ultimately embedded. Initially, the aim will be to elect more people from diverse backgrounds and ensure canvassing is done in ethnically diverse areas. We also need to recruit more diverse members so they can be not only candidates but also represented in internal party posts and elections. During the General Election the committee was able to provide advice to ethnic minority candidates in managing social media. Thanks to Amna for leading this piece of work, as well as to all members of staff, diversity officers and general members across the party for their commitment to an important strand of our work.

### **Membership**

I am pleased to confirm that the arrangements for managing removals from the registered supporters lists where the Code of Conduct has been contravened worked extremely well during the General Election. Those of us with responsibility for this work were able to respond at pace to requests for removal. The causes

were mostly public support for another political party, but we also have some inappropriate fake accounts set up.

We have an outstanding piece of work paused for the General Election - a collaboration between DSG, our Whistleblowing working group and our Safeguarding and Welfare working group - to ensure that we capture all complaints and issues in the correct place, and deal with them using appropriate policies. Hopefully, this will be complete by the time Conference arrives.

Pastoral care - we are aware of the concerns about the mental health advice service that the party provides for members. Although the evidence we have gathered suggests that dissatisfaction is limited, we are monitoring it and would encourage anyone who has had a negative experience they wish to share should contact [people@libdems.org.uk](mailto:people@libdems.org.uk) so we have a formal record.

We feel it is important to focus in the future on wellbeing support for candidates and campaigners. This will be an important piece of work going forward.

Dual Membership (where people have two registered addresses, eg. a university student who is registered at their university accommodation and at home) continues to be an issue as our internal systems cannot manage these at present. We are keen to see this resolved as this is a priority for Young Liberals and also Liberal Democrats Abroad.

Internal elections. FPDC have noted that the number of people putting themselves forward for internal elections and also those voting is very low. We will be thinking about how to promote the elections as part of our membership responsibilities.

FPDC would like to extend its thanks to every single Membership Development officer across the party. Your contribution to the effective running of the party is significant!

## **Training**

The training delivered by the party to election agents was both excellent and absolutely essential. Thanks go to Kerry Buist, our compliance officer and Paul Trollope, North West Region, for leading this training. FPDC are keen to see this training for agents kept up with regular events each year, as we need to ensure our agents are trained for general and local elections.

Part of the work programme for FPDC for this coming year will be working with training staff to deliver training for constituency chairs and membership officers. We also want to prioritise embedding soft skills - like thanking volunteers - in campaigning training.

## **Affiliated Organisations**

FPDC is also responsible for assessing new Affiliated Organisations (AOs) who wish to become official party groups and for assessing applications for transfer from the old system.

There are no current new groups to recommend to Conference at this time.

Party Groups wishing to become an AO must meet the criteria and follow the process previously agreed by Conference, available here:

<https://www.libdems.org.uk/f29-f34>

PLEASE NOTE: We have passed the deadline for previously associated organisations to transfer to the new system. Any groups not completing the process in time for the Spring Conference, will no longer be considered official groups of the party and will not be eligible to be promoted on the party website, or to get preferential rates at Conference. I would urge any AO existing on the old system to either get themselves into the process (previous paragraph) or contact me at [clairesf17@gmail.com](mailto:clairesf17@gmail.com) to discuss their options.

### **Affiliated Organisations - How To Guide**

Our Vice Chair Ellie Hudspith attended the Party Bodies Forum at the Spring Conference and has committed to FPDC creating a 'How to run an Affiliated Organisation guide'. We will be aiming for this to be available in 2025.

Thank you to my Vice Chairs Vikas Aggarwal and Ellie Hudspith for their support with the work of the board.

## **Federal International Relations Committee - David Chalmers (Chair)**

The Federal International Relations Committee (FIRC) is responsible for generally managing the Party's relationships with like-minded parties and individuals in other countries and international institutions. It also advises the Party on International issues and supports international collaborations and training.

The General Election on 4 July saw 72 Liberal Democrat MPs elected to the House of Commons making us the third largest party in our country's history. Our success is of huge significance in so many ways, not just in Parliament where as a party, with internationalism as one of its core values, we will ensure that international issues are raised and given proper debate, but also to liberal parties across Europe and around the globe who will be inspired by our efforts to confront populism and promote liberal values.

I am proud of the role FIRC and its members played in helping craft our policies on Europe, defence and security and other important international issues. I know that they were not as significant in the campaign as policies relating to voters' everyday lives covering health and social care, the environment and the cost of living, but they were important to many voters, who wanted to hear that there was a party caring about these issues. From my own experience standing in North East Cambridgeshire I was surprised and pleased at how many times international issues were raised by voters - ranging from a general consensus that our country needs to develop a better relationship with Europe, to support for our calls for an immediate ceasefire in the Israel / Gaza conflict. It was important for many voters to know that there is a political party prepared to speak out on issues affecting the world, which require greater cooperation between countries, from combatting the climate emergency to protecting human rights. I would like to congratulate all our MPs and thank all those members and staff who helped craft and supported our election campaign. It will significantly impact our ability to carry out our international work going forward.

Like the rest of the party, for the past six months since the Spring Conference in York, those of us involved with international affairs have mostly been involved with the elections. However, throughout this period we maintained our engagement with our sister parties around the world through the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe ALDE and Liberal International, where we have members on its Human Rights, Climate Justice and Fair-Trade Committees and the Vice Presidency of Phil Bennion, who is up for re-election to the LI Bureau in November.

I have previously reported that Vladimir Kara Murza, imprisoned in Putin's Russia for criticising the War against Ukraine, was successfully nominated by the Liberal Democrats for the 2023 Liberal International Prize for Freedom. Many of us were honoured to meet Evgenia, his wife, when she visited the UK Parliament last year to accept the award on her husband's behalf. As a party we helped raise his profile and ensured that Vladimir Kara Murza was not forgotten. It was with delight that we heard the news that he was included in the recent prisoner swap with Russia – particularly as he had been given only months to live.

In March straight after our Spring Conference, I led our delegation to the Extraordinary Congress of ALDE – Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe – in Brussels, which was primarily tasked with endorsing the ALDE Manifesto for the European elections which took place in June. As a non EU party we had a limited role in the proceedings, but we managed to persuade our sister parties to propose two amendments to the ALDE manifesto, which called for developing a better relationship between the UK and EU and closer cooperation between the UK and EU on foreign and defence policy – mirroring exactly our own policies on these important issues. Both amendments were passed unanimously. The Congress also endorsed the new Charter of Values for liberal parties across Europe. The consultation process had been chaired throughout the past year by Baroness Brinton.

