

Reports to Conference

Liberal 
Democrats
Spring Conference
York 2024

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Federal Committee Reports

Federal Conference Committee Report - Nick De Costa, Chair FCC

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

I am delighted that we are back at one of our favourite locations for Spring Conference, York 2024!

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

I am also delighted to see so many of our party bodies and external organisations taking part in Conference through the interesting fringe sessions and involvement in our exhibition. I hope that you all get involved in the great array of events happening over the weekend.

We've also got a great selection of training, which I really recommend you trying out and brushing up your skills in campaigning, being agents, finance, fundraising and much more.

I really do encourage you all to take part in as much of the conference experience as possible, including what will be some excellent debates in the auditorium.

Similar to previous years, we also have an online offering, which means for a small fee you can watch the sessions in the auditorium and vote online. Whilst this doesn't fully replicate the hybrid experience, this is all part of us exploring further opportunities around innovations at Conference.

We understand that Conference is costly to attend, and to help with that, we administer the Conference Access Fund. This provides a means by which people can attend Conference who might not be able to attend. The Conference Access Fund can assist with a range of things, including grants towards accommodation, travel, and assistance with 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: libdems.org.uk/conference-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

In total, we received 29 policy motions and one constitutional amendment. As regularly mentioned, time is tight at Conference, and we are unable to take all motions submitted to 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, and this information will be published in the Conference Directory.

From the submitted motions we selected seven policy motions and one constitutional amendment, and three standing order 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 4 March 2024 at 13:00 and can be done via: https://www.libdems.org.uk/conference_submissions. Deadlines for questions to reports are the same as per the amendments deadline and this can be done via: https://www.libdems.org.uk/conference_submissions.

We have allocated some time 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 weblink 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 19 February 13:00 via the above weblink.

The selected amendments, questions and other information about Conference will be listed in Conference Extra and Conference Daily. Conference Extra will be available the Tuesday in the week before Conference commences. You will also be able to access the same information through the Conference App which can be downloaded from the relevant app stores to your devices.

We will continue to allow the submission of speakers cards online and you can find the link for this in the agenda.

The FCC is here to help you make the most of Conference; please feel free to approach any of us at any time during Conference about any questions you may have about the agenda, conference sessions or speaking at Conference. You will be able to identify us by the badges we wear with FCC on them. You can also contact us via the FCC Helpdesk and the "Liberal Democrat Federal Conference" Facebook group.

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

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

General Election Manifesto

Over the last three years FPC and our manifesto group have been seeking views widely across the party about the development of our manifesto. We ran a variety of consultation sessions at conferences and elsewhere, and debates on full pre-manifesto papers were held at autumn 2021 and 2022 conferences. We also undertook a series of online discussions last year, looking at Climate and the Environment, Health and Social Care, Defence and International Affairs, Education, Economy and the Costs of Living, Crime and Justice and Political Reform. These events were attended by 749 members and included spokespeople from both houses of Parliament and other senior Lib Dems. They were well received by attendees, who were able to share their ideas and ask questions to senior figures in a way no other party in Britain does. Alongside this the manifesto group's chair Dick Newby has carried out a huge programme of meetings with various external groups, both to hear their views, and also to explain to them the approach we are taking.

All these all fed into our final pre-manifesto paper debated at and approved by autumn conference 2023.

If you are interested in what we will be saying at the General Election, we strongly urge you to look at the pre-manifesto, *For A Fair Deal*, available here: <https://www.libdems.org.uk/conference/papers/autumn-2023/policy-paper-for-a-fair-deal>

Following conference's autumn decisions about it we have been working to ensure it is refined and fully updated for ongoing political developments. We

have gone carefully again through each chapter, and considered very carefully the programme's overall costings, so that we will again present a fully costed set of proposals. We expect to have concluded this process by the time of spring conference, so that our manifesto is ready for the General Election whenever it is called this year.

Policy working groups

We have also continued work on four policy working groups.

We have worked with Dr Christine Cheng, Jonny Singh, chair and vice chair, and the rest of the group on International Security, to finalise this paper, which we are bringing to this conference. It proposes policy for the UK's medium term strategic security positioning; given the fast-moving current events in the Middle East, we have deliberately decided not to attempt to address those in this wider paper – we expect that a separate motion, informed by the wider position set out in this paper, but fully up to date to address the most recent developments, will also come to York conference for debate.

Work on developing policy on Opportunity & Skills, chaired by Rosie Shimell, has continued. We will not be bringing this to York conference, as previously expected, but to a future conference. This will allow it to dovetail with the working group on The Future of Work, chaired by Vinous Ali. Our group on Science, Innovation & Technology, chaired by Dr Jonathan Everett, is also continuing. Both the Future of Work and Science & Innovation will be holding consultation sessions at York conference: we encourage interested members to read and comment on their consultation papers available at <https://www.libdems.org.uk/members/make-policy/policy-consultations>. The consultation stage is generally a much more effective point to influence the development of the policy paper than the final formal debate at conference.

We intend that these three papers should be ready for debate at autumn conference in Brighton. However, given the likelihood that that conference will be either immediately before or immediately after a General Election, we anticipate that disruption to its policy debates may well be inevitable. We remain committed to bringing these, and also our separate piece of work on

animal welfare, to conference to debate as soon as this makes sense in wider political circumstances.

Given the likelihood of disruption and possible slippage of some of these papers from autumn conference, we do not intend to commission any policy papers specifically for spring conference 2025. We will soon be considering what policy papers we would like to start development on to bring to autumn conference 2025.

We thank all members of policy working groups, especially their chairs, who put in a huge amount of time and hard work into consulting widely and developing high quality policy for the party.

Keeping members informed

We are keen for our work to be visible to members, and reports on our meetings are made both on the party website, and in our Facebook group at [facebook.com/groups/federalpolicycommittee](https://www.facebook.com/groups/federalpolicycommittee) where members can also ask committee members questions about our work.

<https://www.libdems.org.uk/members/make-policy> sets out a wide range of information about policy development work under way, and how the process works. Members can also ask questions and feed in views to

policy.consultations@libdems.org.uk

Policy index

We have received many requests for a database to set out Lib Dem policy in a particular area. As a result, policy unit staff have created a policy index, doing this for a number of major policy areas. This can be viewed at

<https://www.libdems.org.uk/members/make-policy/policy-index>.

<https://www.libdems.org.uk/conference/papers> also sets out all policy motions and papers approved by conference in recent years.

Local policy debate

As the General Election approaches, there is interest in many local parties and other groups to discuss party policy. We encourage any interested group or individual to consider hosting, in person or online, a policy discussion session about the pre-manifesto paper. This allows interested members a chance to debate what we are saying at this election in any of the major areas – and is often an excellent way to engage and retain local members.

We thank our colleagues on the committee for their hard work, especially on the manifesto. We particularly want to thank Christian Moon, Head of Policy, and Joe Wright, Policy Manager, whose names do not feature prominently in our publications but whose hard work, research, diligence and wisdom make all of it possible.

Jeremy Hargreaves and Lucy Nethsingha, Vice Chairs

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.

It's about winning

There's a lot that goes into making a political party successful, and much which is necessary to sustain success over a long-term. But the crucial difference between being a political party and being a pressure group or think tank is winning seats at elections.

That's why the big measure of success for us this year, a year with almost certainly a Westminster general election, is whether we end it with more MPs, more Liberal Democrat majority councils and more Liberal Democrats elected in local government.

With first past the post in such widespread use for our elections, that also means smart targeting of our resources is essential. Getting more MPs elected won't just be great for those constituencies and local parties. It's also the route to raising our national profile as the number of MPs we have is strongly determinant of how many opportunities we get to raise issues in Parliament, how many invites come our way to take part in TV shows and how much attention is given to our conferences.

That means we all benefit - and will all be better placed to win future elections - if we significantly increase our MP numbers this year.

But a general election also provides an important opportunity to build up our organisation more broadly. It's so often the drama of a general election that gets more people interested, more people willing to join and more people wanting to volunteer.

