

## **Chair's Report 2024**

### **Lambeth Liberal Democrats**

**This year has been a tale of two halves. In the first half of this year we were laser-focused on preparing for - and executing on - our General Election strategy, at home here in Lambeth and in our nearest Conservative-facing seats. Since the General Election we have refocused our efforts on consolidating and growing our strength as the Opposition Group on Lambeth Council.**

At the 2023 Annual General Meeting (AGM) we introduced and reported back on our constitutionally-mandated development plan. Since then we have updated our development plan to reflect the new political landscape that has emerged since the General Election. Our adjusted long-term goals are:

- 1. By 2030 we will be in the administration of Lambeth Council, having won 18+ seats:**

*This sets us the target of achieving this goal four years sooner (or one fewer local election cycle) than previously planned.*

- 2. In two General Election cycles (by 2034/35), we will return the first ever Liberal Democrat MP for the Clapham & Brixton Hill constituency**

*This sets a new ambition to win a Westminster Constituency in Lambeth, with Clapham & Brixton Hill looking the most favourable of our four Lambeth constituencies (and the only one that is entirely within the Borough of Lambeth).*

#### **Implications for our 2026 goals and approach**

In order to achieve this, we have made the following adjustments to our goals for the 2026 Lambeth Council elections:

- We will win 12 - 15 seats on Lambeth Council and retain our position as the Official Opposition Group**
- We will win at least 25% of the popular vote in the borough**

My report follows that of our updated 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**

In April-May we implemented our planned approach to this year's London Mayoral and Assembly elections. We:

- **Promoted local member Rob Blackie's mayoral campaign in our three target wards** of Streatham Hill West & Thornton, Clapham Common & Abbeville and Waterloo & South Bank.
- **Stood a credible local candidate** in the Lambeth & Southwark constituency seat: Chris French.
- **Undertake a full Count operation** to better understand our core Liberal Democrat vote across our borough.

We put on record our thanks to Rob and Chris for their campaigns (and to Ben Austin for acting as our London election agent), which helped secure the reelection of Hina Bokhari AM and the election of Gareth Roberts to the London Assembly. Thanks, too, to all local members who helped to staff the Count and update our data.

In June-July we successfully delivered on our General Election objectives. We:

- **Stood credible local candidates** in all four of our Lambeth constituencies and keep our deposit in every seat.
- **Secured the funds to make full use of the Royal Mail election address** across all constituencies (free to post to each elector): this was in no small part down to the generosity of our members and financial support from Southwark Liberal Democrats.
- **Played a leading role in the election of two + new Liberal Democrat MPs for south London**, powering the successful election campaigns of Bobby Dean (Carshalton & Wallington), Paul Kohler (Wimbledon) and Luke Taylor (Sutton & Cheam) as well as supporting the successful election of other Tory-facing candidates across the country.

We put on record our thanks to our candidates Claire Bonham, Ben Curtis, Donna Harris and Chris French (and their agents) for representing us so effectively; and to all local members who gave time and money towards this General Election.

The boundary changes enacted following the most recent Boundary Review required us to work in lockstep with neighbouring local parties of Croydon and Southwark, which has built far closer ties between us for future cooperation. Similarly, through our multi-year activism in neighbouring target seats, we have further strengthened our relationships with the Merton and Sutton local parties.

In addition to Westminster and London elections, three Lambeth Council by-elections were called this year - two (successively) in Streatham Common & Vale ward and one in Knight's Hill ward. While, due to our focus elsewhere, we decided not to run full campaigns in these wards we:

- **Stood credible local candidates** in all by-elections.
- **Use the by-elections to reestablish ourselves in the wards** and build our local capacity: we ran basic literature campaigns in all by-elections, updated our backend campaign operations and improved our understanding of local issues and community groups.

Although we posted a lowly fourth in each of the three by-elections, we successfully increased our vote share from 2022 levels in both Streatham Common & Vale and Knight's Hill wards and now have a far stronger platform on which to advance. We put on record our thanks to Nick Davidson and Nicholas Sanders for standing.

In a further Lambeth local authority ward - Herne Hill & Loughborough Junction - we anticipate a by-election. Though not yet called, we:

- **Ran a competitive selection process** for our local candidate.
- **Started our campaign in the ward.**

We plan to continue campaign activity until (and when) this by-election is finally called.

In addition, we have continued our programme of regular campaign activity in our target wards, including:

- **Eleven well-attended Lambeth-wide action days.**
- A regular **programme of literature delivery.**
- Ongoing **casework and visible presence** in community groups.

I want to take this opportunity to thank our councillors Donna Harris, Matthew Bryant and Ben Curtis for their fantastic work in this second full year of the Liberal Democrat Opposition Group at the Town Hall.

### **Preparation for Lambeth 2026 local elections: Raising our ambition**

In October we initiated preparations for 2026 local elections in support of our increased electoral ambitions for the borough. To date we have:

- **Opened applications for target seat candidates in October**, on the understanding that we start 2025 with a set of candidates for eleven target wards\*:
  - Note that candidate approval panels are live through November, followed by ward selections in December 2024 - January 2025.
- **Made training available to all prospective councillors** including using our Diversity budget to support attendance at ALDC's Kickstart weekend.
- **Ran a series of monthly Pizza & Politics events throughout the year** to inform the development of our 2026 manifesto.
- **Ran a robust Count operation at both London and Westminster elections** to inform our targeting strategy.
- **Agreed the set-up of two new Executive sub-committees to be implemented in January 2025:** we will establish campaigns and fundraising sub-committees.

