

Chair's Report 2023

Lambeth Liberal Democrats

In 2023 our focus has been on: consolidating our position in our held and development wards in Lambeth, establishing ourselves as the Opposition Group on Lambeth Council, and supporting Liberal Democrat teams in our nearest Conservative-facing seats.

Our new constitution, which came into effect, mandates that our local party has a long-term development plan, progress against which is reported back at the Annual General Meeting. Therefore, the structure of my report this year follows that of our development plan, which can be made available to members upon request.

Secure the election of Liberal Democrats; play a full part in the campaigning activities of the party at all levels; and campaign and work with local people to achieve the objectives set out in the Preamble to the Party Constitution

Campaign activity

We have successfully delivered a programme of regular campaign activity, including:

- 8 Lambeth Action Days across Streatham Hill West & Thornton, Clapham Common & Abbeville, and Waterloo & South Bank wards
- 15+ "Out of Lambeth Action Days" across Wimbledon, Carshalton & Wallington and Guildford
- Extending our campaign reach beyond our held Streatham Hill West & Thornton ward to neighbouring Streatham wards - in particular, Streatham Hill East

Our planned campaign activity has of course been complemented by activity in a series of national and local by-elections:

We had a strong Lambeth presence in Somerset & Frome, Tiverton & Honiton and Mid Bedfordshire Westminster by-elections: thank you to all members who travelled to support these national campaigns, and in particular to members in our local party who work for the Lib Dems in their day jobs - your hard work does not go unnoticed by us.

In May and June, we campaigned alongside our friends in the Southwark Liberal Democrats to challenge Labour in the Southwark ward of Newington, a ward that is now

in the cross-borough constituency of Vauxhall & Camberwell Green: while Labour held the seat, together we secured second place in the ward and a 15 per cent increase in vote share.

September brought us our very own by-election contest here in Lambeth, in Vauxhall ward. It was very encouraging to see a good number of local members step up as prospective candidates for this seat and I hope that those who were unsuccessful in the selection will consider stepping up again in the future. Fareed Alderechi was an excellent candidate, around whom the local party and our friends from across London and beyond rallied for this logistically challenging and high tempo contest. We were in it to win it, but unfortunately were ultimately denied the seat by a very high turnout of Labour postal votes from the inaccessible blocks - a surprise for them and us both!

While Labour continues to hold this seat, we should be very proud of achieving a 14% swing and securing an emphatic second place in the ward above both the Greens and the Conservatives, consolidating our position as the alternative to Labour in the borough. We learned a lot from this election about what we need to do to win in the north of Lambeth, and I know that a number of local members new to campaigning have been inspired to get more involved in our activity. Particular thanks to Fareed, to Alex Haylett for serving as agent, and to our out of borough ally Roger Giess for artworking.

Our local campaign activity has ensured that our three councillors are well-established faces in their wards and has supported them in their efforts to pick up and resolve local issues. I want to take this opportunity to thank Donna Harris, Matthew Bryant and Ben Curtis for their fantastic work in this first full year of the Group at the Town Hall: you have done us proud. I also want to acknowledge the work of Christopher French and Doug Buist in keeping our presence alive in Waterloo & South Bank ward following our close defeat there in last year's local elections.

Going forward, our primary local focus will be in Streatham Hill West & Thornton, Clapham Common & Abbeville and Waterloo & South Bank wards. However, to the extent that financial and human resources are available, we will continue to extend our message and engagement into neighbouring wards.

Preparation for 2024 elections: London and Westminster

On 2nd May next year, London will go to the polls. On ballots, electors will be voting for three things. Their choice of Mayoral candidate (this election will now be administered

under First Past the Post). Their choice of London Assembly constituency candidate. And their choice of London Assembly list candidates.

It is a point of pride that the final two Liberal Democrat candidates in our internal selections for our Mayoral candidate were both members of our Lambeth local party: Rob Blackie and Christopher French. Congratulations to Rob who was ultimately selected; and we are fortunate to also have Christopher as our Constituency Candidate for Lambeth & Southwark. We look forward to voting for you both! I am sitting on the London 2024 Steering Committee as London Party Chair representative and am working to bring the perspective from Labour-facing boroughs into the Party's campaign planning. We plan to fully participate in London-led campaign activity between January and May next year.

This year we have also undertaken the necessary preparations for a General Election, whenever that may be held between now and January 2025. On the back of the review of Westminster Constituencies by the Boundary Commission, we now have four parliamentary constituencies in Lambeth, three of which we share with neighbouring boroughs of Southwark and Croydon.