So alongside the need to win more seats in both the local and general elections, we also need to make good use of the Westminster general election to build up our local infrastructure right across the country.

For the Federal Board this also means ensuring that our general election plans leave us in a strong position to continue to grow after polling day. In particular, we need to end this year with enough money in the bank to repeat in the next Parliamentary cycle what we've done in this Parliamentary cycle, i.e. invest in a large network of campaigns officers to support local parties all around the country right from the start of the Parliament.

Our priorities

To help achieve that, the Board continues to focus on your behalf on our five organisational priorities, drawn from the strategy motion passed by conference earlier in this Parliament:

- Developing a compelling and distinctive narrative;
- Campaigning excellence;
- Improving our record on diversity and inclusion;
- Giving our members and registered supporters an excellent experience; and
- Working together as one party.

These five themes consistently run through both the Board's work and, via the quarterly objectives set by our staff team, the whole work of our headquarters and staff team.

As well as the Board's quarterly reviews of key statistics and trends to check how progress is going, we've done a series of deeper dives into specific areas of general election planning. These have included the planned management and governance structures for the general election, as well as our approach to research and messaging. At time of writing, we'll be shortly also looking at plans around membership..

Necessarily, much of this overlaps with the work of other committees. The Board tries to keep its focus on the strategic picture, with more detailed expertise on such topics often rightly resting with the relevant committee. Thank you to all my other committee chairs for always working so collegiately to ensure our work doesn't overlap each other but is all also pulling in the same direction.

Treating people well

Since autumn conference, as part of finalising the party's budget for this year, the Board signed-off the important financial decision to prioritise our staff pay and conditions in the headroom that we had within our figures. It's always important we value our staff and treat them well, but all the more so now given the huge strains of a general election year.

That point of course applies more widely too, which is why the Board also agreed a definition of bullying and harassment to be used by our independent complaints process, supplementing previous ones such as on antisemitism.

We have also commenced work on making more widespread use of DBS checks to help protect the safeguarding of staff and volunteers, and have welcomed the Federal People Development Committee's work on this and related topics.

Other Board work

How the Board fills posts across the party is an important responsibility. The better these processes run, the better run the party is - and the more diverse and open the pool of people appointed or elected is. Last year the Board reviewed how we do this, implementing some changes immediately - such as removing the requirements for some posts to be nominated by two Board members, which made it a more insular process.

Our constitutional amendment for this conference sets out further reforms, in particular removing the previous rush to fill lots of posts very quickly after a new Board takes up office. That's precisely the scenario that encourages well connected insiders to do well and tends to count against getting a more diverse group of applicants, including new talent.

It also includes recommendations from the Federal Audit and Scrutiny Committee (FASC) review of how posts are filled on the Federal Appeals Panel (FAP). These changes in particular would open up FAP membership to selected Parliamentary candidates, who are a great source of relevant talent in the party.

We know that there is often significant pressure on spring conference agenda timetables, so we offered to the Federal Conference Committee (FCC) to withdraw our motion if it would otherwise squeeze out an important item. As it's a relatively short item, we're grateful to FCC for finding the time to slot it in.

The review of our last internal elections is now well underway. Its start was delayed to allow for the conclusion of the last appeal arising from those elections, and the final report is now due to come to the Federal Board this summer.

Complaints process

The Board has also considered proposals for some improvements to the rules from the Disciplinary Sub Group (DSG), based on feedback from those who run our independent complaints system and from those who have been participants in it.

Based on this, we're reporting to you changes as set out at the end of this report.

Affiliated organisations

Please see the report from the Federal People Development Committee (FPDC) regarding previous party bodies migrating to the new Affiliated Organisations structure. There are no completely new bodies to report to conference this time.

Thank you

Thank you also to our staff under the leadership of our Chief Executive, Mike Dixon, who the Board works with and without whom our work would not be possible. A particular thanks also to Carl Cashman who, as well as leading our group on Liverpool Council, provides the direct staffing support to the Board.

Thank you also to all our members and supporters, for all the work they put into making our party a growing force, winning more political power and so better able to turn our policies into practical action that improves people's lives.

Changes to the complaints process

The changes to the complaints process being reported to conference as part of the Board report, along with an explanation of the changes, are available online at

<https://www.libdems.org.uk/complaints-procedure/proposed-changes>

- The existing rules;
- The new rules being reported to conference;
- The changes between the new and existing rules; and
- An explanation of the changes.

If you cannot access the online versions and would like printed copies, please email president@libdems.org.uk. If you have any questions about the changes ahead of conference, please do also email them in.

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.

2023 Finance report and 2024 Outlook

In 2019 in contrast to our election result the finances of the Party were given a huge boost which meant we were able to clear the Party's accumulated deficit and retain a healthy surplus which enabled us to invest in our people and technology, through running deficits, in order to rebuild our political base. The global pandemic in 2020 and 2021 had a negative impact on our income and the Party had to rebalance with a revised budget.

The 3 stunning by elections successes in Chesham & Amersham, North Shropshire and Tiverton and Honiton in 2022 coincided with a return to a more healthy income stream spearheaded by our fantastic fundraising team and the continued support of our members through increased Membership fees. However, there was also a negative financial variance to our budget as we had to cancel the Party Conference in the Autumn 2022 due to the death of the Queen.

We set a challenging budget for 2023 which we have beaten largely thanks to a very substantial legacy from a member. We also won another by-election in Somerton and Frome which aided our fundraising and appeal income. We ended the year with an in year surplus for the first time since 2019 and enables us to enter 2024 in a financially stable position to fight the coming General Election.

Financial Systems, Financial Performance, and Outcomes

The systems for financial forecasting, reporting, business expenses, and purchasing that were put in place a few 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 Financial Controller, and the entire HQ 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 PPERA regulations. Local Party reporting is improving but is 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 sincere thanks also to Kerry Buist, head of compliance, and the compliance team we continue to enjoy an excellent relationship with the Electoral Commission.

The Electoral Commission is our regulator and are 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. 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 Party 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.

This is a key year for the Federal Communications and Elections Committee as it will include a Westminster General Election.

The work of the FCEC has been focussed on General Election preparation in the context of the strategic need to build the capacity and resources of the Party at all levels.

The General Election provides a very significant opportunity for the Party to grow. FCEC has been dedicating time to consider the plans that are being produced as well as asking for reports on additional areas of campaigning.

General Election Planning

The starting point of FCEC is that our party needs to develop and grow at every level and everywhere. FCEC accepts that the Party's resources must be well targeted to maximise success at the ballot box. However, FCEC also knows the importance of building everywhere.

FCEC asked for a report on the strategic expectations for those seats in Tiers 2 – Moving Forward, Tier 3 – Development, and 4 – Start Up. The aim was to have an agreed and specific purpose for these constituencies. The unanimous conclusion of FCEC was that advice be provided for these seats with the strategic aim of growing the Local Party in terms of members, supporters, activists, and funding rather than prioritising either vote share or vote total.

A strategic decision was also taken, following detailed information and advice from Campaigns, that some of the seats in the Moving Forward tier were campaigning so effectively that they merited being given the status of Moving Forward Plus seats. The campaign progress of these seats is carefully

monitored and reviewed by FCEC. These seats are required to generate all the resources needed from within their Local Party. It is a tribute to them that they are succeeding to do so.

The Advanced tier of seats, often called the target seats, have extremely challenging performance targets that include both resources generated as well as campaigning activity. FCEC reviews progress in these seats every quarter. Some seats then require additional encouragement and a very small number have agreed to move into the Moving Forward category as the target stretch was, for them, a step too far at that point.

Campaigning excellence is the key purpose of FCEC. The Committee has received and scrutinised reports from the Digital team about the plans being made and were delighted to learn that the team has been praised by the US Democrats' equivalent.

Successful communications are essential in a media driven world. The team have been outstanding in achieving coverage in all the main print and online outlets following carefully planned campaigns on issues such as sewage.

