

### News from the Barnet Chair



Dear Member,

An action packed year by any standards! Apart from our regular campaigning and social events we were faced with two major electoral contests this year – the EU referendum and the London Assembly elections.

In February we hit the ground running with the first meeting of the cross-party Stronger in Europe campaign – an excellent event organised by our publicity officer Alasdair Hill. Shortly afterwards campaigning began in earnest with street stalls, leafleting at stations and door-to-door leafleting across the borough. In our spare time we helped out on the phone-banks at HQ. Our efforts undoubtedly contributed to the result in Barnet – a solid vote to remain. While we can take much comfort from this we have to acknowledge that the national result was an unmitigated disaster. It is now down to the Lib Dems, the only genuinely pro-EU party in the country, to fight for the best possible outcome from this shambles and to limit the damage to the country's economy and reputation throughout the world. Here in Barnet we will play a full part in that effort.

Apart from the referendum we had elections to deal with – the Lon-

don Assembly elections, the mayoral election and a council by-election in Underhill ward. Our members delivered thousands of our Londonwide tabloids throughout the borough, held regular street stalls and canvassed extensively. We were delighted to see that Caroline Pidgeon was returned as a Lib Dem Assembly member. My thanks to all who helped in the campaign.

The Underhill council by-election proved, surprisingly, to be more than a just footnote to all this. We managed to deliver a highly professional leaflet to 6500 homes. In the process our excellent candidate, Duncan MacDonald, has put together a local team of activists to build on this achievement and to turn this ward into a winnable prospect for us in future elections. Our thanks to Duncan and his team.

While the elections were demanding and time-consuming they did not interfere with our local campaigning activities in the borough. We can thank Alasdair Hill, our publicity officer, for highlighting the issue of the 251 bus route from Edgware to Arnos Grove (rush-hour passengers unable to get on!). We have raised a petition to the mayor to increase the capacity on this route, and have achieved excellent press coverage for the campaign. Well done Alasdair!

In our campaign for electoral reform we have joined Make Votes Matter, a nationwide cross-party organisation, which is setting up groups across the country. Here in Barnet our members have been involved in several MVM meetings this year and plans are afoot for activities across the borough. Watch this space.

Between the elections and local campaigning, it is a wonder we found time for anything else. Thanks, however, to the organisational skills of Hampstead Garden Suburb ward we had both a New Year and a Summer party, a discussion evening on inequality and another evening of passionate debate on the consequences of Brexit. All events were attended in record numbers. Our thanks to Peter Lusher, his ward committee and to both Peter and Diana Iwi for hosting the events.

Apart, however, from elections, campaigns and social events this past year is notable for another reason. It marks the 30th anniversary of Jack Cohen's election as Lib Dem councillor to Barnet Council. Since he took his seat in 1986 Jack has never lost an election. A truly remarkable achievement. Congratulations Jack!

Finally, my end-of-year report for 2015 concluded with a warm welcome to the hundred new members who had joined us after the General Election. I find myself this year in the remarkable position of repeating the exercise and welcoming a hundred more new members who have joined us since the EU referendum! With the party now doubled in size in just two years we face the New Year in rude health, ready and eager for the challenges that lie ahead. Thank you so much!

Gerry FitzGerald

### Christmas Draw

A book of tickets for the Party's Christmas Draw can be obtained from Geoff Jacobs: 020 8959 1832

## NEWS FROM CLLR JACK COHEN



### **Jack receives a memento from the Council after 30 years service**

Have thirty years really gone by since I was first elected to Barnet Council in May 1986? That was a night to remember. Together with Brian Stone and Monroe Palmer we broke the mould. Mind you it took umpteen recounts and the discovery of a bundle of our votes hidden amongst the Conservative pile to finally get us over the line.

We could never rest on our laurels both Labour and Conservatives threw the kitchen sink at us election after election. We held on but in 2014 the onslaught coupled with our national unpopularity left just me as our sole councillor.

