

LDER AGM

Chair's Report.

How things can change! Think back just one year, to our 2021 AGM. In the UK,

- The Conservatives under Boris Johnson dominated the political map, lifted by the 'vaccination rollout boost'. PartyGate was only a whispered rumour...
- The Liberal Democrats had, yes, managed an impressive by election win in Chesham and Amersham - but we were now overreaching ourselves in trying to win North Shropshire as well. All predictions pointed to a Tory hold...
- Labour had just voted down electoral reform at its 2021 party conference...

We now know the massive changes in the political weather this past year. And they have to be propitious for us - as a party; and as a movement for reform. It is clearer than ever that our rotten electoral system inflicts rotten politics on us all; the case and urgency for reform is greater than ever.

How we seize the opportunity is key and we'll surely discuss strategy and tactics at this AGM.

However, the task of this report (my first as Chair) is to review what LDER has done so far in 2022. I hope and believe our work this year is paving the way for the mission-critical times ahead.

2022 has been a year of hugely expanded activity for LDER. This is to a large degree the re-emergence of voting reform as a critical (if not front page) issue; and also to our own stated goal of campaigning for reform beyond as well as within the party.

The September 2022 Labour Conference decision to support electoral reform - even if not embraced by its leadership - is a crucial stepping stone to reform. At last, one of the two main parties backs proportional representation; a vital pre-requisite for change. This leaves only the Conservatives as First Past the Post advocates; surely to be exposed as a gross example of naked self-interest.

LDER led our party's acknowledgement of Labour's decision with this tweet:

'Very encouraged at Labour Conference's decision to back Westminster voting reform. It creates the chance to rebuild trust in our politics and to ensure that in future people get the Parliament they voted for.'

We posted it in response to the Make Votes Matter announcement. Importantly we were able to coordinate party leadership backing, with retweets by Mark Pack (Party President of course)

and by Wendy Chamberlain MP, LDER President (not to mention Work and Pensions spokesperson and Parliamentary Chief Whip!).

Leadership engagement

The messaging coordination over the Labour Conference is a good example of the relations LDER has with the party leadership. This senior involvement is also amply illustrated by the presence at this AGM of both Wendy Chamberlain MP; and Cabinet Office (which now includes Political and Constitutional Reform) spokesperson Christine Jardine MP. It is an immense and important plus for us. We are grateful for the time and contributions.

Party members' involvement

We still need to do more to motivate our party members 'at large'. It's a nuanced message - reform is of course *not* the number one issue 'on the doorstep'; yet is crucial to rebuilding trust in our politics and our democratic institutions. So we are working through our own channels and the likes of ALDC to equip members with the right-level messaging and campaign tools.

LDER campaigns

Our own campaigning saw us give strong support to opposition to the appalling Elections Act - in the Commons in January; and May saw us take up the cudgels for Lords' hearings. Notably this included a members and supporters zoom briefing by Lord Dick Newby, our party leader in the Lords. Thanks go to our many members and supporters who wrote lobbying emails to relevant parliamentarians.

We have also given strong support to our ally organisations, notably the Make Votes Matter (MVM) Action Day, staged last June.

Our media appearances have been limited, as much of our work, especially regarding grassroots Action Days, has focused on supporting local Makes Votes Matter groups. However, exec member Kathrine Santos had two letters appear in *The Economist* (links?) and in October, we were invited to contribute an article to the Centre Think Tank (<https://lder.org/en/page/blog>).

Cross party and allies cooperation

Our cross-party work is well reflected in our Conference fringe meetings and programmes. We are lucky to have the support of Unlock Democracy, Make Votes Matter and the Electoral Reform Society at Conference time and we've been specially pleased to welcome reformers from other parties onto our fringe meeting speaker panels. Labour for a New Democracy joined our virtual Spring Conference; and had Autumn in Brighton gone ahead, we'd have welcomed a Green Party representative onto our platform. Please note that these sessions are not lost as we have a commitment in principle from everyone involved to re-stage them at our York Conference next March.

Another important initiative has been our proposing the 'Road to Proportional Representation' to various groups, including to another ally organisation, Compass. We believe it is important to address early how to reach agreement on which electoral system should replace FPTP, including the often overlooked/sidestepped issue of implementability - ie how to transition the UK Parliament to the new system.

In developing our approach, we have factored in our own long standing support for the Single Transferable Vote; along with our being signatories to the MVM Good Systems Agreement. The political reality is that any systems agreement will need negotiation among the relevant parties and organisations concerned. Whenever the next General Election happens, this work is, we believe, an important step on the road forward.

Internal management and admin

Internally it's been a very demanding year. As an AO, we have had to manage -

a) our upgrade to being a party Affiliate Organisation (from associate). I am pleased to report that we are on course for completing this switch by end-2022, which is the set timetable; and

b) transition from our Prater Raines website platform (adopted only in late 2021) to the party's new 'Fleet' system, including Connect and Lighthouse. We are also here on track for completion before year-end.

We trust that the 'heavy lifting' on this can be finished soon and that we will benefit from increased effectiveness and productivity.

c) Add to that that over the past 12 months, Stripe and Nationwide both took it upon themselves to unilaterally terminate our accounts and you'll see we've had a tough admin burden!

Stripe has proven particularly onerous; and also galling, as we know many local parties continue to use it without problem. Strenuous efforts on our part - during March/April when many of us were also campaigning hard in local elections and including attempted support from HQ - proved ultimately fruitless and we had to switch to the local party-oriented 'go cardless' system; itself due to be replaced by end-2022 by Fleet!

This has necessitated a payment system changeover for our Nationwide and Stripe subscriber members. This is ongoing.

I'd like to thank our many members for their forbearance and patience during this switch - which we had no control over but have had to deal with.

People

During the year, I am pleased to report we were able to appoint Kay Kirkham as our new Treasurer. Kay brings a wealth of know-how to us and in turn I want to thank, for all his good work, Richard Lawrie who stepped down in March after eight years in the role. Richard saw us through some trying times in terms of financial systems and has left it all in far better shape than he found it.

Next, I'd like to thank Wendy Chamberlain for her unstinting support and advice in her (for LDER) new role as our President. She and her team have been invaluable to us, both in public meetings and 'behind-the-scenes' counsel. I am happy to propose Wendy tonight as our 2023 President.

I also want to thank collectively, rather than individually, LDER executive members. (Once you start picking people out, you're on a slippery slope to missing someone, or someone's particular endeavour, out!) I appreciate daily the amazing efforts of every exec member in maximising our limited resources, both people and money, to greatly enhanced effect and impact. So my thanks to you all.

Finally, my gratitude goes to all our members and supporters for your ongoing contribution and support. The role and work of LDER has expanded hugely in recent times and this is great - but yet our resources, both financial and human, remain very limited. We wouldn't even exist without you!

I look forward to increasing our efforts in 2023.. British democracy and politics is in desperate need of positive reform; and I can assure you all that LDER will play its full role in making that happen.

Keith Sharp
Chair, LDER

October 27, 2022.