

Reports to Conference

Spring 2022



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Federal Committee Reports

Federal Conference Committee - Nick Da Costa (Chair)

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

We've had a few changes to the membership of the Federal Conference Committee (FCC) in the last few months. Jennie Rigg ceased being the English Representative to the FCC and Jenni Laing stepped down as the Scottish Representative after becoming the new Convenor of the Scottish Lib Dems. We would like to thank them for their many years of service to the Federal Conference Committee and wish them all the very best for their new roles. We will miss them. At our agenda selection meeting in January, we welcomed their replacements, Matt McLaren as the English Party Representative and Paul McGarry as the Scottish Party Representative. We warmly welcome them to the committee and look forward to working with them.

Submission of motions

You can read a copy of my report regarding the preliminary agenda selection meeting on the Ad Lib section of the party website or on Lib Dem Voice (<https://www.libdems.org.uk/s22-motion-selection>). We did receive an interesting range of motions. We received 32 policy motions, one business motion, three constitutional amendments and five standing order amendments. As always, unfortunately, time is tight, and we cannot take all the motions submitted. We have worked on the timings in the agenda to try and get in as many of the motions submitted to Conference.

From the submitted motions, we selected 16 policy motions, one business motion, two constitutional amendments, and three standing order amendments. There are also slots for two emergency motions. The

Constitutional Amendment (and supporting Standing Order amendments) on the Board Reform relates to the work that the Federal Board has done on governance and the wider party consultation undertaken – you can find more information on the process here:

<https://www.libdems.org.uk/future-of-the-federal-board-what-members-say-t hey-want>. As this motion has a series of options, we will structure this in a series of votes, which will be explained further in the agenda and the Conference Extra.

At our selection meeting we discussed several papers and issues brought to the FCC. One of which was with regards to this report, and the information we publish relating to the non-selection of motions. Previously, the FCC had not provided the reason for why motions are not selected. We have taken on board lots of feedback and decided that it is only fair that we publish a summary of the feedback provided when this report is published. Whilst we do provide feedback to submitters of motions, it was felt appropriate that we do give the membership more information about why certain motions are not selected. This doesn't mean that the motions are not necessarily a good topic for debate, but in some cases their focus is either too narrow or the motion would benefit from additional drafting support and guidance, which the FCC offers through the drafting advice service.

We also had a very good discussion on the potential of a new type of topical policy debate at Conference, designed to be focused on a specific question. This could be an extension of a consultative session or a topical issue discussion, for example, where Conference would debate how to answer some of the broader challenges facing our society. Interesting ideas or solutions arising from the debate, which garner significant support, could then potentially be brought back to Conference at a future date. We hope that this may be a way of invigorating debate and discussion within the party on important issues without the requirement first to submit a motion on the matter. The FCC will continue to work on options to facilitate this style of debate, and we aim to debut variations of this format at the Autumn Conference in Brighton.

There was also a discussion held on tidying up the standing orders relating to submission of questions to Conference, and this has been brought forward to this conference by the FCC as a Standing Orders Amendment. We also reviewed the Reference Back procedures as there was a request that we look at how this process is undertaken at Conference. There was a good discussion amongst the Committee and the initial drafting put toward is being worked on further by the Committee for discussion at a future meeting of the FCC.

Online Conference – Spring 2022

We announced that the Spring 2022 would be a virtual conference due to concerns about large gatherings and restrictions that may be in place due to the ongoing pandemic; however, we want to encourage local and regional parties to look at organising their own in person events over the Conference weekend. Our amazing Conference Team have been working with ALDC on their Conference Live event which is taking place in York over the Conference weekend, and people who register for the ALDC event get a registration pass for the federal conference too.

We will again be using the Hopin platform to run Conference, which allows us to operate an auditorium with voting, fringes, and a full training programme. There remains the networking function that allows people to meet and chat together over the conference weekend.

We are aware that the exhibition function via Hopin is not ideal and that the virtual footfall to exhibition stands is lower than we all would wish; this is an experience that happens with many online conferences and exhibitions. We do want to see what we can do to improve on this in the future.

Some of the changes we made at the Spring Conference will be carried over to this Autumn Conference, including the compendium Agenda document which will be updated daily online with the relevant sections relating to Conference Extra and Conference Daily. We've continued to allow longer sessions for fringes and, based on the feedback from the previous Conference, had record attendance at the Fringe meetings.

Amendments should be submitted through the website (https://www.libdems.org.uk/conference_submissions), the deadlines for which are at the end of this report. If you are thinking of submitting an amendment or an emergency motion and would like assistance, you can submit a request for drafting advice.

Amendments and Emergency Motions will be considered by the Conference Committee at its meeting in March. Once again, we have set aside time for emergency motions. Those are motions on matters that have arisen since the original motions deadline. Again, those will be selected by the committee in March and if more motions are selected than time available on the agenda an email ballot will be undertaken using the Mi-Voice system, so please do keep an eye out for that. We will need Speakers Cards to be submitted much earlier than they would be at a physical conference so that we can plan debates most effectively.

If you want to speak at Conference, you must complete and submit an online Speaker's Card by, at the latest, 4pm on the day before the debate. If you are called to speak at this conference, the experience will be similar to the past two conferences. You will be contacted in advance by our production staff and talked through what will happen and given the opportunity to test your equipment. They will help you make the most of your speech. We welcome your feedback in every aspect of conference. After the event, there will be an online survey sent through to everyone who registered. We are keen to know how you thought it went, so please do complete the survey.

Deadlines

Please note that the next set of deadlines are:

Deadline for Amendments drafting advice is 14th February.

Deadline for Amendments, Emergency Motions and appeals against non-selection of motions: 13:00, 28th February.

Autumn 2022

The autumn conference will be held in person in Brighton, the dates for this are: 17 to 20 September. We will be aiming to provide further information on this in the next few months, and we look forward to seeing you in Brighton.

Thanks

None of what we do at Conference can be done without the amazing hard work of our dedicated Conference team; Susie Murray, Wilma Robinson, Daiva Buoziene and Amy McClelland. They do such an amazing job and none of this is possible without them. I would also like to pass our thanks to the entire team at HQ who do so much in the lead-up to and during conference.

A huge amount of work goes into the agenda, and I would like to thank Christian Moon and Joseph Wright and the policy team, and our designer Mike Cooper for their hard work on the agenda.

The Stewards, Moderating Team, and the HQ Support team are an essential part of online conference, and they are hard at work behind the scenes making sure that all is running well and that we all have an enjoyable conference. I would like to thank them as well as Mike Ross and Jodie Frapple, our Chief Steward and Deputy Chief Steward.

Thanks are also due to the BSL interpreting team, as well as to Hopin, the team at Vivid Productions and Chris Dann who make conference happen and designed the set and studio for us.

Finally, and by no means least, Conference would not be possible without the dedication and passion of the members of the Federal Conference Committee, and I would like to express my thanks to them for making this all happen.

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.

Committee priorities

FPC's responsibility is to oversee the party's policy-making process. We are keen to do this in a way which contributes most effectively to the party's political success – we want to develop policy which meets the party's political needs and demonstrates our approach to voters, to win us votes. We are closely following the party's research into messaging and policy needs and interests of our key voters, and are putting that at the centre of our work.

Policy development

Since the last conference the FPC has established a number of new working groups to develop policy on a series of topics which we have identified as politically relevant for the party looking towards the next general election. Input into these decisions from the communications and campaigns wings of the party has been invaluable. These include:

- A Fairer Society, chaired by Julia Goldsworthy, which has also taken up the work of the Universal Basic Income Group (and is being vice-chaired by the chair of that group, Paul Noblet);
- A Caring Society, chaired by Baroness Jolly, focussed around social care and carers, and working closely with the Leader's Commission on carers;
- Homes and Planning, chaired by Cllr Peter Thornton; and
- Early Years Education and Childcare, chaired by Cllr Dine Romero.

All of these groups will hold consultation sessions at this Spring Conference with a view to FPC bringing full papers to Autumn 2022.

We have also reached the stage in the political cycle where we need to be seriously preparing for the next General Election Manifesto. The FPC has therefore appointed a Manifesto Group to lead this work, working in consultation with the Parliamentary Party and building on the principles and values paper and themes paper (A Fairer, Greener, More Caring Society) from last Autumn. This will be chaired by Lord Newby and will also hold a consultation session this spring. FPC expects to present a Pre-Manifesto for debate in the Autumn so that conference will have a further opportunity to shape the party's election platform. The full membership of the group is as follows:

Lord Newby (Chair).

Sir Ed Davey MP

Jeremy Hargreaves

Cllr Lucy Nethsingha

Dr Christine Cheng

Cllr Lisa Smart

Wendy Chamberlain MP

Baroness Randerson

Munira Wilson MP

Cllr Josh Babarinde OBE

Two policy papers previously announced are being presented for debate at this Conference by FPC - the revised paper on Democracy and Public Debate, which has been amended to take account of the issues raised during the reference back discussion last Autumn; and a paper on Rebuilding Trade and Cooperation with Europe which has been drawn up by a group chaired by Duncan Brack.

The Natural Environment policy working group chaired by Richard Benwell is also holding a consultation session at this conference, and also plans to have a full paper ready for debate in the Autumn.

The FPC did receive a petition asking it to create a working group on Defence with a special focus on the nuclear deterrent. After discussion FPC decided not to do this. We are however aware that the party's defence spokesperson Jamie Stone MP is developing proposals in this area for submission to Conference.

Future policy development

This current programme of work will take us through to the Autumn of 2022. FPC will shortly be considering the next tranche of working groups to develop papers to come to conferences in the next 18 months or so, and we may have more to say in this is the Report session at conference. We will certainly be asking the Europe Group chaired by Duncan Brack to produce further material for debate next Autumn and Spring, as it has at this and the last conference, in light of the party's agreed approach on this question.

Working with the rest of the party

We continue to report on our meetings through our committee page on Facebook, at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/federalpolicycommittee>, the AdLib blog on the party's website (<https://www.libdems.org.uk/adlib>) and on Lib Dem Voice, and if you are interested in following our work as it develops you may find it of interest to follow these.

We are very pleased to be part of the Party Bodies Forum, comprised of AOs , and are working with these party interest groups to support them engaging as much as possible in policy development.

We also remain very keen to work as closely as possible with other federal committees. We have co-opted the Chair of the Elections Committee (FCEC) to FPC, and have also recently appointed Lucy Nethsingha to be our representative to the People Development Committee (FPDC), with a particular view to co-operating further on member engagement.

We are also keen to do anything else we can to support policy discussion across the party, either on our own work programme or on other topics, and welcome any suggestions about how we can do this further.

Personnel

Members of policy working groups play a very significant and unsung role in developing party policy. Working group chairs in particular take on a very significant task in steering topics through the party. We thank them all again for all their contributions, patience and insight.

We are very grateful to Christian Moon, Head of Policy, and Joe Wright the Policy Manager for their huge hard work in supporting our substantial programme of work.

Finally we would like to thank the members of FPC for their ongoing commitment to a very large and imaginative programme of work, with the committee continuing extremely well-attended and frequent meetings. We are currently planning to hold an in-person awayday this spring and look forward to continuing to work together, both online and physically together.

Federal Board - Mark Pack (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.

