

THE POST

Newsletter for the Angus & Mearns Liberal Democrats

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DATE FOR THE AGM TO BE DECIDED BY A DOODLE POLL

by Convener Ben Lawrie & Secretary Peter Bellarby

Greetings to members and supporters! Welcome to the latest edition of The Post. The local elections are now firmly behind us and Liberal Democrat Councillors are hard at work. The focus of the Executive Committee is now on organising our annual AGM and making sure that we have candidates in place in the event of the new Prime Minister holding a snap general election.

As always, we're in need of volunteers to help with a variety of different party roles to help us spread our liberal values. Please get in touch if you want to help us make an impact!

It's time for our AGM and the Election of Office Bearers and Members of the Exec for 2023. It will be held remotely using Zoom and we hope to have more than just an AGM – more of this later. We want to give as many members as possible the opportunity to attend so there will be a Doodle Poll of all members to determine which date suits the majority. It will be on a Thursday or Friday in November and in the evening. A Doodle Poll is a simple way for people to indicate their availability for a meeting or event. A link will be sent to you shortly. If you have not used a Doodle Poll before, rest assured it is very easy to use. Please respond – we would like to have you at the meeting!

We will also elect our office bearers and other members of the Executive Committee. Documents about this will be sent out with the Doodle Poll link. Do consider putting your name forward. Meetings are not held very often and in recent times we have used Zoom. In between meetings there will be exchanges of messages between members as matters arise. Do contact one of the present committee members to discuss how you might help us put the Liberal Democrat message out to the public and get more Lib Dems elected to public office.

Please contact Peter Bellarby if you would like to know more:
peter@pwbellarby.plus.com

NALOXONE KITS ARE KEY TO PREVENT DEATHS FROM DRUGS OVERDOSES

by Ben Lawrie, Scottish Liberal Democrat Drugs spokesperson



After attending an overdose prevention training, Ben decided to carry Naloxone wherever he goes.

For a number of years now, Scotland has faced increasing trends in drug-related deaths to the point that we are now the drug death capital of Europe. Progress on reversing these trends has been slow with the First Minister even admitting to “taking her eye off the ball” when it came to addressing the crisis, writes Ben Lawrie. He wants to see much more decisive action to save lives.

Upon taking on the leadership of the Scottish Liberal Democrats a year ago, **Alex Cole-Hamilton** created a Drugs Policy portfolio on the party’s spokesperson team and appointed me to the role to shadow the Scottish Government’s Minister for Drugs Policy **Angela Constance**. Since being appointed as the Scottish Liberal Democrat spokesperson for Drugs Policy, my main priority has been to explore ways of preventing drug related deaths and to put forward sensible policy proposals to achieve this. One effective way of preventing drug-related deaths is accelerating the rollout of Naloxone overdose prevention kits. Naloxone is a lifesaving medicine that is administered to rapidly reverse an opioid overdose. Much progress has already been made in rolling out provision of naloxone. Police Scotland, for example, are now committed to a national roll-out of naloxone spray to police officers following a successful pilot programme that took place in certain cities across Scotland.



Ben recently travelled to Newcastle to volunteer with PsyCare at the Noughty Nineties festival as a psychedelic firstaider. PsyCare provide support for people undergoing challenging drug-related psychological experiences. The team from left Adam, Andy, Gary, Wendy, Ben, Nat, Ben L and Ry.

There is however much more to be done to make Naloxone more widely available. **David Strang**, the Chair of the Scottish Drug Deaths Task Force told me in our recent meeting to discuss the Task Force's final report that he would like to see Naloxone in even more public spaces such as on public transport, and that we should be using an approach similar to recent provision of defibrillators to make sure that communities have access to this life saving medicine when they need it. Last year I decided to attend overdose prevention training myself so that I could respond to an opioid overdose if I were ever to come across one. I'm proud to say that I now carry Naloxone with me wherever I go.

Supervised consumption centres

Another way of preventing drug-related deaths would be to introduce supervised consumption centres; professionally supervised healthcare facilities where drug users can consume drugs in safer conditions. Evidence from countries that operate these facilities show that they are highly effective in preventing overdoses and reducing the spread of infectious diseases such as HIV.

