

# campaigner

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## Our Health Service

Most people were left open mouthed in amazement when Health Secretary, Patricia Hewitt, declared last April that the NHS was enjoying "its best ever year". What planet is she on?

By December, the Health Select Committee was painting a rather different picture. They issued a report highlighting the causes of the massive deficits blighting much of the NHS. The GP contract had run heavily over budget, as had the new consultant's contract and Agenda for Change (which relates to the terms and conditions for staff employed by contractors in the NHS). Targets imposed by central Government such as the four hour maximum wait in A and E had been far more expensive to implement than originally anticipated.

Ill-thought through reorganisation has also been a costly burden on the NHS. Primary Care Trusts lasted just over 4 years before they were abolished with the creation of much larger PCTs – looking in many ways rather similar to the old health authorities. Each time, senior staff receive costly early retirement packages or voluntary redundancy payments. This is all money which could have gone to the front line, improving patient care.

Then there is the centrally imposed IT project, 'Connecting for Health'. Critics believe that it will run billions of pounds over budget. It has been mired in controversy and hit by delays – quite apart from serious civil liberties concerns over holding medical records on a central 'spine'.

In many parts of the country, we are witnessing

unacceptable cutbacks as a result of this financial mess. Community hospitals are being closed, despite a Labour manifesto commitment to inject new funds into these treasured local hospitals. Mental health services and other so-called 'soft targets' are suffering unacceptable cutbacks. Out of hours services are also targeted.

What is the common thread running through all these factors? For me the answer lies in Labour's obsession with centralised command and control.

When Primary Care and Acute Hospital Trusts propose cutbacks in patient care in a desperate attempt to get themselves back into financial balance, the Government washes its hands and says that these are local decisions. The truth is very different. The Government has imposed impossible deadlines for clearing historic deficits and the Strategic Health Authorities maintain the pressure on PCTs to deliver. And remember who appoints the board members of local trusts. It is the national NHS Appointments Commission. We need far more local control and local accountability.

Liberal Democrats should campaign vigorously against cuts to services imposed as a result of financial crisis. We must highlight what is actually going on in the NHS. Where local services are being cut or closed, where so called 'reconfigurations' are driven by the need to clear massive deficits, we should be at the forefront of the campaign to expose this Government's mismanagement of our NHS.

Liberal Democrats supported the extra



Lib Dem Shadow Health Secretary Norman Lamb MP with Norwich South Parliamentary Spokesperson Simon Wright

investment in the NHS. After years of chronic under-investment from both Tory and Labour Governments, it was badly needed. But too much of it has been wasted or mismanaged.

The Tories, by contrast, voted against the increased investment. If they had had their way, the NHS would be in a more dire financial state. Over £30 billion extra has been injected into the health service. We must keep reminding people of this extraordinary decision by the Tories and of their dreadful record when in Government.

We are developing our positive response to this Government's approach to the NHS. There will be a consultative session at Harrogate and a full policy paper will go the Autumn conference. We must develop a distinctive, credible and liberal strategy to ensure that our NHS survives and prospers and meets the needs of all citizens in the 21st century.

## Two Months To Go

Its now less than two months to go to our biggest electoral test outside the Westminster General Election. On 3 May not only do we have general elections to the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly, but local councils across all of Scotland and almost all of England will be electing the Councillors. In most districts the elections will be "all-outs", with the whole council to be elected.

As Liberal Democrats not only are we defending over half our council seats, but we'll also be defending control of some of the most significant local authority areas that we run. Places, like Newcastle, Watford, York, North Norfolk and many more where Liberal Democrat policies and principles and have been put, successfully, into action.

For Liberal Democrats in local government our message is clear. As we have so clearly shown in the 100 or so councils we run or have influence in, voting Liberal Democrat in local elections does make a difference. Our commitment to communities, to localism, to green issues, and to well run local councils is unrivalled and sets us apart from our opponents. We have a real opportunity to give a very clear message to national politics from our local ballot boxes.

But this will only come true where we work. By now the final stages of our campaigns will be starting in earnest. If the level of enquiries and enthusiasm we've been seeing at ALDC is anything to go by, we know the scale of the challenge and are ready to get that message across to the voters.

But we should be under no illusion that it will be easy. Our opponents attempt to copy our ways of campaigning. Mostly it's a poor copy because what makes Liberal Democrats different is that we actually believe in community politics and standing up for local people. It's fundamental to how we operate and what we believe.

Over the next months don't forget you are not alone. Make use of the services and support that ALDC can offer. Speak to us, your regional Campaigns Officers and colleagues from neighbouring districts. What should keep us going when we're canvassing, delivering and stuffing those target letters is the clear knowledge that Liberal Democrats do make a difference running local government.

## Local Government Conference

As you will no doubt be aware the "first" Liberal Democrat **Local Government Conference** will take place on **23 June 2007** at the Birmingham International Convention Centre. We have a packed programme for you - keynote speakers, training, best practice, debate and elected member development. ALDC and our colleagues at the Local Government Association Lib Dem Group have come together to organise this event which looks set to be the highlight of the Lib Dem local government year.

Please do take advantage of the special "early bird" registration rate which starts at £30 for ALDC Gold Members. This represents a massive 50% saving on the full undiscounted "on the day" rate, but is only available until 31 March 2007. If you wait till after the elections you'll miss the discount rate!

More information, together with all our resources are available on the ALDC website [www.aldc.org](http://www.aldc.org)

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# Northern Star

Aberdeenshire Council has been run by a Lib Dem led administration since its creation in 1996. Derek Barrie reports on their achievements



*Stonehaven Harbour on the North-East coast of Aberdeenshire. Aberdeenshire Council is unique in having had a Liberal Democrat led administration since its inception in 1996*

The current composition of Aberdeenshire at present is Liberal Democrat 28; SNP 15; Independents 14; Conservatives 11. Liberal Democrats lead a coalition administration with eight of the Independents. One feature in recent years has been the fragmentation of the opposition; the SNP has lost councillors to the Independents following internal disputes.

Since 1996 Liberal Democrat-led Aberdeenshire Council has gone for a de-centralised structure for decision-making, with six administrative areas. At the same time, the Council has remained a Committee-based organisation, opting to reject the 'executive model' after detailed consideration. There has been major restructuring of Committees and Services to create a lean and efficient authority. An increasing range of powers and responsibilities has been devolved to the six area committees. These committees have developed differently, with three of the six under opposition control. The amount of "top-up" money to area committees for one-off community projects has been gradually increased.

## Financial Matters

Aberdeenshire Liberal Democrat Group has had to work through very difficult annual budgets. Councillors have had to make significant increases to Council Tax whilst at the same time cutting services to the tune of £63m between 1996/7 and 2001/2. The Group has been campaigning with local MSPs to secure a fairer distribution of resources through the Revenue Support Formula, a mechanism which does not suit councils seen to cover affluent areas, with high employment and high salaries for some of its residents, but which also have issues of both rural and urban deprivation and

isolation. This campaign will continue after May 3 following the publication of the Burt Report (on local government finance in Scotland) that signally failed to address the issue.