In Vilnius, Lithuania in late June, I led the Liberal Democrat delegation to the ALDE Council meeting, where amongst other things we considered the results of the recent elections to the European Parliament. Whilst the overall number of ALDE MEPs was reduced from 58 to 52 and the total number of MEPs in the Renew Group was reduced from 101 to 77 – impacted mainly by the loss in support for President Macron's Party in France – ALDE now constitutes a larger share of the Renew Group and hopefully will have greater influence. The Renew Group fell from being the third largest to the fifth largest political group in the European Parliament but remains in the governing coalition with EPP – (Centre right parties) and S&D (Socialists and parties of the centre left). Kaja Kallas, the Prime Minister of Estonia from our liberal sister Reform Party was named the new EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, which could be highly significant as the UK seeks to develop closer cooperation with the EU on foreign and defence policy.

In the European elections whilst our sister parties in Ireland, Slovakia, Portugal, Austria and Bulgaria performed better than in 2019 and those across Scandinavia, the Baltic States, Netherlands, Germany and Belgium held their own, in three of the largest European states, Spain, Italy and Poland we now have no liberal MEPs. There will need to be a proper analysis of the results from this year's

European elections looking to guide improvement in the electoral performance of liberal parties across Europe in upcoming national elections and in the next set of European elections in five years' time. I suspect that many of our sister parties will be looking to our own recent electoral successes in the UK for inspiration and lessons to be learned.

One of the major challenges for our European sister parties and for ALDE is how to deal with the threat from the far right and populists. Whether to maintain a 'Cordon sanitaire' around these parties or bring them into government, is a major dilemma facing many of our sister parties. In turn ALDE has to find a way to respond to the concerns of some of its member parties at the decision of other member parties to go into coalition or support Governments that include populist parties from the far right. One of the ALDE member parties ANO in Czech Republic, that had been raising concerns for some time for its flirting with anti immigration and populist policies, resigned from ALDE in Vilnius, which resulted in the reduced number of ALDE and Renew MEPs. ANO's resignation also impacted the Liberal Democrats, as to ensure that the non-EU parties do not exceed a third of the vote, our Liberal Democrat delegations have been reduced to 38 for the ALDE Congress and eight to the ALDE Council. We shall be working to ensure Baroness Brinton is re-elected as ALDE Vice President at the ALDE Congress in Portugal in October in order to maintain our influence over the next few years. As Liberal Democrats we have continued to work with the Alliance of Her and the Rainbow Platform to promote our message of diversity and inclusion.

At our Autumn Conference we have prepared a full international programme with debates and discussions on topical issues and expect many international visitors from our sister parties, international representatives and diplomats to attend as they are keen on learning about our policies and growing influence. LDEG, LIBG and LIDID will be contributing with their own debates at the Conference and have been holding regular webinars and events throughout the year for party members.

The FIRC SubCommittees on Europe, Commonwealth and Global South, Authoritarian States have been meeting regularly to help our parliamentarians formulate positions and develop policy in these important areas. Through our Communications Sub Committee we are developing better ways to communicate and engage with party members. Our aim is also to encourage the views of party members to be better heard in international debates. We intend to better engage with Affiliated Organisations with an international focus and to encourage international issues to be on the agenda of the upcoming national and regional conferences.

Liberal Democrats Abroad ran a campaign throughout the General Election aimed at the 2,2 million voters living overseas, who were recently given the right to vote in UK elections – pushing overseas voter registration and Vote Liberal Democrat messaging, which consisted of a digital campaign, almost daily media posts, including an Ed Davey video appeal to overseas voters and reasons why overseas voters should vote Liberal Democrat, a press and media campaign, phone canvassing, debates and donations to targeted seats. A detailed report will be produced by LDA in September.

Unfortunately, in the middle of the General Election we lost the services of International Officer, Isabelle Pucher, as the agreement to share her services with PAF came to an end. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Isabelle Pucher for all her work and support over recent years. We are currently in the process of working out how the party will support our international work going forward, but I am confident that we shall find a suitable long-term solution in the next few months. In the meantime, we are managing as best we can - with the voluntary support of members of FIRC and others. With our greater influence in Parliament as the third party there will be vastly greater opportunities to develop our international work. Exciting times ahead!

Federal Elections will be held late next year, including membership of FIRC and the Liberal Democrat delegation to ALDE Council. If any party member would like to find out more about our international work, how to join LDEG, LBIG or LDID or become a member of the Liberal Democrat delegation to ALDE Congresses, come by the LDEG / LIBG exhibition stand in Brighton or drop me a line.

## **Federal Audit and Scrutiny Committee - Dave Radcliffe (Chair)**

The Federal Audit and Scrutiny Committee (FASC) commissions and oversees internal audit work related to the work of the Federal Party, as part of which it oversees the Party's risk management operations and its Risk Register. It is also responsible for commissioning the Party's auditors.

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Over the past six months the Committee has considered the audit findings report on the 2023 Federal Party accounts from UHY Hacker Young and recommended them for sign off by the Registered Treasurer, and subsequent submission to the Electoral Commission. By the time of Conference, these accounts will have been published by the Electoral Commission.

FASC continues to monitor the party risk register on a quarterly basis, noting the progress that is being made in managing risk, as well as reducing the levels of risk that the party carries. We last reviewed the risk register two weeks before the General Election was called.

At that time the most pressing risks were current legal cases, maximising General Election resources (and minimising wasted effort), and the Autumn Conference conundrum (due to be decided at the Federal Board in May). In the post-election period, the risk register will need to be revised significantly to account for the position the party is now in at Westminster.

Finally, we gained assurance on the party's approach to compliance, including the successful training programme for election agents that was delivered across the country ahead of the General Election to ensure the overall party compliance with the Electoral Commission. The committee believe this training model could be applied to local party treasurers.



## **Federal Council Report - Anthony Hook (Chair)**

The Federal Council is in its second year of operation having been set up by Conference to scrutinise the decisions of the Board following the reduction in size of the Board's membership.

The Federal Council is now halfway through its first three-year term since it was created by Conference. The role given to the Council is to scrutinise decisions of the Federal Board, whose role is to set party strategy.

The Council meets online and includes 21 members who are directly elected by all party members. In addition, England, Scotland and Wales each appoint three members, councillors elect three members, Young Liberals elect three members and so do the Parliamentary Group (MPs and Peers). I am especially grateful to Lord Clement-Jones and Lord Strasburger for the active role they play.