In addition to radically increasing our annual income in 2026 to support this updated ambition, we will also undertake a dedicated recruitment drive to build our campaign capacity in target wards.

\*This assumes each of these wards has a full slate of willing, local party approved candidates and member/Exec (according to the constitution) selected candidates. At any time between January 2025 and polling day 2026, the Lambeth Executive may:

- "Turn off" any target seat candidate or ward.
- Introduce and select for new target seats, should there be strong rationale to do so.

We also intend to stand a full slate of candidates in 2026, learning lessons from 2022 selections, with paper candidates in place by the end of 2025.

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

This year we have continued to see reduced membership numbers, in line with headwinds in national trends in the membership of political parties: last November we had 590 Lambeth members, while we now have 516 members.

We have worked hard this year to outreach to all members and to increase the number and nature of non-campaigning opportunities for members to get together, including our monthly Pizza & Politics events, each of which has attracted 30+ local members.

As a result of these efforts, we have seen a high level of engagement from our existing membership base. However, there is clearly more to do on both recruitment and retention.

## **Participate in the formulation of the policy of the Party**

The national party has organised two Party conferences this year: in York this Spring, and Brighton in the Autumn, at which Lambeth Liberal Democrats had the highest number of conference attendees of any local party in the country!

Brighton highlights featuring our local members included:

- Cllr Donna Harris moved (and passed) a vital motion on Equitable and Improved Outcomes Throughout Pregnancy and the Neonatal Period
- An emergency motion was selected for debate (and passed) that focused on the response to the Grenfell Tower Fire, drafted by local member Charley Hasted
- A fantastic speech by local member Heather Glass, who spoke against proposed Liberal Democrat policy to set up a new Clean Water Authority and challenged our national party to embrace a more localised approach
- A meaningful amendment proposed (and passed) to a motion on Our Plan to Save the NHS by local members Stevan Cirkovic and David Whitaker
- A powerful intervention by local member Fareed Alderechi, asking the national Party to address the issues highlighted by this Summer's riots
- Prominent Lambeth presence across stalls in the Exhibition hall, including Liberal Democrats for Electoral Reform, Lib Dem Women, Plus Lib Dems and the Liberal Democrat History Group
- Some fantastic Lambeth member-hosted fringe events

We also used this opportunity to work closely with Hina Bokhari AM and a number of our new Liberal Democrat MPs to inform the national party's response to the summer's riots. Liberal Democrat leader Ed Davey has asked Hina to lead a serious piece of work on this in the year ahead and we will support her in doing so.

Finally, It has been suggested by Lambeth members that, for those who are either not selected (or feel insufficiently qualified) for Federal Policy working groups, that London Region facilitate a shadow policy forum that allows for broader engagement. We are working with the Region to establish this.

**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 continue to 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, chair of Lib Dem Women
- Duncan Brack, chair of Liberal Democrat History Group

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. We welcome the fact that more Lambeth members have put themselves forward for Federal and London Region roles: good luck with the elections.

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

We continue to advance our programme of work in line with our 2023 Diversity & Inclusion statement and action plan. This plan is available for any member of the local party upon request.

We have significant challenges when it comes to the representation of young people, women and black and ethnic minority people through our local party and are taking action accordingly:

- **Young people:**
  - Challenge: We have seen a decline in the total number of members aged 20 - 29, who now represent over 8% of our total membership
  - Success: We were happy to select a candidate (Ben Curtis) in this age bracket to represent us in the Clapham & Brixton Hill constituency
  - Opportunity: A number of our younger members have stepped forward to initiate the set up of a South London branch of the Young Liberals.
- **Women:**
  - Challenge: The gender diversity of our local party membership has remained consistent y/y at around 70% membership being male and we are likely to see this translate into a very imbalanced slate of 2026 Council candidates
  - Success: We were happy that 50% (two in four) of our Parliamentary Candidates were women and we have started to improve the gender diversity of our Executive Committee, with more gains expected for 2025
  - Opportunity: Our Council Group has driven some very meaningful work towards supporting women and girls in our borough and we need to profile this more visibly and actively in our campaigning.
- **Black/African/Caribbean/Black British:**
  - Challenge: The race/ethnic diversity of our local party membership has also hit stasis with around 92% of members identifying as white
  - Success: We were happy that 25% (one) of our Parliamentary Candidates identifying as black British and we have made progress in improving the race/ethnic diversity of our Executive Committee
  - Opportunity: We have supported a number of local members to stand as Council candidates for 2026 elections and we expect to have a relatively diverse slate in target wards.

It is also worth noting that we have:

- Used our dedicated Diversity & Inclusion budget to ensure that every member has the chance to fully participate in party business
- Taken deliberate steps to campaign on issues that affect women and girls, leveraging the platform of our Council Group

- Made some initial headway in outreach to the local Muslim community, which we are starting to see reflected in our membership.

It is clear that diversity and inclusion remains a huge challenge for our local party and we look forward to supporting the 2025 Executive Committee in addressing this.

As per last year, our Executive Committee will undertake a thorough end of year audit of our progress towards our stated goals and prepare a series of recommendations for the incoming 2025 Diversity Champion to consider and drive forward.

## **Fundraising**

As we close out 2024, we continue to be in a stable financial position, despite the demands of multiple election campaigns this year.

However, if we are to achieve our stated ambitions then we must double our annual revenue (2025 vs 2024).

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 another 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
- Financial support from Southwark Liberal Democrats: we are grateful for their contributions towards our General Election campaign.

Note that earlier this year we made the decision to end our contract with our part-time campaign organiser. Ideally in 2025 we will secure the financial runway that will enable us to revisit this decision.