



Reports to Conference

Spring Conference 2017

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Federal Conference Committee

Brighton 2016

The feedback questionnaire continues to be a useful tool for us to understand your views of a venue and a conference. As well as a snapshot in time it enables us to carry out year on year comparisons.

For the last conference, some 23% of the responses came from first time attendees. The majority of attendees (new and regular) found the Agenda, Directory, Conference Extra and Conference Daily useful and easy to use although a slightly worrying 18% did not use Conference Daily and 39% did not use Conference Extra at all! Over half of attendees downloaded the app and only 6% did not think it was satisfactory, easy or very easy to use. The majority of the respondents preferred it to paper.

Brighton again came out as a popular venue. The overwhelming majority thought that the balance between debate and nondebate items was about right although a small but nonetheless significant number thought there were too many non-debate items. The balance between debates and fringe meetings was generally thought to be correct. 75% liked or did not mind the 9am start on the Saturday. About the same number gave the same answer about the 3pm finish on the final day.

Most people thought the fringe was satisfactory, good or excellent, with most opting for good. For those that attended the fringe, the average number was between three and six. The majority of people travelled to conference by train or in a car-share. For most, the journey was 1-3 hours. In terms of accommodation, most people stayed in an independent hotel or B&B. There was a good spread of accommodation from £20 per night right up to £200 per night. Only a relatively small minority thought their accommodation poor value for

money. Overall, the vast majority of people rated their experience at conference as excellent or good. Just a tiny handful of people rated it as poor. Again, the vast majority said that it made them more motivated to support the party or to campaign for it and that it made them feel more involved in the democratic process and proud to be a member.

FCC Changes

This new committee that has been elected is due to serve for a three-year period. A number of new members have joined the committee. They include Robert Adamson, Victor Chamberlain, Nick Da Costa, Heidi Worth, Jennie Rigg, Susan Juned, and Alex Hegenbarth. We also welcomed back a few familiar faces. A number of long standing members of the committee either stood down or did not get re-elected. I am extremely grateful to them for all their work over the years.

I was re-elected as Chair and Zoe O'Connell and Geoff Payne were re-elected Vice-Chairs

York 2017

We are pleased to be back in York. The city is a popular venue for our members.

As always, items on the agenda are still open to amendment. The deadline for submitting amendments – and also emergency motions and questions to reports – is 13.00 on 14th March.

We continue to provide a drafting advisory service, and I would encourage all emergency motion and amendment submitters to make use of it – those who have used it in the past have had a much higher chance of having theirs accepted. The deadline for the advisory service for amendments and emergency motions is 13.00 on 28th February, so please do use the service. Amendments and

drafts can be submitted via the website:

www.libdems.org.uk/conference_submissions

Autumn 2017

This autumn we return to Bournemouth. The conference takes place from 16th to 19th September.

The deadlines are:

Drafting advice deadline (motions) 13.00 14th June 2017

Motions deadline 13.00 28th June 2016

Drafting advice deadline 13.00 21st August 2016
(amendments, emergency motions)

Deadline for amendments to motions, 13.00 4th September
2016

The committee considered whether we should adopt the trial that we ran last Autumn of running conference for four days. Usually, Autumn Conference lasts for five days, opening on Saturday afternoon and finishing on Wednesday. In Brighton, conference opened at 9am on the Saturday and closed at 3pm on the Tuesday. We managed with only a very small loss of debate time. It had the benefit of saving money although it was initially triggered by a review of the Parliamentary recess normally allowed for Autumn Conferences. The committee overwhelmingly voted to carry on with the four-day conference for 2017 only. There may be a case for increasing the time later in the Parliamentary cycle but we are not going to do that this year. We felt that that was in accordance with what members wanted and it had other important benefits.

Stewards

As always, conference can only take place due to the massive contribution and efforts of the volunteer stewarding team, who look

after the exhibition, fringe, information desk, stage and auditorium, to ensure that we all get the most out of conference.

Federal Conference Committee

FCC members are here to help you make the most of conference – do feel free to ask us any questions you may have relating to the agenda and how to speak in debates. As well as finding a member of the committee at the FCC Helpdesk you can identify us by the badges we wear, with 'FCC' prominently displayed.

FCC members are assigned to state and English regional parties, and SAOs. The idea is that they provide advice and assistance on submitting motions and when requested attend conferences to answer your questions.