FCEC has reports at every meeting on the state of **candidate selection** across the state parties. The committee has also had regular updates on the Electoral Commission required **agent training**. All agents at the next General Election will only be able to do that important work if the training has been completed successfully. There are training courses throughout the country and FCEC is urging anyone who wants to be an agent, but has not yet been to the training, to do so.

Although much of this report is inevitably about the General Elections, FCEC always takes a close interest in the progress at Local Elections. An ALDC representative is a member of the committee and provides regular information and updates. 407 gains were made in 2023 and 60% of the seats available had a Liberal Democrat candidate, an improvement on previous years.

FCEC is fortunate that experienced and successful campaigners are willing to give up their time to serve on the committee. Thank you.

Federal People and Development Committee - Claire Hudson (Chair)

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

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

Since autumn conference we have welcomed Irfan Latif as our new Welsh rep and Katharine Macy as our LDDA rep.

The following has been the work of FPDC since autumn conference.

Vice President Amna Ahmed, who chairs the FPDC Diversity sub-committee, has starting setting up her committee. FPDC wish to see a clear strategy involving all states and party bodies that the party can collectively get behind, that is embraced, funded and ultimately embedded. Initially the focus will be on electing more people from diverse background and ensuring canvassing is done in ethnically diverse areas. We also need to recruit more diverse members so they can be not only candidates, but also represented in internal party posts and elections. Thanks to Amna for leading this piece of work and to Mike Dixon, Trudy Church and Nicole Turner for their commitment to ensuring diversity is fully embedded in our current working strategy, as well as to all members of staff, diversity officers and general members across the party for their commitment to an important strand of our work.

I am pleased to confirm that the arrangements for managing removals from the registered supporters lists where the Code of Conduct has been contravened (the “Code of Conduct for Members and Registered Supporters” was ratified by Spring conference in 2023) works extremely well.

We are in the final stages of working with Whistleblowing UK on a new whistleblowing policy for the party. Our current task is to ensure that this fits seamlessly in with the complaints process as well as other key party processes like safeguarding. My thanks to FPDC’s Co-Vice Chair Ellie Hudspith for leading this work.

In October we set up a working group on Safeguarding and Welfare, which is being chaired by Janey Little, Chair of Young Liberals, and member of FPDC. We are looking at very specific areas as raised to us by various members. Information about this will be reported in post FPDC meeting reports shared on the website and conference reports. Janey is an ideal person to lead this work as safeguarding in the party context relates mainly to members under the age of 18 and only in very specific and rare cases to adults. My thanks to her for her commitment to raising this and taking on the work.

In January we affirmed our commitment to working on projects that will support federal staff in delivering their objectives. Our membership working group will be undertaking a project to collate the best and most effective membership recruitment strategies from across the party. My thanks to FPDC elected member Lynn Cunningham, St Albans, for chairing this working group.

We have also set up a research working group to see if the issue of dual membership can be resolved, which will be chaired by Jenny Shorten of Lib Dems Abroad supported by Janey Little, Young Liberals, representing the two organisations most desirous of finding a solution. Thank you to both of them for taking on this work.

Kerry Buist, our compliance officer and Paul Trollope, NW region, have been leading the party’s training for election agents. This work is absolutely crucial as it is mandated by the Electoral Commission and people will only be able to be agents if they have completed this training. Please ensure that your

constituency has at least one trained agent as a matter of urgency! My thanks to Kerry, Paul and everyone involved in this training for the incredible job they are doing and the hours they are putting in. *If your agent has not done this training, act now and contact Kerry at kerry.buist@libdems.org.uk.*

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. Since Autumn conference the following existing AO's have been confirmed as transferred from Associated to Affiliated Organisations:

Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors

Green Liberal Democrats

Liberal Democrat Women

Liberal Democrat Campaign for Racial Equality

Liberal Democrat European Group

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

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>

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

Federal International Relations Committee - David Chalmers (Chair)

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

In 2024 more voters than ever in history will head to the polls, as at least 64 countries are due to hold national elections this year representing almost half the world's population, including most likely our own General Election, here in the United Kingdom. At the beginning of June voters across the European Union will also participate in the European Elections electing their representatives to the European Parliament. The results of many of these elections will prove consequential for the sort of world we live in for many decades to come. 2024 will be a year in history.

As we prepare to gather for our Spring 2024 Conference in York, which could be the last time we meet as a party before the General Election, we are right to be focused on the economy, the cost of living, the state of our national health and care service – the issues most impacting daily lives and therefore prevalent in voters' minds. However, whilst international issues may not be the top priority of most voters, our party prides itself on its internationalism and the strength it derives from its relationships with fellow liberals around the world, and we should not underestimate the impact on voters and supporters of the importance of standing up for our liberal values, when taking positions and commenting on what is happening around the world.

Over the past couple of years, the Federal International Relations Committee FIRC has engaged in the process of crafting our position on several key areas, including rebuilding our broken relationship with the European Union leading the way to membership in the future, developing a robust policy towards China, supporting Ukraine in their war with Russia. Indeed, in York party

members will have the opportunity to debate and vote on a new international security policy, which has the full endorsement of FIRC.

Through our membership of Alliance of Liberal and Democrats for Europe ALDE and Liberal International, we work closely with our sister parties in Europe and around the world to find common ground on the important international issues of the day. We are all very proud of the courage and leadership our Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Layla Moran MP has shown during the recent Israel / Gaza conflict, her careful choice of language establishing the Liberal Democrats as the first political party in the UK to call for an immediate ceasefire and reaffirming our support for a two-state solution. At the ALDE Council meeting in Bucharest, Romania in October the LibDem delegation followed Layla's example, by also taking the lead in crafting a motion on this sensitive issue, which brought together liberal parties from across Europe in their support.

In March the LibDems will be sending a delegation to participate in the ALDE Special Congress taking place in Brussels tasked with confirming the ALDE Manifesto for the European elections. Whilst as a party from outside the EU we shall be abstaining from voting, our views are still sought and listened to on many important issues. LibDems have continued to participate with colleagues from our sister parties in several policy working groups. I have sat for the past two years on the international security working group and in December visited Estonia to meet with the defence minister and NATO command – experiences which help feed into our own policy in this critical area. As LibDems we have continued to work with the Alliance of Her and the Rainbow Platform and promote our message of diversity and inclusion. We are proud to see Estonia, with a government lead by our sister parties, recently legislating for same-sex marriage. We have started collaboration with our sister parties in Romania and Ukraine to look at ways to improve the lives and promote the rights of people with disabilities.

At the 2023 Autumn Conference in Bournemouth, we welcomed a delegation of members from the German Bundestag from our sister party FDP, looking to re-establish strong links between our parties post Brexit. Kira Rudik the Ukrainian Opposition Leader from our sister party Golos inspired party members with her stirring speeches. We also hosted the Policy Officer from our sister party Momentum in Hungary, who are looking to establish a process of making policy similar to our own. There is much that we can learn from one another. In September I attended the Congress of Centerpartiet our sister party in Sweden, Rob Harrison the Chair of LDEG attended the recent FDP Europe Congress in Berlin and Baroness Brinton spoke at a D66 rally in the Netherlands. It is expected that many members of our sister parties will want to help our campaign when the General Election is called.

Baroness Brinton in her role as Vice President of ALDE has chaired the process to create a new Charter of Values for liberal parties across Europe, which we shall be voting on in Brussels in March and reflecting the increasingly influential role of the LibDems as a non-EU party, coordinated collaboration and discussions amongst non-EU parties.

Efforts by ALDE to conform with the Ruling of the European Authority relating to the participation and influence of non-EU parties have not, as we once feared, resulted in a reduction in the size of the LibDem ALDE Council delegation. In 2024 we retain 10 ALDE Council delegates. In 2024 we shall only lose 2 delegates to the ALDE Congress – retaining 46 ALDE Congress delegates. However, we have to be vigilant, as further changes may be forthcoming after the European elections – depending on the make up of the new European Parliament.

