

THE POST

Newsletter for the Angus & Mearns Liberal Democrats

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**CONFERENCE
COMES TO DUNDEE!
SCOTTISH LIB DEMS
ARE IN TOWN
10th-11th MARCH 2023.**

More on pages 2-3.

GET INVOLVED IN ANYWAY YOU CAN

by Rod Falconer, Convener

To all local Lib Dems here in Angus & Mearns, I would like to introduce myself as your new Convener. Here is a wee bit about my political sojourn so far.



I always thought the best way to deal with issues was to get involved in an existing campaign, write to various influential people or generally complain. In the end that had little or no impact. Politically, my instinct was always to vote tactically, pursue and/or support lots of campaigns but, there came a point when I began to question that approach. I asked myself “wouldn’t I be better off setting and creating good policy rather than asking someone else to try and alter bad policy?”

That was when I decided to become a Liberal Democrat. When I joined in 2015 I was genuinely welcomed into the party with generous support and mentoring. This gave me the confidence and determination to stand as the candidate for Arbroath West, Letham & Friockheim in the 2022 local elections. Although unsuccessful, the process was incredibly interesting and it made my commitment to the party and our manifesto even stronger.

However, activism needs time, money, energy and support. My invitation to you is to get involved in any way you can. Donating your time or effort would make a huge difference to everything we want to achieve. We are always going to be active for national elections but we need to be ready to respond to Scottish or local by-elections too. We are currently formulating plans for the year(s) ahead. If you wish to contribute to the process of shaping our local policy and agenda please feel free to contact me.

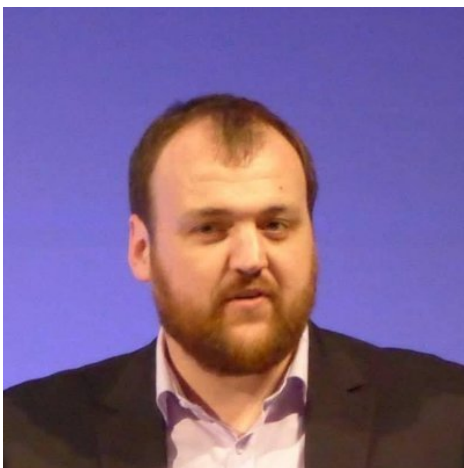
I welcome and encourage any contributions that you wish to share. Hoping to meet as many of our local supporters as possible during my time as Convener.

PAUL McGARRY: READ THE MOTIONS, MAKE A PLAN AND ENJOY THE PARTY CONFERENCE

International aid, student funding and our position on EU on the agenda

by Outi Bourke

To organise a conference is a never ending job for Paul McGarry, the Scottish Lib Dem Conference Convener. Covid forced conferences to go virtual and now the hybrid version is here to stay.



Just two days after the Autumn conference in Hamilton at the end of October, Paul and his colleagues were already on the road looking for new venues for the next event in the North East. There is a lot to consider before the first speaker takes the floor in this most important party event, usually lasting for two days. Their choice turned out to be Dundee, after a break of 10 years.

“We wanted to bring conference to Dundee as we haven't been there for a while. Following the excellent council results I was keen to support a local party that is growing and is an important part of our 150 rising strategy,” Paul says.

Decisions regarding conferences are made by a 10 member committee chaired by Paul. He also works closely with the party operations manager **Megan Wiseman** on every aspect in putting a conference together. “There are a lot of factors that go in to picking a conference venue. The very first thing I look at are local hotels; we need at least one, often two, affordable ones within walking distance. I don't want conference to cost the earth and so this is important. We then look for venues and importantly lots of side rooms. This gives us a list of venues that we can consider using and to be honest it is not a large list.”

PAUL'S ADVICE ON RAISING A MOTION:

Write down your idea.

What is the issue and why is it an issue.

Why this solution will work.

What you want people to do.

Please note that there is a deadline for submitting motions.

Good feedback on the digital format

In-person conferences normally attract 200-250 members but virtual events have had higher levels of attendance. This gave a chance to try new things too. Says Paul: “The digital conferences were a lot of fun and we were able to experiment with the format which gave us some really good feedback. The ability to be flexible with the format meant that we had several international speakers which certainly added an element of intrigue. We plan to continue having digital hybrid elements and I think having regular digital conferences is something we need to strongly consider.” It has already been announced that this year's Autumn conference will be digital only.

*Strong agenda
in Dundee*

The conference is the party's decision making body. Once a motion has been accepted, it will in time become party policy. These decisions can be changed in subsequent conferences but it's unusual for this to happen. Paul explains:

“You can have issues come back more than once. We have had a few debates that have appeared a couple of times. Generally I am keen to avoid this, I think there needs to be some form of substantive change before we will reconsider the same motion.”

In the Dundee conference there are several very important motions including international aid, our position on EU and student funding, which has been submitted by Dundee Lib Dem Association member **Lewis Miller**.

