

Reports to Conference

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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.

The Federal Conference Committee is responsible for organising conference, selection venues and choosing the items for debate. It provides the rooms for fringe, the training sessions and the Spokesperson's Question and Answer sessions although it does not have responsibility

for those programmes. The Committee is made up of twelve people elected by party members as well as representatives from other party Committees and each of the State Parties, the Chief Whip and the President.

York Conference 2023

We are delighted to be back in York for our Spring Conference. It is a regular on our schedule, and we look forward to being here. I am especially pleased that we are meeting again in person.

I would like to welcome our members who are attending, and the ones for whom this is either their first conference, or their first in person conference, and express the Committee's thanks to our exhibitors, fringe organisers and observers.

I very much hope that you enjoy Conference and that you get a lot out of it.

We understand that Conference can be costly to attend. To help with that, we administer the *Conference Access Fund*. It provides a means by which people can attend Conference who might otherwise not be able to. We are constantly impressed by the generosity of members in donating to that fund.

We had initially sought to add an additional day onto the Spring Conference due to the cancellation of Autumn 2022. Unfortunately, there was simply not the budget available to do so. The costs for running Conference have

increased by around 60% across almost all budget lines, and we have already sought to make savings where possible. The Federal Finances and Resources Committee to cover the significant increase in current conference costs, and therefore sadly no additional funding was available to extend the Spring Conference dates.

Online Conference

We are trialling an online attendance at Conference; this will include the ability to watch the proceedings in the auditorium and allow members to vote on motions and reports throughout the Conference weekend. This offering will be used as the start of our work to explore hybridisation options for future conferences.

The Agenda

We received many high-quality motions from all over the party, and unfortunately (as you may have seen in my report in Lib Dem Voice and the Ad Lib section of the website) we are unable to choose everything that is submitted.

We had 39 policy motions, four business motions, three constitutional and one standing order amendment submitted to the FCC for selection. Unfortunately, time is at a premium, especially at the shorter Spring Conference, and it is very difficult to be able to fit in as much as possible to the agenda.

From the motions selected, we have some interesting motions which we feel will be good topics for debate,

including updating the party policy on nuclear weapons, a paper on Social Care (including extended free personal care to everyone), and the debate on a Fairer Society.

From the submitted motions, we selected five policy motions, two business motions, three constitutional amendments (two of which are being composited), and one standing order amendment.

The policy motions, one of the business motions, the constitutional amendment and the standing order amendments can be amended - the deadline for submitting amendments is 13:00 on 6 March.

You can also ask questions to those who have submitted reports for consideration by Conference (including me). The committees now reporting to Conference are: The Federal Board, the Federal Council, the Federal Conference Committee, the Federal Policy Committee, the Federal Elections and Communications Committee, the Federal International Relations Committee and the Campaign for Gender Balance. The deadline for questions is the same as the deadline for amendments.

We have included some time for an Emergency Motion, these are short motions on issues that have arisen or where there have been significant developments since the original deadline for motions. The deadline for emergency motions is as per the amendments deadline.

We also continue to provide drafting advice, under that scheme, members of the Conference Committee review motions and amendments that are submitted to it and provide comments and suggestions on the drafting. The deadline for this for amendments and emergency motions was 14 February at 13:00.

The selected amendments, questions and other information about Conference will be listed in Conference Extra, which will be available online by the Tuesday in the week before Conference commences.

You will also be able to access the same information through the Conference App, which can be downloaded from the App Stores relevant to most major devices. We have made some improvements to the app in recent years, but we recognise that it is still a work in progress.

Please feel free to approach any of us at any time during Conference with any questions you may have about the agenda, Conference sessions or speaking in debates. You will be able to identify us by the badges we wear with the letters 'FCC' on them. You can also contact us through the Liberal Democrat Conference Facebook group.

The Federal Conference Committee

A new FCC was elected in November 2022, in the Federal Elections round and I would like to welcome returning and new members to the Committee. I would also like to thank the former members of the FCC for their service to the Committee and to Conference.

I was delighted to have been re-elected as FCC Chair, and Jon Ball and Cara Jenkinson were elected as Vice Chairs of the Committee. The FCC has two standing subcommittees, the General Purposes Sub-Committee (GPSC), and the Conference Communications Group (CCG). Each of these is chaired by one of the Vice Chairs. The GPSC looks after operational and financial matters relating to Conference, and the CCG looks after communications, marketing, diversity, and membership engagement.

At the first meeting of the FCC we also established two additional working groups, one looking at Innovation (which I will mention further in the below section) and one responsible for Constitution and Standing Orders updates. I am Chairing the Innovation Working Group and Duncan Brack (FPC Rep to the FCC, and former Chair of the FCC) chairs the Constitution and Standing Orders Working Group.

At the same meeting we also appointed several link people, who will be working with Regional Parties and AOs on engagement around conference issues.

Objectives and Work Plan

The FCC has agreed to introduce an objectives and work plan for the three-year term, this would be updated annually and reviewed as the respective FCC and other sub-committee/working group meetings. We wanted to set objectives for the committee so that we were able to take a strategic view at the work that the committee does, and to drive forward innovation and change. We are in the

process of finalising the objectives for the three years, and I am planning to share these with the membership as part of the work that we want to do on engaging with as many members as possible.

As part of this the FCC has also established an Innovation Working Group, which will look at a number of projects relating to new services and offers at Conference.

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.

Since our last report to the (cancelled) Autumn 2022 Conference, party members have elected a new Federal Policy Committee; we say thank you to Adam Corlett, Mark Platt, Richard Cole, Alyssa Gilbert, Rob Harrison, Catherine Royce, Peter Thornton, Sarah Ludford, Wera Hobhouse MP, Alec Dauncey, Lisa Smart and Phil Bennion who have stood down from the committee, and have welcomed new members John Shreeve, Keith Melton, Luke Richards, Mark Johnston, Martin Horwood, Ben Rich, Dick Newby, Judith Jolly, Claire Tyler and Layla Moran MP. The new committee

has elected Cllr Lucy Nethsingha, (Lord) Dick Newby and Jeremy Hargreaves as its vice chairs, with Ed Davey MP continuing as chair.

Developing a compelling narrative which tells the story of our policy offering in appealing and accessible terms, grounded in a body of solid policies which address the country's needs, remains a high priority for the new committee and will be a key focus for us over the next few months.

Policy papers for Conferences this year

The cancellation of Autumn's Conference has meant a considerable re-ordering of our plans to bring policy papers to Conference to debate. Our working groups have continued to develop innovative and distinctive policy which seeks to advance our political objectives.

We are bringing to this Conference two updated papers originally intended for autumn:

- A Fairer Society, including options for Conference to decide on about a universal basic income, developed by a group chaired by Julia Goldsworthy
- A More Caring Society, to tackle the crisis in the care system and support carers more effectively, developed by a group chaired by Judith Jolly

We plan to propose to Autumn Conference our paper on the Natural Environment, previously intended for last autumn, and developed by a long-running working group chaired by Richard Benwell.

We also have working groups labouring hard in the following areas; they are publishing full consultation papers for this Conference, and we intend to propose final papers based on their work to this autumn Conference.

- International Security, chaired by Christine Cheng
- Food and Farming, chaired by Stuart Roberts
- Opportunity and Skills, chaired by Rosie Shimell
- Early Years & Childcare, chaired by Cllr Dine Romero (which consulted at Conference last year)

As always, the consultation stage remains the most effective time for party members interested in their work to influence a working group's proposals. The final Conference debate on any paper only offers the opportunity for a very limited number of changes, debated by Conference. At the consultation stage, however, the proposals are very much open for changes large and small. The consultation papers are intended to both show how the group is currently thinking, and to stimulate views. Views, whether on very specific points or ranging across the whole of the policy area, are very much

welcomed to policy.consultations@libdems.org.uk, if possible by 27 March.

Serving on, and particularly as the chair of, a policy working group is a significant commitment, and FPC thanks the two hundred or so party members who have served or are serving on the policy working groups outlined above, as well as hundreds more who applied to join them.

The full programme of current working groups is therefore as follows:

	Consultation session	Final paper to Conference
<i>A Fairer Society</i>	Autumn 2021 & Spring 2022	Spring 2023
<i>A More Caring Society</i>	Spring 2022	Spring 2023
<i>Natural Environment</i>	Spring 2022	Autumn 2023
<i>Early Years & Childcare</i>	Spring 2022	Autumn 2023
<i>International Security</i>	Spring 2023	Autumn 2023

<i>Opportunity & Skills</i>	Spring 2023	Autumn 2023
<i>Food & Farming</i>	Spring 2023	Autumn 2023
<i>Pre-Manifesto</i>		Autumn 2023

Manifesto

Work on developing our general election manifesto continues, led by its writing group chaired by Dick Newby. We are planning to bring a pre-manifesto paper for Conference to debate this autumn, and hope also to be doing some wider consultation about it across the party over the coming months. A key focus of our discussions will be ensuring it has a strong unifying theme, setting out its overall appeal to the electorate, as well as specific policy proposals.

