



Liberal Democrats  
Spring Conference  
**HARROGATE 2025**

# REPORTS TO CONFERENCE SPRING 2025

# Contents

<b>Federal Committee Reports</b>	<b>3</b>
Federal Conference Committee - Nick De Costa (Chair)	3
Federal Policy Committee - Lucy Nethsingha & Jeremy Hargreaves (Vice Chairs)	6
Federal Board Report - Mark Pack (Party President)	9
Vice President with responsibility for ethnic minority communities - Amna Ahmad	26
Federal Finance and Resources Committee - Mike Cox (Chair and Party Registered Treasurer)	28
Federal Communications and Elections Committee - Kath Pinnock (Chair)	31
Federal People and Development Committee - Claire Hudson (Chair)	32
Federal International Relations Committee - David Chalmers (Chair)	34
Federal Audit and Scrutiny Committee - Dave Radcliffe (Chair)	38
Federal Council Report - Anthony Hook (Chair)	39
<b>Parliamentary Reports</b>	<b>41</b>
The Commons - Wendy Chamberlain MP (Chief Whip)	41
The Lords - Ben Stoneham (Chief Whip)	44
<b>Reports from Federal Bodies</b>	<b>48</b>
Liberal Democrats Ltd - Mike Cox (Chair)	48
Campaign for Gender Balance - Candy Piercy (Chair)	49
Racial Diversity Campaign - Christopher French (Chair)	50
<b>Updates from State Parties</b>	<b>52</b>
English Liberal Democrats - Caroline Pidgeon (Chair)	52
Scottish Liberal Democrats - Jenni Lang (Convenor)	54
Welsh Liberal Democrats - Tim Sly (President)	55

# 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 that we are returning to Harrogate for our 2025 Spring Conference, this is our first time back since 2009.

I've not been to Harrogate before, so I am very excited that we are returning; it's also especially nice that we will have our new MP for Harrogate and Knaresborough, Tom Gordon, opening Conference for us.

It was in Harrogate in 1987 that the Liberal Party convened for a pivotal Conference. It was here, in the heart of Harrogate, that the party overwhelmingly (998 to 21) voted in favour of initiating merger negotiations with the Social Democratic Party (SDP). This decisive move set the stage for the formation of our party as we know it. Harrogate's role in the backdrop of this unifying moment underscores its special place in our party's history, and I am delighted we are returning.

Thank you to those of you who have (or are about to) register for Conference, and a huge welcome to those members here for the first time. I hope that you all take advantage of the great range of events that are offered at Conference.

I am delighted to see so many party bodies and external organisations taking part in Conference and the interesting range of exhibitions. I hope that you all take advantage of the brilliant range of events over the weekend.

A huge thanks to all the people involved in putting together the brilliant selection of training on offer; I really recommend you trying out, and/or brushing up your skills in campaigning, being agents, finance, fundraising, and much more!

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 otherwise. The Conference Access Fund can assist with a range of things, including grants towards accommodation, travel, and assistance with child care 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:

[www.libdems.org.uk/conference/access-fund/donate](http://www.libdems.org.uk/conference/access-fund/donate).

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.**

As regularly mentioned, time is tight at Conference, and we are unable to take all motions submitted to Conference. Unfortunately, FCC is constrained with regards to some of the items submitted which we have to take, which then reduces the time available at Conference.

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 AOs, 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 motion, and this information will be published in the Conference Directory.

From the submitted motions we selected five policy motions and four constitutional amendments. 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 10th March 2025 at 13:00 and can be done via: [www.libdems.org.uk/conference/submissions](http://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: [www.libdems.org.uk/Conference\\_submissions](http://www.libdems.org.uk/Conference_submissions). We have allocated sometime for Emergency Motions; 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 deadline for drafting advice is 24th February, 13:00 via the above web link.

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 LibDem Conference Facebook group.

### **Autumn Conference 2025.**

For Autumn Conference we will be returning to the sunny shores of Bournemouth; the dates are 20th - 23rd September 2025, and you can find the details, including links to booking accommodation on the Conference website.

### **Federal Committee Elections.**

After Autumn Conference, we will have the next round of Federal Committee elections. If you are interested in standing for FCC, then please do reach out to me or one of the members of the FCC if you want to find out more information about being a member of FCC.

## **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.*

### **Policy working groups.**

Since Autumn Conference, FPC has had five working groups developing policy for the party.

A group chaired by Dr Jonathan Everett has developed an excellent range of proposals on Science & Innovation policy, including Artificial Intelligence. This also covers issues such as STEM (Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education, digital rights, and investment in public sector technology infrastructure. FPC is bringing this motion and paper to this Conference.

A group led by Rosie Shimell has continued to look at Opportunity and Skills. It will be making alternative proposals to the Government's flawed Skills England update our ideas on Lifelong Learning Grants, and develop new ideas on careers guidance. It is our intention to bring a motion and paper on this area to Autumn Conference this year.

A group led by Vinous Ali has been looking at the whole area of the Future of Work. They are considering the purpose of work, how technological revolutions will affect work, and how we can equip people to adapt to them. We also intend to bring this to Autumn Conference this year.

Duncan Brack is chairing a working group developing renewed proposals relating to Climate Change. In addition to addressing mitigation measures, it will also be considering how to achieve a just transition to Net Zero and what steps we need to take to adapt to the already inevitable effects of some degree of climate change. This is intended for this autumn.

Ed Davey, assisted by Eleanor Kelly as vice chair, has been leading our policy review. This has taken evidence widely about the major global, economic, and public services challenges facing Britain, and considered this in the light of both liberal democrat values and the views of the public. The intention is that this group will set out a broad direction for our policy development through this parliament, and a programme of future priority areas in which we will set up working groups. This is also intended to come to Autumn Conference this year.

We have also agreed a motion about animal welfare which we are proposing to this Conference, which arises out of our pre-election policy paper on farming.

As ever, the period when working groups are researching and developing their proposals is the most effective time to contribute ideas and discuss their work with them. By the time final proposals are on the formal agenda of Conference it is too late to amend all but a very few key elements. Some more information about all these groups is at [www.libdems.org.uk/members/make-policy](http://www.libdems.org.uk/members/make-policy), and if you have points you would like to contribute or discuss with the group, please do write to the chair at [policy.consultations@libdems.org.uk](mailto:policy.consultations@libdems.org.uk).

At the time of writing FPC is about to make a decision about two new working groups which will work through 2025, with the intention that proposals they develop come to Conference to debate in spring 2026.

Following further progress by the policy review, we anticipate that before the summer we will make some further decisions about working groups in priority areas identified by the review. The expectation is that these will be some of the key policy priorities for the party during the 2024-29 parliament.

We always advertise widely for party members to be part of working groups. This is included in emails sent to all members (who have not opted out of most party emails) as well as through a range of social media. We currently typically receive up to 200 applications to be on each working group, each of which are read and considered carefully as part of constructing a group which is balanced to represent the different key views on topics within the party, as well as demographic factors. If you would like to ensure that you hear about future working group advertisements please email [policy.consultations@libdems.org.uk](mailto:policy.consultations@libdems.org.uk).

About 100 party members are currently making a considerable contribution to the party's policy development through working as part of these working groups, and we extend our thanks to them. Working group chairs in particular take on a key role, leading working groups and managing their interaction with internal and external stakeholders. This is a very significant time commitment and we are very grateful to them.

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

We are always very keen to promote discussion of policy among members. In recent months this has focussed on the policy review, which held consultation sessions at most English regional Conferences as well as organising a short survey sent to all party members. All working groups publish a consultation paper and hold a consultation session at at least one Federal Conference. They are also happy to provide a speaker to groups across the party to speak and gather views

about their work. An FPC sub-group led by Lucy Nethsingha is also currently looking at for further ideas in this area. Please do feel free to contribute any ideas you may have to [policy.consultations@libdems.org.uk](mailto:policy.consultations@libdems.org.uk).

Thanks to the party's digital staff team, the webpage [www.libdems.org.uk/members/make-policy](http://www.libdems.org.uk/members/make-policy) 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 [www.libdems.org.uk/Conference/papers](http://www.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.**

As well as discussing these areas with working groups the committee has continued to discuss overall political developments and their impact on our policy programme. We have also held discussions with Calum Miller MP, Helen Morgan MP, and Christine Jardine MP, respectively our spokespeople on foreign affairs, health and equalities.

None of this would be possible without the work of the staff in the policy unit, who do the bulk of the work of writing policy papers. We send our very best wishes to Joe Wright, who has recently moved on after four excellent years in the team, and welcome Alexander Payne who has recently joined in his stead. We are very grateful to them, and as always to Christian Moon, Head of Policy.



## **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.*

### **Thank you.**

Thank you to our staff under the leadership of our Chief Executive, Mike Dixon, without whom our work would not be possible. Particular thanks to Rachel Minshull, the Company Secretary, who directly supports the work of the Board, along with that of several other Federal Committees.

Thank you also to two members of the Federal Board who left in the last few months due to their terms of office coming to an end: Lucas North who had been Chair of the English Liberal Democrats, and Janey Little, who had been Chair of Young Liberals. They have been succeeded on the Board by Caroline Pidgeon and Harvey Jones respectively.

### **General election review.**

The general election review was published at the start of January ([www.libdems.org.uk/ge-review](http://www.libdems.org.uk/ge-review)), and is an important staging post in ensuring we learn the right lessons from the general election - and make the most of our opportunities in this Westminster Parliamentary cycle.

Many thanks to its chair, Tim Farron, and the rest of the team - Ade Adeyemo, Paul Farthing, Donna Harris, Emma Holland-Lindsay, Mike O'Carroll, and Sally Pattle - along with Vinous Ali for her support for their work.