Thanks

The vast bulk of the hard work of organising conference throughout the year falls on the professional staff in the Conference Office at HQ: Lydia Dumont and her team Emma Price, Jack Everitt and Laura Brody. I would also like to express my grateful thanks to all the others who make conference possible: to all my colleagues on the Conference Committee; to all the staff at HQ, in particular the Policy Team, led by Christian Moon and Rachael Clarke, who process the motions and prepare much of the agenda material; and of course to the stewards' team.

Conference is a fantastic event to be involved in I look forward to seeing you in York.

Andrew Wiseman
Chair, Federal Conference Committee
February 2017

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Federal Policy Committee

The Federal Policy Committee 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 manifestos for Westminster and European elections.

The FPC has 29 voting members: the Party Leader, six other Parliamentarians, the Party President, two councillors, three state party reps, one rep from the Federal Campaigns and Elections Committee and fifteen members directly elected by conference reps. It is chaired by the Leader.

Committee Issues

This is the first report since the election of the new committee under One Member One Vote. I am delighted to welcome a number of fresh faces onto the FPC, including some who have only joined the party since the 2015 election. I look forward to working with all of them.

The newly elected Vice Chairs are Baroness Sarah Ludford, Duncan Brack and Jeremy Hargreaves. In addition to the constitutionally prescribed membership, the FPC has also decided to co-opt representatives from EMLD and Liberal Youth as non-voting members, and to invite the Chair of the Federal International Relations Committee to attend as an observer.

FPC Work Programme

Since the last conference working groups appointed by the FPC have written policy papers on Sex Work and Nuclear Weapons to be debated at York, and both of which have been produced in response to mandates from previous conferences.

Working groups have also prepared consultation papers on Education, 21st Century Economy, Rural Communities, and Britain in the World.

The FPC has also decided to propose a stand-alone motion on faith schools to this conference. This has proved a contentious issue in the party when previously debated, and we decided it would be better to take this as a separate item now rather than leave it to be debated as part of the wider Education policy paper in the Autumns, where it might overshadow other important aspects of education policy.

FPC has decided to establish two new policy working groups on priority topics identified by the Agenda 2020 process: Immigration and Identity (chaired by Adam Pritchard), and Power to People and Communities (chair to be announced). These will produce consultation papers for the Autumn 2017 conference and final policy papers for Spring 2018.

The current schedule of consultation and policy papers is set out below:

Working Group	Consultation Session	Policy Paper
Sex Work	Brighton 2016	Spring 2017
Nuclear Deterrent	Brighton 2016	Spring 2017
Education	Spring 2017	Autumn 2017
21 st Century Economy	Spring 2017	Autumn 2017
Rural Communities	Spring 2017	Autumn 2017
Britain in the World	Spring 2017	Autumn 2017
Immigration and Identity	Autumn 2017	Spring 2018
Power to People and Communities	Autumn 2017	Spring 2018

The FPC is very grateful to all those who give up a great deal of time to serve on our working groups. This is not the most glamorous role in the party but it is absolutely vital to our democratic policy-making process.

Member Engagement

The new FPC is reviewing our processes to widen and deepen members' involvement in our policy development, building on the work already done since the general election. For example, alongside the full consultation papers produced for the Sex Work and Nuclear Weapons papers, we ran online surveys which each received over a thousand responses. We have also been advertising for membership of policy working groups more actively, and receiving in the region of 130 applications per working group, with greater diversity than ever before.

We recognise that given the recent expansion in membership we need to do more to communicate party policy to members. Priorities include improving party policy on the website as well as producing pocket guides to party policy and philosophy.

FPC Links

To encourage policy debate across the party, the FPC appoints representatives to act as links to Party SAOs and also regional parties of England. As the committee as only had one meeting so far, we are still in the process of making these appointments, but will make further announcements at conference.

Policy Staffing and Volunteers

The Policy Unit consists of Christian Moon (Head of Policy), Rachael Clarke (Deputy Head of Policy), and Alex Whitehead (on secondment from PwC). The Policy Unit has also benefitted from the

efforts of volunteers including Christian Podest, Kevin Callanan, and Ellie Persellin. The FPC is grateful for the hard work of all the staff.

Tim Farron MP, Party Leader
Chair, Federal Policy Committee
February 2017

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Federal Board

The Federal Board is the governing body of the Federal Party. It is responsible for, co-ordinating and overseeing the implementation of the Party's strategy, the work of the Federal Party and some of its Committees. The Federal Board also has responsibility, at least once per Parliament, for preparing a document outlining the Party's Strategy, for submission for debate and agreement by Conference.