It is worth restating again that, unlike in some other parties, the manifesto is not written in isolation. In our party the process of members debating and deciding party policy is always under way, with for example the papers we are bringing to this Conference for debate forming key planks of the likely eventual manifesto.

The process of writing the manifesto as such is therefore more a process of distilling and presenting our existing

body of policy in the way most appropriate for the General Election, than starting afresh.

Other work

We continue to report on our meetings through our committee page on Facebook, at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/federalpolicycommittee> and the AdLib blog on the party's website (<https://www.libdems.org.uk/adlib>).

Lastly, we want to thank our indispensable staff team in the policy unit of Christian Moon and Joe Wright, without whom none of the programmes set out above would be possible.

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.

The political landscape

There is a certain normality returning to British politics. An unpopular Conservative Party, messing up the economy and mired in sleaze, has been familiar territory ahead of previous successful Liberal Democrat Westminster general election campaigns.

Although it's unlikely that we'll have one of those this year, the continued rebuilding of our grassroots campaign strength and reform of our national operations through 2023 will be an important part of making a success of the general election when it comes.

We also know for sure that there is a huge round of council elections coming up in May. They will be a great opportunity to give more communities the benefits of Liberal Democrat councillors and Lib Dem led councils.

To make the most of those, we need to do better than we did four years ago at running candidates. The more often voters see the Lib Dem name and logo on a ballot paper, the more credibility we have and the more long-term loyal support we can build. The number of seats where we don't stand a candidate also makes a big difference to how seriously national organisations take us, for example in allocating time in the media.

The reduction in the number of nomination signatures required, bringing England this May into line with Scotland, will also make standing candidates much easier. We must make the most of that opportunity.

I know it's not an easy task to find enough people willing to stand and to get all the paperwork sorted. To help, therefore, there is a great set of training and other support materials available to assist local parties all the

way through from finding possible candidates to getting names safely on the ballot paper. Please do get in touch with your regional campaign staff if you need any help with this. Each extra candidate you put up is a boost for the whole party.

Our priorities

Since being newly elected, your Federal Board has reviewed the core priorities set out in the strategy motion passed by Conference earlier this Parliament:

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

We've agreed that these still make sense, and therefore rather than proposing a new framework to you, we're concentrating on working with others in the party on the next phase of implementing them.

Other parts of the Party, particularly the three state parties for England, Scotland and Wales, have important responsibilities in these areas too and the Board's plans

are deliberately aligned with their priorities. The resources that the state parties allocate are an important part of making a success of the overall strategy.

Conference also voted for the party to move towards net zero emissions in our operations. As well as being a responsibility for the Federal Party, I encourage everyone helping run other parts of the Party also to factor this into your plans.

The Party's budget for 2023, agreed by the outgoing Board in November, focuses our financial and staff resources on these priorities. That always involves some difficult choices, but it is better to take tough choices and prioritise properly.

Our financial planning so far in this Parliament has been through to the next Westminster general election. Working with the finance committee (FFRC), one of the tasks for the Board this year is now to extend our financial planning beyond that, especially mindful of the important elections - particularly in Scotland and Wales - likely to be coming up soon after the general election.

The Board's work

Aside from the budget, there is less than usual to report back to Spring Conference due to the pause in committee

work that happens every three years during our big round of internal party elections.

Thank you to everyone who took part in them. It's clear from the feedback from members that, among other issues, in particular many people found the size of the overall ballot challenging. There are a range of different possible ways of addressing that, and the Board has agreed to ensure that our internal election review considers this. At the time of writing, we're looking to appoint someone to lead the review.

We also agreed to include in that review the previous by-election for the post of Vice President responsible for working with ethnic minority communities, as that contest has not previously been reviewed and was run under new rules.

The Board is also proposing three names to add to the Federal Appeals Panel, to fill casual vacancies. Details are at the end of this report.

Diversity and inclusion

We have been working through improving our processes for various voluntary party posts at the federal level, producing proper job advertisements, creating job descriptions for posts that didn't previously come with any, extending induction processes to cover more of them

and also, crucially, moving away from the old culture of rushing to fill lots of posts just before Christmas. Having a more considered, less rushed process means it can be more open, with greater opportunities for those who aren't already in the know to take part in how our party is run, and making those teams more diverse.

As mentioned in the Board report to the cancelled autumn Conference, the Board agreed the following measures to help ensure improving diversity and inclusion is at the heart of the Board's approach to filling party posts:

"The Federal Board will regularly report to the Federal Council on all the party roles that it has filled, whether by election or appointment, including providing details of measures taken to enhance the party's diversity, data on the diversity of its appointments and the measures the Board takes to evaluate candidates and to judge their performance before deciding whether or not to re-elect or re-appoint them."

Treating people well

Related to that, we've introduced a round of briefings on the party's strategy, finances and working with staff for new federal committees. These are important so that people can make the most of the roles they are elected to. The last one is also regrettably necessary as it is still far

too common for staff to feel they are not being treated well by those in elected posts in the party. That mirrors the experience of the last general election, as documented in the Thornhill Report (our 2019 General Election review), where again how members and volunteers treat staff came up as an important issue.

The Board is also proposing to Conference for ratification a new Code of Conduct for members and registered supporters. This combines and updates the three different codes we used to have, both improving and clarifying their wording and also, by reducing three documents into one, making the new Code simpler. It is on the Conference agenda for debate and vote.

The Board also, based on legal advice commissioned by the Party, updated the Party's definition of transphobia. This is one of the definitions that is used by our complaints process. I know that this update caused some significant concerns, including over the timing of it. The Board is in continuing discussions with LGBT+ Liberal Democrats about how best to address those, including how to ensure that we consult better with official party bodies in future.

Complaints process

The Board has also considered proposals for some improvements to the rules from the Disciplinary Sub

Group (DSG), based on feedback from those who run our independent complaints system and from those who have been participants in it.

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

Thank you

As this is the first Board report since our big round of internal party elections held every three years, thank you also to all the members of different federal committees whose time in post has come to an end.

Thank you to everyone who put themselves forward for the new three-year cycle and best of luck for the challenges that we will all face in this cycle. Thank you also to our staff under the leadership of our Chief Executive, Mike Dixon, who the Board works with and without whom our work would not be possible.

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

Changes to the Complaints Process

The changes to the Complaints Process being reported to Conference as part of the Board report (F17A) are set out below. To see the existing rules in full see:

www.libdems.org.uk/complaints-procedure. To see how the rules would read with the changes in place, see: bit.ly/complaints-changes

The changes are mainly amendments to wording, to provide clarity to participants. The significant changes are:

- **A right to appeal against a complaint being dismissed at the first stage** - currently such appeals are not allowed, and it is proposed this is changed.
- **Suspensions** - allow the Senior Adjudicators' Team (SAT) the discretion to contact the Respondent to clarify information or give them the right of reply before making a decision on suspending them pending the outcome of a case.
- **Resignations** – currently, a Respondent can stop a complaint progressing against them by resigning from the party. Proposal is instead to give the SAT discretion over whether a complaint should still progress, and also to give a complaint panel the power to impose a sanction to apply or consider in the case of the person later seeking to rejoin the party.

- **Allow flagrant breaches of applicable article(s) Federal Constitution to be resolved without a hearing** – currently, Panels can dismiss a complaint without a hearing, based on the papers submitted by both sides. The proposal is to allow Panels to be able to uphold complaints **only** in circumstances whereby there is a flagrant breach of the relevant Article(s) of the Federal Constitution, based on the written submissions (which will include a Respondent being given the right to submit a written defence). The relevant Articles are listed below and it is required there be evidenceable breaches of Articles 3.8(c) and/or 3.8(d) in order to uphold a complaint based on papers alone:-

C. standing against the candidate of the Party in any election to public office;

D. membership of or support for another political party in Great Britain.

- **Investigations** - allow a panel to direct an Investigator on specific additional points to be investigated/clarified.
- **Removal of references to specific job titles** – currently the rules specifically refer to the Head of HR and Chief Executive. Proposal is to change this to

“relevant senior staff” to cater for holidays, absences or job title changes.

- **Warnings** – the proposal is to clarify that previous behaviour and outcomes are considered in this process.

