

# Northumberland Liberal Democrats Diversity Statement 2022

Approved by the Local Party Executive – 14<sup>th</sup> March 2022

## 1) The Vision

The Liberal Democrats in Northumberland (which includes the parliamentary seats of Berwick upon Tweed, Blyth Valley, Hexham and Wansbeck) are committed to promoting inclusion, diversity and equality in our local party, irrespective of age, non-visible or visible disability or other mental physical or emotional health issue, ethnic origin, gender identity and reassignment, marital status and civil partnership, nationality, national origin, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, and socio-economic background.

We are also committed to providing an inclusive and safe environment where people do not feel intimidated and feel comfortable enough to openly express their different opinions and beliefs.

## 2) Demographics & Data

The four Northumberland seats exhibit many similar demographic characteristics but there are also important differences. The Berwick upon Tweed and Hexham seats are in the less populated and more rural parts of the county to the north and west. Blyth Valley and Wansbeck in South East Northumberland are relatively more densely populated.

In terms of ethnicity Northumberland is not diverse in relative terms. The population is more than 98% white in all the seats (compared to the UK average of 87%). The next highest ethnic group is Asian, between 0.6% (lowest) in Berwick upon Tweed and 1.2% (highest) in Hexham.

<b>Ethnicity % *</b>	Berwick	Blyth Valley	Hexham	Wansbeck	UK
White	98.7	98.7	98.0	98.4	87.2
Asian	0.6	0.7	1.2	0.9	6.9
Black	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	3.0
Mixed	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.5	2.0
Other	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.9
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

In terms of religion, most of the population in Northumberland identifies as Christian (between 65% and 70% depending on the seat), no religion or none stated is next in the range of 28% to 34% depending on seat.

<b>Religion % *</b>	Berwick	Blyth Valley	Hexham	Wansbeck	UK
Christian	70.4	64.9	70.2	69.0	58.8
None / not stated	28.5	34.1	28.2	30.0	33.3
Muslim	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.3	4.5
Buddhist	0.2	0.1	0.3	0.1	0.4
Jewish			0.1		0.4
Hindu		0.1	0.2	0.1	1.4
Sikh	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.7
Other	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.4
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

There are differences between the seats in respect of deprivation metrics. Hexham is relatively the most prosperous of the constituencies. However, in all the seats there are significant numbers living in poverty and areas of deprivation.

**Index of Multiple Deprivation \*** for constituencies in England (2019 figures, based on 2015-16 data)  
(1 = most deprived, 533 = least deprived)

*Deprivation rank only shows how deprived an area is relative to others and does not measure the depth of deprivation*

	Berwick	Blyth Valley	Hexham	Wansbeck
Index	275	133	436	129
Change v 2015	-22	-59	+9	-40

<b>Housing Tenure % *</b>	Berwick	Blyth Valley	Hexham	Wansbeck	UK
Owned	62.7	65.1	70.7	65.0	63.5
Private Rent	16.5	10.4	13.8	12.8	16.3
Social Rent	17.5	22.9	12.7	20.8	18.2
Other	3.3	1.5	2.8	1.4	2.1
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

<b>Other **</b>	Berwick	Blyth Valley	Hexham	Wansbeck	UK
EU leave %	54	61	46	57	52
ABC1 class %	47	47	59	45	54
Ave age (years)	52.7	49.7	53.1	50.7	48.3
Ave house price £k	225	147	292	161	310

Sources: \* House of Commons Library, Census 2011 data; \*\* Electoral Calculus

### **3) The Rationale for improving diversity**

Northumberland Liberal Democrats need their officers, executive team, actual and prospective councillors, members, and supporters to be representative of the visible demographic profile of its population. The rationale for this is twofold:

- a) By being more representative of our constituents, we are more likely to understand both their needs and aspirations
- b) By being more representative of our constituents, we are more likely to increase the number of people who will want to join us and vote for us and therefore increase our chances of winning elections.

### **4) The Diversity Plan**

The Northumberland Local Party executive is aware of the challenge and the work required to improve the diversity of its membership. Since the 2019 General Election the Local Party has lost 39% of its membership which has made it more difficult to find people to undertake officer and executive roles.

To address these problems, the Local Party approved a Membership Recruitment & Retention Plan in the last quarter of 2021. The plan's stated intention is "to run an active, valued, and more diverse membership that grows year on year" with a specific objective to grow the membership by at least 150 in year one. Within the plan we are exploring the idea of more membership co-ordinators to supplement branch membership officers to co-ordinate membership activities and reach out to all parts of the county. The activities under the plan are now being defined and promoted by the Membership Development Officer with the support of the new executive for 2022.

Our focus is about attracting people from different backgrounds with different experiences. We value these different backgrounds and experiences and feel the Liberal Democrat party in Northumberland will be richer for them.

We are currently trying to fill the Diversity Officer position on the Local Party executive. While the position remains vacant, the Membership Development Officer will assume the responsibilities of the Diversity Officer.

### **Areas to address**

We can aim to improve our diversity in many ways but there are three priority areas in which we are obviously under represented and which should therefore be our focus for improvement:

#### **Women**

- Currently women comprise 42% of the Local Party membership. 2 of our 4 county councillors and 4 of our 6 town councillors (elected under a party label) are women. However, women are under-represented on the Local executive (currently only 2 out of 15).
- We should strive for gender parity in our membership, councillors, and executive members.

#### **Young people**

- There is no higher education establishment in the county, so it is more difficult to target membership growth in the younger age group than it might be in some other local parties or constituencies. However, we are aware of the dynamism and enthusiasm we could tap into if we could find some younger members, so we need to devise new tactics to engage this group.
- According to Lighthouse, <3% of our membership is under 25, we should aim initially for 5% and longer term for 10%

#### **People with disabilities**

- There are 14m disabled people in the UK (1 in 5 of the population). Many impairments and conditions are not immediately obvious, and we should bear in mind invisible as well as visible disabilities.
- We need to regularly assess the number of people with disabilities in our membership and supporter group to ensure awareness and appropriate representation. We should do all we can to enable as many people with disabilities as possible to participate in party activities.

The methods we will use to achieve our diversity goals are as follows.

#### **a) Training**

We need to ensure that our Officers, Executive, existing/prospective councillors fully understand the rationale for diversity and don't just see it as 'the right thing to do'.

We plan to encourage the above groups to access the Diversity & Inclusivity training being offered by North-East Region Liberal Democrats during Q1 2022.

#### **b) Engagement**

When planning events for members we will ensure:

- Events have open discussions
- We describe what an event will involve so people fully understand what they will get from it and ensure that we provide an environment where people feel comfortable expressing their opinions.

We will consider and communicate in advance:

- Location and description of venue (including photos)
- Time and date
- Type of event, its purpose, and what is expected of attendees
- Accessibility and access

### **c) Campaigning**

When campaigning we will:

- Engage with the community and make an active effort to create links with community groups
- Consider how best to engage Young Liberals who are already members and how we might add to their numbers
- Utilise phone banks wherever possible to allow those who cannot canvass to help in our election efforts
- Promote the voices and concerns of underrepresented groups in our literature and social media

### **5) Next steps**

In summary, the focus over the next year will be:

- a) to carry out diversity & inclusivity training for our executive and councillors
- b) to implement our Membership Recruitment & Retention Plan
- c) to explore the appointment of more membership co-ordinators across the county to help grow membership and widen political engagement
- d) to make a concerted effort to fill the Diversity Officer vacancy and to improve the diversity of our membership and our executive with specific focus on women, young people, and disabled people
- e) to build links with local organisations and community groups