Given the election result, the review has of course many complimentary things to say about the election campaign. But it also rightly sets out challenges to the party to change and evolve so we can do even better next time.

Perhaps most importantly, the review shows that where we were willing to make changes and apply the lessons from what went wrong in 2019, we were able to greatly improve our ability to win elections and to secure political power to turn our policies into action to improve people's lives. The list of lessons may be shorter this time, but it is still important that we work through it. The Board has had an initial discussion welcoming the review and will be having a further discussion to plan our role in implementing its recommendations. That will have taken place by Conference and so an update will be provided in the Board Report session.

## **Developing our strategy.**

Alongside implementing the general election review, developing the party's strategy for the new circumstances of a Labour government and in face of the rise of Reform is one of the top tasks for the Board.

We have set out our current thinking on this in a short consultation paper which we will be discussing with members at Harrogate Conference ([www.libdems.org.uk/news/article/party-strategy-consultation](http://www.libdems.org.uk/news/article/party-strategy-consultation)). Please do come along and contribute your views, or send them to us separately.

## **Diversity plans.**

As Federal Conference has previously decided, improving our ethnic diversity is the specific priority for our diversity work.

LDCRE (the Lib Dem Campaign for Race Equality), RDC (the Racial Diversity Campaign), and Amna Ahmad (Vice President responsible for working with ethnic minority communities) met with other key stakeholders, including both the Chief Executive and myself, before Christmas to discuss next steps. This was in response to the LDCRE's report about the implementation of the Alderdice Review launched at our previous Conference.

We agreed a plan of work, focusing on (a) improving our diversity data for members, (b) getting more canvassing going in areas with large ethnic minority communities, (c) improving ethnic diversity at both local and Westminster elected levels.

The latter - Westminster candidates - got specific support through the last Parliament through Project Stellar, which will continue in this Parliament. Many thanks to the kind donor who has agreed to continue supporting it.

## **Financial plans.**

Our medium term financial plan for this Parliament is similar to the last one. Starting with a significant surplus (though a smaller one this time), we are going to run budget deficits initially so that we can invest early in the Parliament in our long-term success and in our staff team.

We saw in the last Parliament the benefits of that early investment, particularly in having a full campaign team in place for all the rounds of local and devolved elections. But repeating that will continue to require careful financial management, a task that our Federal Finance and Resources Committee (FFRC), chaired by Cllr Mike Cox, is well aware of.

## **Liberal Democrats Ltd.**

The Agenda includes the Board's bid to take the world record for 'shortest constitutional amendment ever' (F17).

We have deliberately kept it as short as possible to minimise the time taken away from other Conference items. It is though an important detail to change.

Liberal Democrats Ltd exists to allow the party to give it specific tasks, such as signing a property contract for our HQ, that the party - as an unincorporated association - either cannot or should not do itself.

However, there may be occasions when we want to give the company a specific task which is best done by directors with relevant specialist expertise. This amendment therefore would give more freedom over who can be the directors of the company, but retains as the members of the company (i.e. those who can appoint or sack directors) three Liberal Democrat post holders. That ensures the company remains fully part of the Liberal Democrat family and that there is clear accountability for what happens.

This is not just a theoretical benefit as the party's fundraising team is currently working on a proposal to improve our legacy fundraising that would involve using the Limited Company. Hence putting the proposal forward now so that if that proposal gets the go ahead, our rules will be in place to allow it.

## **Complaints process.**

The Disciplinary Sub Group (DSG) is chaired by Prue Bray and has not recommended to the Board any changes to the procedure to report to Conference.

## **Affiliated Organisations.**

The Federal People Development Committee (FPDC) has approved the transition of four bodies from our old SAO/AO structures to the new Affiliated Organisations structure - Liberal Democrat Action for Land Taxation & Economic Reform (ALTER), Liberal Democrat Education Association (LDEA), Parliamentary Candidates Association (PCA), and The Liberal Democrats in STEMM (LibSTEMM).

## **Arrangements for party elections.**

This Autumn will see our three-yearly big set of internal elections, including for Party President and for Federal Committees. Over the summer, the three year term of the Federal Returning Officer also comes up.

At the time of writing, the Board is in the process of appointing someone for a new three year term as Federal Returning Officer, and an update will be provided at Conference.

The Board has also agreed the timetable for these elections, which is on the party website at [www.libdems.org.uk/internal-elections](http://www.libdems.org.uk/internal-elections). It is also intended to do a mock election rehearsal in advance to test out how the administrative and technical systems are working.

The Federal Board is also proposing to Federal Spring Conference for ratification of a new set of internal election regulations. These incorporate changes based on the recommendations from the big review carried out by Nick Manners, which consulted widely across the party. The Board then also ran a more recent, more specific, consultation on how best to implement some of the details of what the Manners Review had recommended. Thank you to everyone who took part in either or both of those consultations.

The changes are explained in detail below. The one that is likely to be of the widest interest is the proposal to increase from 10 to 20 the number of nominations from party members required to stand for various party roles.

The reason for this is that both the Manners Review and the General Election Review recommended moves of this sort in order to help address the common complaint from members that there are too many candidates to choose between for some party committee contests, making voting confusing and harder. The consultation the Board carried out also showed general support for some increase, and so the Board decided to put forward a relatively small increase with its impact then to be reviewed after the elections.

## APPENDIX: Election regulation changes.

The changes being proposed are explained below, with new text in bold, removed text crossed out and explanations in italics. These explanations are not formally part of the regulations and the wording of the regulations take precedence.

The existing regulations are at the end of the Federal Constitution document at [www.libdems.org.uk/federal-constitution](http://www.libdems.org.uk/federal-constitution).

### **Regulation #1**

"... These regulations set out procedures for the election by all members of the federal party of the Leader, President, Vice President responsible for working with ethnic minority communities, ~~and~~ federal committee **and Federal Council** posts which are filled by ballots of all party members; and where a decision has been taken to use them for other elections. **References in these regulations to "federal committee(s)" shall also be taken to include the Federal Council.**"

*Strictly speaking the current wording does cover Federal Council. However, it does in a subtle way that has caused some confusion and so this change is to make the regulations easier for the more casual reader to understand.*

### **Regulation #7**

"... Once the timetable for any election has been announced but before the opening of nominations, the Federal Board may postpone the election if the timetable conflicts with a general election or a referendum covering England Scotland Wales or any combination thereof, or any other **significant event** ~~situation, such as a public health crisis,~~ that in the Board's view would unduly hinder the conduct of the election."

*Our experience in recent years with events such as the death of the monarch, snap elections and health crises shows that it is best to have a broad provision to deal with unexpected events, particularly as the next unexpected major event may be of a different nature.*

### **Regulation #8**

"After the opening of nominations for any election, the Returning Officer may postpone or suspend the election if it would conflict with a general election or a referendum covering England Scotland Wales or any combination thereof, or any **other significant event** ~~civil or public health emergency,~~ that in the Returning Officer's view would unduly hinder the conduct of the election."

*This change is for the same reason as the previous one.*

### **Regulation #17**

~~"No material published or circulated by or on behalf of a candidate shall defame by name or implication any other candidate and no candidate shall so defame any other candidate in the course of personal canvassing. No candidate or persons acting on behalf of a candidate will use their own material or access to publicity to disparage any members of staff. All candidates and members acting on their behalf are governed by the Code of Conduct for Members and Registered Supporters and shall in particular follow its provisions when making any reference by name or implication to other candidates."~~

*This change follows a suggestion from both the Federal Appeals Panel and the Federal Returning Officer that the 'no defamation' test was problematic as it required the Returning Officer to make a legal judgement, and moreover a legal judgement in an area of law that is often complicated. The new wording therefore refers to the Code of Conduct that was ratified by Conference. That is an existing known yardstick with an existing enforcement mechanism. It also emphasises protection for individual party staff, who cannot answer back during an election. It is also worded in a way so as not to stop legitimate subjects of debate in an election, such as whether the HQ team overall is functioning well.*

### **Regulation #18**

"All contested elections shall be conducted by secret ballot and the single transferable vote. Counts shall be conducted in accordance with the current edition of the Electoral Reform Society's publication How to Conduct an Election by the Single Transferable Vote, subject to the application of paragraph 53 below for federal committee elections. **On completion of the count, the election result will be published on the Party website giving details of all stages of the count.**"

*The level of detail published in the past has varied, and therefore this change is to standardise this at a high level of transparency.*

### **Regulation #30**

"A candidate for the office of Vice President responsible for working with ethnic minority communities must be a member of the Liberal Democrats and must be nominated by any Local Party, any Regional Party, any State Party, any Affiliated Organisation, or any ~~40~~**20** party members."

*This increase in the number of nominations required is explained in the body of the Board report, and follows two different party reviews recommending an increase along with members supporting an increase in a Board consultation. It is in response to widespread complaints from party members*

*about difficulties completing ballots and being put off participating if there is a very large number of candidates. The principal impact of the change to nominations is the one under Regulation #44 below.*

### **Regulation #43**

“The provisions set out in paragraphs 44–53 shall apply to elections which are to be conducted under these election regulations for federal committee **and Federal Council** posts which are filled by ballots of all party members or where a decision has been taken to use them for other elections.”

*This change is for the same reasons as the change to Regulation #1.*

### **Regulation #44**

“A candidate for membership of a federal committee must be a member of the Liberal Democrats and must be nominated by any Local Party, any Regional Party, any State Party, any Affiliated Organisation (including the Affiliated Organisation or Organisations representing youth and/or students) or any ~~10~~**20** party members.”