Specific wording of changes

PART 1: Complaints process rules

Amend wording for Paragraph 1.1 to state complaints can only be made about members (addition is shown in bold below):

*“Any person can only make a Complaint **about a member of the Party** using the standard complaints form on the Party's website.”*

Add Paragraph 1.2 and renumber accordingly to clarify complainant must provide evidence at inception of complaint:

“A Complaint must set out all the evidence that supports the allegations raised at the inception of the Complaint. A Complainant must set out all the evidence that supports their allegations raised at the inception of the Complaint. The Complainant may introduce, at the discretion of the Adjudicator, further evidence if it either:

A) became available only after the inception of the complaint: or

B) becomes newly relevant to the complaint in the course of the investigation or in relation to the Respondent's submission."

Amend wording for Paragraph 1.3 from "*Lead Adjudicator*" to "*Standards Office*" (change is shown in bold below):

*"The Standards Office will not accept complaints which do not fall within the definition of a 'Complaint' under these rules. If a person is not sure whether their complaint meets the criteria they may contact the Standards Office for advice and/or review the flow chart at Appendix 1 – Who should I report a complaint to? Decisions of the **Standards Office** on whether a Complaint meets the criteria or not are final."*

(This change is because the paragraph states "*Standards Office will not accept complaints...*" but goes on to state that the Lead Adjudicator's decision is final. However, the Lead Adjudicator has not been involved in making the decision and so this change rectifies that drafting error. The Standards Office uses the definition of "Complaint" provided in the Complaints Procedures as previously reported to Conference to determine whether a complaint falls within the remit of the Complaints Process, as previously set by Conference.)

Amend wording for Paragraph 1.4 to state internal information will not be disclosed (addition is shown in bold below):

*"Any written communication about a Complaint sent by any person to an Adjudicator allocated to that Complaint or to the Senior Adjudicators' Team or to the Standards Office, shall be added to the records for that Complaint **for review. Disclosure of information requires adherence to applicable UK GDPR requirements.**"*

Add wording to Paragraph 3.2 to include the Respondent, in order to allow for appeals at first stage, which includes warnings:

"The Respondent can appeal in writing within 7 days of receiving notice from the Standards Office of the decision to issue a Warning. This appeal will be considered by the Review Panel at their next meeting."

Add wording to Paragraph 5.2 to allow the Senior Adjudicators' Team to contact parties to complaint at any stage (pre-suspension):

"The Senior Adjudicators' Team may exercise discretion in adherence to the rules of notifying a Respondent of a complaint. In exceptional circumstances, in order to clarify subject matter content to aid the decision-making process, the Senior Adjudicators' Team may contact parties to the complaint at any time during the process."

Amend wording for Paragraph 5.3 to include any request for additional information to suspend (addition is shown in bold below):

*"If the Senior Adjudicators' Team decide to suspend a person's membership the suspension will be effective immediately, **or in exceptional circumstances, after receipt of information requested of the Respondent.**"*

Amend wording for Paragraph 6.3 to reflect the deadline for submissions rather than specifying the default 14 days as extensions can be provided (addition is shown in bold below):

*"Once **the deadline for all submissions has expired**, the Panel Chair will hold a meeting of the Panel to review the Complaint(s), any Counter-Complaint(s), responses and evidence."*

Amend Paragraph 6.4 to include a new outcome at Panel stage, to allow breaches of applicable article(s) Federation Constitution to be resolved without a hearing (all sanctions are available to the Panel as usual):

"After considering the documents, the Panel will decide whether to:

A. dismiss the Complaint(s) or Counter-Complaint(s) on the basis of the written evidence only, or

- B. **uphold** the Complaint(s) or Counter-Complaint(s) on the basis of the written evidence only **in circumstances where there is evidencable breach(es) of Articles 3.8(c) and/or 3.8(d) of the Federal Constitution**, or
- C. hold a hearing, in which case they should set a hearing date at least 14 days in the future.

*The Standards Office shall tell all parties to the Complaint of the Panel's decision rationale **and sanction (if applicable in the case of an Uphold decision)** or the hearing date (if any)."*

Add wording to Paragraph 6.5 to include the ability for a Panel to instruct the Investigator on specifics (addition at end):

"The Panel can request specific questions to be asked by the Investigator to support their review of the Complaint."

Add a new Paragraph 6.6 (and renumber accordingly) to allow a Panel to consider an Investigator report and restart a review under Paragraph 6.3:

"If an Investigator is appointed under paragraph 6.5, the Investigator's report (and any supporting evidence) will be shared with the Panel for the Complaint to re-considered under paragraph 6.3."

Amend Paragraph 7.1 to add appeals wording to allow for appeals under stages 3.2 (Respondent dismissed - warning), 4.1 (No further info) and amend paragraph number 6.7 (Dismissed by Panel). Changes shown in bold below:

*"A Review Panel will meet at least once a month to consider appeals made in writing against decisions to dismiss (under either of paragraph 3.1, **3.2, 4.1** or 6.7). The decisions of a Review Panel will be final."*

Amend Paragraph 7.2 to add appeals wording to allow for appeals under stages 3.2 (Respondent dismissed - warning), 4.1 (No further info) and 2.1.1 (Dismissed). Changes shown in bold below:

*"If the Review Panel overturns a decision under paragraph 3.1, 3.2 or 4.1, it will set out in writing its reasoning and whether the Complaint should be dealt with under paragraph **2.1.1**, 2.1.2, 2.1.3 or 2.1.4 instead."*

Amend Paragraph 7.3 to correct paragraph number 6.7 (Dismissed by Panel). Changes shown in bold below:

*"If the Review Panel overturns a decision under paragraph **6.7**, the Standards Office will appoint a new Panel to consider the Complaint at a Panel hearing."*

Amend Paragraph 7.5 to correct paragraph number 6.14 (Uphold by Panel). Changes shown in bold below:

*"An Appeals Panel will meet at least once a month to consider appeals against Panel decisions to uphold Complaints made under paragraph **6.14**. The decisions of an Appeals Panel will be final."*

PART 2 – Extra Steps

Amend wording for "Criminal matters - Paragraph 5.2" - Head of HR and/CEO are not relevant, usually Head of Complaints / Complaints, Director of Ops etc.:

Change "report to Head of HR and CEO" to "appropriate or relevant senior members of HQ staff."

Amend wording for "Criminal matters - Paragraph 5.3":

Change "where the Head of HR or CEO intends to report" to "where senior members of HQ staff intend to report."

Amend wording for "Complaints against Parliamentarians and other elected representatives Paragraph 2.1" to clarify that a decision outcome is required from the relevant hand off authority. Changes shown in bold below:

*"If not **found to have been acting in their role as a Parliamentarian or elected representative**, the referee shall inform the Standards Office **of their***

outcome and rationale within 10 working days and the Complaint shall be dealt with under this complaints process."

Amend wording for "Complaints against Parliamentarians and other elected representatives Paragraph 2.3" to clarify that the SAT can ratify or disagree with the referee report and outcome, in which case a Panel is to be convened. Changes shown in bold below:

*"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 make its decision** as to whether to confirm the outcome of the Complaint based on the report and any other evidence the Standards Office has received (and for the avoidance of doubt the SAT shall not be bound by the findings of any report and decision provided by the referee). **If the SAT disagrees with the referee investigation and/or outcome, the complaint can return to paragraph 2.1.4 stage for Panel deliberation.** 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."*

PART 3 – Guidance and explanatory notes

Add wording to “Evidence” to state all evidence must be supplied at complaint inception:

“It is the responsibility of the Complainant to ensure that all supporting material is included at complaint inception. Failure to do so may lead to the Complaint being dismissed.”

Amend wording for “Evidence”:

From “This means it is the Complainant’s responsibility to be prepared” to “It is the Complainant’s responsibility”

Amend wording for “Evidence”:

From “Complainants will need to” to “Complainants must”

Amend wording for “Evidence”:

From “It is also the Respondent’s responsibility” to “It is the Respondent’s responsibility”

Amend wording for “Evidence”:

From “they will need to explain” to “they must explain why”

Amend wording for “Resignation of parties to the Complaint” so that a resignation does not simply trigger an automatic closing of a complaint. Updated wording is:

“Respondents or Complainants may seek to resign their membership of the relevant State Party before the complaints procedure is complete.

While the relevant State Party may accept such resignations, in such circumstances the Senior Adjudicator’s Team should review the case to determine if there is sufficient interest in continuing the complaints process.

If the Senior Adjudicator Team believes there is sufficient rationale to continue with the complaints process, the Panel may continue at the relevant stage of the complaint.