Our political prospects

Who would have thought last time we met for a Spring conference that we would have another two MPs by the time of our next one? Certainly not me! The wonderful victories of Sarah and Helen, their own brilliance as candidates and the huge effort so many people right across the party made, give us renewed confidence about our prospects in this May's elections.

But as we saw last year, success is not guaranteed. We will need to be at our very best to take the political opportunities that come our way in the coming year.

An important part of that will be contesting the May local elections - and really contesting them. Last time those seats were up for election both Labour and the Conservatives stood far more candidates than we did - with the resulting message to voters on far too many ballot papers that we're a second tier party. We need to continue to change that and continue to get better at standing in more council elections.

Winning more elections

To help us succeed, it's important the party, including the Federal Board working on your behalf, continues to implement the lessons of our 2019 election review, the Thornhill Review (<https://www.libdems.org.uk/2019-election-review>).

Our overriding aims as your Board are, as set out in the motion on party strategy agreed by autumn conference, to develop and communicate effectively a compelling political narrative with wide emotional as well as rational appeal to the electorate, and to remove from power this Conservative government that is failing the country.

At the time of writing, a major round of market research is underway to help us further develop the sort of messaging that featured in Ed Davey's speech at our last conference. Watch out for more news on that as we get the results and start to roll it out across the party.

The majority of what voters see from us comes through local grassroots campaigning, so we need to ensure that messaging research isn't just for the central operation. Rather, it needs to help inform what we all do right across the party.

We've maintained our investment in the greatly expanded network of campaign support officers across the country. Thank you to those in other parts of the party, including the three state parties and the English regions, who have made at times difficult decisions to ensure the continued funding of this larger team. We started to see last year the benefits it is bringing.

Alongside that breadth of our recovery, we are concentrating additional resources on the most winnable Westminster Parliamentary seats. With the first round of selections now completed, the Federal Communications and Elections Committee (FCEC) is conducting a review of how the selections have gone. By doing such a review much more promptly than usual, we'll be able to learn and benefit from any lessons much sooner than usual. Although candidate approval and selection is a matter for the state parties (English, Scotland and Wales), there is a useful role the federal party can play in supporting learning from the selections so far.

The focus on improving our diversity has shown through with 40% of the initial wave of target seat selections being won by candidates who self-declare as being a member of an ethnic minority. Project Stellar is now underway too, our programme designed to address the particular barriers faced by candidates from ethnic minority communities in order to ensure that we don't just improve on selections, but we also improve in election outcomes too.

We have much more work to do, but this progress shows that when we really put our minds and efforts to it, we can make our party more diverse and inclusive.

Board reform

To quote Dorothy Thornhill, who chaired that 2019 election review,

“It is clear to me that the diagnosis and recommendations my team and I set out after the failures of 2019 were right, and that they are being taken seriously. Not least among them was that a Federal Board of 41 members cannot, and should not, be the clear leadership team we need to steer our party and help us all win elections.

Something of that size is a talking shop, and talking shops are neither democratic nor effective.

I therefore welcome the Federal Board’s motion to Spring Conference setting out options for reforming the structure of the Board.”

You will see from the conference agenda that we have put forward the three most popular reform options that came out of our consultation with members last year. At the request of some Board members, the status quo is also included as an option.

Alongside that, there are other proposed reforms including one that I am very keen on - a no confidence option for the Party President. If I, or a successor, go off the rails, at the moment there is very little anyone can do about it. Instead, the party would have to suffer the damage wrought. So there’s a new power being proposed to no-confidence the President, with a safety net that members could choose to re-elect a no-confidenced President if they felt that action was unjustified.

That balances the need to be protected from a wayward President with preserving the ultimate power of choice for members, where it should be.

Party Awards

This conference sees the final piece in the jigsaw of improvements to our Party Awards so that we better thank and recognise those who make exceptional contributions to our party. The Awards now take place at both federal conferences each year.

This time we've got the final new award added to this roster - the Laura Grimond award. It is open to people working for the Party at a Federal, State, Regional, or Parliamentary/Scottish Parliamentary/Senedd level. It is a sister award to the Belinda Eyre-Brook award, which recognises local and community staff/campaigners.

I look forward to awarding the first winner at the close of our spring conference along with other impressive winners for the Albert Ingham, Bertha Bowness Fischer and Leader's awards.

Additional reform proposals at this conference

In addition to the Board reform motion mentioned, the Board is also proposing a clean up and simplification of the federal election regulations, learning a number of lessons from the last round of internal elections. Many thanks to Duncan Brack for carrying out a review of previous elections, which has greatly informed the new set of rules. Thank you also to everyone who responded to Duncan's consultations.

The Board has also taken the opportunity to act on initial feedback from the Vice President by-election held at the end of 2021, such as by speeding up the process for appeals after an election.

We are recommending replacing the current three different sets of rules (for Leader; for President and Vice President; and for party committees) with one combined set of rules. This preserves differences between how the elections are run, but means that common processes only need to be covered once, making the rules shorter, clearer, consistent and easier to update in future.

We have also got a constitutional housekeeping motion that sweeps up a set of other issues. These include making clear the rights of Liberal Democrat directly elected Mayors and, if we win future elections, Liberal Democrat Police and Crime Commissioners, to be properly represented under our constitution.

We are also proposing adopting the Scottish Party's model for indemnifying people who are made vulnerable to financial risk as a result of their good

faith and legitimate actions on behalf of the party. This would only apply in cases where people have been properly carrying out their roles and there is a limit on the cover that might be provided.

Among the other items, the proposals also continue our programme of simplifying the party's necessary bureaucratic overheads by stripping out the duplication caused by several different committees running their own registers of interest and instead introducing one combined federal register.

Improving our website and internal communications

Previous reports to conference have covered the initial set of content improvements made to the main party website, <https://www.libdems.org.uk>. At the time of writing, we have just finalised the budget and scope for the major round of technical improvements I mentioned in the Q&A at the last conference.

With Sian Waddington now taking on responsibility for membership at HQ, a clear strategic plan for internal communications is being put in place. We need to think ahead to what we know will cause questions or confusion and then preempt that with good internal communications in advance. Watch out for more news as the new team gets into place over the coming months.

Complaints process

Both the number of outstanding complaints and the average time taken to deal with complaints have continued to drop since our last conference. There are also promising signs that the new procedures reported to autumn conference are having a welcome impact in making the system more efficient.

At that conference members raised concerns about how the party's independent complaints process interacts with complaints processes that already cover local councillors. The Board therefore agreed to consult with those who run our process and with our local government community. I'm glad to report that agreement was reached on changes to improve our complaints system.

These are now being reported to our spring conference, with an initial set of changes to come into effect right away and then a second set to come into effect from 1 August.

The immediate changes will:

- Make clear that a Complainant may appeal after a Panel hearing even if a complaint is upheld (change to 6.13 in Part 1 of the rules);
- Correct some cross-references (changes to 7.1, 7.3 and 7.5 in Part 1 of the rules); and
- When the complaints process waits for a case to be processed first by another complaints system (e.g that which covers MPs), then the change will ensure that the party's complaints process cannot be unduly delayed, and also that any eventual ruling does not have to be bound by what that other process found (change to 2.3 in Part 2 of the rules).

The 1 August changes will then also provide for a council group's own internal process to be able to look at a case first, as long as they have one that is fit for purpose. The council group will then report back to the disciplinary system for a final decision on the complaint. As part of this, the ALDC model standing orders for council groups are being tweaked to make sure they match the changes. It will take a little time to make sure all council groups know about this, and so this change is scheduled for 1 August rather than for immediate effect.

Thank you to everyone who has worked on these changes and the knock-on alterations to council group standing orders.

Thank you

The Board's work would suffer massively were it not for the ever excellent support of the party's Company Secretary, Jack Coulson, and that of Georgia Potter, Executive Assistant to the Chief Executive and President. Georgia is now on maternity leave and her role is being admirably covered by Kay Aydin. Thank you to all of them and the other staff under the leadership of our Chief Executive, Mike Dixon, who the Board works with.

New Election Regulations

The Board is proposing new internal party election regulations for ratification by conference. These will be debated as conference item F20 at 15:50 on Saturday March 12th and the full text is included in the agenda. The existing regulations, which are split into three separate documents, are printed in the federal party constitution document, available at <https://www.libdems.org.uk/constitution>.

Complaints process changes in detail

The changes to the complaints process being reported to conference as part of the Board report (item F27 at 11:20 on Sunday March 13th) are set out below. To see the existing rules in full see <https://www.libdems.org.uk/complaints-procedure>.

To see how the rules look with the initial changes in effect see <https://bit.ly/ComplaintsInitial> and to see how the rules look with all the changes in effect see <https://bit.ly/ComplaintsAll> or, if you have difficulty accessing the documents, email president@libdems.org.uk for a copy.

Changes to take immediate effect from report to Conference

Words to be added are shown in ***italicised bold***.

IN PART 1:

- Amend paragraph 6.13 by inserting the bolded text: "...the Respondent ***and/or the Complainant*** may"
- Update the cross references in paragraphs 7.1 and 7.3 to refer to paragraph 6.6 (not paragraph 6.5)
- Update the cross reference in paragraph 7.5 to refer to paragraph 6.13 (not paragraph 6.9)

IN PART 2: Amend paragraph 2.3 with the addition of the bolded text:

If the referee provides a report and final decision within a month of delivery of the Standards Office's written request under paragraph 2.2, the Complaint shall be referred to the Senior Adjudicators' Team who shall appoint a Panel, which shall make its decision as to whether to uphold the Complaint based on the report **and any other evidence** the Standards Office has received **(and for the avoidance of doubt the Panel shall not be bound by the findings of any report and decision provided). In the event that a report and final decision are not provided within one month, the Complaint shall be dealt with from that date under this complaints procedure.**

Changes to take effect from 1 August 2022

INSERT INTO "PART 2 – Extra Steps" AS A NEW PARAGRAPH 3:

3. Complaints against elected councillors

3.1. Where any Complaint is made about the conduct of a member who is an elected councillor who is part of a recognised Liberal Democrat council group (a **Group**), the Lead Adjudicator shall contact the Group via any of its officers and ask them to confirm within 10 working days that all three of the following conditions are met:

3.1.1. **Power under the standing orders:** the Group's standing orders contain a process for the Group to handle complaints against their members; and