## Council Services

The Council leadership is proud of its record in service provision in a number of areas and we highlight some of these achievements here.

## Education and Recreation

In an area of population growth, educational provision is a key policy area. The council has responsibility for 152 primary and 17 secondary schools. It has provided seven brand new primaries, one brand new and one replacement secondary schools. Most of these projects have been achieved through public and private partnership (PPP) - effectively the only source of available capital funding. The importance of drawing up robust contracts cannot be overstated; some problems have arisen regarding evening and weekend usage.

Liberal Democrat councillors are particularly proud of the big advances made in provision of nursery education, especially in the council's formative years when they made it a major priority. School closure issues, particularly of small rural schools, need to be handled with sensitivity and commonsense in full consultation with communities. The Group recognise that school rolls in rural areas are now falling.

The Group also recognise that as well as formal schooling, Education embraces Life Long Learning, Sport, the Arts, Libraries and Heritage. The Council is working in each of these areas to develop further its

provision, to meet the educational needs of its communities.

## Green Issues

The council has implemented a new waste strategy involving a major recycling element, based on 'Reduce, Recycle and Re-use'. Aberdeenshire did not go down the traditional route of having a green garden waste collection, instead opting for home composting. They thought long and hard before deciding this was the more environmentally friendly and sustainable option. Local residents are encouraged to buy home composters and take responsibility for dealing with their own garden waste – last year almost 3500 were bought. The Council has developed 'mini recycling centres' in many communities and proper waste facilities in larger towns.

The council has adopted a Sustainability Charter to achieve sustainability in everything the council does; has implemented energy efficiency schemes, particularly in schools, giving some significant savings; is striving to meet the Scottish Executive's targets on waste collection and recycling; is promoting biomass and finding a market for it, introducing for example a wood fuel burner at Aboyne Academy.

The Sustainability Charter action programme to 2007 covers five main areas: reducing the use of key resources; raising awareness among staff; guidelines for buying goods and services; reducing the council's "carbon footprint" and encouraging consultation. In addition specific measures have been taken to tackle the production of greenhouse gases. Between 2000 and 2003 the energy used in targeted council buildings was reduced by 10%. Carbon dioxide emission was cut by 15% in the same period. A large part of the Council's electricity requirements are met from renewable resources.

## Community Planning

Aberdeenshire has embarked upon community planning with considerable enthusiasm. The aim is to get all relevant authorities and agencies working together and avoiding duplication. Great efforts are being made to find out resident's opinion through focus groups and surveys. Employees are also surveyed. The focus groups have been conducted independently of the council and the findings will influence decisions about policy and service delivery.

A Customer Care Week has been held for a second time. Efforts are being made to increase awareness of staff to residents' needs. Citizens' Panels have been set up on a cross-authority basis, not based on local areas. The overall aim of these and related matters is to make services more efficient and more effective.

## Transport

Aberdeenshire has been at the forefront of initiatives in Scotland related to transportation issues, particularly public transport. Prior to the introduction

of free bus travel for all aged 60 and over throughout Scotland by the Scottish Executive, Aberdeenshire had an extremely generous concessionary fares scheme. The council also developed successful dial and ride schemes. Cooperation between the council and one main bus operator, Stagecoach Bluebird, has contributed to improved services.

An example of this cooperation comes from March last year when improved bus services were launched jointly by the council and Stagecoach supported by the Scottish Executive Bus Route Development Grant. New "coastrider" vehicles have been introduced and the initiative includes provision of five state of the art easy access low floor buses, with the latest environmentally friendly engines and CCTV to enhance driver and passenger security. As a result, passenger growth has already been demonstrated.

## External Recognition

The council has also been commended for one of the best local authority web schemes in Scotland. In an area of heavy winter snowfalls, head teachers can go on line to find out weather forecasts and inform parents regarding school closures caused by inclement weather. This scheme has been well used and indeed the council's website achieves a high hit rate.

## What of the future?

Despite the introduction of STV for the elections on May 3rd, Aberdeenshire Liberal Democrats are confident of again being the largest group on the council. The Liberal Democrats have given the council progress and stability but with 11 of the 28 strong council group not seeking re-election on May 3rd there is no room for complacency.

The council will have to face a best value review this autumn with a report to be published in 2008. In preparation for this, the Council decided to invite IDEA to conduct a peer review in the summer of 2005, which proved helpful and enlightening.

The council group is recognising where the Council's strengths and weaknesses lie and plans are being developed to tackle these. It is felt to be important that local plans tie in well with the Scotland wide Lib Dem local government manifesto. The group also wants to retain its prominence in local government, locally, nationally and internationally, as the fourth largest council geographically and the fifth largest in population in Scotland.

We look forward to a further period of Liberal Democrat leadership and progress in Aberdeenshire. Real challenges face the new group leader, Cllr Anne Robertson. It will be a fresh start and a new challenge from 4th May this year.

**Derek Barrie is ALDC's Scottish Officer**  
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## Audrey Findlay

One of Scotland's leading Liberal Democrat councillors, Audrey Findlay, has stood down after 11 years as Group Leader on Aberdeenshire Council. Audrey, who will not seek re-election in May, continues as Leader of the Council and its Liberal Democrat/Independent administration till she demits office on 3rd May.

Audrey was first elected to the then Gordon District Council unopposed in 1988. She had never any intention of standing until "persuaded" by Malcolm Bruce MP and encouraged by her husband, Alan, then an employee of Grampian Regional Council.

Audrey has been Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group and of the Council throughout the whole of Aberdeenshire Council's existence. She will miss not being involved in decision-making and influencing what happens in her area. She will also miss working in a large group (28 strong – the largest Lib Dem Group in Scotland), difficult though this has been at times. Life will be quieter without involvement through COSLA in local government at a national level, or at international level through the North Sea Commission where she has been Vice President for the past four years. She will not miss being permanently on duty and available to the public 24/7. But she says she will feel a huge gap in her life after 3rd May.

Audrey rates her biggest achievement keeping the Liberal Democrats as the largest party and leading the administration in Aberdeenshire. She is disappointed that on occasions she and her administration have not been able to demonstrate fully to the public that they have done their best with limited resources.



## Anne Robertson

Anne Robertson, after a contested election, succeeded Audrey Findlay as Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group on Aberdeenshire Council in January. If the election campaign goes as expected in May she will emerge as Audrey's successor as Leader of the Council.

Anne was first elected to Aberdeenshire Council in a by-election in 1997 and sees her greatest achievements to date as a councillor in the fields of social work and housing, in particular the successful agreement with the tenants regarding stock transfer and the expansion, across the Council area of the Care and Repair scheme. The scheme is managed, on the Council's behalf, by Castlehill Housing Association. Aids and adaptations are provided to allow people with particular needs and disabilities to stay at home. She has also taken a leading role in the field of Customer Care, chairing the Project team. The team is inclusive of members of staff and the public. She sees Audrey as a very hard act to follow and hopes that she is up to it.