If the Respondent resigns before the decision of the Complaints Panel has been made, the Complaints Panel should take this into account when considering any outcome and/or sanction.

For example, the Panel may wish to Uphold the Complaint, and determine a relevant sanction, which is to be applied in the event the Respondent tries to re-join the Party. In order to do this, a flag will be placed on the Respondent’s federal party membership record by the Standards Office. In the event that the Respondent tries to re-join the Party, the Standards Office will inform the relevant applicable body of any relevant outstanding sanction, this includes but is not limited to the relevant

local, regional and/or state party or Affiliated Organisation membership teams."

Amend wording for *"Patterns of behaviour - Warnings"*:

From "If any new Complaint is upheld" to "If any new Complaint is made"

Amend wording for *"Patterns of behaviour - Warnings"*:

From "the Warning would then be taken into account." to "the volume, scope and outcome of all previous complaints would then be taken into account."

PART 5 – Definitions and Glossary

Delete definition of CEO as reference has been removed and replaced elsewhere with *"relevant senior member of staff"*.

Add definition of a Decision Notice:

"A document issued to all relevant parties that outlines the decision and rationale of the Lead Adjudicator or Panel in response to the Complaint."

Add definition of a Panel Hearing:

"An inquisitorial process to which all relevant parties to the Complaint(s) are invited, which is convened by the appointed Panel to review and consider the relevant

evidence provided by all parties and to ask any relevant questions."

Add definition of a Procedure Notice:

"A document issued to all relevant parties that outlines the details of a Panel Hearing including, but not limited to the time and date of the Hearing and relevant evidence to be taken into consideration."

Amend definition of a Process Mentor to allow Process Mentors to be appointed to all participants not just Respondents.

From "Respondents" to "Participants"

Federal Appeals Panel Nominations

Laura Coyle

Laura Coyle is a housing solicitor with over fifteen years experience in the legal profession and is a partner at Turpin Miller. She is a charity trustee and previously served as a local councillor in the London Borough of Haringey for six years. She has stood for parliament three times, most recently in 2019 for the seat of Henley in Oxfordshire.

Bridget Fox

Bridget Fox works for an environmental NGO on policy and advocacy work. She served as a local authority councillor for eighteen years, including six as deputy council leader, and has stood for parliament five times, as well as for the London Assembly. She is a candidate mentor and complaints investigator within the Liberal Democrats as well as a charity trustee and a school governor, where she has served on disciplinary and appeals panels.

Neil Stockley

Neil Stockley is a communications consultant, often dealing with complex governance issues, and holds a law degree from the University of Auckland. He is a former Director of Policy for the Liberal Democrats as well as a former executive assistant to New Zealand Prime Minister David Lange. Through his professional life he has extensive experience working with legal and HR teams.

Federal Finance and Resources Committee - Mike Cox (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.

I have been re-appointed as the Chair of the Federal Finance and Resources Committee and the Registered Treasurer of the party. At the time of writing the process for electing the other members of FFRC is currently underway.

One of the key projects we will be undertaking is producing the next iteration of the Party's medium term financial plan which will look at our financial situation beyond the next General Election.

The Party has been rolling out the membership uprating project which has seen our financial situation improve due to increased income from membership dues.

Federal Communications and Elections Committee - Kath Pinnock (Chair)

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

Since we last reported to Conference, the Federal Communications and Elections Committee has continued to work to get more Liberal Democrats elected. I was very

pleased to take over from Lisa Smart as Chair of the Committee at the beginning of the year.

We have received regular updates from our staff on communications and campaigns. A particular recent highlight was a briefing on the fantastic work our Communications Team did over the festive period, which saw a large number of Liberal Democrats stories featured prominently in the national press.

We have continued to review the performance of our advanced seats in voter contacts and literature. It is good to see that so many of them have been making real progress in ramping up their activities as we gear up for the next General Election.

We have also been looking towards the council elections in England this May, including at the potential impacts of the voter ID legislation. As a councillor, I have been particularly pushing for us to develop strategies to make sure that we stand more candidates. This might be the last set of local elections before the next General Elections so a strong performance, in the number of wards we stand in as well as number of councillors elected, is crucial.

As ever, the work we do in developing long-term strategies could not be done without the hard work of Liberal Democrat activists on the ground every day.

Federal 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 Part, the diversity engagement strategy, membership recruitment, retention and activation strategy and working with Affiliated Organisations.

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

Since my report to our last actual Conference in Spring 2022, we have made significant progress in some areas, and have much work still to do in others.

FPDC works with the Campaigns Team to enable and support local party officers, with the Tech Team to ensure

the systems we provide to volunteers are suitable, and with the membership team to recruit, retain and engage members.

The Campaigns Team have revamped the information available on our website to help local party officers and are exploring a strategy to utilise RDO's to help local parties of all sizes to set development goals and engage their own local members. They have held two "Big Build" weekends, which had some limited success, and I am hopeful that they will analyse what worked and could be done better before rerunning these events.

We have a new Membership Development Officer at HQ, who has been working hard to make membership reporting more useful in our mission to recruit and retain members. This is still challenging - partly due to the tension between creating a powerful liberal narrative that will motivate our members and the need to portray Ed as "Centrist Dad" to appeal to the voters we need to switch to us. The necessary focus on the Blue Wall also makes recruitment and retention difficult in Labour facing areas.

We have I believe made progress on engaging our members - we have a new Senior Email Marketing Manager and I hope that members have noticed and welcomed the change in communications from HQ, with

more of an emphasis on informing members, and less on asking them for donations. Regular “Long Explainer” emails, monthly updates from the Parliamentary party, and a new “onboarding” sequence for local party officers are all new innovations.

We’ve also got better at thanking activists, with “Top Canvasser” badges going to our, well, top canvassers, and “Golden Mallet” badges, going to those people who erected the most stakeboards during the local election campaigns. We’ll be continuing to develop a wider range of badges to recognise more of our members’ contributions, and our top canvassers are being invited to regular calls with the Party leadership to discuss what these experienced activists are hearing on the doorsteps.

The Training Manager has continued to develop training in areas where there are gaps, and the new system is working well to ensure less duplication of effort within HQ teams developing training. More of our online training is now available as recorded sessions for members to watch when they want. A cohesive strategy has been written which will provide a strong framework for future training needs including with other training providers, and to develop better feedback mechanisms from training attendees.

A new Diversity Manager has been appointed and is building a network of “Regional Diversity Champions.” We have also had our first “Diversity Development Day” - a virtual event attended by over 200 members which provided information, support and inspiration to improve inclusion across the party. Progress on the EEDI plan goals by the Working Group remains steady, though more volunteers for that group are always welcome.

One area we have made huge progress is in technology. The membership records in Connect are now fully correct, and we have written comprehensive guidance on how local parties can match these to the voter records and enhance this data. The Team, alongside the wonderful people at Prater Raines, have transitioned Nationbuilder users to our new website platform Fleet with over 140 websites live on it. Like all our new tech tools, the development process has been driven by user need and user feedback has been essential. I’m incredibly proud that the Team have developed a solution that local parties large and small are finding much easier than before. We also have many local parties of the Connect-integrated Targeted Email, which makes the process of local parties sending emails in a GDPR compliant manner much easier. But the real benefit of this work is the way the systems have been developed to work together, allowing petition signers to be matched to voter records almost

instantaneously and giving seamless integration between digital and doorstep campaigning. As more local parties use these new tools in election times I hope they will see the massive benefits, both in effectiveness of campaigning and activist time saved.

And lastly we've created a new "Code of Conduct for Members and Registered Supporters," which will hopefully be ratified by this Conference. This brings together various previous Codes into a single updated document. It has been developed after lots of consultation within the Party, and is intended not simply as a list of rules we must follow, but as a values based document that helps embed positive behaviour throughout the Party. If ratified, we will be ensuring that the new Code is communicated throughout the Party.

I am stepping down from FPDC to concentrate on other things within the Party. I am sure the new Committee will be able to make more progress on our goals in the future. I'd like to thank all the members of FPDC who have been wonderful to work with, in particular our Secretary Abi Bell. And on behalf of FPDC I would like to thank all the staff who have worked on membership, training and diversity. And particular thanks needs to go to Greg Foster, former Head of Membership and more recently Head of

Tech, who did so much to support and empower members during his long career with the Party.

FPDC is also responsible for assessing new Affiliated Organisations who wish to become official party groups. This year, these new groups have applied and we recommend them to Conference:

Applications currently under consideration for Affiliated Organisation status

Party Groups wishing to become Affiliated Organisations must meet the criteria and follow the process previously agreed by Conference, available here:

<https://www.libdems.org.uk/f29-f34>

There are three applications in this report. Bodies which were not SAOs or AOs at the time of the creation of 'Affiliated Organisation' status must be reported to Conference before they can be finally approved by the Party.