They also provide vital access to other services such as health and social services or offer assistance with issues such as housing or welfare. This is important as it offers people with addictions the chance to connect with staff and services that they desperately need to stabilise their life but may not otherwise see were it not for this facility. Support for supervised consumption centres in Scotland to address the drug death crisis has been growing but progress has been stifled by both the Scottish Government, who are all too willing to shift responsibility to Westminster while claiming it can't be done without

independence, and the UK Government, which itself has subscribed rigidly to a failed “war on drugs” for over half a century, despite the harms of prohibition.

Direct action works

While politicians squabbled, one man by the name of **Peter Krykant** decided to take matters in to his own hands and start his own mobile supervised consumption centre in the back of a modified van on the streets of Glasgow. When I met Peter at a vigil for Overdose Awareness Day last year, he showed around the van and told me about the people who used his service, the overdoses he had managed to reverse and the lives that he had managed to save. There’s no doubt in my mind that these simple measures save lives and it brings me no end of frustration to watch politicians drag their heels while the death toll continues to rise. Naloxone and supervised consumption centres are just two tools at our disposal in reducing Scotland’s drug-related deaths but there are many more things that we can do. The Scottish Drug Deaths Task Force recently published its final report containing 20 overarching recommendations and 139 action points. The solutions are all there to be seized, all it takes now is the political will to act on these recommendations and finally shed Scotland’s shameful reputation as Europe’s Drug Deaths Capital.

IN PRAISE OF VAT AND THOUGHTS ABOUT SAVING ON HEATING BILLS THIS WINTER

Our Treasurer Stewart Overs has had two opinion pieces published in The Courier recently. Stewart asks if negative VAT could be used to reduce energy bills of low-income families. Also, we should promote living in less heated houses and rely on warm clothing, he says.

In Praise of VAT

In the past decades VAT has proved to be the ultimate sales tax, cheap to collect and with the percentage set by a single instruction from the Treasury. The amount paid to HMRC by companies is the balance of the input Tax on purchases and the output Tax on sales, all derived effortlessly from the company’s accounts computer.

There is one feature which is untested ... Negative VAT. The Government professes to be able to target individual households with low incomes, in need of financial support. Why not register these details with the energy suppliers and authorise Negative VAT to reduce their bill. Replace the energy 5% VAT with -60% VAT and their bill would shrink to around 35% of the original cost. A targeted support with minimal administrative cost.

The computer doesn’t care, the energy supplier is not disadvantaged, the recipient is rewarded, and the cost is offset by those paying the existing 5% or 20% VAT. It is

HMRC that funds the deficit, but with rising inflation, VAT will be in the ascendency anyway. It looks possible, but beyond the imagination of the UK Treasury.

(The Courier 3rd September 2022)

Bleak House 22

Without electricity, or mains water, and before the advent of oil or gas boilers, the Manse was a product of prestigious city design, with large sash windows and high ceilings. There were times when Reverend Ingram wished for the lower status of the local croft houses, with their cosy peat fires and lamp lit shadow.

120 years later there appears to be a panic that 'people will die', because of the lack of heating, and no doubt unfortunately some will, but probably fewer than from exposure to the high summer temperatures. The last 2 weeks of July saw 3,000 excess deaths in the UK. Those vulnerable are not the old, who will have grown up in cold marginal housing, but those who cannot adapt to the change of fashion required to make low temperature existence tolerable. As proof, the Reverend Ingram died in his cold Manse, 104 years old.

Instead of highlighting the expense of maintaining a 20C house over the coming winter, we should be promoting ways of living in a 10C house... all it needs is warm clothing, high tog bedding, and access to hot food. The body will soon adjust, as it has done for thousands of years.

Given the paralysis of the Westminster Government, this is the time for the Scottish Parliament to take control. Fund vouchers for families on benefits in Scotland, to buy woollen clothing, fleeces, thick duvets, wrist warmers, scarfs and socks. For modest expenditure, lives will be saved, and the Scottish Parliament will have proved its worth. It may also save many high street vendors and manufacturers. *(The Courier 27th August 2022)*

Views from members are most welcome , please do not hesitate to contact us if you would like to have your say about a current issue in The Post!

SCOTTISH LIBERAL DEMOCRAT AUTUMN CONFERENCE 28.-30.10. 2022 Town House, Hamilton

This will be a face-to-face conference, but members are able to watch the main hall discussions online. You can register for access: www.scotlibdems.org.uk

Anyone going in person? Please let us know!