The FB has 35 voting members: the Party President (who chairs it); the Leader and three other Parliamentarians; the chairs of the three state parties; the chairs of each of the Federal Committees including a vice-chair of the Federal Policy Committee; a councillor; a Young Liberals representative; three state party representatives; and 15 members directly elected by party members.

Introduction

At the time of writing (early February), the four months since Autumn Conference 2016 have seen a number of significant by-election campaigns with a major commitment from the Party; staff and members. Liz Leffman's campaign in Witney showed just how effective our campaigning can be, jumping from 4th to 2nd place and with an increase of 23.5% of the vote. Following that, in Richmond Park, the Party performed even better, electing Sarah Olney as our newest MP with an increase of 30.4% of the vote. We also fought an additional by-election in Sleaford simultaneously, and Ross Pepper doubled our share of the vote there.

We ended the year with the largest number of net local by-election gains in over 20 years – 28 over the course of the year – an outstanding result of which our new Councillors and ALDC should rightly be very proud.

During the Richmond Park by-election campaign, we also saw the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States – an event which led to a small surge in people joining the Party. This surge has, however, been dwarfed by that which took place during the month of January as a result of the Government's Brexit Bill starting its passage through Parliament. At the time of writing our membership has increased by over 5000 since the start of the year and may increase yet further.

The Party is now in the midst of two additional by-election campaigns led by Rebecca Hanson in Copeland, Cumbria, and Dr Zulfiqar Ali in Stoke-on-Trent Central, and we continue to make local by-election gains: three so far this year in Sunderland, Three Rivers and Rotherham respectively. The win in Three Rivers gave us overall control of the council: congratulations to Leader, Cllr Sara Bedford, and her team.

OMOV Committee Elections

The first set of our Party's internal elections saw thousands of members voting for the first time to elect Party committees, following the introduction of One Member One Vote (OMOV). This means it was also the first time we used our new electronic voting system which worked exceptionally well. Our thanks go to the excellent team at HQ who made it happen, especially the Returning Officer's Compliance Team and our Head of IT Stewart Christie, who designed the system from scratch.

The final phase of our internal elections has just completed, with the election of the Federal Finance and Resources Committee, the Federal Communications and Elections Committee and the Federal People Development Committee. All of these committees will meet for the first time towards the end of February.

New Party structure and reporting mechanisms

Following the decision by Conference to implement the Governance Review's recommendations in full, the Party's internal structures have now been changed to be both more strategic and more open and transparent. Although the Federal Board has, at the time of writing, held its first meeting, only one other committee which will now be reporting through this report has met: the Federal International Relations Committee (FIRC). Its report is appended below. In future this report will also incorporate reports from three other Party committees: the Federal Finance and Resources Committee (FFRC), the Federal Communications and Elections Committee (FCEC) and the Federal People Development Committee (FDPC). The Federal People Development Committee's report will replace that of the Diversity Engagement Group (DEG).

Party Strategy

A key role of the Federal Board under the new arrangements is to prepare a Party Strategy document once in every Parliamentary cycle, from which a Motion will be presented to Conference. The Federal Board has set up a Strategy Task and Finish Group following its Away Day on 14 January to draft the above, and it is due to report back to the Federal Board in the coming months. A motion will then be presented to Autumn Conference for debate in September.

Reviews

The Alderdice Review to improve process and culture within the Liberal Democrats, focusing on race and ethnicity, and the Macdonald Review of the party's disciplinary processes are now well underway. Thank you if you have contributed to the call for evidence on the Alderdice review, John Alderdice is currently considering submissions, both written and oral.

The Macdonald Review has started to take evidence, and will put out a consultation before Conference. Both will report in due course, with any formal recommendations being brought to Autumn Conference.

Thank you

Life in the party is as hectic as ever, and I particularly want to thank Chris Adams, my aide, and Shaquan McDowell for their help and support for me in my role as President and in getting our new committee system up and running. They, and all the staff consistently go above and beyond for the party in supporting us in our resurgence.

My final thanks are to you, the members. Two years ago, the party was being written off. You have made 'Fightback' happen. Your Federal Board as it starts its life will do its best for the party and the members.