1. Liberal Democrat Friends of Hong Kong

The Liberal Democrats have a long history of standing up for Hong Kong, and continue to do so. With the recent influx from Hong Kong, Hong Kongers are only gaining significance in UK politics. Though efforts from the Liberal Democrats greatly contributed to pushing the Government to eventually accept BN(O)s, the Conservatives have gained much of the credit. The

Conservatives have, in places, argued that Brexit contributed to our ability to respond to the Hong Kong crisis and are raising membership and resources from the community.

It is very important that we have a Hong Kong specific party body to turn the tide back in our favour. The main purposes of our organisation will be: 1) asylum policy and assistance; 2) community casework; and 3) assisting Lib Dem local parties.

1. could be politically sensitive. Confidentiality is required to protect them from trolls and harassment. We will ensure at all times to provide confidential and secure support.

Community casework is extremely important, and should be targeted. Many Hong Kongers regard themselves as separate from their neighbours. We look forward to a relationship of good will with other Party bodies.

We have always worked closely with other Party bodies. We maintain effective liaison with levels of the Party structure. We strongly believe in the promotion of liberal democracy. But our experience tells us, for instance through helping draft the recent Hong Kong motion to Conference, it is important for the Party to have a separate and specific Hong Kong interest group.

2. Lib Dem Friends of the Armed Forces

The Liberal Democrats Friends of the Armed Forces has been going through the process of re-formation and compliance in order to meet the requirements of an AO within the Party. It consists of Party members (including former Service personnel) with an interest in defence and security issues, including the welfare and missions of our armed forces and their families. It encourages an Armed Forces Champion in every constituency/local party, and participation in the public marking of service and sacrifice. It intends to participate in the evolution of Party policy on relevant topics.

It will hold its re-formation AGM at the Brighton Conference, including the adoption of a new compliant constitution and the formal election of a committee (which has been functioning to date in an acting capacity).

Our defence spokespeople in the Lords and Commons are honorary presidents. Honorary vice presidents include MPs and Peers with a special interest in security.

The Acting Chair is Sir Nick Harvey and Acting Convenor/Vice Chair is Cllr Robin Ashby - Newcastle upon Tyne.

3. Operation Social Equality

Operation Social Equality was founded in 2021 to campaign and represent the interests of those from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Specifically, we want to address the inequality and disadvantage that those from low socioeconomic backgrounds face.

We see that this group is the most disproportionately under-represented group in politics at almost every level. We believe that tackling this inequality provides wide benefits and creates the society that liberals have called for in the preamble to our manifesto.

We believe that we can address this within the party by encouraging participation and increasing opportunity by levelling the playing field. Practically we are trying to achieve this with three principal aims:

TRAIN: Provide training specifically targeted towards supporting those from low socioeconomic backgrounds. We will support members and supporters of the Party in accessing positions within the Party, getting involved in Party activities, taking on Party roles and standing for elected positions at every level.

MENTOR: We will provide a mentoring scheme that aims to partner members and supporters at various levels in order to provide access to opportunities within the Party and equip particularly those from low socioeconomic

backgrounds to progress within the Party, and also provide support through challenges along the way.

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS: We seek to break down barriers to participation for those from low socioeconomic backgrounds. This includes institutional barriers created over years that reduce access and participation.

Federal International Relations Committee - David Chalmers (Chair)

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

Recognising internationalism to be at the core of our Party, over the past year, FIRC has striven to maintain and develop strong links with our sister parties across the globe through our participation in Liberal International (LI) and our membership of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), thus ensuring that post Brexit our voice is continued to be heard and respected on the world stage. FIRC realises that many members joined the Party because of their European or internationalist attachment, so have helped craft policies on various international topics – ranging from the war in Ukraine, to relations with China, to different aspects of our relationship with the European Union (EU) and maintained our outward-facing activities. Acknowledging the restraints on our finances, we are continuing to seek alternate sources of funding to enable us to increase the working hours of the Party's International Officer.

Both ALDE and LI reinstated meetings in person after the long period of the pandemic. In June we took our first delegation in almost three years to Dublin to attend the ALDE Congress, where Baroness Sal Brinton was re-elected for a second term as a Vice President to the Bureau, and Ilhan Kyuchyuk from Turkey and Timmy Dooley from Ireland were elected as Co Chairs. Through our relations with our European sister parties we are working to foster the closest possible relationship between Britain and the EU27. ALDE also includes parties from non-EU member states so it is an excellent platform for debate and engagement. Indeed, we will hold regular discussions going forward with our sister parties from Norway, Switzerland and Iceland. Alongside 43 of our sister parties, the LibDems signed the Dublin Diversity Declaration, which aims to support and encourage greater LGBTQI+ political representation at all levels of government. The Alliance of Her, ALDE's program for supporting talented female candidates across Europe, goes from strength to strength, and has been joined this year by the Rainbow Platform, an initiative endeavouring to give the same support and direction to LGBTQI+ candidates. The LibDem delegation was very active at the ALDE Council meeting in Bratislava.

At the LI Congress in Sofia in July, the LibDems also increased their influence. My predecessor as Chair of FIRC,

Phil Bennion, was elected as Vice President, and our party secured three positions on LI's thematic committees.

Russia's war in Ukraine has dominated much of our thoughts this past year, representing as it does a direct threat to our liberal values and way of life. Our support for Ukraine and its people are demonstrated by our strong bonds with Kira Rudik's Holos Party. In the summer those bonds were enhanced as we formally welcomed President Zelenskyy's Party 'Servant of the People' into the ALDE family.

Europe and our future relations with the EU are of paramount importance and will remain so. Over the course of the past 2 years, FIRC has been instrumental in helping craft the various Europe motions, which have established our Party's position on Europe. It is clear that developing policies that reconnect us with the EU will continue to dominate much of our international work – as will articulating and communicating our policies clearly to Party members and the wider public.

FIRC is conscious of the significance of various diasporas in the United Kingdom, and we look forward to working with these communities to address the foreign policy concerns that we as the Lib Dems share with them. Such engagement could lead to more active involvement in the Party from members of Black and Minority Ethnic

communities – especially the recent arrivals from China and Hong Kong.

One positive result of lockdowns has been the increase in online webinars and other events organised by various associated organisations. Members of FIRC have taken part in many of these and the Committee has encouraged greater sharing of information about events with an international dimension. Worth mentioning are Liberal International British Group (LIBG), Liberal Democrat European Group (LDEG), the Commonwealth and European forums of the National Liberal Club and the Paddy Ashdown Forum (PAF). A successful international forum was included as part of last year's West Midlands Regional Conference.

It was with great sadness in November that we learned of the death of Robert Woodthorpe Browne, the Chair of FIRC from 2008 – 2019, who established and presided over PAF and who played such a significant role in promoting liberal values around the world.

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 work with the CEO on the recommendations of the Thornhill Report and to examine and challenge the risk register on a quarterly basis.

The Committee continued to work with the Finance, HR and Compliance Teams to improve controls.

A new team will be in place by the time of Conference and I have stood down from the Committee. I would like to formally thank the members of the Committee for the time they gave up over the last few years.

Parliamentary Reports

The Commons - Wendy Chamberlain (Chief Whip)

I am delighted to be reporting to our first physical Conference since Bournemouth 2019. I would like to thank and congratulate the Conference Committee and our staff for their tireless work over these years, notably in Autumn 2022 in the context of the sad passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

I would also like to pay tribute to my colleagues across both Houses in Parliament, staff based in constituencies

and Westminster, our local government representatives, tireless campaigners, and our members for the work they do to ensure our constituents and the Party can be proud of what we do in their name.

The political picture

When I last wrote, Boris Johnson was Prime Minister. While the summer of the zombie Government failing to tackle the cost-of-living crisis was heart-breaking, little did we know that it was the quiet before the Liz Truss storm. The profound damage an unsuitable Prime Minister can do, and the power of a tiny minority to impose one on us, is a reminder of the importance of the pluralist democracy for which we stand.

Some calm has now returned to Parliament but, as legislation such as the Strikes Bill and EU Retained Law Bill progresses, the damage to our country continues.

Some highlights of our work

Ed led our tributes as a Party to the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. He has also continued to champion carers, pushing the – then – Prime Minister to commit to a rise in the Carer's Allowance in line with inflation. More recently, he has been focused on Rishi Sunak's failure to tackle the abhorrent cancer wait times for patients around the country.

