

Warwick and Leamington Diversity Statement – Jan 2022

1) The Vision

The Liberal Democrats in Kenilworth & Southam Constituency which includes members from 3 local parties, Warwick District – 58% of members, Stratford on Avon – 34% of members and Rugby, Nuneaton & North Warwickshire – 8% of members 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. At party meetings, everyone should feel their experience and perspective is valued.

Our aim should be not solely to promote diversity, but to discourage all forms of stigma. 'Stigma' is defined as a negative social label associated with a particular circumstance, quality or person.

Specifically:

- Members may self-identify as being 'Pagan', 'Salvation Army', 'Humanist', 'Spiritualist' or 'Agonistic'. As Liberals we value all religious beliefs and individuals equally. It should not matter that someone's personal faith is a minority in the District as a whole.
- Possible stigma (e.g., members who do not drive, don't own a computer, have a prior criminal record, past members of other parties etc.) should be tackled to promote genuine equality and inclusion.
- Candidate selection and re-selection procedures must be transparent, to encourage a wide range of applicants and real diversity. All procedures and decisions need the substance of fairness, not just the appearance of it.

2) Warwick District demographics

Warwick District is 89% white with BAME comprising 11% of which Asian is 7%. In terms of religion, Christian is 58%, no religion at 28% and Sikhs at 4%.

Warwick District is relatively prosperous and in the 'Vibrant Economy Index' (published by Grant Thornton UK LLP) it came top in the West Midlands and 28 out of the 324 nationwide local authority areas measured. Factors measured included prosperity, opportunity, health, wellbeing, happiness, sustainability, community and belonging.

However, despite this there are still significant numbers living in poverty and areas of deprivation.

3) The Business Case

Warwick District Liberal Democrats need to have their officers, Executive team, actual/prospective councillors, members and supporters be representative of the visible demographic profile of its constituents. The business case 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 also vote for us and therefore increase our chances of winning elections at both local and parliamentary levels.

4) The Diversity Plan

Below we set out our 2021-2023 Diversity Plan including what we have achieved and what we plan to achieve.

Warwick District's Diversity Officer is now Josh Payne.

Visible diversity

There are four visible diversity groups in the two districts in which we are currently underrepresented and should therefore target for improvement, per below goals, by the end of 2023.

Asians specifically Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus.

7% of Warwick District is Asian for instance and this % number is growing

- The Liberal Democrats, both nationally and locally, are overwhelmingly white. The party has only ever had one Asian MP, Parmjit Singh Gill, who won the Leicester South by-election in 2004.
- 4% of Warwick District is Sikh, most of whom are likely to be Asian, although not exclusively so.
- We are targeting our Sikh membership to be 4% or higher, today we are well below this.

Women

- Warwick District membership is currently 33% women and 38% of our town councillors are women.
- We are targeting 50% for both

Young people

- Warwick District, and Leamington in particular, has a high proportion of young people compared to most of the country.
- However currently <5% of our membership is under 25, we are aiming initially for 5% and longer term for 10%.
- Since party activists are volunteers, party meetings can have an unrepresentative age distribution. Retired people tend to have more time to commit. Greater positive action is required to ensure there is no implicit or explicit bias and/or prejudice against young people at party events.

People with disabilities

- 22% of the UK population are disabled
- We need to significantly increase the number of people with disabilities in our membership and supporter group as well as those running for office. In addition, we should aim to increase physical accessibility in all that we do to enable as many people with disabilities as possible to participate.

Non-visible diversity

Our non-visible focus is about attracting people from different backgrounds with different experiences. This can be education, work experience, cultural background, interests and much else besides. We value these different backgrounds and experiences and feel the Liberal Democrat party

in Warwick together with its members and supporters will be much the richer for them.

Finally, we can have all the visible and non-visible diversity in the world, but we have to also have an inclusive and safe environment where people do not feel intimidated and feel comfortable enough to openly express their different opinions and beliefs.

In addition, the LibDems in the constituency need to find a way to improve membership and therefore diversity in another group namely EU nationals (c5,000 in Warwick District alone) who can vote but only in local elections. Our initial focus will be on the significant Polish community within.

The methods we will use to achieve our diversity goals, both visible and non-visible, are as follows

a) Training

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

We have begun to provide 'unconscious bias training' for the above group and have had two sessions with about 20 councillors and committee members taking part.

b) Engagement

When planning events for members we should ensure:

- Events must 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 are unafraid to run events for specific groups

- Although they may have smaller turnout, we may reach new people who are yet to come to any other event. Recently we held a successful panel discussion on 'violence against women in lockdown'
- That we invite speakers from a range of diverse backgrounds and professions
- Taking particular care that we invite speakers who will appeal to the four groups stated above

When having panel discussions, we must ensure that our panel is made up of people of multiple different backgrounds and that events are sufficiently accessible.

We should consider:

- Location
- Is this easy to get to if you are disabled?
- Type of event
- Time and date
- Wheelchair access
- There should be a variety of events to widen people's opportunities to attend

c) Campaigning

When campaigning we should consider:

- Engaging with the community
- We should make an active effort to create links with community groups, the Sikh and Polish communities are our initial focus, and we are also hand-delivering letters introducing the Party with an accompanying survey to the c.5000 EU voters in the District.
- Wherever possible and appropriate we will engage with groups linked to Warwick University through students' inclusion in canvassing and campaigning efforts

- We should consider how best to engage Young Liberals who are already members, including consideration of a Young Liberals branch within the district
- We should ensure that we campaign and canvass in areas with high numbers of Asian and young people
- We should have phone banks wherever possible to allow those who cannot canvass to help in our election efforts
- There should be a concerted effort to encourage European, young people, women, disabled and Asian people to stand for council and/or the local executive
- Our literature and social media should promote the voices and concerns of underrepresented groups, especially the groups mentioned above

5) Key next steps

We believe we have a solid plan with an energetic new Diversity Officer, Josh Payne and a strong diversity team supporting him. COVID and its lockdowns have slowed our efforts to implement our plan.

Therefore, we must now execute our plan without further delay. Immediate focus over the next six months will be:

- a) reaching out to Sikh, Polish and EU national groups
- b) driving membership up in both our visible and non-visible diversity target groups
- c) unconscious bias training so that we improve the environment we operate in
- d) both holding and participating in events that focus on diversity issues
- e) carry out unconscious bias training for our Executive, committee members and councillors no later than by the end of Q1 2022.