## westminster

*The Lib Dem Local Government's Parliamentary Team reporting back to you – not just at election time, but all the year round.*

### The Local Government Bill

Over the next few weeks, Tom Brake and I will wade through the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill, line by line in the Bill Committee. We voted against the Bill at Second Reading, arguing for real devolution of powers and funding from Whitehall to local communities.

Now we are pushing the government to allow councils control over their executive arrangements, to strengthen the overview and scrutiny powers in local health services and to introduce a fair voting system. We are fighting plans to introduce elected mayors without a referendum, the peculiar proposals for elected executives and Ruth Kelly's power to direct a council to apply for unitary status... the list goes on.

### We Can Cut Crime Success



*Andrew speaking to a local police officer in his Hazel Grove constituency about the Cut Crime Campaign*

Thanks to you, the 'We Can Cut Crime' Campaign has hit the streets across the country, and here in Parliament we have been attacking the Government on their shocking crime record. This week, Labour and Tory MPs rejected our Lib Dem principled and practical motion to make prison work to cut repeat crime, give victims fair compensation and use money for more police, not ID cards.

The campaign continues, and hopefully you will be able to join Ming at the high profile Harrogate Conference Rally on Friday 2nd March to take the campaign a stage further.

### 'Community Cohesion'

'Community cohesion' has hit the headlines over the past few months. Now David Cameron has jumped on the bandwagon, a little cheeky I thought after Mrs Thatcher introduced the most divisive time in British politics and society.

As Lib Dems, we know that community cohesion comes from people developing common values which bond them together, respect for the principles of liberty, democracy, human rights, equality, non-discrimination, and the rule of law, and not from heavy handed Home Office laws. We have submitted a report to the Commission for Integration and Cohesion along these lines, and last week I met Trevor Phillips, the chair of the new Commission for Equality and Human Rights.

**Andrew Stunell MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government**

# Target Mail works!

Liberal Democrats in Richmond-upon-Thames made use of target mail to take back control of the Council last May



*Cllr Michael Wilson, elected last May as Liberal Democrat Councillor for Twickenham Riverside, here using Richmonds envelope stuffing machine.*

Target mailing used to mean the blue letter a few days before polling day. Things have changed. In the 2005 General Election Richmond Park produced over 250,000 target letters during the election campaign. This helped Susan Kramer win the Richmond Park seat after Jenny Tonge stood down. In 2006, with the local elections looming, target mailings were going to be even more important as we looked to defeat the Tories and end their brief control of Richmond Borough Council.

In 2002 the Tories won control of Richmond Borough Council with a 24 seat majority. Over the next three years the Liberal Democrats, with 5 local by-election victories, built up the momentum which was needed to win control last May with an 18 seat majority.

In Richmond Borough there are 18 wards each containing 3 members so we had 54 candidates on the ballot paper last May. Target mailings not only allowed us to reinforce our four key messages to the voters, but they also allowed our three candidates or

councillors for each ward to introduce themselves as candidates and as a Liberal Democrat team.

As well as a normal literature schedule containing Focuses (Called Comments in Richmond Borough), tabloids and 'squeeze' leaflets, we had a number of target letters. During the campaign we delivered a round of target letters per week and an extra round specifically for postal voters, Labour voters, soft Conservatives and probable Lib Dems. This was on top of the normal 'blue letter' which appeared a day or two before postal polling day and normal polling day.

Our key messages were very important. They had been repeated in literature for over a year and then for every week of the campaign: Council Tax, Secondary Schools, Youth Services and the Environment repeated over and over again. Our target letters said exactly the same. No long waffle filled speeches, just short and brief and focused on our key messages.

The target mailings also offered us a better way of capturing information. With every target letter an insert was produced. The insert would always have with it a voting intention box and a request for help and money. The insert would also keep repeating key themes. One of our most popular inserts was a leaflet we 'stole' from Islington Lib Dems – a pledges leaflet. It gave people the chance to prioritise 8 or 9 key pledges (related to our key themes) and a chance for them to offer some ideas of their own.

Our freepost address was deluged with responses, most of which came back with a name and address and most of which came back with a voting intention. This was invaluable for election day. An added bonus was that a good number of them came back with a donation.

The target mailings were sent from our three candidates in each target ward. All had photos and contact details and blue signatures. The two horse race message was not lost either as we had the relevant bar chart for each ward in the bottom corner. We had volunteers in the office rising the letterhead a few days before we printed the target letters.

As well as needing the riso's, fast laser printers and volunteers to deliver the letters our stuffing machine was invaluable. It would run day and night and allow us to produce the target mailings relatively quickly. Cllr Stephen Knight (who along with his partner Jennifer Churchill kept the stuffing machine going throughout the day and night) has just bought a second stuffing machine thanks to e-bay! As well as freeing up our volunteers for more delivery it meant we could turn around a mailing in a relatively short space of time. It also meant that we could offer a quick and effective rebuttal for any Tory lies.

By the morning of May 5th when the ballots had been counted we had delivered around 125,000 – 150,000 target letters during the campaign alone (excluding the blue letters).

**Cllr Michael Wilson**  
[michaelwilson@cix.co.uk](mailto:michaelwilson@cix.co.uk)

## Dealing with the Negative

How Lib Dems in Manchester turned round Labour success on the back of negative campaigning to win a by-election in Gorton South



Labour accused Liberal Democrats of a Nazi salute and ran a personal smear campaign against the local Lib Dem candidate.

Everything was going swimmingly in Manchester. Five gains in 2003, 11 gains in the all out elections of 2004, a new, bright, shiny MP, John Leech in 2005 on a 17% swing surprising many (including some of us).

Then came the 2006 elections. £50,000 spent by Labour. A Muslim Labour Lord mayor, who in his official diary held 43 events in one of their target wards. Labour ran a nasty, negative campaign- we were soft on crime, wanted to give rapists the vote, soft on drugs and against the Commonwealth Games. Full colour leaflets. Targeted mailing on polling day to our D's and P's to deflate our vote.

We spread ourselves too thin, didn't produce enough good, local leaflets and ended up losing four seats.

Not an ideal situation for a by-election for a new candidate in a seat won by 340 in May. Although we had financial support from members, the ward, constituency and regional party the Group undertook to support the campaign. The only way the Group could afford this was because Councillors get charged 8% of their allowances towards group funds. That's £95 per month per backbencher, more for those with SRA's and is enough to employ an Organiser and fund target seats (and by-elections).

Six former councillors applied to be our candidate, three were shortlisted and Charles Glover selected. Charles worked for John Leech MP and had stood for us the previous May in Chorlton, where he came within 120 of winning. He promised to move into the ward immediately (which he did) and was subject to massive attacks. As the negative

campaigns had worked so well for Labour in May, why try anything else? Labour didn't even pay tribute to the dead Councillor and lied that "it was because the family didn't want us to."

Labour were up for the fight, and did five full colour leaflets, Charles was attacked for standing elsewhere in the City, and Labour knocked on his new house door at funny times of the day to check he was actually living there! Chas was called "Lazy" and blamed for everything that went wrong in the area. Labour made up false allegations about Charles not doing casework, and kept saying that the Lib Dems were "in charge round here"- so rubbish in the street was our fault although we wanted to spend £1million more than Labour in our budget, and often it had been reported but not acted on by the incompetent Council. And their phone and foot canvassers went further with their smears.