We have completed the selection process for three constituencies: our prospective parliamentary candidates are as follows:

- Vauxhall & Camberwell Green: Christopher French
- Clapham & Brixton Hill: Ben Curtis
- Streatham & Croydon North: Claire Bonham

The selection process for our fourth constituency - Dulwich & West Norwood - is underway, with voting closing on 2nd December, after which our final candidate will be confirmed. Thank you to all who will stand in those elections.

In addition, the Electoral Commission has determined that all those who will serve as Liberal Democrat agents in the next General Election are required to undertake a formal training and certification process. A number of Lambeth members have completed this training and others will do so in the next few months.

This will be the first set of Westminster elections since the 2015 cycle when we will not be contesting any Lambeth constituency as a target seat. Our primary focus will therefore be on being part of winning teams in the nearby winnable Conservative-facing seats of Wimbledon and Carshalton & Wallington. Not only does it help us in Lambeth to have a stronger Liberal Democrat presence in the Commons, but these seats are also

urban London seats with many similarities to our own; which can only bolster our credibility in Lambeth.

That being said, the General Election is an opportunity for us to get our message to voters right across our borough. Ideally, we will have the requisite resources to take full advantage of the free Royal Mail delivery per elector. I am particularly cognisant of the fact that, in 2019, we were asked to stand aside for the Green Party in Dulwich & West Norwood; as a result of which, we have lost some standing as a credible force in the constituency. We plan to use this election to reestablish ourselves with members and supporters in that part of our borough.

Looking ahead to 2026 Lambeth local elections

Next year, we will make the necessary preparations for the next Lambeth local elections - to be held in 2026. This will include:

- A prospective councillor engagement programme, including training and local approvals to stand
- A manifesto development programme, with provision for both member and Council Group engagement
- Using the London and Westminster elections to collect valuable data to inform our campaign approach
- Member and supporter mobilisation outside our held wards

Admit and actively recruit new members and registered supporters to the party

This year we have managed to keep our membership numbers pretty stable, despite headwinds in national trends in the membership of political parties: we started 2023 with 639 Lambeth members; and as of November we have 590 members of our local party.

There is scope for us to take a more deliberate approach to welcoming new members, following up with lapsing and lapsed members, and ensuring that our membership proposition goes well beyond doorstep campaign activity. These will be priorities for the coming year.

We have held a series of successful member events this year, including:

- Summer garden party

- August Bank Holiday picnic
- Pre-conference social
- In-person PPC hustings for four constituencies

We hope our AGM and end of year party will also be a motivating members' event.

We have heard from members that they would like to have more informal opportunities to connect with one another - for example through Pizza & Politics events. We have not had the capacity to get these off the ground this year but will prioritise such events next year. We are also overdue undertaking a full survey of our local membership, which will be a priority for the start of 2024.

In terms of member and supporter growth, we have successfully built a broader-than-membership base of support across our held wards plus Waterloo & South Bank and Vauxhall wards. Our priority for 2024 will be to convert this support into more active engagement with the activity of our local party in these wards, including regular deliverers; and new member conversion.

This year's training opportunities provided by HQ and others have predominantly been marketed to members of the Executive Committee. There is scope for a more systematic training programme for the broader party membership next year, to build our campaigning capacity and resilience.

Participate in the formulation of the policy of the Party

The national party has organised two Party conferences this year: in York in the Spring, and Bournemouth in the Autumn. Lambeth Liberal Democrats had a very strong showing at both conferences; and played a particularly notable role in setting the national policy agenda in the Autumn. Highlights included:

- Lambeth Liberal Democrats proposed a motion on *Ending Period Poverty* in partnership with the Young Liberals, which was passed by conference
- Lambeth member Charley Hasted proposed a successful motion on *Making the Fight Against Climate Change Accessible*
- Councillor Donna Harris proposed an amendment to the *Fixing Fast Fashion* motion, which passed
- A great conference speech by London Mayoral candidate, Rob Blackie
- Another great conference speech by the Party's VP - Diversity, also a Lambeth member, Amna Ahmed

- A high profile housing motion and debate on the back of the work of Joe Wright, secretariat of the Party's housing and planning working group

For last year's local elections, our Liberal Democrat candidates in Lambeth did not stand on a borough-wide manifesto. In 2024 we will develop a local manifesto, in partnership with the Council Group and membership, on which we will start campaigning in 2025 towards the 2026 local council elections.