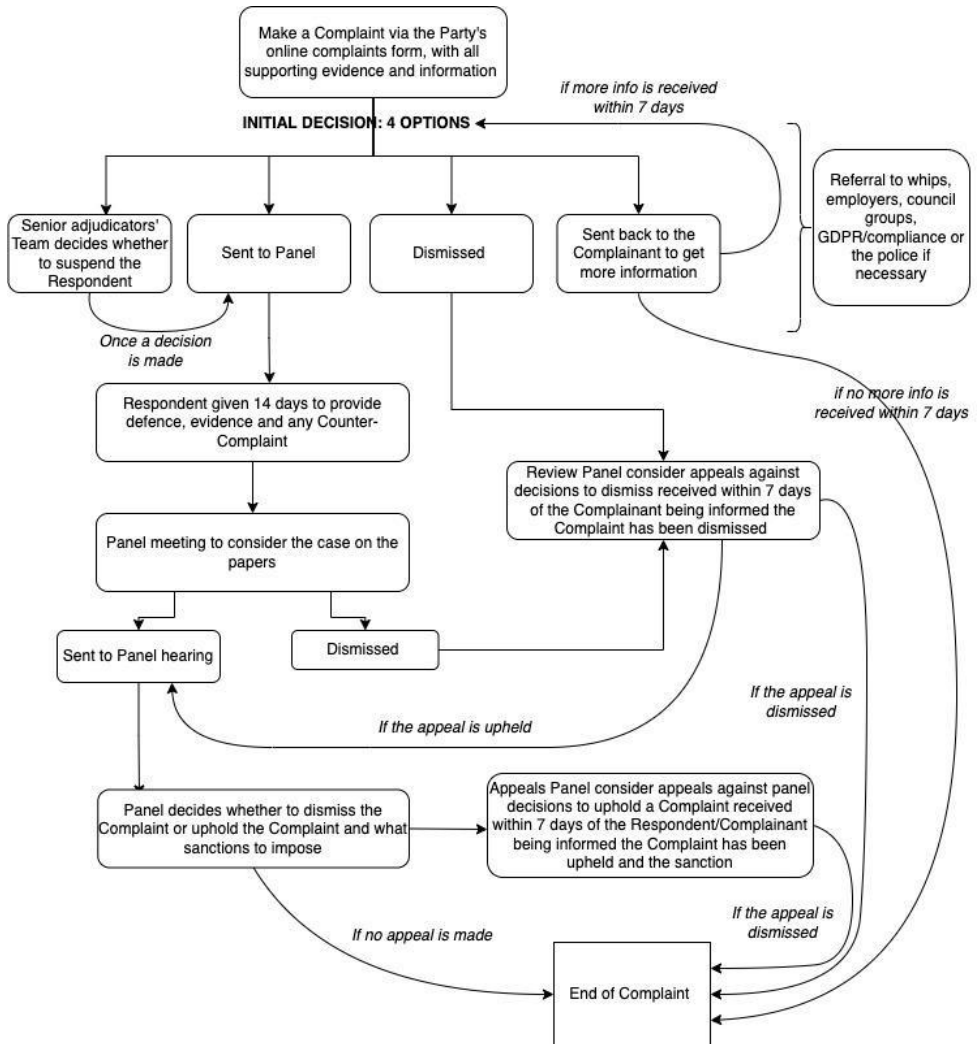
3.1.2. **Capacity:** the Group considers either (a) that it has the capacity to deal with the complaint, or (b) the group does not have the capacity to deal with the complaint but it has requested that the regional or state party identify another council group (the **Nominated Group**) which is able to deal with the complaint and this request has been agreed to by the relevant regional or state party and the Nominated Group. Reasons why a Group may not feel able to deal with a complaint include – without limitation – a complaint involving all the members of the Group who could run the group's internal complaints process, or incapacity among

Group members who would otherwise be required to run the process; and

- 3.1.3. **Relevance:** the subject matter complained about relates to events taking place, or the respondent's conduct when acting, in the course of their role as an elected councillor.
- 3.2. If the Group confirms within 10 working days that all three conditions are met, the Group shall apply their standing orders or procedures first before this complaints process applies. However, if any or all of the conditions in 3.1.1, 3.1.2 or 3.1.3 are not met, or the Group fails to confirm within 10 working days whether they are met, or if the response is that the Group does not wish to deal with the complaint, the Complaint shall be dealt with from that date under this complaints procedure.
- 3.3. If confirmation is given under 3.1, three months after receiving this confirmation the Standards Office shall write to the Group (or if 3.1.2(b) applies, to the Nominated Group) requesting a report as to the progress of their investigation and, if a final decision has been made, (i) a report of the findings of their investigation, (ii) the final decision reached within their own process and (iii) a recommendation as to any additional sanction to be applied under this complaints process. The Standards Office shall then report any response to the Senior Adjudicators' Team.
- 3.4. If the Group (or if 3.1.2(b) applies, the Nominated Group) provides a report and final decision within a month of delivery of the Standards Office's written request under paragraph 3.3, the Complaint shall be referred to the Senior Adjudicators' Team who shall appoint a Panel, which shall make its decision as to whether to uphold the Complaint based on the report and any other evidence the Standards Office has received (and for the avoidance of doubt the Panel shall not be bound by the findings of any report and decision provided). In the event that a report and final decision are not provided within one month, the Complaint shall be dealt with from that date under this complaints procedure.

- 3.5. If no Complaint has been made under this system, and instead a complaint is made directly to a recognised Group then unless the standing orders of the Group contain an alternative process:
- 3.5.1. if the Group considers that the complaint relates to events taking place, or the conduct of the elected councillor when acting, in the course of their role as an elected councillor and their final decision recommends a sanction which can be applied under this complaints process, they shall inform the Standards Office on completion of their investigation of their final decision and the recommended sanction and provide a copy of their investigation report to the Standards Office. The Standards Office shall then register a Complaint in the case management system against the elected councillor (with the Group as Complainant) and refer the matter to the Senior Adjudicators' Team who shall appoint a Panel, which shall make its decision as to whether to uphold the Complaint based on the report the Standards Office has received; or
- 3.5.2. If the Group considers that the complaint does not relate to events taking place, or the conduct of an elected councillor when acting in the course of their role as an elected councillors but there are grounds for a Complaint under this complaints process they can refer the person making the complaint to this complaints process.

INSERT A NEW APPENDIX 2 AS FOLLOWS:



Vice President - Amna Ahmad

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

I am honoured to have been elected by party members to the role of Vice President. I would like to thank our former VP, Isabelle Parasram, for her excellent work in the role for the last six years. I am grateful to Isabelle and her advisors for welcoming me into the role and providing an excellent foundation from which we can further build on the party's engagement with ethnic minority communities, from campaigning, candidates and policy work. As a party, we know we can do better on diversity and inclusion, but we are increasingly understanding that we must do better for improved electoral success into the future. This year, I look forward to working with the VP candidates, SAOs, state parties, local parties, Federal Board and members to further this mission, and truly live our values.

Working together

This is the first time the role has been elected and I am grateful to all the VP candidates for giving their time and energy to the contest. I also want to thank members for their support and for asking the right questions. The contest highlighted agreement amongst all candidates on the urgent need for mobilisation and action on diversity from HQ to state and local parties. We must implement the changes outlined in the Alderdice Review, Thornhill Review, and more recently, the commissioned HQ report by external agency Diversity Matters, but, to do it properly, we need to work together. If we do not act now we will miss the opportunity to win more votes and more seats.

Selecting diverse candidates & increasing membership

As a former target seat candidate, I know that great campaigns, hard work and great candidates help us win seats. This year is no different and, as you are selecting your council and Parliamentary candidates, I urge you to think

about your local community, how you might reach a different demographic (i.e. presentation to a community group on standing for council, for example), and how to retain talented people who already volunteer. When I talk to councillors, they often tell me that they got involved after becoming interested in a local issue or because somebody spoke to them. Getting a full slate of candidates can be hard work and reaching out to ethnic minority communities can make the task easier now and particularly in development seats where you are thinking about a longer term strategy. If you'd like to know more then check out resources from LDCRE, RDC, ALDC and the Lib Dem LGA Group. The country is becoming more diverse every day and we can no longer run to keep up. We must lead the way.

Autumn Party Awards

The VP role relies on volunteer support from our members and as a former candidate, I know how hard local party volunteers work. If you know someone who deserves recognition then please submit them for Party Awards at Autumn Conference. It would be great to lift up those who work hard. Please also signpost those struggling with conference costs to the Access Fund, organised by HQ.

Get involved

Would you like to get involved? Do you have questions? Please email me on vice.president@libdems.org.uk. I'm looking for advisors on a range of relevant issues and welcome conversations.

Thank you to Mark Pack, Party President, for the warm welcome.

Federal Finance and Resources Committee - Anthony Harris (Party Registered Treasurer, Chair)

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.

2021 Financial Progress and 2022 Outlook

It has always been the case that elections are good for our Party. The year 2021 has proved this twice with our fabulous successes in Chesham and Amersham in June, and North Shropshire in December. My congratulations to our two newest MPs, Sarah Green and Helen Morgan.

In years without general elections, it is much harder to fundraise because members and major donors alike are particularly attracted to supporting general elections. However, 2021 has provided these two key events which has stimulated donations and goodwill from supporters and members alike.

Despite that boost, the financial aftereffects of the global pandemic have continued to challenge us and, although we are grateful to our donors and the support of our members, the extra income from these by-elections largely filled the holes, rather than brimmed the financial 'cup'. As members will be aware, the pandemic still impinges on our ability to run physical conferences, and to run fundraising events. Also, many of our members and donors have felt the financial pinch of the pandemic and have had to review their giving. Once again I offer my grateful thanks to our loyal members and donors who have continued to be generous. However, overall donations have continued to be down when compared with pre-COVID years.

I have already reported to previous conferences on our revised financial controls, and long and medium-term forecasting abilities, which now allow us to predict our finances up to two to three years in advance. More importantly, these forecasts have allowed the FFRC, working closely with our CEO and Financial Controller, to carefully monitor our progress, and to react early to any financial storms on the horizon, before they have the potential to flood our decks. This process has worked extremely well for us. We remain in positive financial territory, and our financial outlook and cash position are both good (although more donations would of course make them much better). We now close our month ends within a few days of the last day of the month. This process allows FFRC and the management team to track our finances in real-time, to spot any variations from our forecasts, and to react immediately with any changes necessary. I would like all our members and donors to know that we greatly appreciate your financial support and that we look after the money that you give us very carefully indeed.

Prior to COVID, in the autumn of 2019, we established a budget for 2020 and beyond. However, once the pandemic had set in, it became clear that this budget would not be achievable. Therefore, we battened down the hatches, trimmed the sails, and set course for unknown territories with a new, 'revised budget'. We considered this revision would maintain our hard-won financial stability and would bring us safe to the harbour of the next general election. Towards the end of 2021 the FFRC and the State Parties worked closely together on a new revised budget for 2021, and beyond, as part of a new cooperative budgeting process which we expect to form a model for future years. I would like to thank the chairs of the State Parties for their hard work, dedication, and cooperation in agreeing this new financial arrangement with the Federal Party. It sets us in extremely good stead as we approach 2023 and beyond.

During 2021 the FFRC also worked closely with the CEO and COO on a budget for our new offices. This move has now been completed and the financial overheads that were associated with our Westminster property have been substantially alleviated. Reducing our financial drain in this area, something

that many members have commented on at previous conferences, has proved to be a welcome relief. The new, and improved working environment for our HQ staff has definitely been worth the initial capital outlay. A better environment for our permanent staff leads to better staff retention, and higher productivity from a happier workforce.

The elected members, and chair, of the FFRC are all unremunerated volunteers. My thanks to all these members of FFRC who continue to work so hard to provide strategic and detailed oversight of our financial affairs and controls thereby ensuring that these remain robust. Also, I continue to be grateful to Fern McLurg, our Financial Controller, and the entire HQ finance team for their continuing hard work and dedication towards helping to steer our financial ship and keep it on a steady course.

Compliance

I would like to thank our local party treasurers who assist us with complying with election law (PPERA). Thanks to your dedication, and the dedication of our HQ compliance team, ably captained by Kerry Buist, there have been some substantial improvements in Local Party reporting. This is especially the case with respect to late donations, loans, and loan repayments.