The other attack was that we were soft on drugs and crime. Chris Davies was attacked, but not Labour figures who agree with him like Tony Lloyd, Mo Mowlam and (then) Claire Short. We were against closing crack dens and ASBO's. We managed to counter attack because there had been funds cut from GMP and officers lost, and crime was going up.

Because we were more than matching them for leaflets, we managed to rebut their lies before they had chance to take hold. We turned their negativity and hypocrisy into an issue. They talked down our area and had nothing positive to say. They didn't engage in the issues because they were sufficiently networked in to know them.

Perhaps the most amazing example of the

depths they would stoop to is an incident at the Council meeting a week before polling day. One of their councillors (who, by coincidence had a camera with him, was sat in the wrong seat, and was writing Labour's leaflets) accused one of our Councillors of giving a Nazi salute. And guess what, they reproduced the Evening News article in their last leaflet. The Standards Board dismissed the case a couple of weeks later.

So a Nazi jibe in a multicultural seat three days before polling day. Coupled with, for the first time in a generation, the BNP rearing their ugly heads.

But the Muslim community was not fooled. We produced two separate target mailings with our local MEP Saj Karim, and an Eid Card, along with several articles in leaflets. This kept the BNP at 5%, and meant we won well in the Levenshulme and Longsight end of the ward where there is a higher Muslim vote. The Greens and Tories were squeezed even lower.

We ran an effective postal vote campaign that resulted in 100 more Lib Dem postal voters, and good campaigns against the closure of a local Scout Hut, to clean up the area, to get more police on the beat and for new community facilities.

The result was an almost dead heat of the result in May. The turnout went up, and so did the majority to 380. There was a 0.1% swing to Labour, which means they take the seat in about 70 years!

The party in Manchester owe the party as a



Newly elected Cllr Charles Glover (right) and team after a resounding win over Labour in Manchester.

whole a huge thank you. There was help from all our MEP's and MP's, and members across the region. In all, over 150 people helped, and our new Councillor bought the biggest round on election night I have even seen!

And the message for others fighting Labour? Remember what unites them- power. If they have a chance to win, they will use anything- absolutely anything, to do so. Any quote from a maverick MP, any vote in parliament, spun to high heaven. They will tell lies and go personal. Make sure you have done the work in the ward to withstand these attacks next May.

**Simon Ashley is Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group on Manchester City Council**

# Saving Our Health

## Why?

Because health and wellbeing is a key public concern and a key concern of local government! Most people care passionately and have a strong sense of loyalty to their local health services and health issues can provide a vital local campaigning issue.

As the pictures on this page show, where Liberal Democrats have been central to health campaigning locally we have rightly caught the public imagination and, in some cases, been successful in changing NHS proposals.

Local government in the UK great success in the 19th century was around public health. Local Government today has been given back some of its health remit (though not as much as a Liberal Democrat government would do).

Local Authorities will be working with their local health services in Local Strategic Partnerships and Local Area Agreements will see shared targets and ownership of public health issues.

For all of us in local government health should be one of our key issues - not only on the campaign trail but in the council chamber.

## Get Scrutinising

Health scrutiny is one of the few new responsibilities that local government has been given in recent years. An effective health scrutiny process can provide both a check on your local NHS services and genuine democratic input.

- With the tremendous cross-over between adult social services and health provision the dividing and scrutiny responsibility can fall between committees at the whim of the Executive. Yet with their own services the Councils scrutiny can have more direct impact.
- New Labour's continual re-organisation of the health service "requires" scrutiny to wade through mountains of paperwork to tick the boxes of the health bureaucrats rather than dealing with the concern of voters and the committees on health priorities.
- Without financial control over the health institutions scrutiny can only recommend and publicise. It has not direct power, but major changes can be referred to the Secretary of State.

*Lib Dems campaigning for the NHS in South Lakeland, Montgomeryshire and West Cornwall*



## How?

In today's NHS climate most areas are threatened with some sort of hospital closure of re-organisation. However not all our NHS campaigns need to be on the defensive. Here's some health campaign ideas:

- the withdrawal of services due to re-organisations.
- financial cutbacks/closures
- lack of provision/unmet demand.
- Hidden health care costs - car parks/mobile phone bans

# Health Service

## Case Studies

### Dentistry

75% of dentists 'not taking on NHS patients'

Liberal Democrats have been consistent in campaigning for better access to Dental Care. Our pledge for free dental health check ups is longstanding.

In 2005 we ran our Dentistry campaign after shock stories appeared in the media when patients have queued round the block to try to register with an NHS dentist.

The new NHS Dentist contracts have not resolved this scandal. Across the country, PCTs are overspending their budgets because of a miscalculation by the Government over the financial consequences of the new dentists' contract. In some cases, patients are being told that NHS dental care is being put on hold until the end of the financial year. Many people are struggling to find an NHS dentist willing to take them on. Ministers promised that every patient who had lost an NHS dentist would simply be taken on by another. But it has emerged recently that this may not be so, as dentists admitted that they had used up their annual NHS budgets and could not do any more work on "new" NHS patients until their budget for next year arrived. The British Dental Association said that the situation for patients and dentists was absurd. Campaigners should be making requests to their local Primary Care Trusts for full information on spending against budget, the percentage of the local community with access to NHS dental care, the number of dentists leaving the NHS since the new contract was introduced etc. The NHS team at parliamentary office of the Liberal Democrats (POLD) can provide full details of the questions to ask (email [summersw@parliament.uk](mailto:summersw@parliament.uk))

"A poll of 1,220 dentists across the country by the Liberal Democrats has revealed that only 22 per cent are taking on new NHS patients. One in 10 has set up waiting lists." Daily Express 15/2/07

### Closure

How Lib Dems in West Cornwall are campaigning to save their hospitals

Not every political campaign lends itself to the conventional tribal party political point scoring of the campaign textbook.

The threat to the two small acute hospitals at Penzance (81 bed West Cornwall Hospital with a casualty department, emergency take surgical and medical wards) and Hayle (70 bed elective surgical hospital at St Michael's) has gathered in recent years. The emergence of a gathering deficit in the Royal Cornwall Hospitals' Trust in the autumn of 2005 generated a few further flutters of concern. Parliamentary Questions were asked and the "usual suspects" of local campaigners got together to compare notes, etc.

Many of those involved in the local community hospitals campaign group were active members of the Labour Party, many with Conservative sympathies, a few Mebyon Kernow members, but all with a shared interest in making sure that not only should the Liberal Democrats not prosper during such a campaign, but that we should be found to take responsibility for any bad news that may emerge. We got together with some of the local protagonists to prepare a non-party political tradition which was adopted by one of the local newspapers and which was already generating thousands of sponsors into the constituency office. By the time the rest of the local media caught up with the story panic had set into the local community. We were already well underway.

