



UPDATE 2015!

November
2015

Barnet Borough Liberal Democrats Newsletter

News from the Barnet Chair

Dear Members,

An election year like no other for the Liberal Democrats!

In January our candidates were in place to fight our three parliamentary constituencies and we couldn't have been happier with the outcome of the selection process - Jonathan Davies (Finchley and Golders Green), Marisha Ray (Chipping Barnet) and Alasdair Hill (Hendon). All three went on to do us proud. An unexpected complication was the council by-election in the Garden Suburb ward to be held on the same day as the General Election. We were fortunate to have an excellent candidate in Altan Akbiyik who was selected to fight the seat.

Those who attended the many hustings in the borough will have seen our parliamentary candidates outperform their opponents again and again, reminding voters of our many achievements in government - radical reform of mental health care, millions taken out of tax, record number of apprenticeships, help for disadvantaged children through the pupil premium, free nursery places for toddlers - and setting out our manifesto commitments for the future. They couldn't have done more. At the same time our leaflets dropped through every letterbox in the borough. Not content with campaigning in Barnet we did our best to help Lynne Featherstone retain her seat in Hornsey and Wood Green, many of us leafleting and canvassing week in, week out.

Then it was Election Day. The result was not only a brutal shock for the party it was also the most distorted and unfair ever delivered under our absurd and archaic voting system. Whole swathes of the

electorate were disenfranchised in a way never seen before. It took 2.5 million votes to elect just 8 Lib Dem MPs, 1.5 million to elect a single Green MP and 4 million to put one UKIP MP in the House of Commons. Added to all this, 63% of the electorate got a government they didn't vote for! We have always known our voting system to have little bearing on reality, but this election was something else. On May 7 2015 we finally stepped through the Looking Glass.



Still reeling from the shock, we were presented with another startling development - a massive surge in new members to the party. As soon as the count was finished the applications flooded in, swelling our ranks by more than 50% both nationally and locally. In Barnet we have more than 100 new members and they are still arriving, month by month.

The impact of this has been nothing short of transformative. The party's autumn conference in Bournemouth had a record attendance. The Barnet contingent was the biggest ever, with many new members turning up to listen, debate, vote and make party policy. Here in Barnet our discussion evenings were filled to overflowing. The annual Garden Suburb party was the most successful ever. In

June our meet-new-members social at the Bohemia pub in North Finchley was gate-crashed by the BBC. A week later some new members tuned in to watch themselves on the Daily Politics show!

As the year draws to a close we are preparing for electoral battles to come. We have already voted on the selection of candidates for the London Assembly elections in May. Looking ahead to the council elections in 2018 we are determined to recover the two seats so narrowly lost in Childs Hill ward at the last election. We expect to have our candidates in place very soon and campaigning to start in earnest before Christmas. Then there is the EU referendum with every possibility that it could take place next year. Who better to lead the IN campaign in Barnet than the Lib Dems?

After an extraordinary election result we are, amazingly, in better shape than ever. Our new members not only bring additional finance to the party they will add immeasurably to our effectiveness in local campaigning. Whether the task is leafleting, knocking on doors or finding candidates for the next local elections that task has just got a great deal easier. The good citizens of Barnet will hear more from us in the coming years than ever before!

Finally, my thanks to all of you for your great help in the General Election campaign, to our parliamentary candidates, our by-election candidates, the organisers of our social events throughout the year and to our new members who have brought such welcome support and enthusiasm to the party.

Gerry FitzGerald

A LETTER FROM LORD PALMER



With only eight MPs, the team in the Lords now takes on more responsibilities including, in some areas of policy, being the National leads for the party. At the same time the business of The House of Lords goes on.

At time of writing we have: the Energy Bill which is another fatal step in the Tory dismantling of renewable energy initiatives, including many of the green policies put in place by former Lib Dem Energy Secretary Ed Davey. We will be fighting the worst effects of Tory cuts to the renewable energy sector. Now the Tories are running the Department for Energy and Climate Change subsidies to the solar industry face cuts of 87%.

Recently we have considered The Enterprise Bill and of course, the EU Referendum Bill that had 56 speakers wanting to have their say on Britain's future 'in or out' of the EU. These Bills and Debates are what the Lords does best, namely attempting to improve Bills before they become Acts, and to debate in public matters of concern which in some cases has an effect on the Government of the day.

On a personal note, after three years I stepped down as the Lib Dems lead spokesman in the Lords on Defence, and now speak as part of the Business team in the House. I also speak on housing and made a speech against the forced selling off of Housing Association homes. The Housing & Planning Bill has been altered to weaken the compulsory part of this, but I am still worried how this could affect and reduce housing stock after April 2016. Also the requirement planning authorities have, to insist on developments having an 'affordable to rent' allocation, is to be weakened. I am chairing a Housing Seminar for 'Policy Forum for London' on 21st October.

I have also been officially appointed by Tim Farron as a personal adviser to him on The Middle East.

Monroe Palmer

NEWS FROM CLLR JACK COHEN

I checked on how many advice cases I dealt with in the past year. It is approaching something like four hundred. The issues cover the whole range of Council Services: highways, street cleaning, car parking, housing, refuse planning and environmental health. The vast majority of problems arise simply because the Council is not doing its job properly.

No surprise seeing that Barnet Conservatives have slashed budgets, got rid of their most experienced staff, and outsourced services to the likes of Capita. It is not clear to me that we actually get good value from outsourcing. Certainly the levels of services continue to deteriorate.



But even though Barnet has cut services to the bone, they still need (or so they say) to save another eighty million pounds. This is why they have launched their savage attack on our Libraries. As I write this, they have drawn back from the worst case scenario of closing most of our Libraries, but under their new proposal there seems little future for smaller Libraries such as Childs Hill, East Barnet and Mill Hill. The proposals for these Libraries are fifteen hours a week opening, staffed by volunteers.

Things could have been so much different if the Conservatives had not reduced council tax (backed by Labour) in 2014 as a sweetener to the electorate. The year-on-year reduction of income is now coming home to roost.

This year I tabled an alternative budget, Labour did not bother to propose any thing. For starters, I was able to demon-

strate savings could be made by cutting the special responsibility allowances paid to Conservative Councillors. Conservatives have thirty two Councillors; I believe thirty of them draw special allowances.

The council political balance remains on a one majority knife edge for the Conservatives. Labour is not providing an effective opposition and there are continuing rumblings from within their group. I have no right to be on any committees but the Conservatives very graciously(!) voted me on to the planning subcommittee.

Given the current national Political climate I cannot see the Conservatives losing their majority so we soldier on.

At least they must turn up to all the meetings, and will need to trim some more extreme policies to satisfy some of the better Conservatives in their group.

Finally it's great to see so many new members joining the Local Party. I am always happy to show all members some of the working of the Town Hall and of course I welcome as always any local intelligence about how the Council is performing.

Jack Cohen
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Christmas Draw

A book of tickets for the Party's Christmas Draw can be obtained from Gerry FitzGerald: 07831 391477