“I think it's a really strong agenda and certainly there are a couple of motions that will provoke a lot of debate,” Paul says.

His advice for all first time conference goers and veterans alike is to read all the motions carefully at least two weeks before and decide if you want to speak on it or suggest amendments. He encourages members to go to the party first timer session in order to get a better understanding what is happening. Paul also suggests writing a plan on what you want to do and achieve in the conference.

*Who is sitting
next to you*

Paul went to his first conference in Dunfermline in 2009, 5 months before the General Election, where the whole conference was about the Constitution. “I can't say I really understood a whole lot of what was going on, however, in the last hour there was a debate on our position on a Scottish Referendum.”



“What was amazing was the incredible speeches from members, from people I knew from television. Yards away from me was **Charles Kennedy**, just behind me was **Menzies Campbell** and **Jo Swinson** was talking to the member who brought me. The debate was passionate and the speeches first class. Just two conferences later and I was on the conference committee”.

The conference is a tried and tested format for decision making and member participation. However, Paul is open for new ideas: “We are always looking to change things and welcome suggestions for how to improve conference. We regularly try new things and look at how we can best serve the party in doing this.”

Paul McGarry lives in East Kilbride with his wife and four boys. He is Vice Convenor of the Scottish Liberal Democrats and a well known campaigner.

HARD BUDGET CHOICES AS SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT RINGFENCES FUNDING

Stonehaven Snippets by Councillor Sarah Dickinson



It's the budget time and finalising a balanced budget for the coming financial year has been a fairly excruciating process given inflation and other pressures. To make ends meet it has required taking a long hard look at priorities and how things might be done differently to make the most from the income available.

The financial year begins on April 1st and runs to March 31st, 2024. In recent years, councils have had very late notice from the Scottish Government (SG) of their budget settlement and the grant has been for one year only which makes longer term financial planning more of an art than a science. This year was no different.

The allocation of funding from the SG is based on a formula negotiated by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities many years ago which recognised different levels of need and challenge across authorities. This funding formula has Aberdeenshire Council receiving the third lowest grant per capita of the 32 local authorities. To change our percentage share would require all councils to agree and for those at the top of the table to get less to benefit those of us at the bottom. This being unlikely to happen, for Aberdeenshire Council to get what it really needs, the overall cake for local government would not only need to increase but substantially so.

The SG talks big when it comes to supporting local government but, in reality, it is cutting the base budgets of councils and prioritising its own agendas by ringfencing significant sums of money to specific projects which does not give councils the real or full freedom to determine according to their own electoral mandate how money is allocated.

To date, Aberdeenshire Council has set its council tax for 2023/24. Mindful of the pressures on households at present, a 4% increase was agreed. On March 9th, the Administration will present its budget for the coming year. The agenda papers including the proposed budget are now available to view via this link [Aberdeenshire Council - Committees and Meetings](#) and there you can also find the link for watching the livestream of the meeting on the day or the recording afterwards.

Plastic free Stonehaven

I first heard about plastic free communities several years ago and ever since I have wanted to see Stonehaven achieve this status. The certification is provided by the charity Surfers Against Sewage who have clear criteria for the award.

I am now working with the Stonehaven founder of the charity [Paws on Plastic](#) to progress Stonehaven's bid to become a plastic free town. If you would like to be involved, we will be holding monthly litter picks down at the beachfront. Follow [Plastic Free Stonehaven | Facebook](#) to find out when these events will be or drop me an email and I will make sure you are kept informed. We had 30 people at our first litter pick and collected 30kg of litter much of it the small microplastic which does so much harm to the marine environment.



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Boundaries are changing for Westminster Elections

by Peter Bellarby

Changes to constituencies for Westminster parliamentary elections are about to take place. In Scotland the changes are managed by the Boundary Commission for Scotland.

Following public consultation on its original proposals the commission published revised proposals. These have been open to another period of public consultation. It will publish its final recommendations before 1st July this year. It is highly likely that the revised proposals affecting our area will not be changed in the final recommendations of the commission.

Unlike previous revisions of boundaries the final recommendations this time will not be subject to voting at the Westminster Parliament. An order in council will be laid before parliament and automatically passed. So planning for the next general election should be based on the constituencies proposed by the boundary commission.

The northern part of the area covered by Angus and Mearns Liberal Democrats is in Aberdeenshire and in the Westminster constituency of West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine. This constituency will stay unchanged. The selection of our candidate for this constituency is well underway.

A major change in Angus will be the new constituency of North Tayside. This will include Montrose, Brechin, Forfar and Kirriemuir in Angus as well as Blairgowrie, Dunkeld and Pitlochry in Perth and Kinross Council area. It even includes Rannoch Station on the West Highland Railway! So we will need to cooperate with our Lib Dem friends in Perth and Kinross in selecting our candidate there. The new Dundee East and Arbroath constituency comprises Arbroath, Carnoustie and Monifieth in Angus as well as three wards in Dundee. For the selection here cooperation with our friends in Dundee is needed.