*This change is for the same reasons as the change to Regulation #30 but it is this change which is likely to have the main impact.*

### **Regulation #45**

“Nominations must be accompanied by the written consent of the candidate. In order to be covered by one of the minimum representation requirements under Articles 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7 of the constitution, a candidate must submit information with their nomination paper as to which of the protected characteristics apply to themselves. **Candidates will be informed on the nomination form that, when the election results are published, it may be possible for someone to infer some information regarding the fact that a candidate made such a submission.**”

*This change is to tackle an issue that has come up previously over what level of detail of our election counts can be published, as detailed information may indicate that someone benefited from a diversity quota and so provide some information about their personal data. The party's Compliance Team has advised that this prior warning will be sufficient to allow detailed results to be published without incurring such a problem.*

### **Regulation #53**

“Casual vacancies occurring shall be filled by recounting the original ballot papers in the election, passing over any preferences for any candidate causing a vacancy. If necessary, further counts shall be conducted using the principles set out in paragraph 52 to ensure that all

candidates originally elected so remain and that the specified proportions of protected characteristics are maintained. **On completion of the count, the election result will be published on the Party website giving details of all stages of the count."**

*This change is for the same reasons as the change to Regulation #18.*

If Conference ratifies this set of changes, the election regulations would then read:

## **ELECTION REGULATIONS.**

### **Common provisions for all elections.**

1. These regulations set out procedures for the election by all members of the federal party of the Leader, President, Vice President responsible for working with ethnic minority communities, federal committee and Federal Council posts which are filled by ballots of all party members; and where a decision has been taken to use them for other elections. References in these regulations to "federal committee(s)" shall also be taken to include the Federal Council. Paragraphs 2-25 apply to all such elections; subsequent sections apply as identified to specific individual elections.

### **Organisation of elections.**

2. The Federal Board shall appoint a Returning Officer to oversee all party elections conducted under these election regulations for a period of three years, or until their resignation, incapacity or death if any of these occur sooner. The Returning Officer shall be responsible for the efficient and timely conduct of these elections. The appointment shall be made at least three months before the Returning Officer's term of office begins.
3. Chief Executive shall be the Deputy Returning Officer. The Returning Officer and Deputy Returning Officer may jointly appoint Deputy Acting Returning Officers from party members or staff with relevant experience.
4. The Returning Officer may delegate any of the responsibilities set out in these regulations to the Deputy Returning Officer or any Deputy Acting Returning Officer. In any cases of dispute within the Returning Officer team, the decision of the Returning Officer shall be final.
5. The Returning Officer shall ensure that comprehensive written guides and procedures for the use of the Returning Officer team, candidates and voters, are in place for each



election at least one month before the opening of nominations in an election. These shall not, thereafter, be amended without good cause.

### **Timetables.**

6. The Federal Board shall agree and publicise a timetable for each election, including the publication of the notice of elections, the deadlines to be used for the opening and closing of nominations, submission of candidates' manifestos, despatch and return of ballot papers, and the date for the counting of votes. Once publicised, these shall not, thereafter, be amended without good cause.
  - a. For elections for the Leader, the Federal Board shall agree and publicise the timetable as soon as possible after the vacancy or impending vacancy is announced; and
  - b. For all other elections conducted under these regulations, the Federal Board shall where practicable agree and publicise the timetable no later than the Spring Conference before the elections are due.
7. Once the timetable for any election has been announced but before the opening of nominations, the Federal Board may postpone the election if the timetable conflicts with a general election or a referendum covering England Scotland Wales or any combination thereof, or any other significant event that in the Board's view would unduly hinder the conduct of the election.
8. After the opening of nominations for any election, the Returning Officer may postpone or suspend the election if it would conflict with a general election or a referendum covering England Scotland Wales or any combination thereof, or any other significant event, that in the Returning Officer's view would unduly hinder the conduct of the election. If any votes have been cast, the Returning Officer has the power to cancel them and restart the election as soon as the Returning Officer considers practicable.

### **Conduct of elections.**

9. The electorate for the purpose of these elections shall be those members with paid-up membership of the Liberal Democrats on the closing date for nominations. Members who, at the closing date for nominations, are in the grace period following their membership subscription due date can be added to the electorate if they renew their membership at least three days prior to the close of voting.
10. All elections will be conducted electronically; this includes the submission of nominations, display of candidates' manifestos and casting of votes. The online voting

system shall prompt voters to look at candidates' manifestos prior to voting and provide for the randomisation of the names on the ballot paper.

11. The Returning Officer shall make provision for voters who cannot vote electronically to vote by post upon a request in writing. Any such request shall only be valid for the specific election(s) being conducted at the time of the request.
12. Any official party publication whether in paper or electronic form shall give, as far as possible, equal coverage and a fair balance to all candidates. Coverage of activity by any candidate that is not related to the election may continue in a normal way.
13. Federal Party employees shall maintain strict neutrality from the opening date for declaration of candidacy. It is recommended that employees of state parties, Affiliated Organisations and any other relevant employing bodies shall also maintain such neutrality.
14. Party Officers, acting in their capacity as officers at federal, state, regional and local level, are expected, as far as possible, to give equal opportunities and fair balance to all candidates.

### **Manifestos and publicity material.**

15. Each candidate shall be entitled to a personal manifesto to be displayed electronically, in a format to be determined by the Returning Officer. Each candidate shall be responsible for verifying, to the satisfaction of the Returning Officer, any statement in their manifesto claiming that they are endorsed by any individual or organisation. Such material must accompany the candidate's manifesto.
16. In addition to candidates' manifestos, the Returning Officer may decide to require each candidate to provide answers to common questions about their suitability for the position(s) for which they are standing. The Returning Officer shall draw up these questions in consultation with relevant party staff, party officers or officers of federal committees.
17. No candidate or persons acting on behalf of a candidate will use their own material or access to publicity to disparage any members of staff.  
All candidates and members acting on their behalf are governed by the Code of Conduct for Members and Registered Supporters and shall in particular follow its provisions when making any reference by name or implication to other candidates.

## **Counting of elections.**

18. All contested elections shall be conducted by secret ballot and the single transferable vote. Counts shall be conducted in accordance with the current edition of the Electoral Reform Society's publication How to Conduct an Election by the Single Transferable Vote, subject to the application of paragraph 53 below for federal committee elections. On completion of the count, the election result will be published on the Party website giving details of all stages of the count.
19. The Returning Officer shall have the power to make rulings to facilitate the completion of the count.

## **Interpretation, complaints and appeals.**

20. In interpreting and applying these regulations, and in any case where the regulations are silent, the Returning Officer shall have the power to make all necessary decisions concerning the conduct of these elections, following the aims and principles of public election law.
21. The Returning Officer shall have the power to disqualify before declaration of the result, or unseat if declared elected any candidate who:
  - a. has brought the party into disrepute during the campaign or where the Returning Officer has clear evidence of this happening in the near future; or
  - b. is found to be in breach of any of these regulations,but shall not exercise such power without first offering any such candidate the right to make representation, and having regard thereto.
22. Any party member may lodge, in writing in a format prescribed by the Returning Officer, a formal complaint of infringement of election regulations upon becoming aware of any alleged infringement and not more than 7 days after the declaration. The written complaint should be addressed to the Returning Officer and specify in detail the nature of the infringement. The Returning Officer shall then decide, in full consultation with the Returning Officer team, whether there is sufficient evidence and grounds to uphold the complaint, but shall not do so without offering any candidate concerned the right to make representations, and having regard thereto. Any party member who makes repeated and vexatious complaints may be referred to the party's disciplinary system.
23. If a complaint is made prior to the declaration of the result, the Returning Officer shall have the power to postpone such declaration until the determination of such complaint

or, where an appeal is made against their decision, until the determination of such appeal. The Returning Officer shall have the discretion to use this power to suspend individual candidates from serving on any position they are elected to while any such complaint is investigated and/or subject to appeal.

24. Appeals against decisions of the Returning Officer must be referred to the Federal Appeals Panel within 14 days of the decision.

### **Review.**

25. The relevant sections of these regulations will be reviewed by the Federal Board based on a report from the Returning Officer no later than six months after the completion of any election. The report must include a report on any diversity measures taken as a result of any requirement under the federal constitution, potential data protection breaches and any changes or clarifications required by rulings made by the Returning Officer or the Federal Appeals Panel.

### **Common provisions for leadership, presidential and vice presidential elections.**

26. The provisions set out in paragraphs 27–42 are common to the elections for the Leader, President and Vice President responsible for working with ethnic minority communities, except where otherwise specified.

### **Leadership, presidential and vice presidential elections: timetables.**

27. The timetable for the election shall be no shorter than 7 weeks and no longer than 13 weeks.

### **Leadership, presidential and vice presidential elections: nominations.**

28. A candidate for office of Leader of the Liberal Democrats must be a Member of the Parliamentary Party in the House of Commons, and must be nominated by not less than 10 percent of other members of the Parliamentary Party in the House of Commons, not including the candidate themselves, supported by not less than 200 party members in aggregate in not less than 20 Local Parties.
29. A candidate for the office of President must be a member of the Liberal Democrats and must be nominated by not less than 200 party members in not less than 20 Local Parties.

30. A candidate for the office of Vice President responsible for working with ethnic minority communities must be a member of the Liberal Democrats and must be nominated by any Local Party, any Regional Party, any State Party, any Affiliated Organisation, or any 20 party members.
31. Local parties include, for the purposes of paragraphs 28–30, the Affiliated Organisation or Organisations representing youth and/or students.
32. Nominations must be accompanied by the written consent of the candidate.
33. A nominator may not nominate more than one candidate for any one position.
34. After acquiring the necessary nominations for candidacy, each candidate may nominate an agent for their campaign. A candidate who fails to nominate an agent will be deemed their own agent

**Leadership, presidential and vice presidential elections: manifestos and publicity material.**

35. All publicity material produced in paper or electronic form for or on behalf of a candidate shall bear their agent's imprint, including a full postal address.
36. Any email messages sent out for or on behalf of a candidate for the purposes of publicising their candidacy shall also include a standard form of words provided by the Returning Officer specifying how the recipient of the message may opt out of future messages.