The membership of the Council is broad and diverse with members from different parts of the party with different specialisms, interests and expertise. We are united in wanting the party to succeed and playing our part as a constructively critical friend to the executive.

The Council has received the decisions and papers of the Board within one or two working days of each Board meeting. The constitution empowers the Council to call-in decisions if 13 members of the Council so request. A vote by 27 members can overturn a decision.

The Board took a decision to cancel Autumn Conference in anticipation of a General Election around that time. The Council called this decision in. However, before we could meet to consider it, Parliament was dissolved (for the 4 July 2024 election). The Autumn Conference was restored and the issue no longer required our intervention.

In the short time that has passed since Spring Conference, no further Board decisions have met the threshold to be called in.

A Federal Council meeting scheduled for 5 June was cancelled so that FC members could concentrate on front-line election activity. A meeting date in August was also not required due to a lack of any Board decisions needing our attention.

A hung parliament looked unlikely throughout the General Election campaign. However, in case of a hung parliament and the Board having to take certain decisions the Council set a provisional post-election meeting date so that it could fulfil its role in scrutinising those decisions.

I would not want Conference to think the absence of a long hit-list of called-in decisions represents apathy or indifference on the part of the FC. We receive all of the Board's papers and I believe that all FC members read these diligently. Comments and questions are often asked, even if 13 or more members do not consider it necessary to call in a decision.

Members of the Council currently wish to pursue pro-active scrutiny in a number of areas, in particular:

- Strategy for the use of technology by the party
- Strategy for procurement of legal services and conduct of litigation
- Strategy for retention and recruitment of members.

At the time of writing (1 August 2024) I am in discussion with the President about how we will begin this process.

The Council's further meeting dates for this year are currently scheduled for 25 September 2024 and 4 December 2024, following Board meetings shortly before those dates.

As Chair I am supported by two Vice-Chairs, Councillor Prue Bray and Councillor Aidan Van de Weyer. We are also supported by staff at HQ. I am very grateful to them all.

# **Parliamentary Reports**

## **The Commons - Wendy Chamberlain MP (Chief Whip)**

Welcome to Brighton, what a wonderful place to celebrate everything that has happened since we last met in York. Thank you for taking the time to read my report. I will cover a busy few months in Parliament, and then a wee word on the small matter of the General Election.

First things first, I would like to extend my thanks to my colleagues in the Lords and the Commons, the staff teams in our Constituencies and in Westminster who work tirelessly in the background to support us, as well as our Local Government partners and all those in the devolved administrations.

If you have been signed up for the Party's monthly newsletter, much of the below will not come as a surprise. If you are not, I recommend that you do so you can closely follow all the excellent work our new MPs put in.

### **Parliamentary successes**

A personal highlight in the lead up to the election was the vote on a provision for MPs arrested for serious sexual or violent offences and deemed, by a panel of their colleagues, to potentially pose a risk of being barred from the estate. The Government wanted to allow MPs to be on the estate unless and until the point of charge. Colleagues and I firmly believe that to protect staff and victims, it is vital that Parliament have an earlier mechanism. So I tabled an amendment changing the threshold back to what had, before the government change, been initially proposed.

Fortunately, this amendment garnered cross-party support including from former Prime Minister Theresa May. The vote was a free vote, meaning MPs were not whipped, and we won by 170 votes to 169.

Naturally, much of the conversation in Westminster has been on the Israel-Palestine conflict. We are very proud to be the first party to call for an immediate bilateral ceasefire and an opportunity to start peace talks. We will continue to make our voices heard and to call for the protection of human rights across the globe.

In our ongoing fight against sewage and the companies who dump their waste in our waterways, in May, Tim Farron tabled an amendment to the Criminal Justice Bill to send water companies to court for sewage dumping. Unfortunately, without the backing of the Conservative party, this amendment was not passed. Whilst this did not get the result we wanted, it made a lot of noise in the media and raised the

profile of the dangers of sewage and the damage it is causing to our natural environment.

## **The General Election**

In my last report, I spoke of the uncertainty we were all facing regarding the election date but how we remained raring to go: we were. Our strategy of mixing targeted ground campaigns, with strong visuals and a narrative around Ed and care paid dividends.

You hopefully noticed that our machine was moving before Rishi was even wet. We were the first party to launch our bus - and what a moment that was. During this campaign, Liberal Democrat volunteers knocked on nearly three million doors and spoke with nearly a million people whilst delivering more than 17 million leaflets and mail to print, all while Ed travelled 1343 miles from John O'Groats to Lands End, and at least 50 metres in the air and three metres under water.

The result was 57 new MPs, 72 in total. We are the strongest we have been since the Party's founding and the largest Third Party since before the war. We have regained Liberal Democrat heartlands across the country from St Ives and Yeovil to Hazel Grove and Mid Dunbartonshire, as well as gaining new seats in the Blue Wall. This victory is all of ours. You should be so proud. I certainly am.

My team in the Commons and I have had the privilege of welcoming them and helping them settle into life in Westminster. The 17 Maiden Speeches so far have been a joy to hear.

If you see any of them around, please do give them a word of encouragement. They deserve it, and with a hard job ahead they certainly may need it.

## **The more things change**

In Parliament, our crack insurgent force of 15 now takes on the mantle of responsibility of Third Party status. That means you will hear a lot more from us in the media. We will be more bold about what we can achieve. Our processes will need to adapt.

Our approach to Labour is a new challenge. We have been in opposition to the Conservatives for nine years and they show more signs of tackling one another than they do of challenging the government. We can be the true opposition, but we need to carve that territory out.

However, you are going to see a lot of things staying the same. Rightly so. We have elected a record number of Liberal Democrat MPs by running an incredibly disciplined campaign. We listened to people's concerns and focused on the issues

that matter most to them: Fixing the NHS and care, tackling the cost-of-living crisis; stopping the sewage scandal and protecting the environment.

We now have a clear mandate from the electorate, a mandate we must deliver. We have seen what happens when we tell people one thing in the election campaign and do something different afterwards. Let us learn from the past.

On these key issues, we will be a constructive opposition, scrutinising the Government's plans and campaigning for our policies, but also continuing to hold the Conservative Party to account for all the damage they have done to our country.

And we must show our constituents that we are their local champions, by being excellent constituency MPs and continuing to run effective local campaigns throughout the Parliament.

It is a challenge but I am delighted to be doing it with 71 colleagues who are full of energy and optimism.

Bring on a by-election and let's make it to 73.