Petitions were handed in to the Department of Health just before the summer recess and one of the Town Councils co-ordinated a wider publicity campaign for a march through the town of Hayle, from St Michael's Hospital during the height of the summer recess. Over 27,000 people marched through Hayle (pop 9000) led by the local Town Mayors. Our MP, Andrew George, rallied people both at the beginning and end of the march and both Julia Goldsworthy (neighbouring MP) and he were

prominent at the head of the march. The petition went through a few modifications to take into account the changing circumstances of the campaign as it unfolded. The petition was handed into Parliament on 29th November 2006, as well as to the Secretary of State for Health when she visited Cornwall on 14th November 2006.

Pressure was still mounting on Cornwall County Council and strenuous efforts were made by some to seek to pin the blame on the County Council, rather than the Government for the threats to local services.

Against this, a further rally of Parliament was arranged to coincide with the visit of campaigns from other hospitals on 16th January this year. This helped diffuse some of the pressure of the campaign being waged to put pressure on Cornwall County Council on 30th January to take the blame for some of the threats to the service.

As pressure mounted, a Strategic Review was ordered and panic-driven efforts were made to begin the process of reversing some of the immediate cuts which had been ordered by the Trust which was forced to demonstrate its capacity to meet recurring financial balance as quickly as possible.

Government Ministers were desperate to remove both the political pressure and the "bad news" stories emanating from Cornwall's NHS.

Although the campaign is far from over and the results we all wanted have not been fully secured (by any means), the potential political threat has been seen off and the Liberal Democrats have been seen to play an important part in progress, without alienating the majority if we had appeared to seek to take political credit for the campaign.

It is a delicate tightrope to walk, but the judgement was made that it was far better to quietly win respect of the majority rather than to brazenly win a few votes from a minority whilst alienating the rest.

- e) Transport to hospitals – if they've closed the local clinic -what public transport provision are they providing to get people to the "replacement" facility
- f) Preventive medicine eg men's health

- and women's health check ups
- g) Sport/fitness referrals from doctors. Eg swimming vouchers
- h) Access to "public" facilities that would promote healthy living e.g. School's sports facilities, free passes for OAPs

- and children
- i) Smoking initiatives to help people stop and cut back
- j) Access to free NHS Dental healthcare for children
- k) Access to GP's

## gender balance

The Campaign for Gender Balance (formerly the GBTF) has been enjoying a new lease of life during the last six months, and one of its most important projects has been to reach out to women councillors.

Earlier this year, Lynne Featherstone MP wrote to all 1500 female councillors suggesting that they consider a future career in Westminster: "If you have gone as far as becoming a councillor - then you have already taken the biggest step towards not only understanding the issues at street level where legislation hits the coal face - but you are doing your training for Parliament - even if you don't realise it."

The CGB has since followed this up by telephoning 500 councillors in or near held seats, key areas in the party's drive to increase the representation of women in Parliament.

Jo Swinson MP, Chair of the Campaign for Gender Balance, commented "Councillors are not only used to the demands of politics, but have the passion for their local communities that vitally sustains good MPs. The response to this initiative has been fantastic, producing an unprecedented number of requests for candidate approval forms. It's further proof that plenty of ambitious women candidates are out there, and just need to know there's support available for them to fulfil their potential".

More information on the CGB, as well as useful resources and details of their mentoring scheme and training opportunities for women candidates, can be found on the website at [www.genderbalance.org.uk](http://www.genderbalance.org.uk).

## scotland

### Council or Parliament?

A number of leading Lib Dem councillors, who also have parliamentary ambitions, have had to take difficult decisions regarding the May 3rd elections. Should they stand for both council and parliament or does that send the wrong signals? Should they opt for one only and will that enhance their chances? How do they decide what option to take?

It will be interesting to see how a number of individuals fare. Cllr Andrew Arbuckle MSP is defending both his council and parliament seats. Cllr Jim Tolson, PSPC for the target seat of Dunfermline West has withdrawn from the council race. But Cllr John Stewart, PSPC for targeted Aberdeen Central is standing for Aberdeen City Council and the Scottish Parliament both on the list and for the constituency. The same approach is being taken by Cllr Gordon Macdonald, a strong favourite for election to Holyrood from the list, who is defending a council seat and is PSPC for Eastwood. And this is not just a male problem. Candidate for Strathkelvin and Bearsden, much of which is represented by Jo Swinson MP at Westminster and defending a council seat is Cathy McInnes.

We should certainly learn lessons from how they fare for the next diet of elections in 2011.

### Taking the money!

A unique feature of the run-up to the council elections in Scotland this year is publication of the list of councillors who have served for at least five years, who are standing down and who have opted for the severance payments on offer. Five years service gets you £5k; 10 years £15k and 15 years and over £20k. The total Scotland wide payout is estimated at £7 million. In Fife alone, where 35 of the 78 councillors are not seeking re-election, payouts amount to £585,000, of which £100k goes to six retiring Liberal Democrats.

## Empowering Young People

Caroline Pidgeon, Southwark's Executive Member for Children outlines how Lib Dem's have put policies into practice to empower young people



*Cllr Caroline Pidgeon with local young people in Southwark*

How often do we hear from young people that there is nothing for them to do and that their area is 'boring'? As Liberal Democrats we believe in making sure young people are empowered, and feel they have a voice. We believe in delivering a high quality youth service, that meets their needs. Youth services for far too long have been the Cinderella children's service, an easy cut when schools and other council services have needed money.

In Southwark we have over 19,000 young people aged 13 to 19 and in the last year our youth service was in contact with a third of this age group. We spend £2.8 million on direct youth services, with 30% directed to the voluntary sector. We have 8 maintained youth centres and nearly thirty voluntary youth organisations supported through grant aid.

Youth services perform well if they have strong political direction. They are successful when designed in consultation with young people and partners, and have stable funding. Links with the community sector are essential and good overall management is key.

In Southwark we ask young people what they want. We don't set up provision that we think is suitable for them and that they should enjoy. The number of times I have been to a youth centre where there has been dancing in one corner, a scrabble contest in another and a chill out chatting area in another! Never assume what young people want!

Each year we carry out a pupil voice survey across our schools. We have commissioned a MORI survey to find out what young people want and what their perceptions are on the quality of life in Southwark. We also use our Youth Council and are developing a consultation process which works from the bottom up - linking school councils and youth fora with the Youth Council. But it is not just good enough to listen to young people. You have to feedback and explain what is or is not possible, as we always do with other residents.

As councillors we can use initiatives such as the Youth Opportunity Fund to engage with our young people. The Youth Opportunity Fund is a national pot of money available for young people to spend where they live. It ensures young people have something exciting to do with their time and that they feel valued members of the community. In Southwark we have ensured that young people have taken the lead on how this money is spent. Our Youth Council sought bids from young people through leaflets, banners, press and the web.

36 young people received accredited training by Youth Bank so that they are now experts in grant applications - from developing the criteria, to assessing the grants and monitoring them. Much of half term was spent interviewing and assessing over 100 applications! Over £270,000 has been awarded by young people to young people for projects such as running a fun day, creating a film, holding a fashion show or installing a dance floor at one of the youth clubs. This is genuine empowerment and devolution of power - central to our core beliefs.