**Leadership, presidential and vice presidential elections: conduct of election.**

37. The sections of the membership register containing the names, addresses and telephone numbers of members will be released in electronic version to each candidate subject to the candidate signing a data protection statement agreeing to abide by the party's data protection policies and providing evidence to the Returning Officer's satisfaction that they are able to ensure compliance with them. Any candidate or supporter of a candidate facilitating a breach of this clause will be deemed to be in breach of the party's data protection policies. Candidates should also have due regard to their own data protection responsibilities when collecting and using any data of their own in the election.

38. The Returning Officer shall coordinate arrangements for official party member hustings events with a view to balancing the competing demands for media coverage of the campaign, parliamentary and other duties and the desirability of party members to have a chance to attend or watch a hustings. Any of the official hustings may take place partly or wholly online. Other party bodies may only hold hustings-type events if they invite all candidates to attend, but they do not require the agreement of all candidates to attend or send a representative in order to proceed. Events designated as official hustings by the Returning Officer shall take precedence over any other arrangements a candidate may have made.
39. Official party communications channels may only be used to promote hustings designated as official hustings by the Returning Officer. Responsibility for organising and paying for any hustings event shall lie with the hosting organisation, but the Returning Officer will publicise in good time official hustings events via the party's website, social media channels and email communications.
40. Treating is not allowed but the reasonable provision of food and drink to campaign helpers or event attendees is permissible.

**Leadership, presidential and vice presidential elections: expenses.**

41. For the elections for the Leader, President and Vice President of the Liberal Democrats:
  - a. The Federal Board shall set a spending limit for election expenses, not including travel or subsistence, for each candidate, when they set the timetable for the election. No candidate, or their agent, shall exceed this limit in the production of publicity material and all other expenditures connected with the campaign. This shall include any expenditure (or the relevant proportion of any expenditure) incurred before an individual becomes a candidate if the property, services or facilities are used for the purposes of the candidate's election. All donations above £500 must comply with the provisions of Schedule 7 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000.
  - b. Each candidate and their agent shall complete and lodge with the Returning Officer an election expenses return form. The form must have attached receipts or invoices for all expenditure and must be lodged with the Returning Officer by midday on the 35th day after the declaration of the election result. The Returning Officer will hold the expenses returns of each candidate on file and these may be examined by any party member. The expenses form shall also contain the necessary information to prove compliance with schedule 7 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000.

- c. Any candidate who needs to make a report to the Electoral Commission shall do so in consultation with the Party's Compliance Department in order to ensure they meet the statutory deadlines.

### **Leadership, presidential and vice presidential elections: election count.**

42. The election count may be scrutinised by the candidate, their agents and one other personal representative and shall be open to any party member, subject to the capacity of the venue and at least 48 hours notification to the Returning Officer.

### **Common provisions for Committee Elections.**

43. The provisions set out in paragraphs 44–53 shall apply to elections which are to be conducted under these election regulations for federal committee and Federal Council posts which are filled by ballots of all party members or where a decision has been taken to use them for other elections.

### **Committee elections: nominations.**

44. A candidate for membership of a federal committee must be a member of the Liberal Democrats and must be nominated by any Local Party, any Regional Party, any State Party, any Affiliated Organisation (including the Affiliated Organisation or Organisations representing youth and/or students) or any 20 party members.
45. Nominations must be accompanied by the written consent of the candidate. In order to be covered by one of the minimum representation requirements under Articles 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7 of the constitution, a candidate must submit information with their nomination paper as to which of the protected characteristics apply to themselves. Candidates will be informed on the nomination form that, when the election results are published, it may be possible for someone to infer some information regarding the fact that a candidate made such a submission.

### **Committee elections: manifestos.**

46. In addition to candidates' personal manifestos and answers to any questions (see paragraphs 15–17), the Returning Officer shall ensure that a committee meeting attendance list, in a common format, is published. The list shall also include a report of the consecutive number of years each candidate has served on that committee, regardless of the route by which they have become a member of the committee.

47. The Returning Officer shall ensure that candidates' manifestos and answers to questions, and the committee attendance lists, shall be available to view online at least seven days before voting opens.

**Committee elections: conduct of election.**

48. No candidate may incur, or directly or indirectly authorise or cause to be incurred any expenses on campaigning at any time before or after the close of nominations. Candidates must not carry out any activities during the election period which may be viewed as treating.
49. The names and addresses of party members are confidential and shall not be released for the purposes of the election. Any candidate or supporter of a candidate facilitating a breach of this clause will be deemed to be in breach of the party's data protection policy. Candidates should have due regard to their data protection responsibilities when collecting and using any data of their own in the election.
50. No official party publication whether in paper or electronic form may accept advertisements in support of or in opposition to candidates.

**Committee elections: counting.**

51. The committees shall be counted in the order they are listed in the constitution. Once a candidate has been elected to a committee, if Article 8.3 of the constitution concerning candidates being elected for more than one committee applies, they will be withdrawn from all subsequent elections for which they were nominated.
52. If the specified proportions of candidates with protected characteristics in Articles 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7 of the constitution are not elected by the operation of the above rules, the Returning Officer shall conduct such further counts as they consider necessary and declare elected those members of the under-represented characteristics and declare not elected those members of the over-represented characteristics who would or would not have been elected to committees with such larger and smaller numbers of members as would cause the correct number of that characteristic to be elected.
53. Casual vacancies occurring shall be filled by recounting the original ballot papers in the election, passing over any preferences for any candidate causing a vacancy. If necessary, further counts shall be conducted using the principles set out in paragraph 52 to ensure that all candidates originally elected so remain and that the specified



proportions of protected characteristics are maintained. On completion of the count, the election result will be published on the Party website giving details of all stages of the count.

**Committee elections: principal councillor representatives on Federal Board and Federal Policy Committee.**

54. The regulations set out in paragraphs 2–25 and 44–53 shall apply to elections for the principal councillor representatives on the Federal Board and the Federal Policy Committee, with the following exceptions:
- a. The electorate is members of the Liberal Democrats who are also councillors on principal local authorities, directly elected Mayors or Police and Crime Commissioners; and
  - b. Candidates for any such position must be a member of the Liberal Democrats and a councillor on a principal local authority, directly elected Mayor or Police and Crime Commissioner, and must be nominated by any other two principal councillors, directly elected Mayors or Police and Crime Commissioners with valid membership of the party.

**Other elections: Liberal Democrat members of the Council of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE).**

55. Following the resolution of the Federal Conference, the regulations set out in paragraphs 2–25 and 45–53 shall apply to elections for the Liberal Democrat members of the Council of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) with the following exceptions:
- a. The requirements for the elections of the minimum proportions of candidates with protected characteristics in Articles 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7 of the constitution are replaced by the requirement that those elected shall include a minimum of one person from each state party and one person under the age of 26 at the time of the election.

## **Vice President with responsibility for ethnic minority communities - Amna Ahmad.**

*The Vice President with responsibility for ethnic minority communities is directly elected by members. In this role, they sit on Federal Board and Federal People and Development Committee (FPDC). They also chair an FPDC Sub Committee on diversity.*

### **International attacks on DEI.**

Since the election of President Trump in America, members of minoritised communities have told me that they are increasingly worried that this rhetoric will embolden racist and far right violence. The UK conversation has, so far, been muted in comparison to the US, and mainstream politics continues to champion the rights of minoritised communities to exist in safety and harmony. However last August's UK attacks on immigrant hostels shows how quickly social unrest and racist violence can escalate, fermented by an increasingly unmonitored social media. President Trump came to power in January 2025 and since then, he has targeted 'DEI' initiatives (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion) blaming them for many societal problems, including the tragic air crash over the Potomac River in Washington DC. In the UK, the danger is that this rhetoric is picked up by those on the right taking us back to a time when black, brown and Asian British communities lived in fear of attacks on their homes by the National Front.

As a party, we need to continue to champion minority rights in the UK, and one of the ways we can do that is to increase party membership, engage local communities and get more diverse political champions elected, locally and nationally.

### **Updated Diversity Party Strategy.**

I am grateful to the Lib Dem Campaign for Racial Equality for their report, launched at Autumn Conference, which highlighted the ongoing challenges with improving the racial diversity of our party, how this sits in line with other party initiatives, and made recommendations on how to make improvements.

This led to a series of meetings with me, the President, Party CEO Mike Dixon, the Racial Diversity Campaign (RDC), FPDC, and other interested parties, in how changes can be made, partly through an updated Diversity Strategy. This was expected now that we are in a new Parliament, but it is vital that we continue to work together to keep up the pressure, internally and externally, to maintain progress where it has been made, and kickstart it where it has not happened.

I will also continue to work with the RDC and the English Party as they consider proposals

on how to change candidate selection rules to ensure diverse representation amongst our Candidates.

### **Diversity SubCommittee.**

The FPDC Diversity SubCommittee, which I chair, continues to meet regularly to discuss our three key priorities:

1. Increase the number of ethnic minority people elected as councillors, whilst maintaining our progress on Tier 1 and Tier 2.
2. Increase canvassing in target seat wards with high ethnic minority populations.
3. Increase the number of ethnic minority people becoming members by creating and championing an inclusive environment.