At our Autumn Conference FIRC hosted an international programme of events and briefings for diplomats and international representatives from several countries, including the Ambassadors of Brazil, France, Ireland, Greece and the European Union, Deputy Ambassadors from Germany, Spain, Austria, Netherlands, Norway, Finland and Japan, High Commissioners from South

Africa, India and Malta and representatives from Taiwan, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. The International programme has been widely praised and we were grateful to the participation and support of many of our Parliamentarians. As the General Election approaches the interest of the international diplomatic community in our policies is likely to increase and we have held several meetings with them already this year.

In November Yevgeniya Kara Murza accepted the Liberal International Prize for Freedom at a Ceremony in the Palace of Westminster on behalf of her husband Vladimir Kara Murza, who is imprisoned in Russia for daring to oppose Putin and his invasion of Ukraine. The Lib Dems nominated Vladimir Kara Murza for this prestigious prize – reflecting our support for all political prisoners held in Russian prisons including the Russian Opposition Leader Alexei Navalny. Last month I spoke in London at one of a series of rallies around the world commemorating his 1000 days in captivity.

Liberal International held an online Executive Committee meeting in December, which I attended as Leader of our LibDem delegation, where we approved the financial statement and endorsed the forward policy of the Bureau. LibDems have continued to be active on its Human Rights, Climate Emergency and Trade Committees. Phil Bennion as Vice President recently attended the elections in Taiwan, which saw Lai Ching-te the candidate of our sister party DPP elected as President.

In January an extra 2.2 million overseas voters who have lived abroad for more than 15 years regained the right to vote in UK elections. The expansion means they will be able to register in the constituency of the last address at which they were resident. The change represents the biggest increase of the franchise since full female suffrage in 1928 and LibDems Abroad are running a campaign to secure their votes for our party. In certain key marginal constituencies, the overseas vote could determine the outcome of the election.

Both Lib Dem Europe Group LDEG and Liberal International British Group LIBG and Lib Dem International Development LDID hosted debates at the Autumn Conference and enable party members to engage regularly with international issues through their series of online and in person events.

FIRC's Sub Committee on Communications and Fundraising produced a strategy paper at the end of last year, outlining ways to better engage and communicate with party members on international issues and to improve communication across the party, which was endorsed by FIRC, who will be seeking to implement it through this year. FIRC is keen for international issues to be a regular item on the agenda of regional and national party conferences.

In an attempt to better focus on the important international issues FIRC has decided, in addition to its Sub Committee on Europe, to establish two new Sub Committees – one to concentrate on authoritarian states and the rise of authoritarianism around the world and the other to better engage with the Commonwealth and the Global South. It is hoped that these new Sub Committees will help support the work of our Parliamentarians and enable the view of party members to be better heard in international debates. We are also hoping to better engage with all Affiliated Organisations to the Party that have an international focus and are seeking to hold meetings with the relevant Chairs over the coming months.

The elections taking place in 2024 across the world notably in the EU and including that of our own here in the UK mean that FIRC is going to be very busy this year, but I am confident that with the support of our International Officer and our strong team of volunteers, dedicated to maintaining internationalism as one of our core values, we shall be successful in our efforts. If any party member would like to find out more about the work of FIRC, how to join LDEG, LIBG or LDID or become a member of the LibDem delegation to the ALDE Congress at the end of the year, please drop me a line.

Federal Audit and Scrutiny Committee – Dave Radcliffe (Chair)

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

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Over the past 6 months since the previous report to Federal Conference, FASC has continued to work with the CEO on the recommendations of the Thornhill Report and to examine and challenge the risk register on a quarterly basis.

FASC was tasked by Federal Board to undertake a review of the membership and constitution of Federal Appeals Panel. The outcomes were reported back to Federal Board in December with recommendations for possible minor changes to the constitution.

We have conducted an Internal Audit of the Party's financial controls for income and expenditure. There were no significant recommendations, and that the key controls are adequate.

Finally, we reviewed the due diligence process for donations to the Party, and considered minor changes to balance risk with the workload of the fundraising team.

Federal Council Report - Anthony Hook (Chair)

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

The Federal Council consists of 40 members, 21 of whom are elected by the whole UK party membership and others are elected from the three state parties, Young Liberals, local government representatives and from among our MPs and Peers.

Prue Bray and Aidan Van Der Weyer have been elected as my Vice Chairs.

The Federal Council's role is to scrutinise the work of the Federal Board. After each Board meeting the members of the Federal Council have reviewed the decisions taken by the Board and meet about two weeks after the Board meeting.

In the first week after the Board meeting (five working days) members may call-in a decision. A call-in requires the high bar of 13 members to support it. Since the Autumn conference (when I reported there had been two call-in decisions) no further decisions have reached 13 members asking for a call-in. A number had reached about 5 or 6 members asking to call a decision in.

The Council has adopted a paper written by one of our members Councillor Chris Northwood recommending that, among other things, the Council could receive items for Scrutiny from the Board before decisions are taken for "pre-scrutiny" rather than only afterwards. The Party President has responded positively to this suggestion and this may add to the scope for Council members to influence Board decisions.

In October, Layla Moran MP attended the Federal Council meeting to discuss the Board's decision to adopt an approach of not using Non-Disclosure Agreements in cases of sexual misconduct, abuse, bullying, harassment or discrimination. The Council made a number of comments and matters were

left that further work would be done to refine the Board's intended policy in this area. It is understood this work is now on hold since the worsening situation in the Middle East has demanded more time of Layla as the party's foreign affairs spokesperson.

We also held a useful session with Ed Davey MP. Council members asked Ed a wide range of questions, mostly about party strategy.

In December the Council had a detailed discussion of party finances with Mike Cox, the Chair of the Federal Finance and Resources Committee and the party's Registered Treasurer and the Party President.

This discussion covered the financial challenges for the party and the setting of the Federal Party budget.

At the same meeting the Council had a lengthy, productive session with Baroness Kath Pinnock, Chair of the Federal Communications Committee about preparations for the General Election. Members have a broad range of experiences and this was reflected in their comments and questions.

The Council has a 2024 schedule of meeting dates based on the Board meeting schedule and may add further dates to this. In particular, if the General Election result (whenever that may be) requires the Board to make any decisions then we will be ready to meet at short notice to discharge our duties to scrutinise those decisions on behalf of party members.

Parliamentary Reports

The Commons - Wendy Chamberlain MP (Chief Whip)

Introduction

Welcome back to York, and thank you for reading my latest report. You will hopefully be receiving the monthly members email, so already have a sense of what we in the Commons have been up to. If not, be sure to email the membership team who can ensure you do.

As ever, I would also like to thank my colleagues in the Commons and Lords, staff in Westminster and in Constituencies, our representatives in the devolved administrations and our Local Government family for everything they do.

The Political landscape

If I had a pound for every time someone asked me when the next General Election will be... I'd donate them all to the Party's election fighting fund.

The truth is, nobody knows, but we do know that this time next year there will be a new Parliament. The more we do now, the more liberal that Parliament will be. It's as simple as that.

In the meantime, here's a few highlights of the work the liberals in this Parliament are doing.

Highlights

Ed has been challenging the Government on the key issues affecting people up and down the country, most recently raising the devastating story of a constituent's awful experiences of the NHS crisis during Prime Minister's Questions. In response to the troubling events in the Middle East, Ed challenged Rishi Sunak on the lack of clarity around the risk of escalation in the campaign against Houthi attacks on shipping. As Leader, he joined the Prime Minister and Keir Starmer in the tributes to the sadly departed Tony Lloyd in January. He has also met with the South Korean President, celebrated Tamil Pongal with his constituents, took part in a debate on the treatment of Ahmadiyya Muslims in Iran and continued his work with the Carers and Young Carers All Party Parliamentary Group.

Tim continued to champion rural communities as Spokesperson for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs, from successfully campaigning to reverse decisions around ticket office closures, to securing a debate to call out the Conservatives' inexcusably poor treatment of farmers navigating the transition to the inadequate SFI payment schemes. He also pushed for justice for those affected by the ongoing sewage dumping scandals across the UK, submitting an amendment that would see victims entitled to compensation, and advocated for better cancer care, outdoor education opportunities, affordable housing, and treatment of migrants.