## **Staff**

After 3 years, Matt Smith, Head of the Whips Office, has moved on to a new adventure. Matt led the team with an unparalleled attention to detail and passion for his work, and even stepped up last minute, delaying a trip of a lifetime in South America, to take on heading up the Leader's Tour during the short campaign. We will all miss him greatly, not least me.

That all said, with clouds can come silver linings and I am delighted to announce Jack Coulson will be stepping up from Deputy to Head. I look forward to the challenge of this new Parliament with him.

The Parliamentary Advisors in the House of Commons (CPA) has also welcomed a new addition, Taka Hemley. Taka may be known to you as a dinosaur in a stunt and a stalwart face of the Leader's tour team. A trial by fire if there ever was one, but he is a tremendous asset to our policy support in peacetime too. Toby Davis and Cathal Byrne remain and were instrumental in the Leader's Tour and the introduction of the new MPs.

Like many Parliamentary colleagues, polling day was not the end of the tough period but a marker for another big push. My thanks to them all for their resilience and cheerfulness.

## **The Lords - Ben Stoneham (Chief Whip)**

In my last report, I said we were playing a waiting game for the General Election. In the event, we weren't playing it for as long as most of us thought we would be, and our stunning success means the Lord's parliamentary party is hugely excited to be matched by a Commons parliamentary party of a comparable size to our own!

We are looking forward to working with them all as they navigate Parliament and we will do everything we can as a collective group to support them in their local campaigns, as well as the national Party campaigns.

In what turned out to be the last few months of the Conservative Government, the legislative programme was busy, and I am, as always, very grateful to our Parliamentary Party in the Lords for the heavy workload they take on.

### **LEADERSHIP AND PARTY WHIPS**

Dick Newby and I continue to serve as the Leader and Chief Whip respectively, and we are well-served by Joan Walmsley and Navnit Dholakia as Co-Deputy Leaders. We also have an eight-strong team of whips, supporting me and the Whips' Office in our work, and I am very grateful for everything they do.

### **HIGHLIGHTS OF OUR LEGISLATIVE WORK SINCE SPRING CONFERENCE**

#### **Data Protection and Digital Information Bill**

Tim Clement-Jones took on this mammoth piece of legislation in the Lords that was resoundingly disliked by opposition parties. Working across the House, Tim highlighted the negligible impact of the provisions of the Bill the Conservatives claimed would reduce business costs and cut red tape. Where the legislation would have a greater impact, Tim highlighted the dangerous effects it would have on weakening data protection structures and reducing privacy rights. In an attempt to lay forward-thinking and constructive arguments to support the future-proofing of AI systems, Tim tabled amendments to incorporate a regulatory framework for the transparency and accountability of AI.

#### **Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act**

Tim Clement-Jones skilfully led the Liberal Democrat response to the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act, which made a number of reforms across the regulation of digital markets, competition law, enforcement of consumer protection law, and the enforcement of consumer rights and disputes. Tim raised issues around loopholes for big tech companies and pressed the Government particularly on ensuring the bill was robust in protecting competition law and

consumer rights. He also worked cross-party to secure several concessions on online trading standards powers, fake reviews, drip pricing, litigation, funding, cooling-off periods, subscriptions, and press ownership.

### **Investigatory Powers Bill**

Chris Fox led on this Bill which updates the Investigatory Powers Act 2016. The Bill introduces changes to the Bulk Personal Datasets (BDP) regime, makes changes to the oversight regime to support the IPC in their role, updates the law in relation to communications data and the role of the Prime Minister in granting certain intercept warrants. The most controversial aspects of this Bill were the new provisions relating to the notices regimes. We raised concerns that the cumulative effect of the new proposals would negatively impact data security and information privacy. As a result, we secured a small concession from the government to ensure that there is a limit on the length of time the Secretary of State may take to review a national security notice or a technical capability notice.

### **Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act**

The Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act made a number of changes to the archaic leasehold system of property ownership. Dorothy Thornhill, Monroe Palmer and the late, great Andrew Stunell were led by Kath Pinnock in welcoming the bill, but highlighting that it did not go far enough. Liberal Democrats raised issues of ground rent, sky-high insurance premiums and arguments in favour of a commonhold system, and continued the work started by Helen Morgan to draw attention to the issue of freeholds. Kath also continued her campaigning on behalf of leaseholders affected by the building safety crisis. The bill was expedited during the 'wash-up' process at the end of the session before the General Election, so we were not able to make the changes we would have liked but we remain committed to proper reform of leasehold to ensure a fairer system of home ownership.

### **Media Bill**

The Liberal Democrat response to the Media Bill was led by Jane Bonham-Carter, with support from Tom McNally, Don Foster, Floella Benjamin, Lynne Featherstone, Robin Teverson, Mike Storey, and Dominic Addington. The Bill sought to make a series of changes to the 20-year-old framework in place that protects and regulates public service broadcasting.

The team welcomed the Bill as a good and needed piece of legislation but worked cross-party to push the Government to move further on key issues such as 'prominence' for public service broadcasters, protections for Channel 4, ensuring greater access for UK audiences to enjoy digital on-demand coverage free of

charge, the implementation of key recommendations from the Leveson inquiry, and for stronger protections for local radio.

### **Offshore Petroleum Licensing Bill**

John Russell led efforts to frustrate Conservative plans to impose a new duty on the North Sea Transition Authority (NSTA) to invite for annual applications for petroleum licensing. He worked hard to advocate for net-zero ambitions in line with our international climate obligations, tabling amendments which would see profits derived from North Sea drilling reinvested into renewable energy sources and the green economy.

### **Post Office (Horizon System) Offences Act**

The Post Office (Horizon System) Offences Act Bill quashed the convictions of those sentenced as a result of the Horizon scandal. Sal Brinton and Chris Fox offered our full support for the bill, which put right a deep injustice.

### **Renters (Reform) Bill**

The long-awaited Renters (Reform) Bill reached the House of Lords towards the end of the last Parliamentary session. It had promised to be a radical reform to the rights of renters, and a piece of legislation that would go some way to ensure that renters had access to safe, decent, and stable housing. However, after a fight with the Tory backbenchers the Government watered down the bill, and by the time it reached the Lords it had lost the backing of the renters' rights groups. Dorothy Thornhill led on the bill for us, supported by Kath Pinnock, and highlighted the need to ensure that the bill implemented the Section 21 ban as soon as possible, raised standards for renters and ensured the private rented sector is fairer for all. Sadly, the bill was lost when the General Election was called, but we look forward to offering similar scrutiny to the new Government's Renters' Rights Bill when it is introduced.