We will review our meetings, in line with Lib Dem Campaign for Race Equality's (LDCRE) work and updated party Strategy, to ensure the widest possible attendance and views before the Strategy goes to Federal Board for approval.

## **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 Finance report and 2025 Outlook.**

We had budgeted for the General Election to occur in late 2024 which would have allowed us more time to fundraise and rebuild our reserves. The early election curtailed our planned fundraising and left the party's Election resources to fight the election and build up reserves significantly depleted at the start of the campaign.

Thanks to the marvellous efforts of the fundraising team during the election we managed to recover significantly, but nevertheless the Federal Party will finish 2024 behind our budgeted surplus and therefore reserves.

In sharp contrast to 2019, the Party's stunning 2024 election success has transformed the long term income prospects for the Party which should therefore enable the Party to have a more sustainable budget income going forward providing we can manage the income to match the expenditure in the right allowable budget lines.

A substantial increase in MPs has led to an overhaul of the Federal Party support structure which will take time to bed in and understand where any potential gaps are. The 2025 budget outlook is challenging with a projected substantial deficit of £635k deficit followed by a £288k deficit in 2026. This will leave the Party's reserves significantly depleted at a time when we need to be building up for the next General Election.

### **Financial Systems, Financial Performance, and Outcomes.**

The systems for financial forecasting, reporting, business expenses, and purchasing that were put in place some years ago continue to work well and have protected us from the worst of the political turmoil which has embraced us. As well as revising our budgets to set a baseline working capital position, we have developed a long term forecast to map out our financial position over the next 5 years.

## **Thank You to our Staff and Volunteers.**

My thanks to all the current and former members of FFRC who have worked hard to provide strategic and detailed oversight of the Party financial affairs to ensure that our Party finances remain robust. With these controls and oversight in place, I am confident in our ability to control our finances over the long-term and to spot upcoming problems early.

I also offer my sincere thanks to Fern McLurg, our new Director of Finance & Corporate Services, and the entire Lib Dem Head Quarter finance team for their hard work and attention to the financial detail.

We are also grateful to our Local Party treasurers who assist us with the thankless task of complying with the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act (PPERA) regulations. Local Party reporting is improving but is still far from where we need it to be in terms of donations and loans. The Party reports quarterly but, so we can collate these reports on time, treasurers must report such items as soon as they are received, and no later than the middle of the month following, to avoid missing these reporting windows and committing an offence under the PPERA Act.

My thanks also to Kerry Buist, Head of Compliance, and the compliance team. We have maintained an excellent relationship with the Electoral Commission.

The Electoral Commission is our regulator and is there to uphold the law. If they see late reporting of donations and loans, then they will open an investigation and will levy a fine without a reasonable excuse. Such fines are passed on directly to the accounting unit concerned and these can be punitive. Kerry and the team work hard to keep local parties safe and have already improved the level of briefings, documentation, and training available for Local Party treasurers so PPERA obligations should be clear.

The majority of treasurers, agents, chairs, and other party officers do work tirelessly to remain compliant, and I want to extend my sincere thanks to all of them. We have already implemented an escalation procedure to protect the Party and I trust that Conference will support any initiative to extend these in order to keep us safe.

## **Checking of Donations for Permissibility.**

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 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 (FASC). 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.

## **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 General Election was the constant focus of the work of FCEC until July last year. Post the election, the attention of FCEC turned to post election analysis and learning from that experience.

There have been four meetings since the Autumn Conference. Our September meeting was devoted to hearing from each committee member and member of staff present about what they had learned from the election.

FCEC have five meetings a year and we have agreed that there will be a major topic of discussion for each of them.

The main item on the agenda of the November meeting was the draft campaign strategy for the next four years. FCEC also heard from the new head of Media and Communications, Paul Haydon, about the reorganisation of the team and the plans for appointing regional media officers. Candidates are asked to complete a survey following the election and the committee were given initial findings.

The General Election Review chaired by Tim Farron MP was a major item for the committee. The key agenda item was devoted to the work of the Compliance team. FCEC was very impressed with the vital work of the team in training Parliamentary agents, ensuring the Party election return was submitted to the Electoral Commission on time, as well as the advice and support provided to candidates and agents during the election.

For every committee there is an item about elections. The committee has received reports about the 2025 local elections and the early preparation for the elections to the Scottish Parliament and the Senedd. Every election, be it at Parish, Council, or national government level, provide an opportunity for the Party. More councillors, more MSPs, more Senedd members, and more MPs mean more Liberal Democrat values put into action. Every Party member has a role to play in ensuring there is a Liberal Democrat name on every ballot paper. FCEC are putting effort into achieving that aim and with your help more electors will have the opportunity to vote Liberal Democrat.

## **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 Party, 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 (YL), the Lib Dem Campaign for Race Equality (LDCRE), the Lib Dem Disability Association (LDDA), Lib Dem Women (LDW), LGBT+ Lib Dems (PLUS), the Campaign for Gender Balance (CGB), and the Racial Diversity Campaign (RDC). A representative of Lib Dems Abroad attends in a non voting capacity.

### **Diversity.**

The party's new Diversity strategy is being prepared. Thank you to our Diversity Officer, Nicole Turner, our Vice President with responsibility for ethnic minority communities and Sub Committee Chair Amna Ahmed, LDCRE and RDC for their passion and commitment to ensuring the party's strategy and practice is relevant, appropriate and works.

### **Membership.**

As the federal PEOPLE committee, we have responsibility for Membership Recruitment and Retention. The board are looking forward to working with staff, and all our constituent state parties and AO members on this matter post the General Election review.

FPDC has been charged by Federal Board to work with staff on a Membership Experience Survey.

Our Safeguarding and Welfare working group continues with a new Chair. Thank you to Janey Little former YL Chair and former Chair of this working group for her significant work.

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 on our agenda.



## **Internal elections.**

FPDC have noted that the numbers 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.**

In addition to training that will come out of the work on membership, FPDC are committed to 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.

Thanks go to Becky Carr for everything she does, not least of which is attending FPDC meetings!

## **Affiliated Organisations.**

FPDC is also responsible for assessing new Affiliated Organisations who wish to become official party groups and for assessing applications for transfer from the old system. The current list of AOs can be found at [www.libdems.org.uk/aos](http://www.libdems.org.uk/aos).

New groups recently transitioned and approved by FPDC:

- Liberal Democrat Action for Land Taxation & Economic Reform (ALTER)
- Liberal Democrat Education Association (LDEA)
- Parliamentary Candidates Association (PCA)
- The Liberal Democrats in STEMM (LibSTEMM)

Party Groups wishing to become Affiliated Organisations must meet the criteria and follow the process previously agreed by Conference, available here: <https://www.libdems.org.uk/f29-f34>

## **AO - How To Guide.**

Our Vice Chair, Ellie Hudspith has committed to FPDC creating an 'How to run an AO guide'. We will be aiming for this to be available in 2025.

Finally, thank you to our amazing committee clerk Rachel Minshull, and 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.*

Our electoral success in last year's General Election has not gone unnoticed by our liberal sister parties across Europe and around the world, as many continue to look to us for guidance and inspiration.

From 4th to 6th October, I led our party's delegation to the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) Congress in Estoril, Portugal, which saw the election of Svenja Hahn, an MEP from FPD, Germany as President and six Vice Presidents to the ALDE Bureau – including the successful re-election of Baroness Brinton to her third and final term as Vice President. Other elected Vice Presidential candidates were Yevheniia Kravchuk from Ukraine's Servant of the People, Yoko Alender from Estonia's Reformierakond, Rik Daems from Belgium's Open Vld, Jouni Ovaska from Finland's Keskusta, and Lucia Plavakova from Slovakia's Progresivne Slovensko.

As reported previously the European Authority has ruled that the votes of non EU parties in ALDE are not to exceed one third of the votes cast on the Bureau, in Congress or at the Council, which has determined that for 2025 the Lib Dems have seven voting delegates on ALDE Council and 36 voting delegates at the ALDE Congress. We still remain the third largest party in terms of votes cast and are determined that ALDE Party remains a European Party and ready to challenge any efforts to reduce it to an EU Party. In Portugal we organised a meeting of all the non-EU party members to ALDE, to coordinate our priorities and exert our collective influence.

The Lib Dem ALDE Congress delegation to Portugal included several first timers. As always I was very proud of our delegation and indeed was told by several other party leads that the LIB Dem delegation is the most engaged and effective of all party delegations. If any party member is interested in joining further delegations to ALDE Congress - the next one is likely to take place in November, the venue is yet to be confirmed - I would encourage you to apply when applications open usually two months before the event. It is a great way to get involved in our international work and experience European politics first hand.

The Lib Dems submitted emergency motions on Sudan, Israel Hamas / Hezbollah and a joint motion with Russia's Yabloko Party regarding political prisoners in Russia. All our motions were passed unanimously, with very few amendments, and praised for having brought attention to very important topics. The Israel Hamas/ Hezbollah motion was based on the emergency motion

debated and passed at our Autumn Conference last year, which instructed us to raise the issue with our sister parties. The text of this motion has been referred to by the Parliamentary teams of our Dutch sister parties and the Democratic Alliance in South Africa. It is critical that as liberal parties we should not shy away from finding common positions on important issues of the day.

Adrian Hyrylainen Trett was elected to the Board of LGBTI Liberals of Europe.

From 29th November to 1st December I led the Lib Dem delegation to the Liberal International Congress, which took place in Santiago Chile, with Irina von Wiese and myself casting our party's votes.