Wera is in the advanced stages of changing the law. Her Worker Protection Bill, which has now passed the Commons, will ensure that those affected by workplace harassment and sexual harassment are properly protected in law. Wera has also been working tirelessly to hold the Government to account in transitioning to net zero and improving the UK's transportation sector, hosting debates on Climate Change and Human Security and vehicle taxation reform.

Sarah Olney represented the Party in her Treasury brief covering the 'Mini Budget', the resulting economic crash, and the subsequent U-turn on almost all of the Government's announcements. We were the first party to call for a tax on the windfall profits of oil and gas giants and the first party to propose a package of support for households and businesses to deal with soaring energy bills.

Jamie Stone secured the Green Freeport for Cromarty Firth in his constituency; the port aims to maximise local and Scotland-wide benefits from a pipeline of renewable energy projects and place the Highlands at the heart of the drive towards net-zero. Meanwhile, Jamie's efforts formed part of the successful campaign to prevent the privatisation of Channel 4 and he has recently set up a new Parliamentary Group on the Child Maintenance Services.

Daisy has been leading the Party's response to the NHS winter crisis as Health and Social Care spokesperson. In December, Daisy secured an urgent question, forcing the Government to answer for the antibiotic shortage as a wave of Strep A swept across the country. As the full scale of the NHS crisis became clear over Christmas, Daisy led our party's calls for the Prime Minister to recall Parliament from recess.

Helen has held the Conservative Government to account in her new role as the party's Levelling Up Spokesperson. She has challenged their lack of support for rural communities in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill. It will be no surprise to you that the Bill offers little 'Levelling Up' or 'Regeneration', it is a glorified planning bill and which offers nothing for communities like North Shropshire.

Sarah Green has continued her work with victims of surgical mesh, securing a meeting with a Justice Minister. Her Chalk Streams (Protection) Bill advocates for their protection. As International Trade Spokesperson, she held the Government to account for the lack of scrutiny of the Australia and New Zealand trade deals and for the reduction in UK exports. The Government also urged energy suppliers to stop forced installation of prepayment meters only days after her PMQ on the issue.

Christine has focussed on women's safety, flight paths and air pollution. She tabled an amendment to the Levelling Up Bill which would have required an assessment of the impact on women's safety of planning changes to open spaces, layout of buildings, unlit or hidden spaces, visibility of entranceways, and blind spots. She also secured debate on finding a solution between the Civil Aviation Authority and Edinburgh Airport on proposed flight paths.

Layla has been holding the Government to account for its failures on economic crime, securing a January vote aimed at forcing them to publish their "golden visas" review, which the Conservatives used their majority to keep hidden. In her Foreign Affairs brief, she has been calling for a "lifeboat scheme" to provide safety and sanctuary in the UK for women protesting in Iran. Domestically she successfully fought a Government attempt to reintroduce the Vagrancy Act.

As Education Spokesperson, Munira has been campaigning hard for policies that put our children and young people first, from rolling out free school meals to all families on Universal Credit to allowances for kinship carers. She is also pursuing an amendment to allow publicly owned buildings to be prioritised for community benefit when being sold off, inspired by a police station sale in her constituency.

Alistair secured a £100m Island Growth Deal, signed alongside a £27m package for the Fair Isle Ferry. He secured debates in Parliament on post-Brexit Fisheries and Tidal Stream Energy. As Home Affairs, Justice and Northern Ireland spokesperson, Alistair led our opposition to the Government's illiberal and immoral Nationality and Borders Act, and their half-baked attempts to repeal the Human Rights Act.

As our Defence Spokesperson, Richard visited Ukraine and has been a consistent voice calling for more UK support in its struggle for freedom. He has also been standing up for pubs and local businesses in the face of Conservative neglect for struggling SMEs. Recently, he has been spearheading a campaign to protect the public's right to access national parks, recognising the importance of nature to everyone's wellbeing.

Tim, As Environment Spokesperson, pushed amendments to improve transport services, increase affordable zero-carbon housing, and stop the blight of second home and holiday-let ownership in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill Committee. The pressure paid off, with the Government committing to consult on creating a new Planning Use Category for holiday-lets. As Spokesperson, he additionally tabled Bills to stop the extraction of coal from a new coal mine in Cumbria, and to set targets for new green jobs.

Alongside my duties as Chief Whip, I guided my Carer's Leave Bill through the Commons. The Bill modifies the Employment Rights Act to create an entitlement to Carer's Leave for employees, recognising the crucial role carers play in our society. My thanks to Lord Fox for taking up the baton for the stages in the Lords. Tackling sleaze, I also successfully campaigned for an amendment to Parliamentary Standing Orders to prevent MPs from voting on their own disciplinary proceedings.

Communicating with members

I am happy to report that the Party has launched a new monthly newsletter detailing the highlights of our Parliamentary work to you as members more regularly. Members told us that you wanted to hear more about what we're doing, while we're doing it. Not only is it an interesting read but I know our first few emails have proven their worth for canvassers, giving them an edge on the doorstep. Not everything we do makes headlines, but we are making a difference and fighting for the things our members and our constituents care about.

Staffing

The Commons Whips Office continues to be headed by Matthew Smith. Jack Coulson, formerly the Party's Company Secretary, joined us in the Autumn to replace

Peter Munro. Our PST team remains as Emma Stevenson, Toby Davis and Rebecca Grubb.

Congratulations

As you will have heard there are plenty of things to congratulate my colleagues for but I'd like to give a few final special mentions to: Jamie Stone for winning the Patchwork Foundation's 'Other MP of the Year Award'; Ayesha Hassan for winning the 'Lib Dem Parliamentary Staffer of the Year' Award; and Kathryn Sturgeon, who I proudly call my own Senior Parliamentary Researcher, for winning the 'Cross-Party Project Lead of the Year' Award.

The Lords - Ben Stoneham (Chief Whip)

In my Report to last year's Autumn Conference that never was, I said that, at the time of writing, we were waiting to see whether Liz Truss or Rishi Sunak prevailed in the Tory leadership race. Little did we realise then that in fact they would both prevail – just in separate leadership races!

The chaos in the Tory ranks back in the late summer and autumn and the madness of the short-lived Truss Government had ripple effects in the Lords, not least the merry-go-round of ministers, some of whom were sacked, reappointed and sacked – or appointed, sacked and reappointed.

We continued with the bulk of a meaty legislative programme in the autumn and winter, defeating the Government on a number of issues. At the time of writing, we are about to embark on the legislative journey of the Online Safety Bill, the Retained EU Law Bill and the Economic Crime Bill, to name just three so there is plenty to keep us occupied.

There has been much chat in the media about new peerages and the latest list (from Boris Johnson) further increased the challenges we face in the Lords when coalescing with allies to try and defeat the Government – in essence, their increasing numbers make winning much harder. Rumours abound of further lists of new peerages (Johnson and Truss resignation lists) and we await to see whether anything materialises.

I am, as always, very grateful to our Parliamentary Party in the Lords who ensure that we more than pull our weight during proceedings, whether on legislation or on the many important issues that are given time for general debate and questions. Time has an effect on all of us, and more and more of the time-consuming, detailed work is having to be done by a smaller group of individuals. The Party should be immensely proud of these people.

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 an 8-strong team of whips, supporting me and the Whips' Office in our work, and I am very grateful for everything they do.

Highlights of our legislative work over last few months

Energy Bill

Robin Teverson is leading our response on the Energy Bill, and along with Don Foster, Jenny Randerson, Shas Sheehan and Malcom Bruce, is highlighting the importance of Net Zero at the heart of Government policy as well as making the case for more onshore wind and the need to protect vulnerable consumers from the rising costs of energy.

Social Housing (Regulation) Bill

Dorothy Thornhill and Kath Pinnock welcomed the long-overdue Social Housing (Regulation) Bill but raised the need for more action on the lack of social housing, as well as the need for the regulator to have a role in reducing homelessness. Kath continues to raise the plight of tenants and leaseholders affected by the cladding and building safety crisis. The team were able to secure a key

concession from the Government of the need for social housing to be energy efficient.

Public Order Bill

This is a deeply illiberal bill and Brian Paddick is leading our opposition to it. As the Police have demonstrated with numerous arrests in recent months, the new offences and powers in this Bill are simply not needed. In the Lords, we will be voting against the worst aspects of it, including new police powers for suspicionless stop and search, and to stop new far-reaching civil orders being imposed on individuals when they haven't even committed an offence. We are also supporting amendments to protect journalists, legal observers, academics, and bystanders who monitor or record protests or the Police's use of powers related to protests. We will vote on a cross-party basis to ensure the grounds for triggering the offences in the Bill are more proportionate.

Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill

Kath Pinnock led the Lib Dem Lords' response during Second Reading of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill and the group's strong local government roots were on full display with a team including John Shipley, Dorothy Thornhill, Andrew Stunell, Cathy Bakewell, Paul Scriven, Don Foster, Shas Sheehan, Kate Parminter, Robin Teverson, Ros Scott, Angie Harris. The team will focus on

being a strong voice for local government, local democracy, devolution, the environment, social housing, second homes and local highstreets and much more as the Bill continues through the House.

Procurement Bill

The Procurement Bill reforms the UK's public procurement regime following Brexit. Public procurement accounts for a third of all public expenditure at around £300 billion every year. The Bill as presented had a huge carve-out for the NHS. It would have given the Secretary of State for Health excessive powers to make up their own rules for massive swathes of NHS procurement with very little parliamentary scrutiny. At Report Stage, Sal Brinton moved and won an amendment to bring the NHS within the scope of the Procurement Bill, ensuring NHS procurement would follow the same rules as other public sector procurement. However, we expect this to be removed in the Commons. Following the PPE procurement scandal during Covid and the by-passing of the usual procurement rules via 'VIP lanes', Paul Scriven moved an amendment to ban 'VIP lanes' in public procurement. Unfortunately, this amendment was lost, with 189 Tory peers shamefully voting to retain this practice. Sarah Olney is pressing this amendment again in the Commons. Other cross-party amendments won in the Lords tighten up procurement rules to ensure supply

chains are protected against modern slavery practices or other unethical activities; and to ensure that government principles and priorities in procurement include social and environmental priorities that procurement is carried out with transparency and integrity.

National Security Bill

Jeremy Purvis is leading an expert team on this Bill, including Jonathan Marks, Sarah Ludford and William Wallace. At Committee stage, Jonathan led calls to include a Public Interest Defence in the Bill. Such a defence is vital if we are to avoid the prospect of convicting journalists, investigators, campaigners, whistle-blowers and many others for exposing serious executive misconduct. We also pressed the Government to publish in full its review of the 'Golden Visas' scheme and to report to Parliament on the actions the Government has taken in response to the report of the Intelligence and Security Committee on Russia. We remain concerned about how the Bill implements a new Foreign Influence Registration Scheme. The Scheme requires organisations and individuals to register their political influencing activities if they are "directed by" a "foreign principal". However many charities, universities and businesses are concerned that the Scheme as drafted goes too far and will inadvertently capture lawful and legitimate political influencing activities. We will be returning to these issues at Report

Stage when we hope to inflict significant defeats on the Government.

Northern Ireland Protocol Bill

Jeremy Purvis led our opposition to this Bill which “breaches international law, undermines our reliability for other international trade agreements, divides communities rather than brings them together and abuses proper parliamentary legislative processes to an egregious degree”. We tabled amendments at Committee stage to remove each individual clause from the Bill, as well as to object to the new huge swathes of powers conferred on Ministers under the Bill. At the time of writing there are no dates for later stages of the Bill.

Financial Services and Markets Bill

Susan Kramer, John Sharkey, Sharon Bowles, Shas Sheehan, Lindsay Northover and Claire Tyler have been tackling the Government’s plans for the financial services sector post-Brexit in the Financial Services and Markets Bill and have been highlighting the need for Parliamentary Scrutiny and regulatory reform, as well as emphasising the central role of climate change and consumer protection.

Retained EU Law Bill

At the time of writing the formal Lords stages of this Bill are yet to commence. We remain opposed to this

undemocratic power grab, which gives Conservative Ministers the power to eliminate workers' rights, environmental protections and other consumer and economic protections. We will fight against the arbitrary deadline set in the Bill for junking EU laws which creates uncertainty for businesses.

Peers and staff

It is always dangerous to single out working individuals in this section, but Sal Brinton must deserve a particular mention as she stepped down as Lords Health spokesperson at the end of 2022 after almost three years in the role. The health portfolio was exceptionally busy during those three years for obvious reasons and Sal worked magnificently in the role, elevating the scrutiny of the Government during the pandemic to new levels. We are all very grateful for everything she has done, and we thank her very much as she returns to the backbenches. We are really pleased that Richard Allan has taken on the health spokesperson role, and he has really hit the ground running in the last few weeks.

We remain an active group of 75+ but we were all very saddened by the sudden death of Nigel Jones in November. Nigel was a real character and served the Party at many levels over the decades as a councillor, an MP and a Peer. His bravery and stoicism in the years following the sword attack at his constituency office in

January 2000, which resulted in the death of a member of staff, was testament to the type of person he was. The Group in the Lords miss him.

As ever I would like to extend my thanks to the staff in the Lords team who support us so well in our work. I am also very grateful to the Parliamentary Adviser Unit, the Parliamentary Support Team, the Leader's Office and the Party's Press Office and Communications Teams for all the support they give us.

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.

CBG has continued to provide support to women who want to become Members of the Westminster Parliament, the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly over the last six months.

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

Our team has been providing mentoring support for women going for approval and Parliamentary selections.

The target seat selections were very challenging last year and there were a number of notable successful women candidates.

CGB Vice Chair Julia Cambridge led our Candidate Approval Team to considerable success, helping many women get approved as Parliamentary Candidates. We are very proud to be supporting women candidates with a range of different protected characteristics. Our commitment to supporting intersectionality is one of the CGB's defining values.

CGB Chair Candy Piercy has led the team providing support to women applying for selection in specific seats. We are very happy with the overall success rate and some excellent women have been selected. However, we are concerned that it seems to be getting harder for candidates to be selected who do not live in the seat they are applying for.

Another factor making it harder for women, and other candidates with diverse characteristics, is about timing. When all the target seats are up for a selection at the same time this causes them problems. It limits the options for diverse candidates to gain the experience they need of selection battles in order to win selection in a seat with strong prospects.

The good news is that more women have been coming forward for approval since Christmas 2022. Many more women who have got involved in politics because of their experience during the pandemic, are now setting out on their political journeys.

As a result, we are running a Future Women MPs Webinar Weekend this month. We have had great feedback on this event in the past and look forward to a new cohort of successful women being selected to stand for Parliament as a result of attending this training.

We had a full programme of training modules planned for Autumn Conference last year. As we all know it had to be cancelled due to the death of the late Queen. This was a big blow to the continuity of CGB training. Unfortunately, the Conference hotel in York has very limited space so we are only able to run three training sessions here this year.

Looking forward, we are delighted that there will be new people joining the CGB team after the Federal Committee Elections. We look forward to a very active time, supporting excellent women for approval and selection over the coming year.

Racial Diversity Campaign - Christopher French (Vice-Chair)

The Lib Dem 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: [POSITION VACANT]

Vice Chair 1: [POSITION VACANT]

Vice Chair 2: Christopher French

Unfortunately, our Chair, Ade Adeyemo and First Vice Chair, Julia Ogiehor, both decided to step down.

We would like to express our thanks to them both for the fantastic work they undertook in getting the RDC set-up, the outreach they did and the events that were run for prospective candidates.

Shortly before Ade and Julia stepped down, a new Vice Chair for the RDC was appointed. Christopher French is an active campaigner in Lambeth, South London.

Understandably, this has been a challenging time with essentially only one person working on the RDC.

At the time of writing, the process is underway for the Federal Board to appoint a new Chair and Vice Chairs of the RDC, and this should be concluded by Spring Conference. It is hoped that this will see a full board returned to RDC to continue the important work already begun.

Plans for the RDC

There has been a focus on further strengthening the links to and with RDC. This has involved getting members of the party, industry experts, current and prospective MPs lined up as part of a panel to be called on to provide training, support and advice.

We have also arranged a meeting with other AOs to see where we can work more closely aligned together. The RDC has the capability to become not just a way of increasing a more diverse talent group for PPCs but for positions across the Party. For example, working with other AOs when they are recruiting for their positions. We need the internal Party to also reflect the diverse communities that we seek to represent.

Having only one board member has meant that progress has not been as quick as the RDC itself and others would have wanted. This has meant that outreach to and support for prospective candidates has not been at the

level hoped for and needed. However, this can only be achieved with a strong and supported Board.

There will soon be a new and (hopefully) full Board to drive forward the RDC's work. This will require a period to form, formulate and function.

It is often the case that it's those from diverse groups who, already under-resourced and overstretched, must make the initial effort to build relationships for the collective goal to help the Party better represent our richly diverse communities. It is known that the RDC exists and what our overall aims are. We ask that you approach us with what support you can offer.