Sal Brinton, Party President
Chair, Federal Board
February 2017

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Appendix: Federal International Relations Committee Report

The Federal International Relations Committee held its first meeting on 28 January, having elected Robert Woodthorpe Browne as its Chair. Having ensured that it is compliant with the requirements of Article 14 of the Federal Constitution, it went on to discuss plans for forthcoming events, including the 70th Anniversary Congress of Liberal International, where an updated version of the 1947 'Oxford Manifesto', defining modern liberalism, will be adopted.

Reports to Conference

As the Committee has newly defined responsibilities, discussions have taken place to ensure that it has a strategy for delivering such aspects as supervision of internationally-minded groups within the Party, policy advice and communication with the wider Party membership and our sister parties across Europe and further afield. It is hoped to engage with both potential Liberal Democrat voters abroad, in collaboration with Brussels and Europe Liberal Democrats, and with eligible voters amongst those from abroad resident in the United Kingdom.

Delegations to both the Liberal International Congress (in Andorra) and the ALDE Party Council (in Ljubljana, Slovenia) are being organised, and a means of selecting the rather larger delegation to the ALDE Party Congress (scheduled to take place in Amsterdam in December) will be determined in the months ahead.

Robert Woodthorpe Browne
Chair, Federal International Relations Committee
February 2017

Parliamentary Party (Commons)

In my last report, I reflected on what had been a pretty turbulent summer in British Politics given It was the first conference following the EU Referendum result. I am therefore delighted to kick this report off by reflecting on a slightly more positive result. The Richmond Park by-election! We have expanded our Parliamentary Party in the Commons by 12.5%, but more significantly, we have added a driven, intelligent and passionate individual to our ranks. Sarah has settled in quicker than any of us could imagine. Bearing in mind she is only relatively new to the political scene, it is staggering how quickly she has picked things up, particularly when you consider some of the bizarre aspects of being an MP. Sarah's election has been as invigorating for our group in the Commons as it has for the wider membership of the Party. It is a clear sign that our message is cutting through.

With a UKIP-lite Government staggering mindlessly towards a hard Brexit, and a Labour Party more concerned with internal troubles than they are with providing meaningful opposition, there is now a clear recognition that the Liberal Democrats are needed more than ever. I'd also like to take this opportunity to thank the thousands of members who helped with our campaign in Richmond, as well as those of you who have helped with the campaigns in Witney and Sleaford. At the time of writing we are about to embark upon campaigns in Stoke and Copeland. Who knows, by the time of Conference, I may have more colleagues to welcome.

Looking specifically at Parliament, it is unsurprising that Brexit has dominated the agenda. I spoke in Brighton of a 'zombie' Parliament, lacking in substantive legislation. Little has changed to that effect, with Whitehall spending most of its time scratching its head about how to 'make Brexit a success' – a near impossible task to fulfil within the hard-Brexit parameters Theresa May has set out. On the

rare occasion that we are presented with a significant Bill, its content is made largely redundant, given the huge uncertainty on the horizon. The most obvious example of this was the Higher Education and Research Bill. The Bill in itself was deeply flawed, seemingly paving the way towards full marketization of the Higher Education sector, and a two-tier system. John Pugh led ably in the Commons for us, laying down a number of amendments which sadly were not accepted. As we all know, the world renowned Higher Education and Research Sector in the UK is hugely affected by Brexit, and this Bill should have been delayed to address these issues - the full scale of which are yet to be known. Clearly however, in a cynical attempt to prove that they are not suffering from departmental-wide gridlock, the Government decided to push on with the Bill. It is indicative of a Government more concerned with PR and perception, than they are with substance.

At the time of writing, we are in mid debate in the Commons about the colloquially known Article 50 Bill, which I hope to be able to reflect on in more detail by the time we are in York. The Government have produced (kicking and screaming) an extremely short Bill, in a cynical attempt to quash debate and scrutiny. We will however continue to press the Government to ensure that the public have a say on the final deal, particularly in the absence of a functioning Labour Party who appear to be giving the Government carte blanche to take us down a damaging path towards hard Brexit.

To end with a positive also, I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome the thousands of new members who have joined the Party since September. This appears to be becoming a permanent fixture in my reports and long may it continue. With vital Local Elections just around the corner, as well as regular by-elections popping up, I hope you choose to throw yourselves whole-heartedly into campaigning. Richmond Park showed us what was possible with a strong message and passionate activists willing to convey it.