Elections were held for the LI Bureau and we were successful in achieving the re-election of Phil Bennion as Vice President. Karl-Heinz Paque from FDP, Germany and Chair of FNF was elected as the new President of LI, with Astrid Thors from the Swedish People's Party, Finland elected as Deputy President. The other elected Vice Presidents were Henrik Bach Mortensen from Venstre, Denmark, Ahmad Al- Hariri from Future Movement, Lebanon, Art Eggleton from Liberal Party, Canada, Luz Poblete from Evopoli, Chile, and Sidi Tiemoko Toure from RHDP, Côte d'Ivoire. Lennart Salemink from VVD, Netherlands and Manfred Eisenbach from FDP, Germany were elected as Treasurers. Baroness Brinton, was appointed to the Human Rights Committee and successfully elected as its new Chair, with a non-voting seat on the LI Bureau. Our nominations were accepted for Pippa Heylings MP to join the Climate Justice Committee and Bobby Dean MP to join the Fair-Trade Committee. Adrian Hyrylainen Trett was reappointed as the LIBG representative to the Human Rights Committee.

LI offers the opportunity to engage with liberal parties from around the world, listen to their needs and priorities, and to help promote and spread our liberal values. Holding last year's LI Congress in Chile was important for the cause of international liberalism in that region. The two Chilean liberal parties Evopoli on the right and the Liberal Party to the left, who belong to the two rival political blocks and usually do not speak to one another - successfully jointly hosted the Congress. With the main theme 'The Future of Freedom', it is hoped that this cooperation will improve the strength of the centre in Chilean politics going forward. There were many delegates from other Central and South American countries and Partido Novo, Brazil and PLP, Costa Rica were admitted as observers. Maria Corina Machado Parisca, the Leader of the Opposition in Venezuela, addressed from her place in hiding, a debate on political prisoners in Latin America.

Several parties from Africa were represented in Santiago, which has led to further discussions on ways to support LGBT+ rights, condemn legislation like Uganda's Anti-homosexuality Bill, challenge the hatred often spread by evangelical preachers from the West and recognise and combat the increasing violence against women that is becoming prevalent in countries like Kenya. Our connections with the African Liberal Network are important and will grow stronger.

Whilst the Lib Dems did not submit any motions for debate, we were able to support and put forward amendments to other motions including one to prohibit the use of single use plastics and a motion in support of LGBT+ rights in Africa, which was passed with unanimous support.

The Lib Dems successfully nominated Victoire Ingabire Umuhoza, the Rwandan opposition activist for the Liberal International Prize for Freedom.

In early December I held meetings in Pristina with our sister party PDK, Kosovo on ways to support their future election campaigning, before traveling on to the meeting of LIPSEEN - the group of ALDE member parties from across Southeast Europe -including Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Romania, and Bulgaria - which took place on 14th and 15th December in Skopje, North Macedonia. Monika Zajkova the Leader of the Liberal Party of North Macedonia - was elected as the new Chair of LIPSEEN with a nonvoting seat on the ALDE Bureau.

On the sidelines I held meetings with several of the parties to discuss ways that the Lib Dems could offer our experience and guidance in their development. There is growing concern across the region at the interference from Russia and Serbia as many countries become increasingly disillusioned at their long paths to join the EU. This year is the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Dayton Accords, which saw the end of the War in Yugoslavia, and present an opportunity to mark our party's commitment to the region – in particular Paddy Ashdown's role in Bosnia.

On 14th January a group of us traveled to Brussels to meet MEPs from the Renew Group in the European Parliament. Many issues were discussed including support for the Youth Mobility Scheme between the UK and the EU and how best to nudge the Labour Government towards taking bolder steps in developing a closer relationship with Europe. Our policy towards Europe, outlined in our General Election Manifesto, has given us the lead on this important political issue and calls from Sir Ed Davey for the UK to join a Customs Union with the EU and James MacCleary MP's ten Minute Rule Bill on the Youth Mobility Scheme recently successfully passing its first Reading in Parliament.

North Hertfordshire District Council passed a motion in January, brought by the Lib Dem Group, in support of the Youth Mobility Scheme, which is hoped will encourage other Councils around the country to follow suit.

The absence of an International Officer continues to present challenges, but we have managed to ensure the smooth running of our delegations to the meetings of ALDE and LI with the voluntary support of FIRC members. The International programme of debates and events at the Autumn Conference was widely acclaimed and we received increased interest and attendance from 42 diplomatic representatives including the ambassadors of Germany, the EU, Greece,

Turkey, Kosovo, Israel, Ireland Luxembourg, and Finland as well as other diplomats from India, Canada, Austria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Norway, Netherlands, Italy, Malta, Spain, Slovenia, Japan, Morocco, UAE, and Taiwan, in addition to government representatives from Jersey, Guernsey, and Gibraltar. The income from sponsorship and international guests far exceeded the sums raised in previous years.

The Federal Elections to be held in the autumn will include for the members of FIRC and the LIB Dem delegates to ALDE Council. If anyone is interested in putting themselves forward and would like to find out some more information about the role and the work involved please get in touch.

## **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.*

### **Risk Register.**

The Chief Executive has begun the significant work of updating the risk register. The risk register needs significantly updating following the GE, with many risks becoming redundant. However, with a larger parliamentary party there are new risks - such as campaigning capacity and a renewed political strategy under a new government. Old risks remain however, such as the financial and reputational issues related to legal cases, and FASC remains concerned with the risks related to donations reporting and the reliance on local parties and their treasurers. FASC continues to review the risk register on a quarterly basis.

### **Review of Complaints Process.**

FASC has agreed the terms of reference for our review and have begun working with the Standards team to draw on the relevant information to support this review. We are also including a control sample of complaints related to elected members in this work.

### **Review of Legal Cases.**

FASC has agreed the terms for this review and interviewed the first key witnesses in November. We have further evidence to gather at the start of 2025.

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

*The Federal Council (FC) 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 Autumn 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.

In September the Council discussed membership retention and recruitment with the Party President. We also briefly discussed issues around the party's approach to certain legal cases and its general approach to procuring legal services for the party. The Council contemplated setting up its working group to look at these matters in detail. However, the Federal Audit and Scrutiny Committee (FASC) has been tasked to do this. The Council is content for FASC, whose members have very relevant skills, to undertake this work and we look forward to seeing their report.

We also discussed with the President and a representative of the Federal Conference Committee (FCC) the decision to allow Liberal Voice for Women to have a stall at the Autumn Conference. Council members expressed a range of views about this matter and noted the provision of legal advice, the importance of defending Trans people, the importance of complying with the law, the importance of free speech, and how the decision might be viewed in light of John Stuart Mill's harm principle.

In December the Council had a lengthy discussion with the President regarding the Federal Board's new strategy paper .

Since the turn of the year the party has published the 2024 election review. The Council has received and studied this report. We are aware that the Federal Board will be developing a plan for the implementation of the report's recommendations. We look forward to playing our part in constructively scrutinising this important area of work.

The Council was also pleased to have sight of a report by Lib Dems Abroad regarding their work, particularly around the General Election. We thank them for their work.

Every paper that has gone to the Federal Board has been shared with and read by the Council members.

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 Lib Dem Head Quarters. I am very grateful to them all.



# Parliamentary Reports

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

Welcome to Harrogate - a beautiful city to reflect on everything we've achieved since we last gathered in Brighton. I would like to start by expressing my heartfelt thanks to my colleagues in the Lords and the Commons, our dedicated staff teams in Constituencies and Westminster, our Local Government partners, and everyone in the devolved administrations. Your tireless work is the backbone of our success.

In July last year, millions of voters put their trust in us, some for the first time. With their trust, they have given us an incredible opportunity and responsibility, something we are not taking lightly. In the mere seven months of this Parliament so far, it is fair to say that our Liberal Democrat MPs, all 72 of them, have been busy.

### **The constructive Opposition Party.**

As the Third Party, and the biggest liberal party in the House of Commons in over 100 years, we play an essential role in our democracy as the only responsible opposition. Liberal Democrats are challenging the Government to act faster and be much bolder, on everything from the NHS and care to Europe and political reform.

I would like to welcome colleagues to Spokespeople positions and thank them for all of their hard work so far. Our rapid growth has meant many have hurtled from hopeful Prospective Parliamentary Candidates (PPCs) to the front bench in a matter of months, but they have hit the ground running and are already doing us all proud.

We were delighted to use our first Opposition Day to focus on the issues we campaigned on: carers and the NHS. Our first motion was about the carer's allowance overpayments scandal. After months of pressure from Liberal Democrats the government committed to a review, but we called for more; a write-off of overpayments, an increase in the earnings limit, and a comprehensive review of carer support. Our MPs expressed our worry that the Government is still ignoring the elephant in the room: the social care crisis, because until we end the crisis in social care we cannot fix our NHS. Liberal Democrat MPs are taking every opportunity to urge the Government to begin cross-party talks on social care immediately, to find a long-term solution.

Our second motion addressed access to GPs, NHS dentists, and community pharmacists, highlighting the suffering caused by current failures. We have also taken a strong stance

opposing the National Insurance rise, emphasising its detrimental effect on the NHS, social care providers as well as small businesses.

The budget saw the Government listen to Liberal Democrat calls for more investment in the NHS to start repairing the damage done to local health services by the Conservatives. We will now hold the government to account on delivering its promises so people can see a GP or dentist when they need to.

We continue to speak up for those struggling with the cost-of-living crisis, holding the Government to account on its decisions to cut Winter Fuel Payments, which is leaving millions of pensioners without the support they need this winter

In December the Government announced that there would be no compensation for women born in the 1950's for the Government's failure to properly notify them of the changes to their pensions. The heartless decision cannot be allowed to stand and our MPs will be pressing ministers to give those affected the fair treatment they deserve.