RDC Budgets and Finances

The initial £5,000 'budget' for the RDC was approved by the Party in 2021. It is still imperative that the Party 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)

Finance: Back in black and ready to rock!

The Party in England is wholly funded by the income from membership fees since unlike other Party bodies, we receive no donations. Income from our members' fees is currently split 55% to the Federal Party and 45% to the State Parties, giving us a more limited pot from which to fund Regions, pay key bills like insurance and Mi-Voice, and also support grants we give to the Regional Development Officers, the Young Liberals and G8.

We want to give all Regions the most support we can this year, ahead of the largest round of local elections in the cycle, where we will be defending the many gains made in 2019 and looking to push further against Tories discredited by the current Government. Success this year will be vital in setting us up for the coming General Election.

Membership levels were constant at the end of 2022, in no small part due to the successes in local elections and the Tiverton & Honiton by-election raising our profile. This also demonstrates investing directly in Regions is paying benefits. Our "Investing in Regions" grant programme has meant that Regions have more dedicated staff hours to work on building back outside of the target seats, fulfilling the primary aim of the English Party for the next two years: building and helping you build capacity.

The final months of the year also saw a definite turnaround in our cash income, as the Membership Uprating Programme rolled out. The upturn in income has enabled us to balance our accounts for 2022, bringing the current account back into black after we pushed ourselves to the limit, both financially and with volunteer time, working to get you, the members, more of the resources they need.

Thank you for everything you have done so far. We all rise together or not at all.

RPC: Standards and Best Practice

This year has seen a new Chair and some new team members for the Regional Parties Committee. The body has oversight into local/regional parties, council groups, membership admission requests and historic cases.

A lot of work continues to be done at pace:

- Supporting several local parties that need assistance, from guidance, through temporarily providing officer functionality while the party is rebuilt.
- Investigations into remaining historic cases, which can now be processed after circumstances that were preventing action have passed, i.e. if there is any police

involvement, we have to pause until their involvement is concluded.

- Supported contested internal appeals on behalf of the English Party.
- Starting to build up a series of new “How Tos” and “Best Practice Papers” covering a variety of topics that members have sought support with over the last few years - the aim being to start an accessible hub where members can search for these.

CANDIDATES: Will there, won't there, when will there be a General Election...

The Candidates' Committee has been really busy over the last 6 months, carrying out candidate approvals and driving the selection of Prospective Parliamentary Candidates. There are now more than 900 approved candidates and (as of 30th January 2023) seventeen applicants on the waiting list for an assessment day, all of whom should have completed the process by the time of Conference. A considerable number of other applications are also at an earlier stage. This is in addition to other work carried out during 2022:

- 11 fast-track by-election selections (some of which were 'precautionary').
- 20 assessment days, 19 of which were online.

- A new online policy test as part of the assessment process.
- Training for:
 - 28 Assistant Returning Officers
 - 40 e-ballot administrators
 - Refresher courses for 41 Returning Officers.

We now have over 100 qualified Assistant and Full Returning Officers, and although they are not always all available at the same time, this number should stand us in good stead to support constituencies for PPC selections.

The Committee has continued its regular work of revising and updating selection rules; other procedures and protocols (including boundary change provisions); dealing with selection-related appeals; candidate disciplinary issues; liaising with the Campaigns and Compliance Teams; providing advice and guidance on all candidate-related matters and answering queries (including some very strange ones).

The Committee has met three times since September 2022, and this January, we welcomed four new Regional Candidates' Chairs and two new directly-elected members (both of whom have many years experience of candidate-related activities). Rachel Minshull, our Candidates' Officer,

continues to give us first-rate support, and is coming up with new initiatives to make us more efficient.

WE NEED YOUR HELP! That General Election may seem a way away, but it will be upon us before you know it. The way the Conservatives are behaving, it may be sooner rather than later!

Please, local party officers, we're addressing you directly. For the first time since 2015 each local party has the opportunity to carry out a proper open selection, giving members the chance to choose a candidate they really want to work for.

We need them in place NOW! There is a set process to becoming a PPC or for a local candidate to be selected - imagine if everyone does it all at the last minute! Please help us by applying now if you want to be a candidate. Please go ahead and select your PPCs. Having them involved as part of your local election campaigning, supporting your local council candidates, helps them to become a well-known face - the longer they have to work in your area, the better they will do.

Having a PPC in place is not just sensible preparation for the next General Election (which may come in only a year's time) – they will help with campaigning in local elections;

fundraising; raising the Party's profile with local media and with building a strong and effective team of local activists.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT: Looking towards elections

There's a lot planned to support Regions over the next two years – including the following:

- Working with Regional Chairs to run membership retention and engagement campaigns.
- Work with Regional Executive Members to share best practice and create a forum for discussion of common issues and how we can work together to resolve them.
- Support efforts to recruit and engage members from diverse backgrounds, including underrepresented genders and ethnic backgrounds, and disabled members.
- Working with Regional Execs to understand issues they're facing, and to identify areas where the English State Party can either provide support and guidance, or signpost to somewhere/someone helpful.

Thanks, and I look forward to seeing you around York 😊

Scotland - Jenni Lang (Convener)

Elections

We were delighted that the Scottish Party made gains at the 2022 Scottish Local Elections. For the first time since

2007, the Party in Scotland is winning again. There are no local elections in Scotland this year. This means we will be able to concentrate on building our activist base and not have to fight European, Parliamentary, Holyrood or any by-elections. Using this year to best effect is essential to our long-term success.

150 Rising Strategy

Following our success in the local elections, Alex Cole-Hamilton unveiled our 150 Rising Strategy at our Autumn Conference. The plan aims to win 150 council seats in four years' time; grow our grassroots capacity and invest in local campaigns and leaders. By putting a firm focus on building up this grassroots activity, this will support our goals to grow at Scottish Parliament and Westminster level.

To support the delivery of 150 Rising, we launched our inaugural programme to identify, train and support the next generation of leaders from across Scotland. 13 activists have received residential and online training. The focus is to give them the skills and training normally only extended to target seat Westminster candidates, to help them build their own teams and deliver that 150+ challenge.

Conference

We held our first in person Conference in 3 years, in Hamilton last October. The mood was upbeat, and it was great to see friends and colleagues together again in real life. Our next in person Conference in 6 months is almost upon us already.

Wales - Tim Sly (President)

Since January, the Welsh Party has a new Board which is getting down to work. I took over the role of President from Paula Yates at the start of the year and have been taking time to meet with key individuals within the Welsh Party and within local parties across Wales; working with the new Board and understanding how the party functions. Paula provided great leadership to the Board and is a tough act to follow.

Getting more Liberal Democrats in the Senedd

My stated aim when standing for President was to get the Welsh Party more focussed on campaigning.

Whilst we do not have many Westminster target seats, the new boundaries which are coming into force, coupled with the new electoral arrangements for the Senedd, give us a strong opportunity to gain a significant number of seats at the next Senedd elections in three years' time. These will be based on 16 new Senedd constituencies, formed from

pairs of Westminster seats, each electing 6 Senedd members on a party list system using the D'Hondt method. Party lists will be gender balanced, with equal numbers of male and female candidates in alternate gender order.

This is Wales' opportunity to show what can be achieved under a proportional voting system (albeit a flawed one). A challenging but achievable increase in our vote share throughout many areas of the country would deliver a very significant Liberal Democrat group in the next Senedd and this is our key goal for the next three years.

There are many barriers to achieving this, however. Capacity and resources at a local level vary greatly across the country and this in turn places a demand on Welsh Party resources. The Membership Development Committee has been working with local parties on individual development plans which are regularly reviewed, but in many areas, membership numbers are static or falling and this is a key area that we must address.

Creating the right structure for success.

The Welsh Party has commissioned a study to understand the changes needed, both at a local party level and within the Welsh Party more generally, to give us the right structure to deliver the campaigning and fundraising

capacity which will be needed to rise to the challenge of the 2026 Senedd elections and local elections the following year.

An interim report is expected shortly with a full report to the Welsh Board in the summer. It is hoped that the key findings can be adopted and actioned during 2023.

Developing future talent

If we are to achieve significant gains in the next Senedd and local elections, we need to nurture and develop outstanding candidates who can assume a leadership role in their area and help to build effective campaigning machines. We especially need more female and minority candidates, particularly in view of the requirement for party lists to be gender balanced.

Subject to final Board approval, the Welsh Party is planning to launch a Leadership Academy for an initial cohort of 10 - 12 candidates this year, using a mixture of residential courses, virtual training and action days, combined with peer support and a mentoring program to spread best practice. It is hoped to hold an initial residential session for the first cohort this summer.