Follow the link below to see maps of the new constituencies. Please note that viewing the maps requires a large-screen device.

<https://www.bcomm-scotland.independent.gov.uk/?q=reviews/2023-review-uk-parliament-constituencies>

DOES VOTING ACTUALLY REFLECT VOTER CHOICE?

by Rod Falconer

Why do we exist as a party? Why are you a Liberal Democrat? Your value set of life, family & community normally indicates how you would reference this. It's always interesting to find out if it's the life lived or how life could be, that is your bedrock.

For me, it is that subtle combination of the two which is one of the great advantages having many interesting and varied life experiences. The Liberal Democrats exist to build and safeguard a fair, free and open society, in which we seek to balance the fundamental values of liberty, equality and community, and in which no one shall be enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity.

What that means in reality, is that we believe in:

1. A fair distribution of wealth, protection of civil liberties, along with more power to individuals. Life long learning and support for education at all levels.
2. Proper funding of a NHS free to use and not for profit. Aligning physical as well as mental health plus regulating the cannabis market.
3. A green strong economy that tackles climate change, reduces pollution and encourages strong employee participation in the workplace

4. At every opportunity we tackle inequality and promote democracy while balancing the concerns that an overbearing state has on the individual including the free market which empowers individuals.
5. Liberal Democrats are instinctively on the side of the individual against concentrations of power. We are free thinking, unimpressed by authority and unafraid to challenge the status quo.

When you look at the wide political spectrum of parties, do you think restricting us simply to a duopoly of parties gives us the depth & breadth of choices that we as individuals need in our lives? Clearly, the proliferation of multiple parties at both local & national level indicates that people favour choice and would wish their voice to be heard in a respectful and meaningful way.

This Segway's me nicely into how we actually choose political candidates. Are you familiar with STV (Single transferrable Vote) PR (Proportional Representation) or FPTP (First Past the Post) where you simply place an X in a box? If you believe in choice for political candidates as well as parties then how they are chosen, should also be equally important.

I believe national voting needs to change to PR. Once the country as a whole is more represented, then our local electorate would feel more comfortable in making more appropriate bolder choices. Politics evolves as people evolve and it's always great to hear from supporters like you what issues we should be talking about both locally and nationally. As your new Convener of Angus&Mearns Lib Dems any input you have on how we can best represent such a multiplicity of views that are out there are always welcome.

Highlands vs Electric Vehicles (EVs)

by Stewart Owers

In 2029, except for the 2% of hybrids with a range of over 50 miles, no more petrol or hybrid vehicles will be sold in the UK. It will be EV's only, which presents a major challenge for those in Highland and Island communities, with heavy snowfalls and mountain passes.

An example is my 150 mile trip from Montrose to Oban. This consumes 12lt of diesel, translating into 36kWhr of motive power, as the diesel is only 30% efficient. This compares with 80% for an EV, so an EV with a minimum battery of 45kWhr battery should be sufficient. An affordable alternative EV would be a 62kWhr Nissan Leaf+, rated 200 miles summer but only 155 miles in winter. This might work as in winter there is so little traffic, the 4 charging points on the A85 should be available.

However, experience shows that the A85 is prone to closure; flooding at Loch Lubhair, diversion 80 miles around Loch Lomond; land slip at Lock Awe, 60 mile diversion; accident in Glen Coe, 40 mile diversion. All out of range of the Leaf without charging. So, a long winters night awaits me in my Leaf, as the heater degrades the motive battery. The 600 mile diesel range has merit.

There will be incremental improvements in battery range but charging points have fixed rates of charge, so they will take longer to charge. In the two main Councils of Argyll and Bute, and Highland there are currently only around 140 public charging points in a 32,500 sq Km landscape. Their Councils list 6,000 second homes with long range transient occupants. The short seasonal traffic peak means that commercial charging points are not viable.

The July 2021 traffic counter showed car peak transits of 290 cars per hour on the A85 alone, and an average of 3,250 daily, nearly all petrol or diesel, as EV's do not have the stamina. From 2030 this will increase to 100% EV's over a decade, so there will need to be dozens of 20 vehicle charging parks to cope with demand. Alternatively, the number of cars will reduce. If the EV's fail to arrive, there will be reduction of footfall for all those with assets in the Highlands (hotels, second homes, caravan parks, distilleries, marinas, ski and outdoor centres).

However, there are two positive scenarios. We are fortunate in having a Scottish Government committed to making EV's a success, but also renowned for making Local Authorities foot the bill. And second, as most Tesla, Porsche, Jaguar and BMW EV's have sufficient range, the Highlands may revert to being a select playground for the wealthy.

It is the perverse effect of the 'EV only' decree on Scotland's least polluting communities.