POLD

As MPs, we are ably supported by a team of talented individuals in the Parliamentary Office of the Liberal Democrats. We are fortunate to have had many of these people in place for an extended period of time, and benefit hugely from the expertise they have developed in their respective portfolios. We sadly had to bid farewell to two members of the team. Rosie Gray has left the PST to begin a career as a Civil Servant in DCLG. Giles Derrington has left his position as the Head of the Parliamentary Adviser Unit to work in the technology sector. We wish both of them all the best in their new careers.

In their absence, we continue to have a fantastic team. Jack Fletcher continues to Head up the Whips Office in the Commons, supported by his deputy Joe Edwards. Euan Stone and Jenny Steinitz continue to work in the PST providing support to Parliamentarians and their offices. In the Parliamentary Advisor Unit, we continue to benefit from the support of Vinous Ali, Rosy Cobb, Claire Mathys, Rosie Shimell and Fiona Tod. I would like to thank them all for their hard work over this period.

Tom Brake MP
Chief Whip, Commons
February 2017

Parliamentary Party (Lords)

Leadership

Following Jim Wallace's decision to stand down last summer, **Dick Newby** was elected the leader of the group in the Lords in September. That left vacant the position of Chief Whip and **Ben Stoneham** was elected to this position in late October. They are supported in their work by our two deputy leaders, **Kate Parminter** and **Navnit Dholakia** and a team of party whips – **Diana Maddock**, **Chris Humphreys**, **Alison Suttie**, **Cathy Bakewell**, **Mike Storey** and **Qurban Hussain**. Huge thanks go to **Brian Paddick** who stood down as a party whip in December after two years.

Legislation

We continue to provide the real scrutiny of the Government in the House of Lords. On numerous occasions in the last months we have taken the lead in challenging the Conservative Government, resulting in the Liberal Democrats providing effective opposition to the Government's legislative programme.

Since the autumn, the Lords spent a lot of time on two major Home Office bills, both led by **Brian Paddick** and **Sally Hamwee**. During the passage of the **Policing and Crime Bill**, **Jonathan Marks** pushed on giving anonymity to victims of revenge porn, whilst **Sal Brinton** worked hard to ensure that the Victims' Code and its enforcements is more robust by introducing a wide range of measures including giving timely and accurate information to victims.

We fought against the Government's illiberal **Investigatory Powers Bill**, and pushed hard on a number of issues, including establishing an independent civil liberties board to ensure that civil liberties are always considered in the development and implementation of policy

and legislation; deleting the provisions in the bill that allowed records to be kept of websites visited; and powers to bar bulk acquisition warrants from being used to collect internet connection records. We were frustrated in many of our efforts on this bill thanks to the attitude of the other groups in the House of Lords.

Kath Pinnock, Mike Storey, Claire Tyler, Joan Walmsley and Cathy Bakewell worked hard on the **Children and Social Work Bill**. Key issues for the team were providing proper mental health support for children in care, ensuring better financial support, and early intervention to prevent children from being placed into care in the first place.

Jenny Randerson led for us on the **Bus Services Bill**, with support from **Bill Bradshaw, Sal Brinton, John Shipley, Cathy Bakewell and Ros Scott**. We championed the rights of passengers, calling on the Government to tackle disability access to bus services, promote bus services in rural areas, and to provide a concessionary fare scheme for young people.

Martin Thomas, with support from **Chris Humphreys** and **Jenny Randerson**, worked on the **Wales Bill**, where we managed to get Government support for a Liberal Democrat amendment on the devolving of teacher's pay to the National Assembly for Wales.

Europe and Brexit

The **European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill** is making its way through Parliament. In the Lords, **Dick Newby, Sarah Ludford, Julie Smith** and others will be ensuring that our central demand that the British people must have a final say on the deal negotiated by the Government is debated through a Liberal Democrat amendment.

Private Members' Bills

20 Liberal Democrat Peers have tabled Private Members' Bills this session. **Olly Grender's Renters' Rights Bill** aims to provide a range of protections to private renters. She scored a massive win in November when it was announced that the Government would indeed ban lettings agent fees, something which was included in her Bill. **Judith Jolly** has also had a Second Reading on her Bill to introduce a **Register of Arms Brokers** and **Kishwer Falkner's Armed Forces Deployment (Royal Prerogative) Bill** provides for the prior approval of the House of Commons to be obtained for any conflict decision. **Jonathan Marks** has introduced a Bill which aims to protect the rights of cohabiting couples.