### **Leading the way on what people care about.**

We have continued to be at the forefront of the campaign for better health services and addressing the NHS winter crisis. Liberal Democrats led debates on the backlog and readiness of emergency services, advocating for a qualified clinician in every A&E waiting room.

Ending the sewage dumping crisis has continued to be a top Liberal Democrat priority. After revealing a 40% increase in Thames Water's sewage spills while customer bills climbed, we called for stricter penalties on water companies and compensation for affected communities.

Through the Private Members' Bills ballot we have also seen success with Max Wilkinson's New Homes (Solar Generation) Bill, also known as the Sunshine Bill, extracting concessions from the Government. At time of writing, we are also watching with interest Roz Savage's Climate and Nature Bill.

In a historic moment, Sarah Olney MP's Bill to introduce proportional representation (PR) for Westminster and local elections passed its initial vote in Parliament, in a Liberal Democrat win over Tory Opposition and the abstention of the Labour leadership, demonstrating the Liberal Democrats' commitment to democratic reform. Parliament also accepted the introduction of James MacCleary's European Youth Mobility Scheme Bill, an issue on which we continue to press for change.

Liberal Democrats MPs continued to push for Middle East peace, urging UN funding for displaced communities, condemning settler violence, and advocating for the suspension of arms exports to conflict zones. We also focused on critical international issues like reinstating the 0.7% GDP target for humanitarian aid and advocated for a Youth Mobility Scheme with the EU. The team also supported financial assistance to Ukraine and emphasized the need for comprehensive rebuilding efforts post-conflict.

The party's advocacy for special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) continues, with MPs highlighting the unacceptable delays in assessments for children with special needs. We also celebrated success when the Renter's Rights Bill finally brought into law a ban on no-fault evictions; a Liberal Democrat victory.

### **A word on the Whips team**

The wonderful growth in the Parliamentary Party means a big growth in my team. As a team of one in the last Parliament, I am delighted to now count Deputy Chief Whip Tom Morrison MP and Whips Zöe Franklin MP, Will Forster MP, Susan Murray MP, Charlie Maynard MP, Tessa Munt MP, and Bobby Dean MP to the team. At a staff level, we have welcomed new Deputy Head of the Whips Mel Gordon, and new members of the CPA, Ella Lewis, Alex Twemlow, Cosmo Lupton, Joe Brazier, and intern Sophie Walker. Between us, we are proud to serve a rejuvenated Parliamentary Party.

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

The Group in the Lords is really enjoying having such a large parliamentary party in the Commons to work with on parliamentary and legislative issues. Our role is to support them all in whatever way we can to bring attention onto local campaigns, as well as the national Party campaigns. We are working with them all as they navigate Parliament.

Our work over the last few months in the Lords has been busy, as we get to grips with working with a new government and finding that balance of constructive opposition - supporting Labour when we think they have got it right but pushing them to go further when we think there is a need. Numbers in the Lords at the moment mean that Labour needs us to win votes - so we are in an influential position!

### **Leadership and Party whips**

Dick Newby and I continue to serve as the Leader and Chief Whip respectively. Jeremy Purvis and Kath Pinnock were elected co-deputy leaders of the Group in October, and I am very grateful to them for all their work and support. Thanks must be given to Joan Walmsley and Navnit Dholakia as they stand down as deputy leaders - they have provided solid and important support to the leadership team, the whips' office and the wider Group. 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 Autumn Conference 2024.**

#### **Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Bill.**

Jenny Randerson, deeply missed by us all, led our scrutiny of this Bill which paves the way for the re-nationalisation of the railways. Jenny was supported by Caroline Pidgeon, Bill Bradshaw, Sal Brinton, and Ros Scott with the team as a whole securing important changes to the Bill and significant commitments from the Government. Sal secured a significant concession from the Government in relation to disability access, with the Government changing the law to ensure that the public sector equality duty applies to public sector companies operating train services, as well as significant commitments for further improvements to accessibility. Jenny and Ros pressed the Government in relation to passenger standards, receiving a firm commitment that the forthcoming Railways Bill will deliver improvements for passengers and maintain high standards of performance will be a crucial part of its purpose. Working on her first piece of legislation in the Lords, Caroline pressed the Government to encourage more services to be operated by devolved authorities. In response the Minister pledged that any requests for the devolution of services would be considered openly, fairly and carefully.

## **Mental Health Bill.**

This Bill introduces a range of changes to the mental health treatment and detention framework under the Mental Health Act 1983. The bill team, led by Claire Tyler and supported by Paul Scriven, Liz Barker, and Kate Parminter, has focused on ensuring that treatment and detention prioritise patient autonomy wherever it is therapeutically appropriate. Key efforts include establishing the role of a Mental Health Commissioner to oversee treatment practices at a national level, addressing racial inequalities in the use of Community Treatment Orders, and ensuring that community services are adequately resourced to meet growing demand.

## **Bus Services (No 2.) Bill.**

This Bill introduces several changes to bus service provision in England making it easier for services to be franchised and granting local authorities greater control to establish their own bus companies and tailor services to local needs. The bill team is led by Caroline Pidgeon, one of our newest Peers, with support from Sal Brinton, Kath Pinnock, Dave Goddard, Bill Bradshaw, and Angie Harris. Peers are broadly supportive of the Bill's focus on empowering local councils, but we aim to ensure it is used to address the needs of rural communities, tackle rising fares amidst the cost-of-living crisis and improve accessibility for passengers with disabilities across the country.

## **Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (Transfer of Functions etc.) Bill,**

This Bill abolishes the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, transferring its responsibilities to the Secretary of State. It represents a significantly watered-down version of the Skills Bill promised in the King's Speech. The bill team, led by Mike Storey with support from Dominic Addington and Sue Garden, has emphasised the need for a far more ambitious national skills agenda to enable people to develop essential skills that benefit the workforce and economy. They have also criticised the Bill as a centralisation of power in the hands of the Secretary of State, removing opportunities for Parliamentary scrutiny in the establishment of Skills England. We intend to push for amendments to clarify the scope, responsibilities, and ambitions of Skills England when it is eventually created.

## **Product Regulation and Metrology Bill.**

This Bill grants the Government powers to regulate products in the UK marketplace, particularly where there are safety concerns regarding their use and distribution. The bill team, led by Chris Fox with support from Sal Brinton, Don Foster, and Rupert Redesdale, has emphasised the importance of improving product safety and addressing environmental concerns. A key focus has been on the risks posed by lithium-ion batteries, commonly used in e-scooters, which

present a significant fire hazard. Peers have also worked to ensure that product regulations support a competitive environment for small businesses while aligning with the rules of the UK's closest trading partners. Our contributions during the Committee stage have prompted the Government to reconsider aspects of the Bill, with the aim of introducing changes to make the product regulation and metrology regime more effective and future-proof.

### **Financial Assistance to Ukraine Bill,**

This Bill is a money bill, meaning the Lords were limited to a Second Reading and could not table amendments at later stages. However, our bill team, led by Julie Smith and Jeremy Purvis, used the Second Reading to emphasise the importance of supporting Ukraine in its efforts to resist Russia's illegal invasion. We also called for frozen Russian assets to be repurposed to aid Ukraine's defence and contribute to its reconstruction.

### **House of Lords (Hereditary Peers Bill).**

This Bill, to remove the remaining 92 hereditary peers from the House of Lords, is being led by Dick Newby and William Wallace. We support the Bill as a small and modest move towards more substantive reform of the Lords. Speaking in support of the Bill, Dick Newby pointed out that an elected second Chamber has been Liberal, and now Liberal Democrat policy since the original Parliament Act in 1911 - perhaps our most long standing policy. We will continue to press the Government for more meaningful reform of the Lords, and also to make progress on a number of interim measures that will improve the reputation of the House.

### **National Insurance Contributions (Secondary Class 1 Contributions) Bill.**

Susan Kramer is leading a Bill team consisting of John Sharkey, Paul Scriven, Malcolm Bruce, Mike Storey, Olly Grender, Julie Smith and Cathy Bakewell. Following the work done by Daisy Cooper in the Commons, we are continuing to oppose this unfair jobs tax that will hit small businesses, social care providers and GPs. Susan tabled and voted on a "Regret" motion at second reading, which was not carried as the Conservatives did not support it. We have tabled amendments at Committee stage to highlight the dire consequences for many sectors, including GPs and social care; charities; farmers; early years providers and universities; veterans; and part-time workers.

### **Non-Domestic Rating (Multipliers and Private Schools) Bill.**

This Bill makes changes to business rates and removes any private school's entitlement to charitable rate relief. Kath Pinnock is leading for us, supported by Chris Fox, Mike Storey and John Shipley. The Bill simply tinkers at the edges and does not represent real reform of the

business rates system. We will continue to argue that it is only by abolishing business rates and replacing them with a Commercial Landowner Levy that we can truly help our high streets and boost small businesses.

### **Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill.**

Alison Suttie and Sally Hamwee welcomed this Bill, which implements Martyn's Law. The Manchester Arena attack highlighted gaps in the security of venues, and the public and victims' families have pushed for stricter laws to protect attendees at large-scale events. The Bill ensures that businesses and organisations are better prepared to deal with - and respond to - serious incidents. Alison and Sally are pursuing amendments in relation to training, guidance and reviews of the legislation to ensure that there is clarity and the law works as intended.