### **Safety of Rwanda Bill**

Mike German led a team consisting of Jeremy Purvis, Paul Scriven, Sal Brinton, Sally Hamwee and Julie Smith in the Lords where we continued to oppose the Safety of Rwanda Bill. In a highly unusual move, but which demonstrated the depth of our opposition to this Bill, we tabled an amendment to reject the Bill outright at the Second Reading. As this motion was not supported by Labour it was unsuccessful, and the Bill proceeded to the usual scrutiny stages in the Lords. Amongst other things, the team pressed amendments to protect the rule of law; to ensure that unaccompanied children, victims of human trafficking, and victims of modern slavery, could not be removed to Rwanda; and to remove the



clauses from the Bill that undermined the Human Rights Act. Working on a cross-party basis, we voted and defeated the government ten times during the Bill's main stages in the Lords. During intensive rounds of ping pong the Conservative government ruthlessly refused to engage and simply overturned all of the changes made in the Lords.

## **Victims and Prisoners Bill**

The Victims and Prisoners Bill was a missed opportunity by the Conservative government to really put victims at the heart of the criminal justice system. The Liberal Democrat team, led by Sal Brinton and Jonathan Marks and including Sally Hamwee, Floella Benjamin, Mike German, Lorely Burt and Lynne Featherstone, therefore pressed the government to go further and be more ambitious in delivering for victims. Working closely with Sarah Olney, Sal Brinton tabled and voted on an amendment to ensure that victims can access free transcripts of their trials.

Unfortunately, this was not successful as Labour did not support Sal's amendment. We also worked on a cross-party basis to secure a number of government concessions, including strengthening compliance with the Victims' Code and recognising the particular needs of victims who are children or have protected characteristics.

The government also gave a concession to Layla Moran on non-disclosure agreements, changing the law to ensure that they cannot be enforced if they prevent victims of crime from reporting criminal conduct to the police or accessing legal or counselling services.

Sal worked closely with others in the Lords and in the Commons to strengthen the provisions in the Bill on compensation for victims of the infected blood scandal. In particular, Sal's work ensured the government brought forward an amendment to ensure that interim payments are made to victims. She also continued to fight for proper recognition of victims of stalking. Lorely Burt worked with a cross-party group of peers to address concerns relating to those serving indeterminate sentences for public protection (IPPs). Jonathan Marks focused on protecting the independence of the Parole Board and fighting further erosion of the Human Rights Act.

## **PEERS AND STAFF**

We remain an active group of almost 80 peers but we were all devastated by the sudden death of our friend and colleague Andrew Stunell in April. Andrew served the Party, and the cause of liberalism, exceptionally well during his life, serving as a councillor, MP and peer. But it was in the everyday ordinary things that Andrew

made his mark. He was effortlessly humble and wore the trappings of public life very lightly. He was hugely popular amongst everyone he worked with and we miss his clear and sensible opinions and advice, and his dry sense of humour very much indeed.

After nearly 14 years in the Lords, Judith Jolly has decided to move on and she retired from the House at the end of July. Judith has been a core member of the team in the Lords throughout her time sitting on the red Benches, and before that, she was a hugely important part of the Party's set up in the southwest of England for many years. I am very pleased that her retirement comes at a time of great success for the Party – and particularly the revival in the southwest. We will miss her work and her company, and we wish her well for the next stage of her life.

As ever I would like to extend my thanks to the staff in the Lords team who support us so well in our work. I am also very grateful to the Political Advisers, all the staff in the Commons Whips' Office, the Leader's Office and the party's press office and communications teams for all the support they give us.

I must just mention Sarah Pughe who for the last 9 years has worked in the Lord Whips' Office, most recently as one of our Legislative and Political Advisers. Sarah has brought so much to the staff team, the Lords group, and the wider operation in Westminster and beyond, and we are very sad to see her move on. Her creativity with legislation, her endless patience and her wit and good humour made her not just excellent at her job, but also the sort of person everyone loved to work with. We will miss her very much indeed.

## **Reports from Federal Bodies**

### **Liberal Democrats Ltd - Mike Cox (Chair)**

In common with most political Parties, the Federal Party is registered as an 'Unincorporated Association' for company regulation purposes. Since 1988 we have also maintained a non-trading 'Limited Company' structure, 'Liberal Democrats Ltd.' (The Company), registered in England (Company number 02231620). Where needed, the Company allows us to enter into formal legal contracts (e.g. office leases) which require an 'Ltd.' structure. The records of the Company are available from Companies House.

The full responsibilities of the Company are set out in Article 9.5 of the Federal Constitution. The Directors delegate the operation of the Party's Legacy Fund to the Federal Finance and Resources Committee. The role of the Directors under the Party's Major Donations Protocol (for donations above a £25,000 threshold) was switched to the Chair of the Federal Audit and Scrutiny Committee following the reforms reported to Conference.

Over the past year, the Company has continued to fulfil its corporate and Party duties as well as its legal obligations with Companies House. The currently serving directors of the Company are me as the Chair of the FFRC (myself), the Party President (Mark Pack), and the Party Vice President (Amna Ahmed) responsible for working with ethnic minority communities. Carl Cashman took over as Company Secretary from Kerry Buist and Carl has very recently been succeeded by Rachel Minshull.

## **Campaign for Gender Balance - Candy Piercy (Chair)**

The Campaign for Gender Balance (CGB) exists to develop and support women interested in standing for public office within the Liberal Democrats.

CGB was expecting a relatively quiet run up to Autumn Conference. The unexpected General Election put paid to that! We are delighted that the Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Party now has 45% women members of Parliament. A total of 32 out of 72.

Current Vice Chair Vikki Slade has been elected to Westminster. Our previous Vice Chair Anna Sabine is now also an MP!

CGB has records of contact with at least 18 of the newly elected women MPs and all of the previously elected women. We are delighted that every one of the 32 women elected has shown that women candidates are winners. We are proud that CGB training, coaching or mentoring may have contributed in some small way to their successful journey to Westminster.

We recognise that our task as CGB is not yet done. We are in contact with some excellent women who didn't win this time but will have a good chance next time. But there are not enough of them. We pointed out in our last report our concerns about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the pipeline of women on their way to stand for Parliament. The pandemic depleted the number of women coming forward to stand for local government, for the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly and ultimately for Westminster.

We are therefore redoubling our efforts to find, inspire and support the next generation of women to stand for the Liberal Democrats at all levels of public office. In line with the Party's strategy, CGB is an intersectional organisation supporting all women candidates who come to us for training, mentoring or coaching.

We have co-opted Kelly-Marie Blundell, a long time CGB supporter, to work with CGB in our new endeavours.