However, although this is an improving picture, we are still not where we need to be in terms of our compliance with PPERA and I must ask all local Party treasurers and chairs to continue to be vigilant. We ask you to report donations, loans, and loan repayments as soon as they are received (via our LIGHTHOUSE system) to avoid committing an offence under the PPERA Act.

My grateful thanks to Kerry, through whom we have an excellent working relationship with the Electoral Commission. However, If the Commission sees late reporting by local Parties then they will open an investigation. That is why it is extremely important that you provide the compliance department with a 'reasonable excuse' if you slip up. Without this, it is impossible for our compliance team to support you, and much more likely that the Electoral Commission will levy a fine. Such fines are now passed on directly to the local Party concerned and can be punitive. Please help us to help you by giving this

area of compliance your top attention and do take advantage of the extensive training and support options available from our compliance department. Having said this, I do know that most treasurers, agents, chairs, and other party officers work hard to remain compliant. My thanks to them and to the entire compliance team, including data protection, for helping to keep us all on the straight and narrow.

Checking of Donations for Permissibility

When donors pledge or give £25,000 and above, their due diligence profile is subject to scrutiny by a wider group, beyond the Fundraising Team. The profile is shared initially with the Chair of the Federal Audit and Scrutiny Committee (FASC). Should there be any negative comment then the decision to accept or not is passed to the following panel of three people who must agree unanimously to proceed: the Party Treasurer, the Registered Treasurer (Chair of FFRC), and the Chair of FASC. The Party Leader can also veto a donation if they are concerned about its potential ramifications. Declarations of donations, statements of accounts, and Party campaign expenditure are on the Electoral Commission website.

Federal Communications and Elections Committee - Lisa Smart (Chair)

The Federal Communications and Elections Committee (FCEC) oversees the implementation of the Party's strategy in relation to elections, campaigns and communications.

Since we reported to the party's Autumn Federal Conference in September, the Federal Communications and Elections Committee (FCEC) has been working on a number of projects to achieve our main aim – to get more Liberal Democrats elected.

We've been making steady progress in doing just that in by-elections across the country with some notable gains against both the Conservatives and Labour. The win that made the most headlines was Helen Morgan's fabulous victory to become the Lib Dem MP for North Shropshire. A huge thank you must go to everyone who contributed to that win. A particular thank you to those people who came to campaign for the first time and caught the campaigning bug.

FCEC has taken regular reports from campaigns and communications staff as we learn from what has worked well in the past and where we need to concentrate our efforts more in future.

We've looked at our approach to by-elections and confirmed that, unless there are truly extraordinary circumstances, we should always stand a candidate. This applies to elections at every level. Voters should always have the opportunity to put a cross (or a number 1) in the Lib Dem box and we were very grateful to the work of Lord Stunell and Cllr Anood Al-Samerai in bringing together a report which made a number of recommendations about how we as a party could tighten up our working on this in regard to local elections.

We've kept a regular eye on activity levels in our most winnable parliamentary seats and it's been good to see real progress being made with the selection of

candidates in most of those (at the time of writing). We've commissioned a report to make recommendations on how the selection process could be improved.

Much of the work we have been doing as a committee has been embedding long-term strategies looking to support more Lib Dems into elected office so that we can represent and improve our communities. Every single Lib Dem member has a role to play in those efforts and we look forward to continuing to work with you all.

We have a huge round of local elections in May with all councillors up for election in Wales, Scotland, London and Cumbria among others. We are a political party and we exist to fight and win elections. As we showed in North Shropshire, a team of committed Lib Dems can achieve wonderful and remarkable things.

Federal People and Development Committee - Mary Regnier-Wilson (Chair)

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

Introduction

The Federal People Development Committee (FPDC) brings together three key functions of the party: training, diversity engagement, and membership recruitment, retention and activation. This includes overseeing party strategy in these areas, supporting staff with specific tasks that help deliver the strategy, coordinating activity with other committees and supporting the party's Affiliated Organisations with membership and diversity.

The FPDC has 18 voting members: the Party President; the Vice-President responsible for working with BAME 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.

FPDC Work Programme

Our 2021 Work programme was set out as below for the following 12 months. Progress has been mixed due to competing priorities within the HQ teams, staff changes and delays in the complex process of fixing our technology and data.

Membership	Ensure the party has a robust and ambitious member recruitment and retention strategy for the long term
	Support staff to prioritise improvements to membership data according to local party need, and ensure changes are implemented
	Continue efforts to improve internal communications plans
	Increase resource-sharing and advice for local parties on membership recruitment, retention, engagement and activation
Diversity	Oversee the implementation of recommendations from the Party Bodies Review 2020
	Oversee 'task and finish' diversity strategy commissioned by HQ
	Ensure the FPDC and the wider party have the opportunity to feed into the diversity strategy
	Trial a regular 'surgery' with State, Regional and Local Diversity Champions
Training	Oversee the development of a holistic federal training strategy, encompassing all training providers within the party
	Create a training audit and recommendations
	Support staff in creating a system to improve the recording of training
	Support staff in expanding the number of accredited volunteer trainers and ensure their skills are used effectively
	Increase support for trainers and establish a Trainer Compact
Liaise with Federal Conference Committee around training Communications and prioritisation	

Membership

We now have a new interim director of Membership Operations, Sian Waddington, who is making progress in renewing plans for engaging our less active members and understanding more about the different levels of interaction they wish to have with the party.

We have made improvements to communications with our members. On emails we have reduced the number of email fundraising requests (and given members the ability to pause fundraising emails for a set period) to address a perception from more active members that too many emails were simply asking for money. We've also started sending longer emails - most recently sharing detailed data and strategy about the North Shropshire by-election - which have been well received. Quarterly online briefings by the President and CEO to different groups, where we have again been more open about strategy and progress have also been well attended and received. Over the next year we'll be looking to get more detailed feedback from our active members on our internal communications and the support offered to them by various parts of the party.

There have been technical delays in the project to Fix our Data and provide Local Parties with tools they need to effectively communicate with and engage their own members. But we have now transitioned to in-house management of our systems, and signed a contract with Prater Raines to develop new websites and integrated email tools and will be involving members in the development of these over the next few months, ensuring that user need is at the centre of our plans.

The decline in membership numbers has continued, but slowed further as we have reached the 2nd year post the 2019 influxes around the European Parliament and General Elections. We remain deeply concerned at overall levels of recruitment and retention, whilst accepting that these are often driven by external factors out of our control. During recent By-elections, regular Maraphones were run to contact nearby members to ask them to get involved, and thank them for having done so. We are planning to utilise this same format

outside of large By-elections to help and encourage local parties to have conversations with all their members.

We have refreshed the online guidance for Local Party Officers, and welcome the support of the Campaigns department in providing guidance and resources for LPO's, and the excellent work done by the Compliance department to support treasurers. Over the next 6 months we will be working with state and regional parties to develop a system of Local Party Health Checks, so we can ensure all Local Parties have the support they need to perform effectively.

We have held a consultation on the current Members Code of Conduct, and will be bringing forward proposed changes in this to a future conference.

Diversity

FPDC has welcomed the formation of the working group on Equality, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, chaired by the Chief Operating Officer. We have been pleased to see the progress they have made in creating a Strategy and Policy document, and on completion of some short term goals. One of the first concrete tasks was gathering a greater range of diversity information from more members, and creating a diversity dashboard within Lighthouse which will allow Local Party Officers to analyse the diversity of their own party benchmarked against local demographics and other geographic areas of the party.

Autumn Conference passed the Party Bodies Review Group's motion to change the constitutional status of Party Bodies to a single Affiliated Organisation, and we are managing the (relatively simple) process to switch existing AO's and SAO's to the new status. As part of that we will soon be giving them the ability to use Lighthouse to manage their membership data and financial reporting.

Training

A consultation plan has been developed that will enable us to build a holistic training strategy for the party, encompassing all providers and users. This strategy will focus on training requirements from a member point of view, rather than an institutional one.

Staff have already created a training module in Lighthouse. This ensures that all training delivered by the Federal Party is recorded in Lighthouse, with materials linked, and details of all sessions and attendees stored. This has already reduced duplication and increased efficiency within the programme of Federal training delivered, and as use of the system grows will be spread to encompass training delivered by some other parts of the party. The linkage of the training module with membership details will allow us to develop training pathways within the party.

Thanks

I would like to thank Bess Mayhew - the former Chair of FPDC who stepped down to go on maternity leave, leaving me with both a hard act to follow and excellent plans. And also all members of FPDC, especially Secretary Abi Bell for her organised work.

On behalf of FPDC I would like to thank all the staff who have worked with us - including Mike Dixon, Trudy Church, Sian Waddington, Katy Perryment, Chessie Flack and Jon Alwyn. My particular thanks go to Greg Foster, the former head of membership, who has taken up a new role as Head of Technology and Jack Coulson, who has been an invaluable source of knowledge, advice and support.

Federal International Relations Committee - Phil Bennion (Chair)

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

The Report to Autumn Conference was submitted in June 2021, and much of this report relates to events prior to Autumn Conference 2021.

ALDE Congress took place in June as an online event for the first time. We fielded a delegation of 40, which was diverse in all the required aspects and more. Our delegation included a number of EU nationals resident in the UK as well as UK nationals resident in Europe. The delegation had met in advance to agree positions and policy staff had been consulted. Despite the Working Groups at Congress overrunning by several hours, we stuck it out and our policy objectives were achieved and no red lines were crossed. Despite being very late getting organised, due to the International Officer being on furlough and the death of the Chair, the delegation was satisfied with the outcomes. Timmy Dooley of Fianna Fail and Ilhan Kyuchyuk of MRF Bulgaria are sharing the role of acting President until the 2022 Congress. David Burke, also of Fianna Fail was elected Treasurer. Sal Brinton, our Bureau member, was not up for election last year, but her place will be up for election in June 2022.

FPC set up a policy group on relations with the EU, under the Chairmanship of Duncan Brack, including the FIRC Chair and LDEG Chair as members. LDEG Chair David Chalmers organised a series of events looking at The Conference on the Future of Europe and the UK's future relationship with the EU. There were several regional events culminating in a national event, all taking place online during October. The speakers included an FPC member and an MEP for each group, plus other internal and invited speakers. Several hundred party members took part in the events, which were a great success as both a consultation and in maintaining our links with sister party MEPs.

With the rapid takeover of Afghanistan FIRC held an emergency meeting in August to discuss the situation. Our main concerns were safe passage for vulnerable groups and the pressure that might be applied to the Taliban to form an inclusive government. There was a consensus on non-recognition and working on potential exit routes for the vulnerable. George Cunningham was tasked with drafting an urgency resolution for LI ExCom and an emergency motion was also planned for Autumn Conference. In the event we fed into an emergency motion from WLD and others. Our House of Lords team in particular have been engaged in cross party efforts to find routes out for the vulnerable and this work continues, partly in cooperation with colleagues from Canada.

Liberal International Executive Committee (LI ExCom) took place online on 1st October. There were a number of new applicants to join, and Joyce Onstad and I attended the scrutiny sessions. The most controversial new member is Yesh Atid from Israel, who are the largest party in the new coalition government. They scored very well in their defence of liberal values around diversity and freedom of expression. Their response to my question regarding settlements was acceptable, but their response to Joyce's question on the future of Jerusalem was not. In our view this was their only failure point and given that they had full support from the Arab Liberal Federation, we voted in favour. We have been questioned about this by some party members in the time since, but the vote to admit them was almost unanimous and their youth movement is active in IFLRY, so the application was also strongly supported by Young Liberals.