In Southwark we have many initiatives that engage young people including our junior street leaders, young friends of parks, 180 millennium volunteers, our get scene film making competition and our community games - a year round programme of sports coaching and competitions for young people across our eight community council areas. Over 9,000 young people have represented their area in a wide range of sports.

We also support peer mentors on issues such as sexual health and crime, and have ensured youth input into local projects such as gangs research and regeneration schemes.

If we are to represent young people and develop their interest in politics, then we need to talk to them and campaign on things that they are interested in. Why not carry out a youth survey, an online questionnaire or visit places where young people go and find out what they want in your area. You'd be surprised how feeling safe and more frequent bus services, are up there alongside places to go and things to do. Contrary to the 'hoodie' concept - whether huggable or otherwise - simply by treating young people with respect and interest, they respond!

**Cllr Caroline Pidgeon**  
Executive Member for Children's Services and Education, London Borough of Southwark  
[cpidgeon@cix.co.uk](mailto:cpidgeon@cix.co.uk)

# Localism needs Fundamental Reform

Bernard Greaves, co-author of the 1980 ALDC pamphlet "Community Politics" argues that local government needs fundamental reform



Reform of local government is back on the political agenda, driven by Tony Blair's modernisation programme for public service delivery in Britain. The Liberal Democrats first response was the thoroughly inadequate policy paper and resolution presented to the Party Conference at Brighton last year. Reactive, short term and superficial, it was deservedly referred back. We now have the chance to produce more considered, coherent and comprehensive proposals that address the highly unsatisfactory state of local government today.

If it is possible to use the phrase now without people responding with a snigger, local government is no longer fit for purpose.

The powers which it used to exercise have been pared away, scattered over a period of more than half a century between a variety of agencies in the public and private sectors and in that indeterminate unanswerable quango land straddling the two.

Those powers that remain are subject to ever extending and tightening central government control through a complexity of targets and performance management procedures. More and more duties are imposed on local authorities on behalf of central government, usually inadequately funded, if at all. Indeed nowhere are its powers more circumscribed and controlled than in its finances, epitomised by the council tax, rising, as a result of central government decisions, far faster than inflation, and widely perceived as both unjust and unduly burdensome on vulnerable sections of the population.

Over the last quarter of a century I have witnessed a steady decline in the quality of local

councillors and increasingly now the willingness of people to serve in that role. It has become an intrinsically unrewarding position, lacking in real power to control local events but attracting blame for things beyond their control. I now see a similar decline setting in in the quality of local authority officers, and for similar reasons.

Local government is clearly not up to the crucial task of leading the physical, social and economic regeneration of local communities that now desperately need it.

The government's response has been the setting up of Local Strategic Partnerships, required to implement locally nationally determined policies, priorities and solutions by means of Local Area Agreements, where the rhetoric of localism disguises the reality of central control. In a city like Leicester the Local Strategic Partnerships brings together services provided by 18 different agencies in a structure that is neither democratic, answerable, nor open - all of which, and more, a century ago were run by a single democratic city council.

Accordingly we need to undertake a radical reconstruction of local government. Tinkering around the margins and ad hoc solutions are not enough. We need to redefine the purpose and powers of local government based on explicit adherence to fundamental principles.

1. Local authorities should be based on real communities that have a natural coherence and a sense of identity. They need not and should not all be the same size, but be determined by the reality on the ground.

2. There should be a single tier of principal local authorities with the responsibility for planning, co-ordinating and controlling all local services, with the exception of those that form part of the criminal justice system, which should be subject to local authority scrutiny. This would involve for instance in due course, their taking over responsibility for the provision of local health services from PCTs, of adult education and training from Learning and Skills Councils, and of employment services from Job Centres and Connexions.
3. Local authorities should be able to choose their own governance arrangements, without having imposed on them elected mayors and a divorce between executive functions vested in a cabinet and separate scrutiny committees, so long as they maintain a proper and fair political balance within them.
4. Local councillors should be elected by single transferable vote from multi member wards, say every four years, using electoral processes that enhance the privacy and security of the ballot and end the abuses made possible by the sloppy arrangements recently introduced.
5. Local authorities should raise all their own revenue and central government allocations should end. Income Tax should become an entirely local tax, collected by the Revenue and Customs, and distributed according to a redistribution formula determined by the upper chamber of Parliament. Business rates should be abolished and replaced with a tax on all incorporated bodies, whether private, public or voluntary, based on a percentage of the turnover at each of the sites from which they operate. There could be concessions for charities.
6. Local authorities should be free to run services directly, commission or contract them out, or run them jointly with other local authorities. They should be required to delegate powers to democratically constituted neighbourhood, area or parish bodies.
7. The basic powers and duties of local authorities should be cushioned and protected in a written constitution as part of a new constitutional settlement for the United Kingdom. The new arrangements should be phased in over a number of years as part of a planned implementation programme.

**Bernard Greaves**





The manifesto consultation website www.manifesto.libdems.org.uk

Calling all councillors – your chance to shape the next manifesto

The Federal Policy Committee recently held an 'away-day' to think through themes for the next manifesto and one of the most consistent themes was the desire for a strong message about 'localism' in all its forms. It is therefore especially important that in framing our next manifesto we work hard at thinking how this principle can best be put into practice and hear from those who are already on the frontline of delivering quality public services at a local level.

I am therefore very keen for as many fellow-members of ALDC as possible to take part in our new online manifesto consultation process. The site can be found at www.manifesto.libdems.org.uk and it has instructions about how you can get access to the members only discussion area. Once you have gained access to the site, make sure you subscribe to e-mail updates, so that you will be alerted when new debates of interest are started.

The site has only been up and running for a short while, but already hundreds of party members have visited and have started to add their views. The particular priority of the site is to consult members BEFORE decisions are taken, rather than just ask for a rubber-stamp after the event. The more councillors who bring their views and experience into the debate, the more chance we will have a manifesto which has real credibility on the key issue of localism. Over to you!

Steve Webb MP
Chair, Manifesto Writing Group

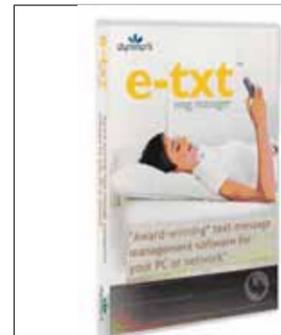
star photo



We couldn't resist sharing this picture of Cllr Monica Whyte and Cllr Matt Davies of Harringey Council taken at 7.00am after two hours of "Good Morning" leaflets in Barnet in February. Matt's blog is www.mattdaviesharringey.blogspot.com

Texting to Win

Mark Pack describes how local campaigners could be using SMS text messaging to get campaign



A means of getting our message across?

Imagine someone wants to get hold of you urgently – what's the best way of doing it? Come round to your home and knock on your door? But you may not be in. Send you a letter? But will you open it amongst the various junk mail you receive. Ring you on the phone at home or work? But you may be away from the phone. Send you an email? But it may get drowned in other emails or blocked as spam.