Debates

Liberal Democrat Peers have led debates in the Lords during through the autumn and winter on important topics for the party, such as Brexit, renewable energy, and refugees and migrants. During our Liberal Democrat debate day in the Lords in January, **Tim Clement-Jones** and **Jane Bonham-Carter** led a debate on the impact of Brexit on the creative industries in Britain, and **Malcolm Bruce** and **Lindsay Northover** led a debate on the threat posed to the liberal international order by the rise of populism and nationalism around the world.

Campaigns and Visits

The group continues to be very active around the country. Since the 2015 general election, we have participated in over 500 visits to local parties, AGMs, campaigning sessions and EU events. The group also played a key part in the stunning by-election win in Richmond Park. All this is in addition to all the campaigning that Peers are constantly doing in their local areas.

Peers

Very sadly, **Willie Goodhart** passed away in January. Willie was a founding member of the SDP, and co-authored the Liberal Democrat constitution. He will be remembered as a man with a brilliant mind and a gentle soul, committed to the principles of social justice and human rights.

Geoff Tordoff has retired from the group since Autumn Conference last year. We thank him for all his work for and dedication to the liberal cause in Britain and wish him a long and happy retirement.

Staff

I would like to extend my thanks to the staff of the Leader's Office and the Whips' Office in the Lords who support us in all our work – **Humphrey Amos, Elizabeth Plummer, Sarah Pughe** and **Dave Shaw**. We owe a great debt of gratitude to **Polly Martin**, who left us in October, for all her work for the Lords group and the wider party.

We are also very grateful to the staff in the Parliamentary Adviser Unit – **Fionna Tod, Vinous Ali, Rosie Shimell, Rosy Cobb, Claire Mathys** and **Giles Derrington** - and the Parliamentary Support and Correspondence Team – **Jenny Steinitz** and **Euan Stone** – for their invaluable work in advising and supporting our group in the Lords.

Ben Stoneham
Chief Whip, House of Lords
February 2017

Parliamentary Party (Europe)

The end of 2016 is the halfway mark for the current parliament. Since my last report, the CETA trade deal has been signed by both the Canadian government and the three European Presidents of the Parliament, the Commission and the Council - the end of years of negotiations with many hitches along the way. Trade agreements, even between agreeable partners with similar economies and values, are tricky and take time.

Recently I welcomed 20 PPCs to Brussels, as well as our Manchester Mayoral candidate, Jane Brophy. I arranged training on how the European Union functions, its various institutions and political intricacies. It will be greatly useful in their campaigns to understand the implications of Brexit and what it will mean to lose all of these benefits. I'm looking forward to welcoming lead Councillors and candidates soon. I will also be inviting another group of PPCs as well as MPs and Peers in the near future.

The recent half term elections of Parliament President, committee chairs and other parliamentary appointments have been reinforced with an agreement between the Liberals (ALDE) and the EPP group. This agreement commits us to work for reform in the EU, to better connect with the citizens and work for better environmental standards. This coalition gives the EPP the Presidency, but the Liberals many committee chairs and an extra Vice President. But the real bonus for us is that Guy Verhofstadt remains Lead Brexit Negotiator for the Parliament – I will be having regular meetings with Guy to feed in the concerns of the Liberal Democrats.

Environment Committee

I am delighted to report that my parliamentary report on the EU's Wildlife Trafficking Action Plan passed with an overwhelming majority. 567 MEPs voted in favour, (5 against and 39 abstained, most of whom were UKIP). The report calls for the EU to increase and take seriously the fight against wildlife trafficking. This has now

become the world's fourth biggest criminal activity after the trafficking of people, guns and drugs and is causing untold and often irreversible damage to our planet's ecosystem and its species. Wildlife trafficking is a high profit, low risk activity for criminal gangs and individuals and the money from this trade is also used to fund terrorist activities. As Chair of the cross-party group 'MEPs For Wildlife' I am urging EU Member States to prioritise wildlife trafficking as a serious and organised crime threat in Europol's 2017 Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment. Only with this increased prioritization, can Europol conduct operations which deal specifically with this crime.