Due to the extension of mandates until June 2022, Robert Woodthorpe Browne has continued to serve on the LI Bureau and I have continued as Vice Chair of the LI Human Rights Committee and its representative on the LI Climate Justice Committee. Our Working Group on the Link Between Environment and Human Rights has completed its work and the final draft will be presented to the next Congress in June.

LIBG has continued to hold interesting debates under the Chairmanship of Adrian Hyyrylainen-Trett, (now Secretary of FIRC) including an appearance by LI Bureau member Kitty Monterrey, whose party was banned in Nicaragua just before the recent election and most of its leaders imprisoned by the Ortega regime. Kitty had escaped the country on horseback. LIBG and LDEG have worked effectively with sister parties in Poland and Hungary to counter the threats to LGBT+ rights in those countries. Irina von Wiese, my former MEP colleague, has been elected as the new Chair of LIBG and will now join FIRC.

At our own Autumn Conference FIRC members were involved in drafting motions on The Uyghur Genocide, Cultural Ties with Europe, International Trade (substantially drafted by Paul Reynolds), Afghanistan and Supply Chains. We had at least one speaker in each of those debates as well as in numerous fringes. Many of our speakers experienced serious technical problems and many were unable to join debates because of the problems with Hopin. . My own attempts to Chair three events (two to diplomats) from my iPad were chaotic, as it was impossible to unmute, and we were unable to bring in Ilhan Kyuchyuk MEP or play the video from Reinhard Butikofer MEP for the China fringe. Andrew Adonis was unable to be heard in the Europe fringe and LDEG Chair David Chalmers invited me to speak as a replacement with 5 minutes notice, before reading out Adonis's speech after it was emailed. Graham Watson was also unable to join the fringe where he was speaking, along with the others speaking from overseas and the fringe was abandoned.

Lib Dems Abroad (LDA) have taken an active role in FIRC and have been engaged in submissions to the Elections Bill. They have been working with several members of the House of Lords, particularly the recently retired Paul Tyler, but many others including Ben Stoneham, Andrew Stunnel and William Wallace, on amendments. George Cunningham also gave verbal evidence at Committee stage and the LDA Steering Group met with former minister Chloe Smith. Their efforts are focussed on improving voting rights for expats in UK General Elections.

FIRC China subcommittee has continued its work on bringing together a comprehensive policy position on China in cooperation with our parliamentary team and Policy Advisor Will Cowie. We will have a fringe on China at the Spring Conference and plan to bring a policy motion to Autumn Conference 2022.

The FIRC Europe subcommittee held an emergency meeting in January to discuss the situation with the build-up of Russian troops on the Ukrainian border. In conjunction with LDEG and LIBG they will hold a Zoom event and FIRC plan a fringe at Spring Conference.

Our subcommittee on marketing, publicity and fundraising chaired by John Kelly continues to wrestle with the problem of ALDE money coming back to the Liberal Democrats for projects being interpreted as foreign donations. We are meeting with Compliance shortly and I had a constructive meeting with the Director General of ALDE in Rome to discuss possibilities. We have also discussed conflicts of interest regarding donations from individuals who may be closely allied to other governments. We have continued to discuss changes regarding the employment of our International Officer.

In December ALDE held its Council meeting in Rome as a hybrid event. Half of our 10 delegates were present in person; the other half online. Mark Valladares asked questions on the budget, as COVID had resulted in a big underspend, due to the lack of an in person Congress for 2 years. Two new members were admitted, Strategy Builder from Georgia and the Freedom Party from Latvia. Both have parliamentary representation.

We passed several urgency resolutions, including one on the threats of a Russian invasion of Ukraine. We also overturned the Bureau recommendation on an urgency on Nordstream 2 and voted to oppose its certification, despite opposition from the FDP, who are now in the new German coalition. The vote and debate may well have helped the FDP review their position. Others included the humanitarian crisis on the Poland-Belarus border, where our intervention toughened the language, on Nicaragua and the descent into dictatorship, and for a diplomatic boycott of the winter Olympics in Beijing.

We withdrew our urgency on Afghanistan when the Council voted to strike out our text on the rights of women and the LGBT+ community on the grounds that it was unrealistic to expect such from the Taliban. We considered this part of the text fundamental to our resolution which was in full alignment with the position of the international community. We intend to take some updated text to the next Congress in Dublin in June.

Sal Brinton updated Council on progress with rethinking the structure of individual membership. There have been problems in that the individual members do not have the infrastructure required to act in the same way as a political party in areas such as discipline, accountability and conformity with GDPR. Various options are being explored. The new rules regarding non-EU individual members given to us by the EP secretariat has forced us to downgrade them to associates, so we now have a two tier system, which is unsatisfactory. Consultation will continue and firm proposals come to Congress in June.

The Bureau Policy Group on Jobs and Growth chaired by Dita Charanzova MEP held its first meeting. I was present as a member of this policy group. We discussed Strategic Autonomy in the face of sanctions against human rights abusers in China and Russia and also supply chains disrupted for other reasons such as COVID. We had a clear consensus that we should not abandon our commitment to free trade, but that targeted sanctions should not be shirked in the case of human rights abuses and other unacceptable international behaviour.

An additional ALDE Policy Group on China is being set up at our request. George Cunningham, David Chalmers and I met with the Group's Chair, Henrik Bach Mortensen at the end of the Council meeting to discuss its remit and expectations.

Federal Audit and Scrutiny Committee - Helena Cole (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.

Over the past 6 months since the previous report to Federal Conference the Federal Audit and Scrutiny Committee has continued to receive regular feedback on how the recommendations from the Thornhill Report are being implemented. The committee has access to a live document updated regularly by the LDHQ team and can report that things are being progressed despite the uncertain times that we all find ourselves in.

Over the period since Autumn 21 FASC have appointed new auditors to the Federal party and will work with them on the audit of the 2021 accounts. However, the main focus of the past few months has been an in-depth look at the complaints process. This is much improved since conference made some changes, but FASC have been investigating if further changes might improve things further. The results of this review are due soon after conference and we will report back in the Autumn.

FASC will continue to look at risk and other processes which might change the risk register.

Parliamentary Reports

The Commons - Wendy Chamberlain (Chief Whip)

Conference, it is once again my honour to submit the most recent Parliamentary Party Report for the House of Commons. I would like to take this moment to put on record my thanks to the Federal Conference Committee for their organisation of Spring Conference 2022, and I am very excited for the prospect of seeing colleagues, members, and friends, in Brighton at the Autumn Conference later this year. In my previous report, I noted that we have all shown great resilience, ingenuity, and resourcefulness in the face of demanding circumstances. I would like to reiterate these words and recognise all the staff in LDHQ who work tirelessly to deliver Conference, and to those who support the Parliamentary Party in their endeavours all-year-round. My colleagues and I, and the wider Party, would simply not be able to represent our constituents or promote our liberal vision without your efforts. I would also like to take this opportunity to recognise MPs' staff, both in Westminster and in our local constituencies, who always go above and beyond to support our work for those we represent, no matter the political weather or the challenges of the day. Finally, I would like to thank our colleagues in the House of Lords who have been constantly assisting our work in the Commons via the detailed scrutiny of the abhorrent legislation that this Government has brought forward. Over the last year, it has been delightful to witness and be part of historic wins across the country that materialised from dedication, skill, and everyone pulling together. Each department and office across the party has much to be proud of and, with the momentum we are carrying from 2021, I am incredibly keen to see what 2022 holds for the Liberal Democrats.

Conference, it seems like every time I put pen to paper on these reports, I have the satisfying privilege to announce a new MP in our ranks! Last Autumn, it was my duty to note that Sarah Green was duly elected the MP for

Chesham and Amersham. This Spring, it gives me great pleasure to announce that Helen Morgan was duly elected the MP for North Shropshire! These two historic wins in 2021 have demonstrated that the Liberal Democrats are back and a threat to this poor Government that is mired in sleaze and scandal. Within hours of her official swearing in, Helen challenged the Prime Minister at PMQs on the dire state of ambulance services across the country. I was incredibly proud to sit beside Helen as her voice echoed around the Chamber, as she just wanted to do what all Liberal Democrats want to do, to get on with the job of representing her constituents. A couple of weeks later, before this report went to print, Helen made her Maiden Speech in the Chamber, delivering an accomplished speech that I sincerely recommend you watch if you have not done so already. Our group is all the stronger with the additions of Sarah and Helen, and I am looking forward to welcoming more colleagues in 2022.

Although the last decade of politics in the UK provided a rolling sense of imminency and intensity, the last few months in Parliament have been littered with boiling points ranging from possible resignations in Downing Street for countless scandals, the Omicron variant, to the passage of controversial Bills that seek to limit our civil liberties and basic rights to protest. My colleagues and I have been reacting to every development relating to our portfolio areas.

Given my policing background, and as Chief Whip, one of my responsibilities has recently included responding to the recent stories of sleaze from the Government, the Tory stitch-ups to protect their own MPs from consequences, and even Metropolitan Police investigations into Downing Street. The whole sorry saga has seen parliamentary antics used to defend the indefensible and has seriously diminished the trust that the electorate has for politicians, which is already at all-time lows. Regrettably, I had to use parliamentary tools available to me to put the Government on the spot regarding the affair involving the former MP for North Shropshire. The Speaker of the House granted my application for an SO24 debate (Standing Order 24), which allows time for the Commons to properly debate emergency

matters. In this case, it pertained to blatant attempts to rip up Parliament's anti-sleaze rules and replace it with a Tory-filled Committee that would make the rules up as it went along; an unacceptable overreach of power and an insult to the country who now think "it's one rule for me, no rules for them". The ongoing 'partygate' scandal, and allegations that Government Whips have been threatening their MPs with the loss of local school funding if they rebelled against the whip, have done nothing but further weaken the electorate's faith in public service. I will be continuing to focus my efforts on restoring the trust between the public and the institutions that are supposed to represent them. Elsewhere, I remain on the Select Committee for Scottish Affairs, hold the Wales portfolio, and continue to hold the pen for Work and Pensions, which will be front and centre in the next few months as the cost-of-living crisis approaches.

Party leader and MP for Kingston and Surbiton, Sir Ed Davey, continues to lead the party on all fronts and steps up in the Chamber against the Prime Minister. Ed led the charge in North Shropshire from Parliament, raising key issues at PMQs such as ambulance waiting times, and is steering the party in a direction to focus on the local elections in May. Ed is always first out of the blocks on national issues including calling on the Prime Minister to convene a G7 summit to ensure that energy prices are not affected by the situation with Russia and Ukraine, and also called on the Prime Minister to resign over the 'partygate' scandal.

Deputy Leader and MP for St. Albans, Daisy Cooper, finished 2021 with a new portfolio. Daisy previously led on Education, but now takes on the Health portfolio, with long-term focuses on tackling the big questions such as how the NHS recovers from the pandemic, NHS staff numbers, and the current ambulance crisis. Specifically, Daisy led the charge against illiberal vaccine passports a few months ago, and our party will continue to fight against clear government overreach into civil liberties. Along with the health portfolio, Daisy continues her campaign to protect leaseholders from paying for the removal of dangerous cladding and sat on the Bill Committee for the Building Safety Bill, developing amendments that eventually made their way to the

floor of the House. Unfortunately, the government rejected cross-party amendments to protect leaseholders, but Daisy will continue to lead on this key issue.