## **Racial Diversity Campaign - Christopher French (Chair)**

The Racial Diversity Campaign's goal is to see more people Black, Asian, and multi Ethnic people become, not only parliamentary candidates but, parliamentary candidates for our target seats. We are looking to the (presumed) 2029 General Election as we recognise that this is a long term goal that requires a long term strategy and vision.

The Executive comprises three members. The current Executive members are as follows:

**Chair: Christopher French**

**Vice Chair: Samantha Young**

**Vice Chair: Melissa Gordon**

### **Summary of action to date**

The RDC has not been as active since the inception of its current set up. The board have been in conversations about taking on the running and delivery of the Stellar Programme, which compliments the role of the RDC and allows a greater alignment of 'by and for' internal Liberal Democrat diversity programmes.

RDC were still in the process of designing the next iteration of its support programme and have drafted out volunteer job descriptions to help support this. We see RDC as the vehicle to increase diverse representation, across politically elected posts (councillors, mayors, PCCs, MPs) and Stellar as the programme to support those who want to, in some cases literally, make the move to become a target seat MP for our party.

### **Next Steps**

We will begin the integration of Stellar into the work of the RDC, maintaining the distinction between the two but creating pathways.

Whilst we have not been as active, we have not been idle. We have considered the support that we need and drafted a number of roles that we will seek volunteers for. At the time of writing, the roles within the RDC are:

- Chair (Appointed, current)
- Vice Chairs x2 (Appointed, current)
- Funding Lead x 2 (Volunteer)
- Project Manager/Coordinator x1 (Volunteer)
- Social Media/Website Manager/Marketing x1 (Volunteer)

- Candidate Coordinator x 2-3 (Volunteer)
- Events Coordinator x 1 (Volunteer)

We will also establish a panel of mentors from across political and LDHQ colleagues and industry specialists. We feel that having group sessions rather than individual sessions will work better for some parts of the programme. Adverts and the application process information will be shared at the Autumn Conference.

We want to know what the target seats will be as soon as we are able so we know where we need to focus, but we also want to be able to hear from those who believe they can make things happen where they currently are. This is the trajectory of our Accelerator to Stellar programme.

### **Chair's reflections**

We cannot do this alone. We need the support of ALL in and around our party. Whilst we desire to see more diverse representation across our party, it cannot be left to an already smaller cohort of diverse people to bring this much needed change to fruition.

We are excited for this next chapter. This is a short report, as we want to start the actions. We look forward to providing a fuller update on our progress at Spring Conference 2025.

## **The Complaints Process - Neil Christian (Lead Adjudicator)**

The party's independent process is created under Article 23 of the Federal Constitution and the three state parties - England, Scotland and Wales - have all also decided to participate in it.

I would firstly like to thank the members of staff and volunteers who help manage the independent complaints process throughout the year. It is never an easy task, especially in a busy election year. My overall view is that we have performed and worked well over the last 12 months.

It has been an eventful year. Firstly, we rolled out a revised and improved version of the rules on 17/03/2024. The revisions were aimed at making the system more user friendly and followed previous revisions aimed at continual review and improvement. The transition was smooth and appears to be bedding in. Secondly, there was a General Election. This was expected and a protocol had been put in place to manage the additional strains on the system that were expected. The complaints system and protocol performed well. I thank the volunteers who worked so hard during this time. It is noted that there is a backlog of cases from this period to be heard by Panels but this was also expected and is being worked through.

The following information is required to be provided in my annual report. The figures cover the period 13/08/2023 to 12/08/2024.

- There have been 235 complaints made in this period
- There were 37 suspensions considered. Of those, 23 were suspended during this period
- There have been 22 members expelled
- There have been 21 Appeals to the Disciplinary Appeals Panel
  - Disciplinary Appeals Panel (this is the new appeal procedure) - 6
  - Review Panel (earlier rules) - 9
  - Appeal Panel (earlier rules) - 6

Please note with rule changes the system of appeals has changed. Cases have progressed through the system in this period using the systems applicable to the case.

- There are 98 open complaints and 226 complaints have been concluded (The concluded cases include complaints remaining open from the previous year and closed in this period)
- The number of concluded Complaints which were dismissed, referred back for additional information and referred to a Complaints Panel were:
  - Dismissed cases - 98 cases
  - Referred for Further info - 45 cases
  - Referred to Panel - 84 cases
- The average period from opening to closing a complaint is currently 69.4 working days
- The sanctions imposed, if any, in each concluded case were:
  - Expulsion - 22
  - Warning - 7
  - Ban from Party office - 4
  - Apology - 2
  - Withdrawn - 1
  - Fixed term suspension - 1
  - Mandatory training - 1
  - Mediation recommended - 1



# Updates from State Parties

## English Liberal Democrats - Lucas North (Chair)

The Liberal Democrats in England is a federation of 11 Regional Parties, together with the English Young Liberals, who are the youth and student wing of the Liberal Democrats. As the Chair of the Party in England, I am pleased to present this report to shed light on the organisation's work, structure, and aspirations for the future.

I must of course begin by thanking my predecessor, Alison Rouse, for all the hard work she did, and wish her the best. I know many members have turned to 'Aunty Alison' for advice over the years, and I can only hope to do her justice as I step into the role.

Much of the work we do is behind the scenes – we often do work that, to quote a veteran member: “Comprises of plumbing, maintenance and sewage. You don't see it often, but you know when it's not done because it backs up and it smells!”

### General Election

During the General Election, it was of course necessary for much of the business of the English Party and its Committees to be put on hold whilst the General Election was taking place.

As such, this report now presents an opportunity to once again convey grateful thanks and much appreciation to everyone involved for their incredible work and dedication during the election period which ultimately led to the extraordinary result achieved by us all.

We now return to our business-as-usual work, supporting on matters relating to candidates, regional and local parties, and membership engagement. Some of our priorities for the remainder of the calendar year are below.

### PROMOTE DIVERSITY MORE EFFECTIVELY

#### **Briefings with Affiliated Organisations in the Party that represent protected characteristics.**

We continue to talk with these groups to share a comprehensive understanding of how the candidate's process works and clarify information. This allows them to identify where their members may require support and there is some excellent work going ahead to improve the chances of those with protected characteristics applying and passing assessment.

We are joining in work to identify places where we can improve the chance of people having a successful and enjoyable selection journey while ensuring all potential candidates are more aware of the reasonable adjustments that are already available.