But what if they send you a text message?

For most of us, text messages are the one direct form of communication that we still always look at – and look at promptly. So whilst all the other methods of communication have huge value for political campaigning, sending a text message has

particular power. It's much quicker to send a text message to a group of people than to going round knocking on all their doors or ringing them all separately. It's much more likely to be read than a letter or an email. It isn't free – but it can be very cheap.

These are all reasons why many political campaigners are starting to use text messaging seriously in their campaigns. The most effective way to get started is using text messaging to help remind activists to come out canvassing tomorrow, to remind members about the social event on Sunday afternoon, to remind donors to respond to an appeal mailing and other similar messages that are reminding people about a particular event or deadline.

The party is now supplying a piece of software – e-txt – that makes it very easy to send mass text messages. You just import a file of mobile phone numbers (which could have come from EARS, Hands or a spreadsheet for example), type in your message, make a payment on your credit card and hit send.

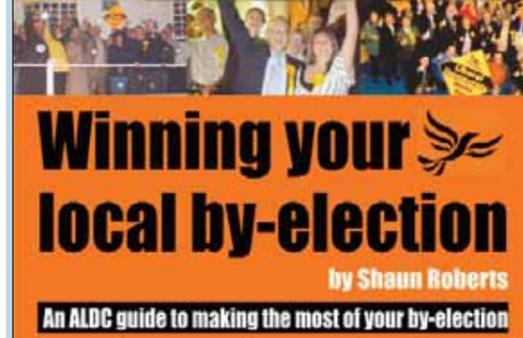
The software is available from the party's extranet at http://tinyurl.com/yjbhv5 along with training guides on how to use it.

If you are not an extranet user at the moment, remember that it is open to party activists and all councillors. More details are at http://tinyurl.com/2rscjg

Mark Pack / m.pack@libdems.org.uk
Mark is the party's Head of Innovations

The New By Election Pack

Fresh for Harrogate conference ALDC are publishing a By election Pack, council Groups and regional parties to have up their sleeve for that rainy day



ALDC has a proud record of helping Liberal Democrats fight and win local council by elections. But there is plenty of room to improve.

We only stand a candidate in 80% of by-elections We only have a 60% success rate in holding our own seats at by-elections. Together with the Campaigns Department we recognised that the difference between winning and losing was often down to the speed at which our local campaigners got "up and running".

To this end Shaun Roberts who works for the Campaigns Department in the South East of England and has run winning campaigns in over twenty local by-elections has brought together experience from across the party to produce a new by election guide. This will not replace all the other campaigning publications produced by ALDC but will act as a checklist of do's and don'ts for campaigners across the country. It is available from ALDC £10.

## aldc

### Tell us your candidates!

All candidates in the May 2007 local elections have now been sent two special election mailings. Following additional financial resources secured by the Party nationally, every candidate has been sent free copies of the "Winning Elections" handbooks volumes 1 (basic guide) and 2 (advanced guide). (We won't be sending out volume 3 (election law) - so if you want it you need to buy it!

The mailings have supplemented our regular "Election Briefing" newsletter which provides tips and ideas about campaigning for the elections, together with helpful information about election law and formal deadlines.

If your candidates haven't been receiving the packs, it's probably because we don't know who they are! To take advantage of this free service please make sure that ALDC has the details of your candidates (name, address and email) and we'll make sure that the latest pack is sent out to them.

Contact Emma Hall for more information - emma.hall@aldc.org

### Changed Circumstances

Three events are planned for **Sunday 6 May 2007** immediately after the local elections. These events scheduled to take place in Perth (for Scotland only), Manchester and London are for Council Groups who find themselves in "changed circumstances" - either moving into control, opposition or no-overall control.

Clearly it is important to make the right decisions, and where appropriate arrangements with other parties, after the elections - but please talk these through with colleagues first. As well as the events ALDC will be running a telephone helpline right through the weekend after the elections to make sure you get the advice and support that you need.

More information on the events, which are provided with kind support from the Leadership Centre for Local Government, nearer the time.

### Advice

Please feel free to contact ALDC at any time during office hours for advice and help on campaigning and council issues. This is particularly important during the run up to the elections on 3 May 2007.

Alternatively you can email us at info@aldc.org.

We will be running an **emergency helpline** service over the bank-holiday weekend immediately after the local elections (Saturday 5 May - Monday 7 May) to help provide advice to groups who find themselves in new circumstances or have immediate enquiries. Please contact us on the normal number and you'll be re-directed to an emergency number.

### Councillor Development

ALDC has recently announced its Councillor development programme for 2007. Three events have been scheduled to meet the development needs of Liberal Democrat councillors. Following on from the success of last year's event, our **Leadership Weekend** is aimed at Group Leaders, Deputy Leaders and future leaders over a packed weekend in Kenilworth 20-22 July 2007.

Later in the year a one-day training day for **newly elected councillors** takes place on Saturday 14 July 2007, whilst a mid-week one day training event on making the most of **Scrutiny** takes place on 18 October 2007. Details of all will be on the ALDC website www.aldc.org

## members services

### Website Changes



The new look front page of the ALDC website.

More changes have recently taken place with ALDC's website in order to provide a better service to members. In addition to news and information, the site contains a growing members only archive of best practice, campaign guides, articles and useful resources.

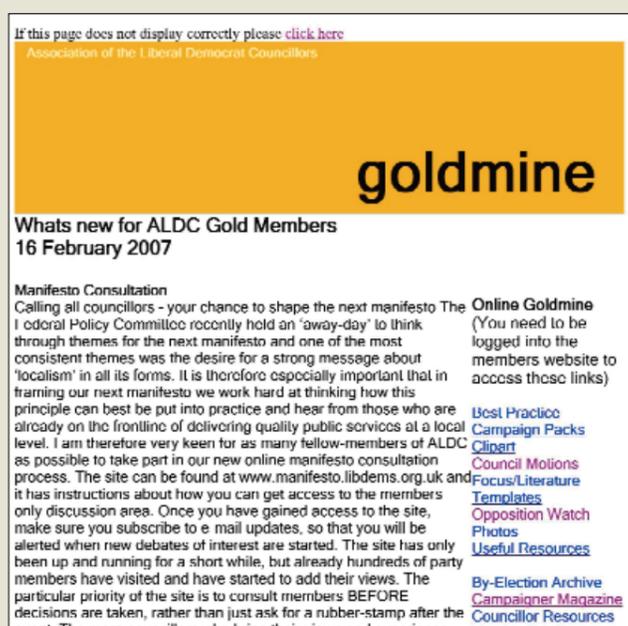
For Gold Members our "online goldmine" contains a comprehensive set of resources including: focus templates, clipart, photos, publications and opposition materials. Please send us your best literature, and the best literature from your opponents, if you feel these might be of use to colleagues across the country. Information can be sent either electronically (PDF or PagePlus formats) or in the post.

Obviously we do have to make our materials secure and only available to our members. But logging in to the members only section is easy. You need your ALDC membership number (this is different from your Party membership number) and your postcode. Once you've registered you can set your computer to remember your registration permanently (though obviously this should only be done on a secure personal computer. If you have any problems registering with the site please do not hesitate to give us a call in the office.