From Health to Education, I would like to personally thank Munira Wilson, MP for Twickenham, for her heroic efforts as Health Spokesperson in covering the pandemic from January 2020, soon after becoming a new MP. Munira, in a similar vein to Daisy, will be focusing on the state of education in a post-pandemic world and how schools can return to a form of normality. A substantial amount of learning has been lost due to the pandemic and the government needs to step up the cash for catch-up vouchers, as Liberal Democrats called for a few months ago. For liberals, education is one of key priorities, and Munira will be leading the charge into 2022.

On the domestic front, Alistair Carmichael, MP for Orkney and Shetland, continues to lead on Home Affairs, which has been one of this Government's most active departments. The Nationality and Borders Bill, which includes provisions to strip people of citizenship without genuine due process, and the Police, Crime, Sentencing, and Courts Bill, which severely prohibits our basic rights to protest, both represent the worst of what this government has to offer. Our party is the natural opposition to these breaches of fundamental rights, and we need no further incentive to continue the fight. Alistair's other portfolio, Political and Constitutional Reform, has also been in the spotlight due to the Elections Bill, where the Government are introducing further illiberal provisions such as voter ID, which could disenfranchise millions of potential voters and tilt future elections in Conservative favour. He tabled an amendment to secure Proportional Representation but it did not pass through the Commons.

On the global front, Layla Moran, MP for Oxford West and Abingdon, continues as Foreign Affairs Spokesperson, going toe-to-toe with the Government and their poor record in this area as they cheapen Britain's standing in the world. Cuts to international aid have not only hindered our soft power leverage in the world, but have left millions in desperate need of

humanitarian relief. Layla has been reacting to ongoing situations such as growing tensions on the Ukrainian border, and the fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban. As Russia begins to provoke global tensions, Layla will be scrutinising the flow of finances between London and Moscow, and continuing a campaign to install true beneficial ownership, to clean up global finances.

In the same sphere, Jamie Stone, MP for Caithness, Sutherland, and Easter Ross, continues as Defence Spokesperson, aligning efforts with Layla to respond to these international developments. Jamie has consistently warned against drastic cuts to the military, and these calls have gone unheeded. His responsibilities as DCMS Spokesperson are also key in this sphere, as there are various Bills currently travelling through Parliament relating to telecommunications security and trying to secure networks in the UK from foreign interference. As a party, we are generally welcoming of this move. As mentioned earlier, a cost-of-living crisis is approaching, and it will hit hardest in the most rural areas such as the Highlands, where temperatures are lowest. Jamie will be looking to stand up for his constituents on this issue in the coming months.

The cost-of-living crisis is a responsibility of the Treasury, and Christine Jardine, MP for Edinburgh West, will be calling on the government to act on this so people do not have to choose between heating and eating. We have inflation at its record highest level in the last 10 years, a stealth tax that the government introduced by freezing the tax threshold, and a hike in national insurance, all of which are making a bad situation worse. Christine will be calling for Universal Credit uplift to be reinstated to make sure the most vulnerable households have the support that they need to survive, and that the Warm Home Discount should be doubled.

Sarah Olney, MP for Richmond Park, continues to lead at the front, making the case that the Liberal Democrats are the true party of business. This Government's Trade and Cooperation Agreement puts all sorts of barriers in the way of British exports to the EU and the situation is most grave for small and medium-sized enterprises. The importance of SMEs to the British

economy is immense. They account for three fifths of private sector employment, and around half the turnover. Sarah will be calling for action with vigour and that begins with ensuring the support mechanisms put in place by the Trade Partnership Committee are kicked into full gear with the kind of haste and urgency called for by the current situation. Sarah also continues to hold the pen for the Transport brief.

Trade deals not only have an impact on business, but also for farmers in our rural communities. Tim Farron, MP for Westmorland and Lonsdale, has been working with Sarah to raise the impact that poor trade deals will have up and down the country. Tim has introduced a new Bill that requires the Trade and Agriculture Commission to undertake an impact assessment of any new trade deal on the UK farming industry and ensure the Government considers the environmental and animal welfare implications when negotiating trade deals. This would include an assessment of the impact of new trade deals on farming communities in each region and nation of the UK. The Government's trade deal with Australia threatens Britain's high animal welfare standards and the future of small family farms in the UK, and Tim will be ensuring that the Liberal Democrats are standing up for rural communities.

Along with Tim and Sarah, Wera Hobhouse, MP for Bath, continues the ongoing fight for climate justice. Gas prices have shot up in the last 6 months and, as a result, households face a 50% rise in their energy bills from April. Let's be clear, the UK's over-reliance on volatile international gas markets is fuelling this crisis. Wera is making the case in Parliament that government policy limits the growth of UK renewables. The solutions are all out there, which Wera will be acting on – a windfall tax on gas producers to pay for additional, targeted support through Universal Credit, the Warm Homes Discount, and Winter Fuel Allowance in addition to a new ten-year insulation scheme and a ramping up of renewables. Wera also continues to hold the pen for the vital Women and Equalities portfolio, where she is currently putting focus towards the issue of cyberflashing. Perpetrators of cyber flashing are often able to get away with it and not face consequences. It is particularly prevalent form of online violence against women, and, like real

life flashing, cyber flashing can frighten, it can humiliate, it can violate boundaries, it is a form of sexual harassment from which even the physical boundaries of a home offer no respite. I look forward to seeing Wera champion this issue in the same way that she previously changed the law on upskirting.

Staffing Changes

The Commons Whips Office continues to be headed up by Matthew Smith and deputised by Peter Munro.

Emma Stevenson continues with her role in the PST and has been joined by Toby Davis and Chimere Nwosu.

Sarah Dobson has moved on to the PAU to be responsible for education policy, and Callum Delhoy is no longer in the PST role.

The Lords - Ben Stoneham (Chief Whip)

Summary

Since my Autumn Conference report, the legislative programme in the Lords has been heavy and we have achieved some great 'wins' on issues that are important to the Party. I am, always, hugely grateful to our Parliamentary Group who ensure that we more than pull our weight in parliamentary proceedings, whether it is on Government legislation or on the plethora of issues that are given time for general debate and questions in the Lords.

The Government has introduced a huge number of bills in this session of Parliament, many of them making controversial changes to law. The House of Lords gets much more time to debate legislation than the Commons and remains the best place to raise complex issues given its capacity for self-regulation. When cross-party support is achieved, we can win votes but this is made increasingly difficult by late sittings and the larger number of Conservative Peers. The Government still has a huge amount of legislation left and is running out of time in the session. Twelve bills still need to complete stages in the Lords, including bills like the Nationality and Borders Bill, the Elections Bill, the Building Safety Bill and the Judicial Review and Courts Bill.

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 7-strong team of whips, supporting me and the Whips' Office in our work, and I am very grateful for everything they do.

Legislative work

We have had a number of 'big ticket' bills in recent months –

Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill (December 2021/January 2022)

- **Brian Paddick** has been leading the Lib Dem team on this bill, which introduces a number of controversial Government policies.
- There were a total of 14 Government defeats in the Lords!
- We supported cross-party efforts to try and retain important data and confidentiality protections, as Government provisions in the bill to try and tackle serious violence are very much police-led, rather than a truly multi-agency approach.
- The Bill also gives the Home Secretary the power to force professionals against all existing legal obligations, implicit duties of confidence and their own professional judgement, to pass confidential information to the police. Brian led efforts to remove this power, but we had no support from Labour. Sal Brinton did however secure a significant concession from the government to maintain doctor-patient confidentiality, meaning they are not under an obligation to disclose personal health data to the police.
- **Brian** also led on the issue of retaining the transparency and simplicity of the system of cautions, trying to resist the Government's changes.
- **Jonathan Marks** tried to amend the Government's proposals for minimum sentences by allowing for judicial discretion.
- **Mike German** secured the first Government defeat on the bill, winning his vote to allow local authorities to run new Secure Academies for 16 to 18-year-olds.
- We supported a successful cross-party vote that seeks to mitigate the harms that may be caused by the Government's introduction of Serious Violence Reduction Orders, which can be used to impose a range of requirements or prohibitions on a person.

- Lack of Labour support meant that we were not able to win Lib Dem amendments to create a Women’s Justice Board, along the lines of the successful Youth Justice Board. This is long-standing party policy to address the specific needs of women in the criminal justice system.
- Despite Lib Dem support the Government voted down an attempt to put the inquiry into the death of Sarah Everard on a statutory basis.
- We defeated the Government on provisions in the bill that would give police powers to tackle non-violent protests that have a “significant disruptive effect on the public or on access to parliament” – including setting conditions on the duration of protests, maximum noise levels and locations.
- The Lords also voted to repeal the outdated Vagrancy Act, something which the Party has been campaigning on for a while.
- When it came to the most controversial provisions in the Bill – around restricting the right to protest – we managed to kill off a number of provisions including a new criminal offence of obstructing major transport works; the expansion of suspicionless stop and search powers; and a new power for police to ban named people from demonstrations. These are now removed from the Bill and the Commons will have no opportunity to reinsert them.

Health and Care Bill (January 2022)

- At the time of writing, the Health and Care Bill has started Committee in the Lords. Votes don’t happen until Report Stage, but the Lib Dem team led by **Joan Walmsley and Sal Brinton** will be scrutinising a number of key issues, including
- The Government’s decision to undertake another reorganisation of the NHS, in the midst of an ongoing global pandemic.
- The reorganisation not including comprehensive plans for the social care crisis and scrutinising the measures on the social care cap that were added in the Commons.

- Provisions in the bill for procurement and the involvement of private providers.
- Powers in the bill for the Secretary of State to intervene in the running of the NHS – these are broad and should be restricted.
- We will also be raising key Lib Dem issues such as unpaid carers, and issues like ambulance response times that were raised many times on the doorsteps of North Shropshire.

Environment Bill (September/October 2021)

- There were a total of 14 Government defeats! Key victories included:
- **Robin Teverson**-led cross-party amendment to declare a **climate and biodiversity emergency** domestically and globally
- **Kate Parminter** led cross-party amendment to require MoD and HMT ministers to have **due regard to environmental principles when making policy**.
- Labour/Lib Dem amendment to ensure that items made of plastic or any other single use material are included in the regulations to **charge for single use plastic items**.
- **Cathy Bakewell**/Labour amendment to fix a gap in the pesticide authorisation process which currently omits any assessment on the **long-term effects of pesticides on honey-bees** and omits any assessment of the effects on wild pollinators.
- Crossbench-led cross-party amendment to ensure the interim targets in the bill are met.
- Government concession on **species abundance target** - requires the Secretary of State to set a species abundance target.
- Government concession on **Local Nature Recovery Strategies** – our key issue on this Bill. The concession requires the government to produce statutory guidance on how local planning authorities should have regard to Local Nature Recovery Strategies and will outline the important role that Local Nature Recovery Strategies will have in the reformed planning system.

- Many of these amendments were overturned in the Commons, but we did achieve a great victory on sewage when the Government conceded on a Lords amendment which strengthens the duty to ensure water companies reduce the impact of discharges from storm overflows and other causes.