It is important to involve stakeholders from the beginning. There is more outreach planned to other stakeholders as the year progresses. We are aiming to achieve a “nothing about us without us” approach and will be working with the different committees and AO’s to make this work – developing plans for what is needed rather than what we think is needed.

## **PROJECT WORK**

### **Continuing to fund staffing – the “Investing in Regions” project.**

We continue to run our funding program to give regions extra staffing hours – as part of delivering our strategy to help the regions support their local parties even more effectively.

To receive funding, regions are asked to provide information that they are working on a set of criteria which includes improving diversity and membership development.

Feedback consistently demonstrates that this is really having an impact on what regions are able to achieve, and we are now conducting the latest round of reviews to understand how to shape the program over the coming years.

### **Continue to contribute G8**

G8 is a funding scheme to help elect more Liberal Democrats in local government. It is funded by the Federal, English, Scottish and Welsh parties, managed by the G8 Committee and administered by ALDC.

### **Post General Election Candidate work**

There is now a massive amount of work being performed by the English Candidates Committee following the General Election. The Committee are currently reviewing our approval and selection procedures for the next Parliament and conducting the post-election review. This work is expected to continue into the start of 2025.

### **The Future**

We’re currently conducting a governance review to make sure that the English Party organises itself in a way that makes sense and helps us to achieve our

aims. If you have feedback or would like to input into this, please email [chair@englishlibdems.co.uk](mailto:chair@englishlibdems.co.uk).

The next internal elections for the Liberal Democrats in England are coming up later this year, and if anyone has any questions about our elections or the work of the Party in England, I'd encourage you to visit our stall in the Exhibition or email [chair@englishlibdems.co.uk](mailto:chair@englishlibdems.co.uk).

Thank you for everything you've done and continue to do.

We all rise together or not at all.

# **Scottish Liberal Democrats - Jenni Lang (Convenor)**

## **Elections**

Despite a different backdrop of an SNP led administration in Scotland, the Scottish Party made gains at the General Election in July, getting Susan Murray elected in Mid Dunbartonshire, and Angus MacDonald in Inverness, Skye and West Ross-shire. We also retained our existing seats, despite boundary changes making some nominally SNP seats. We now turn our minds to the Scottish elections in 2025 with a solid foundation to make gains in constituencies and on the list.

## **Scottish Parliament**

Led by Alex Cole-Hamilton we have continued to make our voice heard on key issues in Parliament, and with the Scottish Parliament now being run with a minority Governing party, every voice counts on key votes, and we are developing ways of working to support on issues that we agree with, for example, the approach towards any potential far right led unrest, and offer a robust challenge on areas we do not. Moving forward we will aim to work in a way that brings the best outcome for Scotland.

## **Future Leaders Programme**

We have continued to run our Future Leaders Programme to develop our talent pool which can help us grow our grassroots campaigns.

Feedback from the participants has been universally positive. The investment in them as leaders has been welcomed and valued by everyone who has been involved.

## **Conference**

At the end of 2023, we moved to a 'pay what you can afford' model for Conference. This has proven to be extremely successful, with the majority of attendees paying the recommended amount or more, whilst widening access to those on lower incomes.

We held a two day conference in Hamilton in May 2024, just a couple of weeks before the General Election was called. We will hold a one-day Conference in early November.

## **Welsh Liberal Democrats - Tim Sly (President)**

### **New Chief Executive**

Following a very thorough recruitment process, the Welsh Party appointed Mike O'Carroll as Chief Executive with effect from 1 March. The standard of applications was high and we were fortunate to have Mike Dixon join us as part of the interview panel. This appointment forms part of the five-year staffing and budget plan approved by the Welsh Party board last year.

Mike is a very experienced campaigner and brings extensive management experience from both the public and private sectors to his new role. He led the recent General Election campaign in Wales and is making great strides to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Party machine in Wales in the run up to the Senedd elections in 2026 and then the local elections the following year.

### **Welsh Spring Conference**

In March, the Welsh Spring Conference took place in Cardiff and was very well attended, with over 150 attendees from across Wales and the UK and as far afield as France. This was our best conference attendance in several years and also attracted a significant number of external organisations, both as attendees and exhibitors.

### **Police and Crime Commissioner Elections**

The PCC elections in May represented good progress for the Party across Wales. An active and well planned campaign resulted in an increased vote share in all four Police areas (we were the only party to achieve this), in many cases doubling our previous share of the vote. We retained our deposits in all four areas, in marked contrast to the previous elections where we lost three deposits. Possibly the biggest benefit was to wake up our activist base and remind many of them what campaigning is about, in the run up to the General Election, as there were no local elections in Wales this year.

### **General Election: we have a Liberal Democrat MP in Wales again!**

Following a very intensive campaign, David Chadwick was elected as the new MP for Brecon, Radnor and Cwm-Tawe on 4th July.

The Brecon and Radnor seat has flipped between Conservatives and Liberal Democrats in recent years and was last won by Jane Dodds in the 2019 by-election. Since then, boundary changes have added a large area in the Swansea Valley which is traditionally Labour-facing.

David saw off an attempted squeeze by Labour to take the seat, beating incumbent Tory Fay Jones by 1,500 votes. Work now begins on building up the local party infrastructure, especially in the new areas of the constituency in the Swansea valley, so that David can achieve a higher majority next time. This will also help bolster our efforts in the 2026 Senedd elections.

Huge thanks are due to the campaign team, especially Glyn Preston, Pete Roberts and James Lillis, as well as volunteers from across Wales who came to campaign in Brecon, Radnor and Cwm-Tawe. Under the Welsh Party constitution, David also becomes Welsh Deputy Leader and takes a seat on the Welsh Board.

### **General Election: progress in Moving Forward Seats in Wales**

We increased our vote share in three of the four Moving Forward seats in Wales, achieving second place in Ceredigion Preseli and Cardiff East and a strong third in Swansea West with a 6% increase in the vote.

Notably, Rodney Berman achieved 17.2% of the vote in a six-way contest in Cardiff East which bodes well for our chances there in the 2026 Senedd elections, to be held under the D'Hondt method of PR.

Efforts are now focussed on building up capacity and resources ahead of the 2026 Senedd elections, which will be an important test for the party as the first national elections to be held entirely under PR in mainland Britain.

# **Report from the Federal Appeals Panel - David Graham (Chair)**

The Federal Appeals Panel (FAP) is established under Article 22 of the Federal Constitution and adjudicates over a variety of disputes which are within the jurisdiction given by Article 22.3.

The FAP acts as a safeguard to ensure that bodies act within the limits assigned to them by the Federal Constitution, and the rights of members under the Federal Constitution are respected. It therefore plays an important role in maintaining good governance within the Party.