### **Peers and staff.**

We remain an active group of almost 80 peers but we were shocked and devastated by the sudden death of our friend and colleague Jenny Randerson at the start of the year. Jenny was a consummate politician - sensible and tough with an ability to cut through the rubbish and actually get stuff done. Her work as a councillor, as a member of the Welsh Senedd, as a minister both in Cardiff Bay and Westminster and as a peer, are all testament to her standing in both Welsh and national politics. As transport spokesperson in the Lords, she was working on legislation up until the day before she died - thinking about amendments to the Bus Services Bill - and we are already missing her hugely as part of our team. We remember with great gratitude everything she did for the Party and for the cause of liberalism, as well as the impact she had on us as individuals.

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 and digital teams for all the support they give us.

# 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 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 myself as the Chair of the Federal Finance and Resources Committee (FFRC), the Party President (Mark Pack), and Party Vice President with responsibility for ethnic minority communities (Amna Ahmed) responsible for working with ethnic minority communities.

Rachel Minshull took over as Company Secretary from Carl Cashman.



## **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.*

The Campaign for Gender Balance has continued to provide support to women who want to become Members of the Westminster Parliament, the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly over the last six months. We are also supporting a number of women who want to stand for election to local government in next May's election - something we see as an excellent way to prepare for standing for Parliament.

We would like to pay tribute to our wonderful team of volunteers who help and support women candidates across the UK.

Our team has been providing mentoring support for women going for approval. Parliamentary selections are not yet underway. However, we are very encouraged to see more women coming forward for training with a view to becoming Parliamentary candidates.

CGB Vice Chair, Julia Cambridge has continued to lead our Candidate Approval team to considerable success helping many women get approved as parliamentary candidates. The CGB team are concerned that the drive to select target seat candidates earlier should not block new women from getting selected. We plan to discuss this further with the State Parties.

Unfortunately, we were unable to run our planned Future Women MPs Webinar Weekend in the autumn due to team illness. This will now run this spring. We have had great feedback on this event in the past and look forward to a new cohort of successful women being selected to stand for Parliament as a result of attending this training.

We ran a well-received set of 12 training modules at Autumn Conference in Brighton. One new module which was very popular was about fighting Misogyny, which is becoming more open in British public life. Together with our CGB module on 'Staying safe on Social Media' this forms a new strand in CGB training aimed at increasing the resilience of our women candidates. Our thanks to the new women MPs who came and helped deliver our training in Brighton. It was fantastic to see so many women at Brighton who are now MPs whose journey to Westminster began at CGB training workshops. Congratulations again to all our new women MPs.

We are delighted that there will be new members joining the CGB team after the Federal Committee Elections in September. We look forward to a very active time, supporting excellent women for approval and selection over the coming 12 months.

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

*The Racial Diversity Campaign's (RDC) 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.

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

Despite advertising for a number of voluntary roles to help with the mission of RDC, there were no applications. The roles of Chair and Vice Chairs remain voluntary. Feedback was that roles should be compensated in at least some way to attract more applicants but also to show that investment in increasing racial diversity in our Party is being taken seriously.

Due to time constraints, which is absolutely understandable when undertaking a voluntary role, by mutual agreement both Vice Chairs of the RDC decided to step down. We want to acknowledge the role that these Vice Chairs had in helping to move the needle forward overall for RDC and again state that being volunteers, who have full time jobs, caring responsibilities and other general life pressures, looking at a challenge as big as increasing racial diversity in a national political party is in itself a challenge.

We thank you Melissa and Sam for their time and dedication whilst they were able.

We are pleased to announce that after a successful application process with multiple applications, we now have two new Vice Chairs, appointed in January 2025. They are Cllr. Attia Aslam and Haboon Adan.

### **Next Steps.**

The newly appointed Vice Chairs and Chair will meet to formulate the next steps for the RDC. This would have happened by the time this report is produced at Conference.

There will be a focus on supporting ethnically diverse candidates in seats where there is a chance of success by virtue of us having come second or where with work and support on the ground a building of that chance. We have a reduced budget for this specific work so need to be more targeted in our approach.

With this in mind, we must not forget our overall aims of increasing diverse representation across all levels of elected positions, political AND party. We will run another series of our

Accelerator Programme, with more detail around working for the party in roles such as Returning Officers.

We also want to engage with HQ and regions around the point made in the 2024 General Election Review that ‘... many organisers - who have experience - [have now moved] into paid parliamentary staff roles..’ leaving vacancies that should be an opportunity to recruit for a more ethnically diverse organiser base.

# Updates from State Parties

## English Liberal Democrats - Caroline Pidgeon (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 new Chair, I am delighted to present this report to provide information on some of the current issues and activities being carried out by the Party in England.

I must of course begin by thanking my predecessors, Alison Rouse and Lucas North, for all their hard work.

We start the year with a new team of Officers namely:

Chair - Caroline Pidgeon

Vice Chair Regional Development - Hannah Kitching

Vice Chair Regional Parties Committee - Brian Orrell

Treasurer - David Craddock

English Candidates Committee (ECC) Chair - Dave Raval

I would like to put on record our thanks to the outgoing Treasurer, Richard Flowers for his work over the last four years.

### **Lead Diversity and Inclusion Officer for the Party in England.**

In addition to the above, I am very pleased to be able to confirm the appointment of Shaffaq Mohammed, our new Lead Diversity and Inclusion Officer. We are all looking forward to working with Shaffaq in the weeks and months ahead on a number of new and exciting projects with a view to improving diversity and inclusion amongst our members, active volunteers, candidates and holders of elected public office. Further updates on this will also be provided in due course.

### **English Governance Review .**

We will be considering an English Governance review this year. We have already started to streamline our meetings to maximise efficiency. Any review will be considered with the input of English Council. We will also be looking at what support we can provide to the regions, sharing best practice.

## **General Election Review.**

We have started to look at the recommendations from the General Election Review which have an impact on the English party and will work with the Federal and other state parties to implement what is agreed, in particular in the areas of membership and candidates.

## **General Election Deposit Scheme.**

At the end of last year, the English Finance and Administration Sub Committee proposed that a new General Election Deposit Scheme should be set up from the utilisation of unallocated funds within the budget at that time. This scheme was subsequently considered in detail and approved by English Council and now allows Local Parties to make regular contributions in advance of the General Election in order to help with cash flow.

## **Candidate review.**

Led by last year's Chair of ECC, Margaret Joachim, a full review has been carried out of all General Election candidates, alongside a review on the process for the selection of Parliamentary Candidates in England. This was considered by English Council in November 2024, and was referred back for more consideration. The revised paper will return to English Council in the near future.

Finally, I would encourage you to visit our Stall at the Conference to meet with members of English Council Executive.

You can also contact me personally [chair@englishlibdems.co.uk](mailto:chair@englishlibdems.co.uk) should you wish to discuss any of the above issues or other matters with regards to the Liberal Democrats in England.

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

### **General Election.**

We were delighted to gain two seats at the general election. Susan Murray MP won in Mid Dunbartonshire, and Angus MacDonald won the seat of Inverness, Skye and West Ross-shire to the delight of all who had been devastated when Charles Kennedy's seat had been lost.

### **Scottish Parliament and 2026 elections.**

Our MSPs (Members of Scottish Parliament) continue to hold the SNP (Scottish National Party) to account at Westminster and have been actively campaigning on issues from dentistry, sewage, the Scottish budget, mental health waiting lists, and green energy.

As we gear up for the elections in 2026 we look forward to growing our numbers both at constituency level and on the regional lists. Boundary changes are almost complete and selections are now underway with key target seats already selected.

The Scottish Party passed a motion at the Autumn Conference to ensure that four of our most winnable regional lists will be topped by a female candidate to ensure we can improve gender balance within our Parliamentary Party.

### **Local Government.**

We continue to make gains and move forward in a wide range of local by-elections. We continue to run our 150 Rising Leadership programme to attract the next generation of talented campaigners and support our commitment to diversity.

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

### **Senedd Elections.**

Over the last few months, work in the Welsh Party has focused on preparation for next year's elections to the Senedd. These will be the first national elections held under PR (Proportional representation) in mainland Britain and we hope to make gains. Wales' 32 parliamentary seats are being paired to form 16 Senedd seats, each of which will elect six members by the d'Hondt method, giving a total of 96 elected members.

At the end of January, the Welsh Party leadership met with leading Welsh activists, candidates and members of the Federal Party campaigns team for a three day workshop to define strategy and messaging for the Senedd election and identify the steps to be taken at Federal, Welsh and Local Party level to facilitate our success.

Following changes to the selection rules agreed at the Autumn Welsh Conference in November, selection of candidates for the top target Senedd constituencies commenced in January and will be followed immediately by selections for the lower tiers of seats.

### **Welsh Autumn Conference.**

The Welsh Autumn Conference took place over the weekend of 15th - 17th November at the Metropole Hotel, Llandrindod Wells, in the constituency of Brecon, Radnor and Cwm Tawe, now a Welsh Lib Dem seat represented by David Chadwick since the 2024 General Election.

The event was well attended and featured motions on a diverse range of topics, notably calling for a basic income for care leavers and supporting increased powers for local renewable energy initiatives. Party business included a motion on tithing of elected members at all levels as well as changes to candidate selection rules.

The Welsh Spring Conference takes place at the Holiday Inn in Cardiff on 4th - 6th April 2025.

### **Welsh Budget.**

The current Labour government in Wales lacks a majority and needs the support (or abstention) of at least one opposition member of the Senedd in order to pass the 2025-26 budget. Previous budgets were passed with the support of Plaid Cymru, who were in a cooperation agreement with Labour which ended in May 2024.

At the time of writing, Welsh Lib Dem leader Jane Dodds is in negotiations with the Welsh Government to leverage her position to try to obtain increased funding for Lib Dem priority areas, including health and social care in Wales, childcare and an improved settlement for Welsh local authorities, most of which face severe financial difficulties.