I am also Shadow author on the palm oil dossier which is calling for all products containing this ubiquitous vegetable oil to be sourced sustainably. The palm oil industry has come under immense scrutiny for its links to climate change, human rights abuses and biodiversity and species loss in South East Asia, Africa and South America. Palm oil is in about half of all packaged products sold in supermarkets and is also a major component of European biofuels so it's important to make sure it has high ethical, sustainable and environmental standards. However, alternatives are also problematic as others such as soybean oil, produce a lower yield yet require large amounts of pesticides and energy to grow. Therefore, sustainable palm oil which is fully certified and that does not result in clear felling of tropical forests, is key.

The Environment Committee, like all parliamentary committees have been asked to investigate the impact of Brexit on their work. Our report makes it plainly clear that the UK would need to abide by the EU's key environmental regulations as part of any Brexit deal. From the air we breathe, to the cleanliness of our beaches, the EU has been fundamental to the UK's improving green credentials, and we must ensure that this is not lost.

Media

My wildlife crime campaign and report calling for an immediate ban on ivory in the EU has been widely covered. As lead Liberal spokesperson on the National Emissions Ceilings (Air Quality) I have had good coverage on my campaign to reduce air pollution.

I am now beginning a series of letters to Ministers questioning their Brexit plans and the costs involved – these have been cross-posted into many of the pro-European groups online and are getting a positive response. I have also been writing letters to the local press and my nationwide letter network have been receiving weekly letters that they can tailor for their local press. Please do follow my Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/catherinebeardermep> and subscribe to my newsletter at: <http://www.bearder.eu/newsletter>.

Quaestor

As with all the other parliamentary appointments the 5 parliamentary Quaestors were re-elected and I am happy to say that I continue in that role, with the same portfolio of Artworks and exhibitions and the ICT working group. It also means that I sit in the President's Bureau, the only British MEP to do so.

As we wait the triggering of Article 50 there are great concerns from British and European citizens about their current and future status. In the Parliament, I am working with ALDE and MEPs from the UK and other countries on hearings and lobbying on their behalf. If, or until, the UK actually leaves the EU, British MEPs will continue their work as full members of the European Parliament and I will continue to work on your behalf in the ALDE group to deliver liberal values and policies as best I can. Please don't hesitate to contact me if I can help with any issue. catherine@bearder.eu

Catherine Bearder
Member of the European Parliament
February 2017

Campaign for Gender Balance

The past six months has been very busy for CGB. The training programme we ran at September Federal Conference was very successful but limited by the number of training slots made available to us. We were only able to run seven training sessions across the whole of Conference. The same problem has impacted on our preparations for the York Conference where we have only three training slots.

The Morrissey Report specifically called upon the Lib Dems to run more training for women. It has been most disappointing that we have been allocated a reduced number of training slots since that report was published. We have made representations to Dan Purchase in the Training team. We plan to take this issue up with both the new Director of People (when announced) and with the Conference Office.

The CGB training that was run at Autumn Conference stimulated a significant level of interest from women members keen to learn more about standing for Parliament. Some of these women were long standing members - many others were members who joined in the months after the EU Referendum.

Our small team of Approval Mentors have worked hard to help all those who sought our help. I am glad to say they have had a significant impact, helping more women to join the Approved Candidates List.

However, we found a significant number of cases where very able women were not able to go forward for approval as they had joined the Lib Dems less than a year ago. I have taken soundings from my team of Mentors on this issue. We support the principle of having a period of time before someone can go forward for approval and stand for selection. However, we are concerned that the extraordinary political events of last year mean that flexibility is

needed in these unprecedented circumstances. We are concerned that the one-year rule may demotivate some outstanding women candidates if they are unable to gain approval in time to stand in this year's round of Westminster selections. We therefore intend to discuss this issue with the Joint States Candidates Committee at the earliest opportunity.

The CGB Selection Mentors worked with women who went for selection in a number of high profile seats recently. They provided guidance and coaching along with help on selection literature. They are now helping approved women candidates decide which seats they should apply for in 2017.

The CGB team has been lucky to have enjoyed the excellent support given to us by Nathalie Chindipha from the Diversity Team in LDHQ. She has helped me with the planning of the Future Women MPs Weekend which will take place at the beginning of March 2017. Nathalie has led the implementation of our plans and has been exceptionally effective in her organisation of the event.

We have now begun the implementation of our CGB Cluster Programme, a project to provide mutual support for selected women candidates by creating small groups or clusters for training and networking. We intend that this project will gather momentum during 2017 as selections take place over the summer.

Candy Piercy
Chair, Campaign for Gender Balance
February 2017

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