As Education spokesperson, Munira Wilson has been leading the party's response to the many crises in education, including school funding, crumbling school buildings and the lack of specialist teachers. Munira secured a Ten-Minute Rule Bill to put a mental health practitioner in every school and continues to campaign for more children in poverty to be eligible for free school meals. Locally, Munira is at the forefront of the campaign to oppose Thames Water's controversial proposals to remove water from the Thames and replace it with recycled sewage

Richard has been fighting the Conservatives' neglect of coastal and rural communities. He has repeatedly challenged the Government over delays to broadband rollout, the underfunding of local councils, and plans to strip away a whole wing of Seaton Community Hospital. He has changed the law to stop taxpayers' money being loaned to water companies until they have a clear plan to end sewage discharges and has introduced a Bill to pass the responsibility for monitoring sewage spills from water companies to the regulator. Richard has protected people's right to wild camp on Dartmoor National Park. As Defence Spokesperson, Richard has urged the Government to reverse cuts to the size of the Army, and he has tabled a Bill to ensure that MPs can scrutinise and give Parliamentary approval for the use of military force by the UK.

Since her by-election, Sarah Dyke has been holding the Government to account for gaps in rural services, including calling a debate on 'Government Support for Rural Communities', highlighting the additional costs that rural councils and communities face. She continues to stand up for public transport, working to save several local bus routes, pressing the government for an update on the proposed station for the Somerset Levels and tabling and presenting the Public Transport (Rural Areas) Bill. Sarah is currently campaigning to improve local NHS services, as well as spearheading a drive to raise awareness about farmers' and farm workers' mental health concerns. She recently hosted a drop-in event in Parliament with the Farm Safety Foundation, to promote its 'Mind Your Head' week.

Wera has been recognised as the 'Environmental Champion of the Year' by the Environmental APPG. She remains committed to addressing environmental issues, spearheading an amendment to the 2023 Energy Act to prohibit 'flaring' and 'venting' by oil and gas installations. She has additionally achieved a legislative victory with the passing of the 2023 Worker Protection Bill, which holds employers accountable for ensuring workplace safety and preventing harassment.

Daisy has been holding the government's feet to the fire on their broken promise to deliver "40 new hospitals by 2030" and exposing the shocking rise in NHS waiting lists. Meanwhile, she continues to promote our key pledges of giving everyone the legal right to see their GP within 7 days by securing 8,000 more GPs, and enabling everyone to access urgent and emergency dental care. As we approach the General Election Daisy will continue to promote these and our other major policies on cancer waiting times, mental health and social care.

Helen has been busy championing local government, leading the calls for fairer council funding, pushing for more social housing and joining the Public Bill Committee to scrutinise the Renters (Reform) Bill. She has repeatedly questioned Ministers on rural bus services, ambulance waiting times and the national crisis with NHS dentistry. Helen has also taken an active role in several cross-party groups, including co-chairing the All Party Parliamentary Group on Baby Loss where she has ensured maternity scandals get the national attention they deserve. In between scrutinising trade deals on behalf of farmers and pushing the Government to improve military accommodation, Helen also found time to launch a new campaign to improve rural mobile phone signal and brought forward a Presentation Bill to address this problem.

As Treasury and Business Spokesperson, Sarah Olney has shone a light on the government's failure to properly fund our public services, their unfair freeze on income tax thresholds, and their wider shocking low-growth economic policy. Sarah has also been campaigning to get victims of rape and sexual assault access to free court transcripts, for the re-opening of Hammersmith Bridge and alongside Munira in opposing Thames Water's controversial sewage plans.

Jamie successfully opened a second office in Wick which he hopes will increase his coverage and impact in what will soon be the UK's largest constituency. He has also sought to address his constituents' concerns on issues such as energy and pensions through robust engagement with the

likes of OVO Energy and SSEN. Back in October, Jamie led a Westminster Hall Debate on the sustainability of rural postal services, which was followed by the announcement that the DVLA and the Post Office were to sign a new contract to extend vital services. Jamie has continued to apply pressure on the government across his Culture, Media & Sport portfolio by calling for protections for our Public Service Broadcasters and local radio, as well as calling for getting more sporting events on free-to-air television.

Christine is working on a Bill to create a right to help from British consulates in the case of human rights abuses. In Scotland, she continues to push the SNP to reverse council cuts and defeated an attempt to hold new Scottish independence referendums. In the Cabinet Office, she called for regulation of AI-generated content during elections, and as Women & Equalities Spokesperson, Christine has highlighted the impact of antisemitism and Islamophobia and is urging the Government to back our ban on conversion practices.

Layla has spoken movingly about her extended family's experience in Gaza, consistently called for an immediate bilateral ceasefire and championed international law. Away from her foreign affairs brief Layla is leading cross-party efforts to end criminalisation of rough sleepers, as well as questioning Ministers over Thames Water's gross incompetence.

Sarah Green has re-presented her Private Member's Bill to give legal protections for chalk streams. As International Trade Spokesperson, Sarah highlighted concerns over the impact of the Comprehensive Progressive Agreement for Trans Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), particularly for UK farmers. She has continued advocating for those with Crohn's & Colitis, meeting with the Minister for Disabled People and founding a new All Party Parliamentary Group. She continues to champion the case for victims of the Loan Charge scandal.

As Home Affairs, Justice and Northern Ireland spokesperson Alistair has led our opposition to the government's madcap, immoral Rwanda scheme, and seen off the Tories' attempts to repeal the Human Rights Act. He secured debates in Parliament to fight proposals to cut back coastguard helicopter provision, as well as on the future resilience of telecommunications networks and on keeping defined benefit pensions protected, securing concessions from ministers in each case.

I have been leading the fight for recognition of the paediatric conditions PANS PANDAS. I held debates on consumer protections in the energy industry and the Life in the UK Test. I also advocated for funding for local infrastructure projects including for railway. As DWP spokesperson, I fought on behalf of the WASPI women, called out Government failures in relation to the state pension, and advocated tirelessly for a proper social security safety net especially for unpaid carers.

Staffing

In bittersweet news, the Parliamentary Advisors in the House of Commons (CPA) bid goodbye to Rebecca Grubb. Rebecca was an outstanding member of the team, but thankfully will still be making the Party proud in her role with the Political Advisory Unit (PAU). Rebecca's successor will be announced shortly.

The CPA also welcomed new member Cathal Byrne, taking the reins of multiple briefs, including Treasury, Business, and Science, from Emma Stevenson. Cathal has already shown his metal on a number of fronts and we are delighted to have him. The Commons Whips Office remains headed by Matthew Smith, supported by Deputy Head Jack Coulson and CPA stalwart Toby Davis.

The Lords - Ben Stoneham (Chief Whip)

We are now playing the waiting game for the General Election. There is a strange feeling in Parliament as we are all aware that what we are doing now will have an impact on the outcome of the election. Parties are baring their teeth, and everything is starting to get very political.

The ongoing Tory soap opera was paused as Parliament was prorogued for a couple of weeks back in October – the first prorogation of Parliament by a King since 1951. The King's Speech in November outlined to us what legislation would be coming through our doors over the coming year and showed us what we should expect from the Conservatives going forward.

One of the most unexpected things to have happened in the Lords this session is the appointment of David Cameron to the role of Foreign Secretary and his subsequent introduction into the House of Lords as Lord Cameron of Chipping Norton. He cannot be properly scrutinised or questioned by elected MPs, but we are proud that Jeremy Purvis has been shadowing him and keeping up the pressure on him, ensuring he is directly accountable in Parliament.

Of course, we have been ever conscious of international events has been hanging heavy on our shoulders. We have debated Ukraine and the Israel-Gaza conflict, and now Rwanda, conscious as ever that our actions are being watched, and pulling our weight to ensure our voice is heard on such matters.

At the time of writing, we are in the midst of the legislative journeys of the Safety of Rwanda Bill, the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Bill, and the Victims and Prisoners Bill – we will continue to put down amendments and scrutinise legislation until the House is dissolved for an election, whenever that may be.