Other bills that we've considered include –

Social Security (Up-rating of Benefits) Bill (November 2021)

- This bill temporarily removed the triple-lock on pensions to take into account the circumstances of the pandemic.
- **Barbara Janke** was involved in a cross-party effort led by former Conservative pensions minister Ros Altmann to maintain the triple-lock, given the protection it offers to the poorest pensioners who are most affected by the rise in the cost of living.
- Barbara also raised issues of fairness and the pension gap between men and women.

Dormant Assets Bill (November 2021)

- The Dormant Assets Bill makes changes to the scheme where financial products (such as a bank account) have not been used for many years can be reclaimed and used for charitable purposes.
- **Liz Barker, Susan Kramer and Sharon Bowles** raised issues about the types of people the money could go to, and to ensure the money was not used to replace existing funding.
- The Lords passed an amendment that would lay the ground for the introduction of Community Wealth Funds.

Armed Forces Bill (November 2021)

- The Armed Forces Bill renews the statutory basis for the Armed Forces (required every 5 years). This bill also made changes to service justice, along with other measures.

- **Julie Smith** led the Lib Dem team, and worked with a cross-party team to obtain a concession from the Government on the role of the Government and the duty of the Armed Forces Covenant.
- **Martin Thomas** led a number of rounds of ping pong on the issue of requiring serious crimes, such as murder and rape, to be tried in civilian courts.

Peers

We remain an active group of 80+, but we were sad to mark the retirement of Paul Tyler at the end of October. With 13 years under his belt as a MP and 16 years as a peer, Paul was a consummate Westminster performer, and a doughty campaigner on many issues, particularly those of voting, election and constitutional reform. We shall miss him from our Benches, and we wish him a happy retirement in Gloucestershire.

Staff

As ever I would like to extend my thanks to the staff in the Lords team – Sarah Pughe, Elen Young, Callum Littlemore, Mo Souidi, Elizabeth Plummer and Humphrey Amos – who support us so well in our work. I am also very grateful to the Parliamentary Adviser Unit, the Parliamentary Support Team and the party's press office and communications teams for all the support they give us.

The pandemic has meant that the ways of working have continued to be challenging, but we are all hopeful that this will change over the coming weeks and months.

Reports from Federal Bodies

Campaign for Gender Balance - Candy Piercy (Chair)

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

The Campaign for Gender Balance has had an extremely busy six months since the 2021 Autumn Federal Conference.

We have been providing mentoring support for any women who contact us who are considering going for approval or applying for Parliamentary selections, through 2021 and into 2022.

CGB Vice Chair Julia Cambridge led our Candidate Approval team to considerable success helping many women get approved as parliamentary candidates.

CGB Chair Candy Piercy leads both the CGB training operation and the selection mentoring team. She has also been working with Daisy Copper MP and RDC Chair Ade Adeyemo to identify and support diverse candidates who want to apply for target seats.

CGB is pleased to see the positive approach that the English Candidates Committee has taken to make the English selection procedure significantly more diversity friendly.

But we were very concerned last year that if most target seats in any Region went forward with selections in the same period of time in Summer and Autumn 2021, this will restrict the opportunities that diverse candidates would have to get selected. Sadly we were right to be concerned as the latest trends show. We ask that the FCEC considers this issue in good time for the selections after the next General Election.

Early in 2021 we ran the first ever fully digital Future Women MPs Weekend. This was a great success winning rave reviews from the over 30 women who participated. We are planning the next FWMP Weekend for early 2022.

At Autumn Conference 2021 we ran a full programme of online training modules which were very well attended and reviewed.

We continue to be very concerned about the number of excellent women who have stepped back from political activity as a result of the Covid pandemic. However we are happy to see the number of excellent women who have got involved in politics as a result of their experience during the pandemic, who are now setting out on their political journey.

Many are starting off by standing in local government elections. A great way to develop political skills and experience. Others want to go straight for parliamentary selection. CGB provides training for either of these approaches.

CGB has also worked with organisations outside the Lib Dems this year to encourage women who want to be politically active to consider joining us. In particular, we have provided speakers to 50:50 Women and encouraged their training and support they give to a number of our newer women members.

Just as with the brilliant Sarah Green MP at the Chesham & Amersham By-Election, CGB was prominent in providing support to the North Shropshire By-election and our fabulous new MP Helen Morgan. Thanks to our many alumni who have given their time, energy and made donations to the campaign. And to the many women energised and inspired by the campaign. 2021 was amazing with two winning by-election campaigns with two great woman candidates, and involving so many talented and effective women campaigners.

With a majority of women in the Parliamentary Party now do the Lib Dems still need the CGB? That question needs to be explored. Naturally the CGB believes the Party does still need us. We believe the gains of recent years on gender balance in Parliament could easily be lost if the next tranche of candidates in winning seats are predominantly men.

Other diversity strands have a long way to go too. So we continue to work closely with and provide support to RDC. We have also been in very positive discussions with Trudy Church at LDHQ, FPDC and others about how to use our experience to support the formation of a CGB-like sister organisation to support disabled candidates.

Earlier in this report we mentioned our concerns about the compressed timetable for target seat selections making it hard to get new women and other diverse candidates selected in target seats.

We have a majority of women members of Parliament at present. How long will that continue if selecting a new woman or diverse candidates is made harder by timetable issues? The Party Leadership talks about diversity. But in practice more barriers are being raised.

We ask the Leader, the President and the Chief Exec to engage in a strategic and practical manner with both the strategy and tactics needed to overcome these barriers.

We are delighted that a new Diversity Officer is being appointed at LDHQ after a long gap. That will be a very positive step for the future. CGB looks forward to working with them.

The CGB has continued to work without a financial grant from the Party. Regretfully we decided to close down our website to save money. Thank you to everyone who gave us donations last year. Do let us know if you would like to donate by sending us an email.

Last but by no means least thank you to the women and men who are our volunteer trainers, mentors and art workers. They are amazing, going above and beyond to help women get approved and selected. Without them Candy and Julia could not deliver the fantastic range of help and support that CGB provides to women in the Lib Dems who want to stand for Parliament.

If you would like our help to get selected or approved for Parliament, or to donate or to help CGB as a mentor, coach or art worker please email us at cgb@libdems.org.uk.

Racial Diversity Campaign - Ade Adeyemo (Chair)

The Racial Diversity Campaign (RDC) supports ethnic minority members to become approved candidates, be selected, and win elections.

The RDC was formally launched in early 2019 and the Executive comprises three members.

The current Executive members are as follows:

- Chair: Ade Adeyemo
- Vice Chair 1: Julia Ogiehor
- Vice Chair 2: [POSITION VACANT]

Unfortunately, our second Vice Chair, Cllr Josh Babarinde, had to step down to concentrate on his parliamentary selection campaign for the Eastbourne & Willington constituency.

We would like to express our thanks to Cllr Babarinde for his excellent work with the RDC and also for his continuing support for prospective ethnic minority candidates. We wish him the best in his campaign to become the next MP for Eastbourne & Willington.

The Party's first attempt to recruit a new Vice Chair for the RDC was unsuccessful, partly due to a clash with the Party's Vice Presidential election and also due to the last-minute withdrawal of a strong candidate due to personal reasons.

The Party is now re-advertising for applicants to fill the vacant Vice Chair role.

Current Plans for the RDC

The last quarter of 2021 was difficult in terms of RDC activities due to the elections for a new Party Vice President and also due to continuing covid restrictions and concerns about public gatherings.

As a result of the above, RDC activities planned for Q4 2021 were postponed. Now that covid restrictions are being lifted, we will be developing a revised programme of events for 2022.

We are mindful that our Executive and many of our members are involved in local elections in May. Therefore, we are unlikely to be organising formal RDC events in Q2 2022. However, we will continue to promote Action Days to support members who are standing in local and regional elections.

Other plans for the RDC include the following:

- Training sessions at the Autumn Lib Dem Conference.
- Advice, training and support for ethnic minority candidates who want to become Councillors, MPs, AMs, PCCs and Regional Mayors.
- Mentoring for 'Target Seat' and Tier 2 Candidates.
- Working with the National Party and ALDC to develop training programmes for ethnic minority members and candidates.
- Organising RDC Candidate Training sessions, including Inspiration Days, Candidate Development Seminars and Future MP Weekends.

Initially, the Executive took the conscious decision to keep the RDC "a bit quiet", whilst they set up the organisation. They felt that it was important to have the basic building blocks in place and to have something to offer, before going public.

Progress and Current Activities

- Development of a Strategic Plan for the RDC - ongoing
- RDC Inspiration Days - Q1 – Q3 2022
- Online Candidate Training - ongoing

As before, the RDC continues to work with LDHQ Diversity and Candidates teams, as well as LDCRE, CGB and the ALDC to develop training and mentoring schemes, to assist ethnic minority members who wish to stand for office.

Our approach and priorities are guided by the results of our 2020/21 review of ethnic minority candidates, in which we asked Members about their

experiences of standing as a Lib Dem candidate and the assessment process in order to become a PPC.

RDC Budgets and Finances

An initial £5,000 'budget' for the RDC was approved by the Party in 2021, which will enable the RDC to pay its bills and put on some face-to-face events in Q1- Q2 2022.

For the RDC to be a success, it is imperative that the Party now develops long-term funding proposals that will enable the RDC to achieve its stated aims of training and developing ethnic minority candidates within the Party and getting them elected.

Updates from State Parties

England - Alison Rouse (Chair)

ENGLISH PARTY REFORM

Improving the effectiveness of English Council

After a vote passed at December's English Council, we will now have three Councils a year. This aims to deal with various issues feedback to us by your EC reps. It will mean we can adopt changes rapidly that are required due to changes in the law or issues we have encountered.

We can ratify decisions needed to make sure processes run i.e. replacing a member of the EAP if someone steps down, thereby making the process more robust and improving functionality by reducing the workload on each volunteer by ensuring we have a full complement of EAP Vice-chairs.

Having shorter meetings with less paperwork to read for each meeting – Rep feedback said that each meeting required a large time commitment with reading all the paperwork required on top of attending the meeting itself.

Please see Appendix 1 for the motion with the full proposal that was accepted.

More effective working terms

We have also passed a motion to extend the post holders term to two years. Often, particularly when there are by-elections, when you step into a role it takes a while to find your feet as we've all experienced. Before you know it you are campaigning for re-election! Rather than encouraging long term planning, this can lead to Some Regions have moved to 2-year terms already and others are looking at doing so. Please see Appendix 2 for the full motion and reasoning behind this.

Further Work...

We will be continuing to look at how we can make the Liberal Democrats in England more effective and add value to you - based on our aim of helping Regions to support their local parties even more effectively. There are a couple of projects that we are looking at currently to get Local Parties more support on the ground.

We have worked through previous reviews to examine historical recommendations also, and are building up a list of reforms so we can deliver on Baroness Thornhill's recommendations. We all need to work as one Party – when we do so we are more likely to win

CANDIDATES

Improving Understanding

Thank you for the feedback that you have given us over the last year. As the results of our last review bed in, we have been doing further work to improve the general awareness of how the candidate process works, based on feedback from you.

This included with the Quarterly report from the Officers* where English Candidates Chair, Margaret Joachim, laid out the candidate process, after analysis of our feedback mechanisms showed that:

We seemed to regularly get certain questions a lot more than others, and That sometimes errors that occurred were due issues of misunderstanding.

*This was circulated to English Council reps so hopefully will have been available to you. If you would like to see the last copy from towards the end of last year, please contact your English Council Reps – you can usually do so through getting their names either from your regional website or by emailing your regional secretary.