The FAP is made up of 18 members – nine of whom are elected by the Federal Board and confirmed by Conference, with three being elected by each State Party. Members of the FAP are all volunteers. The Chair of the FAP is elected by the Panel from amongst the members elected to it by the Federal Board. The FAP is there to protect the rights of Party Members and is directly accountable to Conference.

The Chair of the FAP is required by Article 22.6 to publish an annual report to Autumn Conference, containing the Panel's procedures, all its decisions on the interpretation of the Constitution and a summary of its other rulings since its last annual report.

## **Personnel**

Thomas Hood, who joined the Panel following his approval by the last Autumn Conference, resigned in June 2024. Accordingly, there remains a Federal vacancy.

There also remain State Party vacancies, notably from Wales.

The Federal Party Constitution (Article 22.4, paragraphs A and B) requires that any dispute between State Parties and the Federal Party, or between State Parties, must be heard by a panel including a member appointed from each of the States concerned; and that in any other case at least one hearing panel member must be an appointee of the State Party of which the applicant is a member.

The FAP has been persistently under-strength and I have raised this in every Report to Conference since I assumed office. This issue was looked at by the Federal Audit and Scrutiny Committee following Autumn Conference 2023, and the Federal Board is cognisant of the issue. A motion was passed at Spring Conference of 2024 to widen the pool of eligible candidates to include prospective parliamentary candidates and members of the Federal executive, but the issue with not having a full complement of State Party appointees remains. I remain of the personal view that a further constitutional revision should be considered to ensure that there is sufficient flexibility to hear cases.

## **Performance statistics**

Since the last report, six cases have been finally disposed of (in one case, subject at the time of writing to publication of the full text of the decision which will accordingly not accompany this report but shall be available on the Party website by the time of the Conference).

There are 12 matters formally pending. One of these matters was brought by a member who has since left the Party and brought court proceedings against the Party.

Our target timescale for determination of disputes is three months from the date of filing to final disposal. The mean duration of the matters disposed of over the last year is in excess of 12 months, which is not acceptable for parties concerned. This is attributable to an insufficiency of panel members, difficulty in arranging convenient hearing dates, and work pausing for the local and General Elections.

The figures in this section are correct at the time of writing, as of 19 August 2024, although matters will have moved on by the time of Autumn Conference.

## **Published procedures**

The procedures adopted by Conference in 2021 are reproduced [here](#).

## **Constitutional rulings of the FAP**

In Johnston (Case 58), the applicant alleged in a case brought at the end of January 2023 a failure by the former Chair of the Federal Audit and Scrutiny Committee (FASC) and the Party Chief Executive to make reports of its meetings held in 2021 and 2022 available to party members.

Article 8.8B of the Federal Party Constitution provides that each committee of the Federal Party must make regulations which must include 'provisions for reports to be made to party members after the completion of each full meeting of the Committee...in a manner deemed practical by the Federal Chief Executive within 14 days of the conclusion of the said meeting'.

The FASC had its own standing orders which by standing order 9(iii) thereof mirrored this provision in the Federal Constitution requiring a brief report for Party Members within 14 days of the conclusion of each ordinary meeting, to be published in a manner deemed practical by the Federal Chief Executive'.

The evidence was that the Chair of the FASC had received advice from the then Company Secretary of the Federal Party to the effect that this obligation could be discharged by the minutes of the meetings and the publication of minutes. Minutes had therefore been prepared in a manner that did not provide a full



account of the proceedings in order to protect confidentiality. They had not in fact been published timeously on the Party website and the Chair of the FASC had not been responsible for updating the website. The practice had therefore been that no separate reports to members had been prepared by the Chair or routinely published within 14 days.

By the time of the FAP hearing, the complaint had become academic since reports of relevant meetings had been uploaded to the Party website.

The FAP ruled that it had been inappropriate for Mr Johnston to proceed by way of an application to the Panel because (i) he was complaining about meetings that had occurred many months and in some cases years previously, long out of time to apply to the Panel, and (ii) he had not exhausted alternative remedies because the FASC was accountable to the Federal Board under art.16 (1) of the Constitution, and latterly the Board was subject to scrutiny by the Federal Council (art.9.15). The case was also academic now, because reports had been published. It therefore dismissed the application. However, as it had heard argument, the Panel did nonetheless determine that the requirements of article 8.8B of the Federal Party Constitution could not be discharged by keeping minutes, but required at least a brief report to be published for the benefit of party members. The FASC's standing orders referred to 'minutes' in standing order no.6 and the drafters should be interpreted as having advisedly intended a different kind of document when they referred to 'reports' in standing order 9, paragraphs (i) and (ii). The FAP also noted that it was desirable for fuller minutes to be kept that would remain confidential to a committee.

## **Other rulings**

The FAP's decisions are published in full on the Party's website unless we are persuaded that there are good reasons not to do so in a particular case. The FAP will consider whether to anonymise the ruling or make redactions. Members are directed to the website for the full text of any determinations of interest. The following is a summary of the decisions made.

In Holliday (case 53), a decision of a complaints panel was overturned. The FAP were satisfied that the decision was unreasonable. The case turned on particular facts as to whether a forthright speech made by a local councillor in a public meeting was properly described as 'bullying', and the FAP concluded that it could not be.

In Scott (case 61), an appeal was made against dismissal of a complaint and subsequent appeal about an article published in Liberal Democrat Voice on 19th March 2023 entitled "It's time for gender critical people to leave". There were not

found to be properly arguable grounds that the complaints and review panels had erred in principle or acted unfairly in concluding that as a matter of judgement that the article did not warrant a disciplinary investigation.

In joined cases 40, 41 and 42, Crowther and Newman, cross-complaints were made about a situation that arose whereby the executive of the Southport local party had decided not to stand a candidate for election in a particular ward if a particular independent candidate submitted nomination papers, but Mr Newman submitted papers – approved by Mr Crowther – and did not subsequently withdraw them when it was confirmed at the last minute that the independent candidate was also running. We determined that Mr Crowther acted reasonably in the circumstances known to him, and that whilst Mr Newman had been entitled to submit his papers, the local executive had thereafter been entitled to determine it was not in the best interests of the Party to contest a particular ward and not to devote resources to that particular campaign. We allowed Mr Crowther’s appeal.

### **Conclusion and thanks**

I would like to end by thanking all my colleagues for their work, as well as all the Party staff who have supported the work of the Panel throughout the last year including Beth Morris, Neil Pickles, Sian Waddington and Trudy Church.