I am, as always, very grateful to our Parliamentary Party in the Lords for the heavy workload they undergo.

LEADERSHIP AND PARTY WHIPS

Dick Newby and I continue to serve as the Leader and Chief Whip respectively, and we are well-served by Joan Walmsley and Navnit Dholakia as Co-Deputy Leaders. We also have a 9-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 OVER LAST FEW MONTHS FROM OUR PEERS

Peers are often a little hidden from sight despite the vital and difficult work so many of them do. I thought therefore that this would be a good opportunity to hear from a handful of them about what they have been up to on the Red Benches.

JENNY RANDERSON

Like all House of Lords work we predominantly respond to events, scrutinise Government and work to improve Government Bills. In the transport sector we face the urgency of technical revolution and environmental impact (such as electric cars, hydrogen buses, e-scooters, and driverless cars) and the practical problems of transport in a densely populated country. Our major focus as a Party has been on the environmental impact of technology as well as how to improve services for passengers and travellers.

We have criticised cuts to bus services, chaos on the railways - including farcical mismanagement of HS2 – and the Govt's U-turn on net zero. Their narrow win in the Uxbridge by-election led them to turn traffic calming into a "wedge" issue and to row back on plans to phase out sales of new petrol and diesel cars by 2030. This decision annoyed car manufacturers as well as environmental campaigners – as it was not just bad for our planet but also for our economy!

After 5 years with no significant transport bills, the Department for Transport was granted two in the King's Speech. So, they chose the Pedicabs Bill – a bit niche as it only affects the square mile around Westminster. And the Automated Vehicles Bill, which has been fascinating for transport nerds but is sadly not going to revolutionise public transport for some years yet. Both Bills will have gone to the Commons by the time of Conference. We had an active team on both and our amendment to devolve powers over pedicabs to Transport for London was accepted by the Minister – this was a small victory for the principles of devolution. We also used this Bill as an opportunity to raise issues of fire safety associated with lithium batteries. On Automated Vehicles we concentrated on disabled access rights and protection of personal data, as well as safety issues.

CHRIS FOX

The Autumn term saw the final days of ping pong for the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill. This bill was supposed to crack down on international criminals and offshore illegality. It remains underwhelming but along with colleagues we made major improvements such as increased powers for judges to take action on lawsuits used by oligarchs to silence critics.

The same can almost be said about the Investigatory Powers (Amendment) Bill which seeks to change the access the intelligence services have to some data. There was not much collective ambition in the Lords to change this bill, but we did get concessions. There are various types of notices that can be given to telecommunications operators (TO) by the Secretary of State, requiring the TO to take certain steps specified in the notice. However, a TO can refer the notice back to the SoS for review. During the course of the IP(A) Bill we raised concerns about the overall length of time that this process can take, and tabled an amendment suggesting that the review process should take no more than 180 days. The government recognised this concern, which was also expressed by the sector. At Report stage the government tabled an amendment to allow the SoS to set an overall time limit via regulations.

Whilst this is quite a technical issue, it helps provide certainty and clarity to all those involved in the review process.

A highlight during this process was being declared “annoying” by one of the protagonists for the Bill. Another one was being able to scrutinise the Rwanda Treaty as a member of the International Agreements Committee, alongside Tim Razzall. The Committee tabled the report that then got passed by the Lords that sets conditions on its ratification. This is not binding on the Government. But it did annoy them.

KATH PINNOCK

The so-called Levelling Up Bill started in January 2023. It was scrutinised and challenged in the Lords for the next 9 months due to its extensive size. Kath has been very closely involved throughout the process as Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Local Government. September and October were spent in trying to force the Government to change some of the worst aspects of the legislation. This included a significant victory in blocking the Government’s plans to relax rules around pollution and nutrient neutrality, as well as raising key Lib Dem campaigns like the crisis of RAAC in schools and hospitals.

As a party, we have constantly raised concerns about the lack of local Government finance and spoken on Fire safety, homelessness which is at a 25 year high, a long-term plan for housing, no fault evictions, fairness in the Levelling Up funding allocation, and challenging the lack of democratic accountability in the Teesside Works project.

JOHN RUSSELL

John's personal highlight was securing a balloted debate at the end of November. This was his first debate in the House since joining last July, but it was also a great opportunity to spend three hours discussing the terrible state of mental health support for children and young people. John and our other speakers argued that we are facing a young persons' mental health emergency, with an annual 89% increase in the number of children and young people seeking mental health service support. They reiterated to the Minister our call for each school to have access to a mental health professional, and highlighted Claire Tyler's Private Members' Bill on mental health support for school kids.

At the beginning of January, he was appointed as our new Spokesperson on Energy and Climate Change which he is passionate about. So far in the role, he has raised many issues including, flood defences, protection from wildfires, the civil nuclear roadmap, the need for a green industrial strategy, public access to nearby green spaces, and calling for greater openness and transparency from the government on how it is meeting its environmental targets.

SAL BRINTON

Sal's main focus has been on the Victims and Prisoners Bill, which tells victims about the services they can expect, but does not give those services, such as the police, courts, and healthcare a duty to provide those services. We are still fighting to make sure they do.

For many years she has campaigned for support for victims of stalking, following her own harassment and stalking by the Conservative PPC opponent in Watford. This year, the Government finally agreed to Independent Stalking Advocates, similar to Domestic Abuse Advocates, who can help the 1.3 million victims of stalking a year navigate the criminal justice system.

Lastly, she is also trying to get the Government to make swift interim payments to the families of those in the forty-year-old infected blood scandal who were not originally included, as well as pushing the Government to strengthen and speed up the compensation scheme for the Sub-postmasters criminalised and lied to by Post Office and Fujitsu.

SUSAN KRAMER

Over the past few months in Treasury matters we have been challenging Conservative myths on the state of the economy. So many still face a cost-of-living crisis. But underneath this the fundamentals which drive economic growth are all flashing danger red - productivity, investment, workforce, trade, tax, infrastructure, the national debt, the state of public services. The Office of Budget Responsibility has described the Chancellor's "plan" as worse than fiction.

We take on the Government in debates and questions pushing for an industrial strategy, a path to grow productivity, investment in key services and repair of our trade with Europe. We have been arguing for proper consumer protection and are often the only voice raised for smart regulation.

MIKE GERMAN

These last few months have been dominated by the Government's plan to send asylum seekers on a one-way ticket to Rwanda. Liberal Democrats have fought this at every turn, but without Labour backing our plan we cannot beat the Conservative. This was exemplified at the Second Reading vote which we initiated to stop the Bill in its tracks. Sadly, this was rejected as Labour refused to vote for it. We did what we thought was right, and we will now turn our attention to amending this terrible piece of legislation.

We take the humanitarian and international law approach, putting forward our alternative to a government whose plan is costing a fortune, and will not work. The Government is making this a key issue in the upcoming general election, but public polling shows just how wrong they are - it just will not work.

At the same time the government is making it increasingly difficult to come to this country to join a UK partner. The Conservatives are breaking up families simply to satisfy their hardline views.

Mike's debate on speeding up the integration of refugees into our society – into a proper home, training, and a job – was well received across the House. We will continue to press for speedy integration to be a priority so that those fleeing persecution can start their new lives and help build stronger communities in our country.

PEERS AND STAFF

We remain an active group of 80+ but we were all very saddened by the death of Brian Cotter in November. Brian was very proud of his role as a small businessman in Somerset and used that experience to speak about business and his local area throughout his 8 years as MP for Weston-super-Mare, and in his 17 years in the House of Lords.

Brian Paddick has temporarily stepped back from party politics as he has taken up a new role with the Metropolitan Police. He continues to advocate for asylum seekers and refugees with passion from the non-affiliated benches and he has remained a good friend of the office and of the Party.

Lastly, Bill Rodgers, after a phenomenal 60+ years of public service, retired in December. Bill was a political giant, who maintained throughout his career a consistency of principle and a determination to act on them. He will be missed by many across the Party, the House, and the political world. Without the efforts of Bill, as one of the Group of Four, the Party likely would not exist.