### Email Updates.

A new range of email updates are also now being sent out. These include the Gold Member only "goldmine" email with details of what's new in the online goldmine and the more widely distributed "grapevine" for all Councillors and ALDC members, and "briefing" for candidates in forthcoming local elections.

If ALDC hasn't got your email address please contact us in the office - emma.hall@aldc.org



A Gold Members "goldmine" email

## diary

**Saturday 10 March 2007**  
Welsh Spring Conference

**Saturday 17 March 2007**  
North West Regional Conference, Oldham  
West Midlands Regional Conference (check locally, date to be confirmed)

**Saturday 24 March 2007**  
South Central and South East Regions Joint Conference, Maidenhead

**Noon Wednesday 4 April 2007**  
Deadline for the submission of nomination papers for 3rd May elections

**5pm Wednesday 18 April 2007**  
Last day to make a new postal vote application or amend or cancel an existing postal vote or proxy vote arrangement

**Thursday 3 May 2007**  
Polling Day in English and Scottish local elections, and elections to the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly.

**Sunday 6 May 2007**  
ALDC Change Circumstances events in London, Manchester and Perth.

**Thursday 7 June 2007**  
Last day to submit election expenses (Friday 8 June where declarations were after midnight)

**Saturday 23 June 2007**  
Liberal Democrat Local Government Conference, Birmingham ICC

**Monday 2 - Thursday 5 July 2007**  
Local Government Association General Assembly and Conference, Birmingham

**Saturday 14 July 2007**  
ALDC Training Day for newly-elected Councillors (Birmingham)

**Friday 20 - Sunday 22 July 2007**  
ALDC Leadership Weekend for Group Leaders, Deputy Leaders and future leaders. Woodside Conference Centre, Kenilworth

**Sunday 16 - Thursday 20 September 2007**  
Federal Party Conference, Brighton

**Thursday 18 October 2007**  
ALDC Training Day - "Making the most of Scrutiny". Venue TBC

**Wednesday 12 December 2007**  
Local Government Association General Assembly, London

## campaigner

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# Affordable Housing

Cllr Heather Kidd, leader of South Shropshire District Council explains how Lib Dems are putting policies for affordable housing into practice

Just occasionally a Councillor (often a Lib Dem) will read a document and just know it is fundamentally wrong and will not deliver what is needed for their electorate. That, for me, in South Shropshire was the new Draft Local Plan. It set out to build houses for the wealthy incomer. 83% of people on our waiting lists are in real housing need. My fellow Joint Leader and I had it thrown out as it did not deliver for our very rural wards or for the rest of the District. An emergency meeting had to be arranged and our innovative Affordable Housing Policies were born. These are our policies;

- We support three tenures of affordable housing. To buy, to part buy and to rent
- We strongly encourage mixed tenure sites. This gives a healthier mix of people together.
- Affordable housing should be indistinguishable from the rest of the developer site.
- Our policy recognises that some people can never afford to buy. Half the 50% on developer sites are for rent.
- Some people can afford to part buy – these are provided for by equity share properties. Government (the Housing Corporation) put some funding into building these. South Shropshire

feels that these 'homebuy' properties are less affordable than our 'affordable to buy'.

- Other people can afford to buy housing from about £86,000 and some significantly above that but cannot afford open market prices.
- **All our affordable to buy property stays affordable in perpetuity for local people using a 106 agreement and a legal restriction called an Equity Mortgage (not a mortgage as we know it!!)** The District Valuer has recognised that these affordable to buy will never be sold on the open market. They now only pay Council Tax at Band's A and B rather than D and E.
- The policy is for all in need, young people, older people in need of downsizing or a bungalow, people moving back to be near family, those already here, locals and key workers. We now have teachers, fire fighters and nurses unable to afford housing, also care workers, farm workers and many others.
- The policy is designed to help keep our young people and take some of the pressure off the rented sector. It should support the extended family and aid social sustainability. Take pressure of social services
- All affordable housing is now required to be built to Very Good Eco Homes standard. And to



life times standard where ever possible. We need to increase disposable income, cut bills, save the planet and keep housing as flexible as possible for the future.

- We have created a Joint Venture Company, South Shropshire Local Homes, with the Housing Association and a local Developer, to increase the supply of affordable to buy – by proactively seeking sites and getting planning permission and then building.

Building affordable housing is never easy and always has objectors. It is always needed, always acknowledged – but should 'never be next to me' and for very good safety reasons! It can only be delivered by a team of committed members and officers - Planners, Housing officers and elected members working together. Any weak link will mean delivery fails.

# New Europeans

Non-UK citizens of the European Union can vote in European and local elections. Andrew Duff MEP explores how we might gain their support.

When Nicolas Sarkozy came electioneering to London recently, he claimed there were 300,000 Frenchmen and women in the city, enjoying the sweet scent of capitalism. He certainly attracted a crowd. But the truth is that nobody has an accurate picture of how many non-British EU citizens are now resident in this country. Because Britain has declined to join the Schengen area, EU citizens are not obliged to register their residency. Only the Inland Revenue, for obvious reasons, appears to be interested in 'capturing' the working non-Brit European.

What is clear, however, is that of the several million European citizens eligible to vote in British municipal or European Parliamentary elections, relatively few have bothered to register themselves as electors. Local authorities are obliged by law to encourage the registration of electors, including eligible non-Brits. In practice, some councils are good at this, some bad, and many indifferent. New Europeans is a joint campaign of ALDC and Lib Dem Euro-MPs whose goals are to ginger up council electoral registration officers, to identify

registered European voters and to appeal to them to vote Lib Dem.

Our party stands to gain more support than our opponents from such a campaign. Many of Britain's 'New Europeans' are young professionals with children whose natural concern for better local services will be sharpened by their ability to make invidious comparisons with their home countries. British schools, transport and hospitals are not the reason why foreigners come to live here!

As far as the European Parliament is concerned, some New Europeans will be able to vote at home by post, proxy or in person at a nearby consulate. But for many who have chosen to live and work in the UK, the future of Britain's European engagement will be a question of key importance. Whether it's the euro, the constitution or the environment, the choice of representative in Brussels and Strasbourg matters very much. Equally, the future shape of British culture can hardly be ignored by Europeans who live here. If England is suffering one of its periodic fits of ugly, petty nationalism, who better to counter this than the Liberal Democrats?



The profile of our Westminster party in the continental media is fairly low. The fact that we have seldom played to our strength as Britain's European party has done us few favours. If we are now to rectify that problem, we must promote our existing European connections through the Alliance for Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE). We should be more readily identifiable with our continental partners: François Bayrou's current presidential election campaign in France, for example, has much in common with our posture and policies in Britain. We strongly support Romano Prodi's government in Italy and Guy Verhofstadt's government in Belgium. French, Italians and Belgians residing in Britain should be made aware of these loyalties.

A vigorous pro-European campaign by the Liberal Democrats coupled with continued effective activism in local government will comprise an attractive package deal for Britain's New European voters.