The majority Conservative administration kicked me off the planning sub-committee last May. It was in my opinion a calculated act to neutralise my contact with residents. I have to tell you it has not worked!

This time last year I was telling you about the many complaints from residents not being sent reminders when their parking permits were becoming due for renewal. It has improved, last week a resident emailed to tell me she had seven, yes seven, reminders in two days!

I calculate that over the past year I have dealt with almost three hundred advice cases. Most are the result of poor service from Barnet with residents complaining they cannot get through to the council or no one gets back to them. The main issues residents raise are, highways (street cleaning, car parking, paving stones), planning, especially planning enforcement (unauthorised structures and building are increasing), housing, crime, and

anti-social behaviour. I make sure I respond within twenty-four hours. I must make an admission, this August was so crazy with complaints that I put up an out of office response!

I know email has made it easier for residents to make contact, but I do not recall it ever being so busy with advice cases. The reason in my view is outsourcing. So many experienced council officers have left. The turnover of staff is extraordinary. I don't think I am so old fashioned to still believe in the ethos of public service.

Once again I presented an alternative Budget to Council in March of this year. The Conservatives thought it sensible, but then promptly voted it down. The referendum campaign revealed that most Barnet Conservative Councillors are Brexiteers. One notable exception, a true-blue, high-profile Tory Councillor who in the past has been very nasty to us, proclaimed during the Council meeting following the vote to leave "we are all Liberal Democrats now".

I continue to hold regular ward surgeries and many residents regularly turn up seeking advice. I am grateful to Monroe, Susette and Jonathan for their support in helping out at ward surgery.

It is great to see so many new members joining us. I look forward to their support and the continuing support of our many stalwarts.

**Jack**

## FROM LORD MONROE PALMER



**Monroe with Shirley Williams**

Government business continues in the Commons and the Lords. At the Time of writing this piece, in the Lords we are dealing with: Investigatory Powers Bill, Wales Bill, Pensions Scheme Bill, Policing & Crimes Bill, Children & Social Work Bill and much more. However, most of the talk and concern is the UK exiting from the European Union. The general opinion is that it is a 'done deal'. The Prime Minister says we're going to leave the European Union and 'Brexit is Brexit'.

The Lib Dems are the real voice of

opposition and the fight against a reckless Brexit that takes us out of the Single Market. We will fight to hold this Tory Government to account and question what comes next for the UK's economy, security and standing in the world.

It is about four months since UK voted to LEAVE. Do we yet understand what are going to be the consequences? There is a strong feeling in Parliament that when the terms and expected consequences are clearer, Parliament should have a say before Article 50 is triggered.

Tim Farron has made it clear that the Liberal Democrats remain proudly pro-European. It's in our DNA. The Liberal Democrats will respect the outcome of the referendum, but we're not going to stop arguing for what we believe in. We're not going to give up on this country's proud history of liberal internationalism. And we're not going to give up on the idea the Britain's place is at the heart of Europe."

Nick Clegg is producing a series of papers to explore the complexities of the process in as dispassionate and rigorous manner as possible. What are the trade-offs, what are the thorny questions the Tory government has a duty to answer?

I believe that the Government has no real idea how to get us out of the mess we are in. Statements are made and then corrected. Are we going to, in some way, stay in the EU single market? Are we going to reduce Freedom of Movement and if so who will it affect?

The UK hasn't had to negotiate trade deals for many years. They have been done by the EU. So now we will have to do this with a shortfall of staff trained to carry out this task for the UK.

Over 50 trade agreements with other parts of the world will be no more, and have to be renegotiated. I believe this can only happen when we have established ourselves as an independent trading nation at the World Trade Organisation.

No one has given an adequate answer as to what happens at the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland. There will be turmoil which I can only hope will not be disastrous as forecast.

In this climate, the Liberal Democrats are making gains in Council elections and performing well in Parliamentary by-elections. Our party membership is increasing. Corbyn's Labour Party has also gained members but is in considerable disarray!

**Monroe**