As ever I would like to extend my thanks to the staff in the Lords team who support us so well in our work – we welcomed two new members of the whips' office last autumn who have settled well and are working hard. I am also very grateful to the Political Advisers, all the staff in the Commons Whips' Office, the Leader's Office and the party's press office and communications teams for all the support they give us.

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 (CGB) exists to develop and support women within the Liberal Democrats who are interested in standing for Parliament. As part of that support we coach train and mentor women for public office at any level.

CBG 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.

Our focus recently has been on helping very new woman candidates to get approved and selected. The Party has been keen to get as many candidates in place as possible ready for a possible Spring General Election. This meant a great deal of activity for our wonderful team of volunteers who help and support women candidates across the UK.

CGB Vice Chair Julia Cambridge led our Candidate Approval Team. It has been gratifying for Julia and her team to work with so many women new to politics, who have now been approved.

CGB Chair Candy Piercy has led the team providing support to women applying for selection in specific seats. The Autumn was very busy as more and more seats began selecting.

We ran a large number of sessions at Autumn Conference with a high attendance rate. Many of the women who first came across CGB at Autumn Conference then applied for mentoring for both approval and selection. We are delighted to see so many of them selected to fight at the next General Election.

Re-establishing this pipeline of able and motivated women candidates has been a key objective for CGB since Covid.

Now that selections are largely finished for this GE, we are continuing to support and prepare women on their journey towards the next GE.

For women who have been selected we are planning to run a series of webinars to develop their skills as a candidate in the run up to the GE Campaign.

Racial Diversity Campaign - Christopher French (Chair)

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

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

Chair: Christopher French

Vice Chair: Samantha Young (Community)

Vice Chair: Melissa Gordon (Fundraising)

Summary of action to date

The RDC continues to be supported by Sydney Samuels, former CEO and Founder of tech driven recruitment platform, built with the mission of improving social mobility by connecting underrepresented candidates to tailored career opportunities, and her expert consultancy, Scale DEI. She's also Inclusion and Diversity Manager at British Airways.

The Access Accelerator

Summary: The Access Accelerator ran with 5 of the 6 planned virtual sessions. These were dynamic, interactive and informative with fantastic guest speakers including Cllr. Hina Bokhari AM and Bobby Dean (Carlshalton and Wallington PPC). It was fulfilling to hear about their experiences, and challenges, on their journeys to where they are now.

Access Accelerator Sessions:

(Delivered Virtually via webinar)

Session 1 - "The Political Playbook: Know the Ropes"

Session 2 - "Candidate Crafting: Hacks and Tracks"

Session 3 - "Selection Success: Candidacy Unveiled"

Session 4 - "PPC & MP: Inside the Powerhouse"

Session 5 - "Assessment Day: Prep like a Politician"

Session 6 - "Panel Discussion: Charting Your Political Journey"

(Postponed)

We were and will continue to be ambitious. Whilst we had a dedicated group of regular attendees, we did not see the numbers over all that we hoped for. With this in mind we decided to postpone the final session which was to be a panel discussion.

This then led to our decision to postpone the programme overall, meaning that we will not run the following Selection and Election Accelerator parts of the programme until 2025. This aligns with our stated goal of increasing the number of people from diverse backgrounds in our target seats for the general election in what is likely to be 2029, and by which time we should know where our targets for that election will be.

Next Steps: We must recognise, and it must be recognised, that the RDC Executive are volunteers and also have other volunteering roles with the Liberal Democrats and outside the party, and hold full time jobs. Without the support of Sydney it would not have been possible to run The Access Accelerator to the high level of content that it did.

Chris and Sydney have had a preliminary meeting to discuss how the RDC will strengthen itself to deliver SMART objectives, by recruiting more volunteers to specific and accountable roles, setting realistic time commitments for those roles and having a formal recruitment process to fill them.

This will allow us to then build our base of support for the RDC, including funding opportunities, and participants for 2025's Selection Accelerator. We will set a target number for this cohort, and employ a competitive application process to select those to fill the available spaces.

Chair's Reflections: It was a pleasure to be able to run the Access Accelerator and to have such an engaged group of people take part. Whilst it was a small number, the calibre was high and the interactions were meaningful. I'm very grateful to those who gave up their time to

speak to our cohort:

- Cllr Hina Bokhari AM
- Margaret Joachim MBE - Chair of the English Candidates Committee
- Bobby Dean - PPC for Carshalton and Wallington
- Victoria Collins - PPC for Harpenden and Berkhamsted
- Peter Truesdale OBE - Former Leader of Lambeth Council

We know that we must do better as a party overall when it comes to racial diversity. The RDC's ambition is clear. We have certainly learned a lot from running this smaller programme, learnings that will be used to help us refine and restructure our approach to this important area of need across our party.

Updates from State Parties

Report from the English Liberal Democrats -

Alison Rouse, Chair of The Liberal Democrats in England

As we hit an election year, it is all the more important that we all understand how things work and make our processes more accessible and understandable. Where to get support when something goes wrong and importantly when it goes right! In my speech to our Conference last Autumn, I gave a short explainer about how money flows and work that's done across the Party – as it was an area where members had fed back to me that they were unclear on, and would like more information. Others have approached me since, so I thought it would be useful to share this here so that more of you might have access to it.

How things work

The English State Party's only income comes from membership fees. Of that, we then pay an annual Federal Levy of over half of that amount to the Federal Party.

While some things are state party responsibilities, the English State Party relies on the support provided by HQ to deliver these services. These are covered by a Service Level Agreement – an agreement where the Federal Party are the supplier and we're the client. So, in addition to the lump sum of the Federal Levy, we pay a "service level fee" – a payment per every one of you.

We sometimes pay for credits to facilitate additional services: i.e. due diligence on candidates, which has meant we could focus on getting people in place and we're on track to have candidates in place for everything. A big

thank you is of course due to those people who stood in by-elections for us. It's such a different experience, with different challenges to face, when you are the sole focus of press and media attention.

Because we have now agreed to reduce the levy lump sum, we have moved some monies over to pay slightly more per member for services – covered by the Service Level Agreement, which the Federal Party reports against to let us know how things are going. This facilitates more transparency and accountability.

Benefits for you

As the Chair of the English State Party, I felt that, after some belt-tightening the Party did last year, it would not be fair to ask all of you, regions, local parties and members, to go into building for a general election without giving something back.

The financial changes that we negotiated above have meant that the Lib Dems in England have been able to achieve several goals that we set to improve things for Regions (and therefore Local Parties) at the start of the year:

1. As a result of these changes, the Lib Dems in England can now increase the regional rebate to 15%.
2. A more direct way of supporting you is our “Investing in Regions” project - where we give a grant to regions for staffing hours. So, there is an investment from us in staffing hours and capacity in your regions, which means they will be able to support you even more effectively. As a result of this new English State Party budget, funding is now more sustainable and will be able to continue on to provide this direct financial support through 2024 into 2025.

When we reviewed the project feedback from the last two years, it was clear that this investment by the English State Party made a difference when you looked at the results of local elections – and local infrastructure is crucial to winning constituencies.

We felt that it was the most direct way to help you to do what you KNOW how to do, work hard to spread a liberal vision.

Benefits across the State Parties

When Baroness Dorothy Thornhill published her report, she talked about cross-party communication and working together effectively rather than in silos.

The Lib Dems in England utilised our Federal Levy negotiations to provide a platform through which we have improved communication, consultation and transparency of the flow of money around our state party – with information being fed to your regional chair, executives and English Council representatives.

The three state parties (England, Scotland and Wales) have communicated with increased effectiveness throughout the Levy process and have continued to do so since. The creation of this forum has meant we are able to support each other, solve common problems quicker, and share the exact lived knowledge and experience that Thornhill highlighted as crucial in her report.

We have all committed to mechanisms to ensure that none of the parties would suffer a detriment as a result of the Levy negotiations, demonstrating a willingness to work together for the betterment of the Party as a whole.

FOR THE FUTURE?