Play a full role in the democratic processes of the Party; and to send representatives, in accordance with the constitutions of the bodies concerned, to Party bodies

Lambeth Liberal Democrats play a full part in the Party's Affiliated Organisations, for example:

- Charley Hasted, chair of Plus Lib Dems
- Christopher French, chair of the Racial Diversity Campaign
- Sarah Lewis, secretary of Liberal Democrats for Electoral Reform
- Donna Harris, vice chair of Lib Dem Women

It has been fantastic to collaborate with these official Party groups over the course of this year. Additionally, in my capacity as Chair of the local party, I have regularly attended the meetings of London Chairs as organised by the London Regional Party.

Lambeth members Duncan Brack and Amna Ahmend continue their work on the Federal Policy Committee and Federal Conference Committee, and as VP for Diversity, respectively. There is potential for further representation of the Lambeth Liberal Democrats on Federal bodies going forward; in particular the Federal Council.

Promote diversity within the party and to represent the interests of under-represented groups in the locality

This year, the Lambeth Liberal Democrats Executive Committee set out a Diversity & Inclusion statement and action plan for the very first time, as required by the national party. This plan is available for any member of the local party upon request.

In this document we state that:

- We believe that our local Party can best fulfil our constitutional responsibility to

promote and support the values and objects of the Liberal Democrats in Lambeth by making diversity and inclusion a priority.

- We believe that it is the responsibility of our local Party (and not of those citizens we look to represent and serve) to ensure that we reflect this rich diversity of our Borough.
- We believe that the inequities within our Borough are inconsistent with our Liberal Democrat values of liberty, equality, and community. We believe it is the responsibility of our local Party to actively promote the political, economic, and social inclusion of all Lambeth citizens - without stigma or discrimination - in order to play our part in righting these inequities.
- We acknowledge that we have a significant way to go when it comes to making diversity and inclusion a priority in our local Party.

The development of our five-year plan presented an opportunity to assess the diversity of our executive, our membership and our candidates; as well as to set out our areas of focus moving forward. The 2024 Executive will revisit the statement and action plan in their first meeting of the year.

As part of this effort, our Executive identified three demographics significantly under-represented in our member and supporter base:

- Young people (under 30s)
- Black/African/Caribbean/Black British
- Women

We have set out steps to address this, led by our Diversity Champion and have made some progress, namely:

- Establishing a partnership with the Young Liberals
- Taking deliberate steps to campaign on issues that affect women and girls, leveraging the platform of our Council Group
- Earmarking a significant portion of our local budget available to advance our diversity & inclusion goals
- Actively supporting national Party efforts on diversity and inclusion

However, our progress was somewhat hampered by our Executive Diversity Champion stepping down from their role on the committee for professional reasons (politically restricted role). Our Executive Committee has undertaken a thorough audit of our

progress towards our states goals and prepared a series of recommendations for the incoming 2024 Diversity Champion to consider and drive forward.

Fundraising

As we close out 2023, our primary concern is the financial sustainability of our local party activity. For the past six years we have had the good fortune to have been able to operate without significant funding concerns due to the availability of resources leftover from the fundraising efforts of our 2017 and 2019 prospective parliamentary candidates in target seat campaigns. However, that financial security blanket is no longer.

If we are to fulfil the expectations of our membership to maintain - and even increase - our level of activity in the year ahead then this requires us to fundraise vastly more per annum than we have done in recent years.

Our current revenues are driven by:

- A portion of local party membership fees, although the national and regional parties are the primary beneficiaries of these fees
- Monthly tithes from our councillors: many thanks to our three councillors for their regular contributions
- Standing orders from members and supporters: we undertook a standing order campaign this year, and are hugely grateful to all members who have set up regular donations to our local party
- One-off donations from members and supporters: again, huge thanks to all those who have made contributions to our local party over the course of this year
- Grants from other Liberal Democrat organisations: we secured financial support from both ALDC and Plus Lib Dems this year to support our Vauxhall by-election

Fundraising will be the top priority for the 2024 Executive Committee. I am conscious of the fact that we will not benefit from the headwinds of parliamentary target seat campaigns as we undertake these efforts; and will continue to depend on the generosity of our membership to help fund our operations.

It is also worth noting that a significant increase in our 2023 expenditure was a result of recruiting a part-time paid organiser. The organiser has been invaluable to our local team, most of whom have both full-time jobs and care responsibilities to undertake alongside their voluntary work for the local party. We feel that this investment has offered good value for money. However, our ability to continue the support of this paid

staff member is entirely dependent on our ability to raise sufficient funds. Many thanks to all those who have contributed towards our organiser; and should any other local member have the capacity to support us in continuing this arrangement, contributions are keenly sought and welcomed.