

LDER AGM - November 30, 2023

Chair's report

Leadership relations and manifesto preparation

It's been gratifying over the past twelve months to both witness and support our leadership team's strong advocacy for voting reform - Fair, Equal Votes for UK General Elections. As ever, the balance to strike is between addressing the electorate's immediate concerns 'on the doorstep'; and the need to build trust and confidence in our politics - for the long term good.

So it has been great to see Ed Davey emphasise this issue in both his Conference speeches in 2023. The Autumn Conference rally focused on electoral reform. LDER has backed this through input and feedback to Ed's team and other members of our leadership. We are providing a range of materials and feedback to further bolster this initiative.

Parliamentary spokesperson, Christine Jardine spoke at our AGM this time last year and also led our fringe meeting at Autumn Conference.

With the General Election only a year away, manifesto preparation has been a key task for LDER. In May, executive member Crispin Allard joined our President, Wendy Chamberlain, in an online members zoom consultation on political reform and further formal and informal exchanged have taken place, including participation in the manifesto consultation session at Autumn Conference. The goal is to have political reform (with PR for Westminster the priority) prominently positioned in the manifesto; and moreover woven into our overall narrative (not a 'nice-to-do' stand alone) as a key underpinning of the changes needed to bring about a liberal Britain. Throughout, Lord Dick Newby and his team have been accessible and receptive and we are all appreciative of this.

Conferences

2023 has of course seen the return to 'actual' conferences for the first time since 2019. LDER has made its presence felt! Our exhibition stalls at both York and Bournemouth were highly popular and the range and variety of members' questions and comments underscored the crucial relevance of electoral reform in the current political environment.

We held two fringe meetings in York - Wendy Chamberlain chaired an Electoral Reform Society co-hosted session on the local government democratic deficit, and Tom Brake (now Director of Unlock Democracy) chaired a meeting on 'broken politics' with support from Make Votes Matter and - importantly - guests from both the Green and Labour parties. We followed this up with a

massively well-attended meeting in Bournemouth, with speakers from the Institute for Government and Compass on the panel.

Our Allies

We know we can't win electoral reform on our own and so continue strong cooperation with ally organisations in the democracy movement. In particular, I want to acknowledge the great support at Conference time (and throughout the year!) from Make Votes Matter, Unlock Democracy and the Electoral Reform Society. We simply couldn't have the presence and profile at our Conferences without their support.

- Sort the System was a mass lobby of MPs, spearheaded by Make Votes Matter with strong support from other allies, which took place in May 2023. As our MPs are already committed to electoral reform, our goals were more to rally momentum than to convert! Thanks go to London Assembly member Hina Bokhari and the next MP for Carshalton and Wallington, Bobby Dean, for speaking to lobbyists and activists. There was a great turnout of MPs and key PPCs - as the photo on our website (Ider.org) website proves! We worked closely with the Young Liberals for this event and thanks go to them for their contribution.

Campaign materials

LDER has made a big investment in on line and printed materials this past year. Our new introductory leaflet was launched at York in March and two further pamphlets, introducing PR systems already in use in the UK were introduced at Bournemouth in September. Go to Ider.org/The Change We Need to see and download.

We also produced campaigning materials for local parties in conjunction with ALDC - we are looking to upgrade these going forward and you can see the current versions on the ALDC website.

Technology and back office

It's been a case of 'three steps forward, two steps back' in this area during 2023. We began the year with the completion of the transfer of memberships from Stripe and Nationwide onto GoCardless - an arduous and not very glamorous but necessary task which was diligently conducted by membership secretary Helen Parker.

We also have a smart new website - more work to be done but looking good! - as we moved onto the new Fleet platform (Ider.org).

However, we are still struggling to complete the overall transition onto the party CRM Lighthouse. Our HQ staff are simply overloaded/overworked and we combine patience and understanding with persistence. We cannot optimally do the membership recruitment job we

need without these systems being in place. Massive thanks go to exec member Sarah Lewis for maintaining relations among a multitude of other tasks.

Looking ahead

A General Election must be held at the latest by January 2025, so the year ahead will be full on - and probably frenetic!

As well as Westminster, there is an opportunity for local government reform to single transferable vote (STV) in Wales. However, this is only 'permissive' (as opposed to mandatory) and November 2024 is the deadline for adopting STV. Our Councillors in Wales are doing all they can but concerted campaigning is required. The Electoral Reform Society is perhaps the key player here and I have added Wales local PR as a 'matter for discussion' at its upcoming AGM (in December 2023).

Thank you

I have given thanks to individuals at various points in the report. The trouble with doing that is that inevitably hugely deserving people don't get a mention!

Let me try to overcome this by offering my thanks to every member of the LDER exec this past year (you'll find us on lдер.org/About Us). We are all volunteers with limited resources; yet I think we are in a good place as we head for 2024, possibly the most crucial year for a generation so far as political and electoral reform is concerned - and of course rebuilding our parliamentary party by winning seats and getting rid of this truly awful, incompetent, illiberal Tory 'government'.

Keith Sharp
Chair, LDER
November 2023