Communication

As we look towards the Elections this year (because we have locals in some places and larger seats like Mayorals and Police, (Fire) and Crime Commissioners too) we commit to improving communication with you.

After having spoken with members across our organisation, from Council Group leaders to local party secretaries – after each English Council Exec or English Council, we commit to sending Local Party Officers an update DIRECTLY, to let you know about decisions made and/or guidance released that will impact on / make it easier for you to deliver your roles.

These emails will be as short and concise as possible - Please ensure that your post holders are updated on Lighthouse so that you don't miss out on this information.

FYI: There are 6 English Council Executive meetings and 3 English Council meetings a year. Your English Council Reps are elected at Regional level to represent you. You can contact your regional secretary for details of these members who are elected to represent you.

Capacity building

One of the criteria we ask Regions about for them to get funding via our Investing in Regions project is membership development.

In addition to the regional grant being paid by the English State Party to support membership development, we are looking to roll out an Intern Program to help build skills across English Regions. More on this to come (probably in one of those emails I mentioned above)

A reminder to us all

With what is going on around us in this country and the world at large, it is even more important to reach out to members of the public whether it's on

the phone during a phone banking session or on the doorstep when you are canvassing, to show them that a Liberal alternative is possible and that there is a place where they can fight for it.

There is a membership recruitment and retention incentive - an additional income specifically designed to reward the hard work you do on the ground locally to recruit new members and renew your existing members.

Information can be found on the Federal Party website – remember you must use the “join-local” or “renew – local” to ensure that it registers to you locally.

I close this update with good wishes to you all. It’s going to be an interesting/challenging year that we will get through even more successfully if we remember that we are all one Lib Dem Family, prepping for election/s, building capacity, raising funds and supporting each other. And that is how we will win.

All the best

Alison Rouse
Chair – The Liberal Democrats in England

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Report from the Scottish Liberal Democrats - Jenni Lang, Convener of the Scottish Liberal Democrats

It has been a busy year as we get our 150 Rising Strategy underway. Following internal Scottish Elections, I was returned unopposed as Convener for another two years. Other appointed Office Bearers include: Mike Gray, Treasurer; Charles Dundas, C&C; Neil Casey, Policy; Paul McGarry, Conference and Willie Wilson as President. We welcomed new committee members with a round half being new faces.

Scottish Parliament

As part of the preparations for the General Election, the party has developed its campaigns and policy offer to voters on issues including the sewage scandal, access to NHS dentistry, mental health and connectivity. These are designed to sit alongside the manifesto being drafted by the federal party and of which there will be a Scottish version.

Policy Committee

Over the last 12 months, Policy Committee has seen a new convener join the team, and the group have undertaken work on a number of policy areas of critical importance to the Party's plans for the forthcoming election cycle, as we move forward with our 150 Rising campaign.

During 2023, Policy Committee considered a number of reference backs from Conference, including a motion to bring the Scottish Party's policy on nuclear power into alignment with Federal Policy.

The Committee also worked closely with the Conference Committee to revamp the way policy is debated and new ideas generated, with the inception of 'mini-motions', allowing for quick-fire debates on succinct policy ideas leading to indicative votes. These debates were a revelation at our most recent Conference and encouraged participation from those who might not

otherwise speak in debates. Approved mini-motions are then passed to Policy Committee to consider in further detail and return to Conference.

Campaigns and Candidates

The Approved Candidates List has been audited with interviews carried out with any candidates about whom the party had concerns about their capabilities. There was a big push to select candidates in all new Westminster constituencies by the end of the year, by the end of December there were just 9 seats still to find a candidate. The list of approved Returning Officers has been refreshed and more training is planned to expand those numbers.

Over 100 wards have been identified as part of the 150 Rising project and door knocking is happening across more wards. This is a great opportunity to bring new candidates into the party.

There have been 33 applications for the next round of the Future Leaders scheme.

There were 2 sessions of the compulsory agents training in Scotland in 2023

We engaged with the Scottish Boundary Review. The final report will go to Ministers by 1st May 2025. Guidance was issued to local parties regarding boundary changes and Westminster selections. A seat tiering review was also carried out and no changes made.

By-election candidates were found for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Westminster) and a Council by-election in Tain.

Scottish Conference

This past year has been marked by new approaches and impactful debates and thought leadership, setting a new standard for political conferences in the UK.

Highlights from Dundee:

The Dundee conference was a standout event, marking the beginning of a year filled with dynamic ideas and conversations. The presence of Kira Rudik as our keynote speaker was a highlight, and had a packed room hanging on every word. This conference wasn't just a meeting; it was a catalyst for inspiration and action among all who attended.

Edinburgh:

In Edinburgh, we took steps with innovative initiatives like the "pay what you can afford" ticket pricing. This approach not only made the conference more accessible but also echoed our commitment to inclusivity. Another pioneering concept, the "mini monitions" for policy motions, was embraced enthusiastically, proving effective and popular. The conference was further elevated by the powerful contributions of our keynote speakers, Naxanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and Richard Ratcliffe, who shared their unique perspectives and experiences.

The Hamilton Conference:

Building on our success, we're excited to bring these successful innovations – the flexible ticket pricing and "mini monitions" – to our upcoming conference in Hamilton. These features have demonstrated their effectiveness in creating a more inclusive and dynamic conference.

As we move forward, our commitment remains to be at the forefront of hosting the most innovative and engaging political conferences in the UK. We're dedicated to continuously exploring fresh ideas, welcoming influential speakers, and fostering an environment of meaningful and impactful discussions.

Wales Report for Spring Conference 2024 - Tim Sly (President - Welsh Liberal Democrats)

A lot has been happening in Wales over the past six months.

New Boundaries

The new constituency boundaries came into force in Wales in the summer of 2023 and this has led to some reorganisation and consolidation of local parties as the number of Westminster seats has reduced from 40 to 32. It's also been an opportunity for local parties to review their constitutions and ensure these are in line with the model constitution published by the Welsh Party.

Most of the candidate selections for the new constituencies were completed by the end of January, along with three of the candidates for the four PCC areas in Wales.

Welsh Autumn Conference

Back in October, the Welsh Autumn Conference took place in Wrexham and was very well attended, despite heavy rainfall and flooding that occurred across much of Wales earlier in the week, closing rail lines and major roads. Members offered lifts on various party WhatsApp groups to ensure that almost everyone who wanted to attend was able to get there.

With keynote speeches by Jane Dodds, Ed Davey and Mark Pack, and a selection of good motions attracting strong debate, the conference was an undoubted success. As I write this, the Welsh Conference committee and party staff are finalising arrangements for the Spring conference in Cardiff on 2 & 3 March. With a record number of registrations, we are looking forward to another successful event.

By-election success

In Powys, where Lib Dems control the County Council in an arrangement with Labour, we won three by-election seats in quick succession – two in Crickhowell and another a few days later in Talybont, thus ensuring that we retained control of the council and cementing the Lib Dems as the party to beat the Conservatives in the enlarged Brecon, Radnor and Cwm-Tawe constituency.

Developing tomorrow's leaders

In November, the Leadership Programme held a residential weekend in Cardiff at the commencement of this training programme for future candidates and leaders. The aim of the programme is to increase the number of top quality candidates available to campaign in the 2026 Senedd elections and subsequent local elections, with a particular focus on those from under-represented backgrounds.

A cohort of ten members of the Welsh Party, selected from over 40 applicants, spent an intense weekend of training with sessions led by six experienced campaigners and trainers and led by Rachel Palma Randle of the Scottish Lib Dems. Feedback from the residential was very positive and this is now being followed up with a continuing programme of in-the-field training, action days, and mentoring.

Staffing Plan

During 2023, the Welsh Party Board established a working party to recommend a sustainable future staffing plan for the organisation. The aim was to establish a structure and associated staffing budget which would provide transparency in planning over a rolling five-year period, giving greater certainty in budgeting and providing staff with better longer-term visibility on their career options. This plan and its associated budget were approved by

the Board in November and work is now in progress to recruit for the new positions identified, and in particular to find a new Chief Executive.

Tim Sly

President, Welsh Liberal Democrats



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