Returning Officers

Some of you may not be aware that ROs are reviewed in a similar way as candidates do after each Election – helping us to identify where we need to offer more support or training. Being a Returning Officer can be a thankless

job but one that is crucial to the Party winning – thank you so much to those of you reading this that perform this function! It is important that we support our Returning Officers because they carry a lot of responsibility and sometimes, sadly, have to deal with challenging behaviour.

Although we had to wait for the latest revisions to the rules to pass through the English Council (hence why having three meetings will speed things up), we are now delivering refresher training to ensure our existing RO team are up to date with the changes and feel confident delivering them.

We have also delivered and are currently delivering training to bring onboard new ROs - bringing in fresh blood to reinvigorate the team, with every region having a Senior Returning Officer to offer advice and guidance. These SROs are also in place to do the more complex selections and by-elections. It is important to have as wide a number of ROs as possible as this spreads the workload.

I want to take a moment here to thank and acknowledge the large contribution from those who have done long service and chosen to move on. Thank you we couldn't have dealt with the large workload without your contribution.

Accessibility

As a result of feedback from members going through the assessment and selection processes, we will be doing more to make it clear that support is available to potential candidates like seating, scribes, signers, extensions to written papers etc. We will be working with the Liberal Democrat Disability Association to ensure that reasonable adjustments measures are fair and balanced, and that information on their availability is, in itself, more accessible. No use just saying, "it's on the website!"

We have just over 900 active PPCs in the system, and we look forward to that number growing to build towards electoral success.

APPENDIX 1

This is a summary of the original motion passed by English Council in the meeting in December 2021 with some extra explanatory notes. **PLEASE NOTE: This meeting will be at no extra cost as it will be free over Zoom**, something which lines up with our environmental aspirations as well!

Improving English Council Engagement & Effectiveness

More productive meetings by increasing to three shorter meetings a year

Background

- Meetings are long at over 5 hours.
- We have an engagement issue with a lot of members having blank screens and not contributing.
- With meetings being bi-annual it restricts the ability to change items that need to be passed or ratified by English Council.
- Reports are given to the body as part of its oversight function – however some items may have been completed up to 6 months ago and are now too late to change.

What we are already doing

- Introduced consultations to mean that an increased number of reps can participate and give their opinions.
- (this means that reps can provide constructive feedback to Affiliated Organisations (formerly SAOs and AOs) when they are developing ideas or want to understand how members feel about areas of policy.)
- Working on a glossary of terms that will go out with the papers to help members understand acronyms and terminology.
- (Members gave us feedback that a basic “How To English Council” would be useful to help them understand how the Council functions, what their role is in it, how to submit agenda items for discussion and maximise the value of the English Council for their Region.)

What we're suggesting

- Agree a job description for English Council reps with signposting to support (i.e. mentoring?).
- (Again, based on member feedback that they sometimes came into the role without an understanding of how to “interact” with the Council, what was meant by “confidential items”, how to be heard most effectively etc. This is currently being drafted by the English Party Administrator.)
- Increasing the number of meetings to three a year with the explicit mandate that this means: Council meetings should be shorter and therefore more productive.
- (A shorter meeting should be more productive than a five-hour meeting, even if breaks are included in the longer meeting. This would also reduce the obligation on reps to read through such a large amount of paperwork for each meeting – a large time commitment in itself.)
- It would facilitate more effective oversight (the English Council's role) because members will be discussing matters closer to the time when they actually occur and at a point where they can effectively “call in” decisions.
- (The current “two meetings a year” structure leaves them in a situation where they may be looking at something that happened up to six months before, when it may be too late to suggest changes.)

How & Where Would Meetings Take Place

Currently all English Council Meetings happen on Zoom, and we see this continuing for the foreseeable future. Should the Covid situation improve to the point where there is a decision to return to “in person” meetings, then over the year, we would suggest that the first meeting would be online, then the second one in person. This would make the meetings more inclusive and accessible as members would have “met” before attending a physical event.

Recognising a few familiar faces makes a room more welcoming and less intimidating for those who have not attended before.

Cost

Given the restrictions on our budget this year, cost is an important consideration. Having a third English Council meeting would be free as it would be held on Zoom.

Constitutional Changes

Having a third meeting would mean there would have to be changes to submission deadlines for motions and amendments etc. It seems that the original deadlines that we have used were based on allowing documents being sent in the post! So, in this digital age, shortening these timelines won't impact the meeting, so a proposal on how to do so, including any constitutional changes required was submitted to and passed by December's English Council.

APPENDIX 2

Reform proposal: Lengthening the terms of elected representatives

Background

The English Party elects all state positions annually, while the Federal Party elects its positions every 3 years. Some Regions elect annually but others every two years.

What issue is this proposal trying to address?

1. Productivity

Currently, all English roles are elected in late Autumn, to take office from January (apart from the RPC chair, who is elected from those on ECE at the first ECE meeting of the year, and the Treasurer, who is appointed by ECE annually).

Once a representative has found their feet and starts to become effective, there is very little time before they are required to start campaigning for re-election. This means that productive time is reduced to a few months in the middle of the year. This is also true for those roles, the Treasurer and RPC Chair, that are appointed annually.

This is not sensible when so much needs to be done. Everyone is a volunteer and needs time to learn how to do their job and is doing it in their spare time. We need to use that resource effectively, and annual elections make it less effective.

There is the additional issue (as mentioned in the Thornhill report), of knowledge getting lost or forgotten in handovers (or there being no handover at all), and then time gets taken up trying to work out what needs to happen immediately. And people get blown off course by having to fight fires. There are always going to be fires – but they can be fought better by people who have had some experience and practice. A one-year term means someone has only just figured out how best to do something and their time is up.

2 Short-termism

Changing representatives and the leadership of the state party every year encourages short term thinking, as people focus on making their mark within a single year. Longer term strategies are harder to implement, due to changes of personnel. Detailed strategies which set priorities are needed to help the party move forward but take time to develop. By the time they are written and agreed there is no time to implement anything or see the results before the term of office is over.

So, we don't get the investment of time to drive things forward for the long-term benefit of the party.

On top of that general problem, we also have chopping and changing of direction that can happen because of someone new who has their own ideas. New thinking isn't always bad but swerving in different directions isn't that helpful.

3. Cost

The Party has very little money to spare and what we do have needs to be prioritised for campaigning and development. For each election that we hold, we have to pay for use of the software, but we also have to pay postage for a mailing to every member of the English Party who does not have a working or usable email address. If they decide to send back a paper ballot, that means an additional cost for Freepost.

This means mailing about 10% of English members, at a cost of at least £1 each, meaning the cost is at least £7500. And the turnout for the elections is only something like 20% if we are lucky.

Financial Benefits:

Extending terms to two years would halve what we spend on elections. If we also share costs with the Federal Party when our cycles align, we could be saving even more money for both ourselves and the Federal Party.

This is the least important reason. I know that democracy matters. But we have to start being realistic. What we spend on an annual election would almost cover the Regional Development Officer grant for one Region, and I think the Regional Development Officer is more useful to the party. If we don't have enough money, then extending the terms of our elected roles would help us direct more funds at campaigning and development.

Proposal:

Move to electing all English Party positions every two years, including the "appointed roles" like Treasurer.

Scotland - Jenni Lang (Convener)

This is my first report since taking over as Convener at the start of January. Since we last reported, the Scottish Party has been focussed on local election preparation which takes place in May.

The party has continued to hold conference online, and had hoped to meet in person this Spring, but sadly this was cancelled due to Covid concerns. Instead we will hold a three day conference in Autumn.

Scottish Party Leadership and Office Bearers

After ten years as our Scottish Party Leader, Willie Rennie MSP stood down. Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP was selected as leader uncontested, taking over the helm in August. Over the coming months Alex, along with the new office bearers and executive will be defining the strategy for the party over the next five years.

My thanks go to Sheila Ritchie who stood down as the Convener of the Scottish Party after 4 years in the role Sheila passes on a party in an excellent state and her work across a range of areas from diversity, budgeting, staff resourcing and compliance has been tireless.

Alistair Carmichael MP stood down as our Deputy Leader, replaced by Wendy Chamberlain MP; Alan Reid stood down as Convener of our Campaigns and Candidates Committee, replaced by Jenny Marr. This means that we have seen a significant change in our Office Bearer team over the past six months, as well as some experienced hands.

We held our bi-annual elections for Office Bearer roles and committee membership at the end of 2021, with a number of new faces putting their name forward for a variety of roles. We saw turnover in our various committees, meaning we have a good mix of experience alongside new faces and skills.

Local Elections

The Party is preparing for local elections in May. We are looking for candidates in remaining seats to allow people across the country to be able to vote for a Liberal Democrat in their area. The campaign team has been working with target and development seats to deliver support and training and we are hopeful that we will hold the number of seats that we have, and hopefully make some gains.

Responding to Coronavirus

In line with Scottish Government guidelines, our team continues to work remotely for the majority of the time, however some team members are starting to return to the office and that is a decision for them as to where they feel most comfortable.

Wales - Paula Yates (President)

Electing more Liberal Democrats

Since the last Federal Conference, the Welsh party has continued to work at getting everything in place to move forward in our council seats in May. A strategy has been agreed by the Welsh Board which lays the foundations in the next 12 months for a more significant advance in local government representation in 2026. The Membership Development Committee has been working with local parties on development plans and meetings are planned with local party executives to discuss in detail how these development plans can feed into the overall strategy. In terms of this year's elections, candidates for 2022 are in place in most of our held and target wards and activity is increasing in these wards. Our objective is, in principle, to field at least one candidate in every ward but, given the number of local authority wards in Wales and the membership of the Welsh party, this will not be easy to achieve.

Capacity remains a very significant issue in Wales. Despite considerable efforts from staff and key volunteers, our activist numbers have not greatly increased, though those we have are working very hard, often in more than one capacity. Staff numbers have been reduced by the departure of our two campaign staff in the autumn. We wish them well in their new roles but it has left the Welsh party for some months with a staff of less than 2FTE. Replacing them has proved difficult and is becoming increasingly critical as the local government elections approach. We hope to appoint in the next few weeks.

Plans for the next six months include ensuring that Westminster candidates are in place in the seats where we hope to move forward when a general election comes and also in seats which we will be targeting for the Senedd elections.

Improving party efficiency and reform

Since my last report the Welsh party has been devoting much of its time, in committees and on the Board, to working on the recommendations of the O'Carroll report. A series of members' meetings has been held to begin to capture a shared understanding of our vision. The next stage, in which we intend to engage with organisations external to the Welsh Liberal Democrats, is scheduled for after May, so that the party can focus on the elections. As stated above, the strategy has been agreed and it is hoped that that will give guidance for the party both at State and at local party level to focus its resources on reaching challenging but achievable targets. The roll out of the strategy and follow up discussions are the next stage and will take place as time permits between now and September 2022.

A review of the regional committees, which have a different role, and function differently, from those in England, will take place over the summer, resources permitting. It is hoped that the review will ensure that the regional committees are better able to carry out their remit and give clarity to the relationship between the regions and their constituency local parties.

Training sessions are being offered to newly elected local party officers and the Welsh party is hoping to improve communications, both between officers in different local parties and between the officers and the Welsh party, for the exchange of good practice.