Croydon Liberal Democrats

Chair’s Report to the 2020 AGM

After the frenetic energy of last year, with its multiple and un-planned elections, this year has been the complete opposite and has been almost entirely overshadowed by the coronavirus pandemic. The executive has had a shorter timeframe within which to operate due to the postponement of the AGM after the General Election, and limited opportunities to oversee campaigning activity, but we have still managed to make progress in some areas.

With the postponement of the London GLA and Mayoral Elections and the inability to undertake any face-to-face campaigning, we have taken the opportunity to get some of the back-end processes into better shape and think about how we better support and engage our members. Successes this year include the creation of a Croydon Liberal Democrats Members Handbook; new and streamlined communication channels through WhatsApp; creating teams to cover wards and reach out to members whose membership is about to lapse; starting a Croydon Lib Dem bookclub; and starting the conversation about how we describe ourselves and what we say to members.

It is clear that we have some challenges coming up over the next year – nationally Lib Dem membership is declining somewhat. Members who joined us specifically because of our stance on Brexit for the European Elections last year and the General Election are now coming up for membership renewal, and we expect many not to renew their membership. We are also faced with the prospect of an election that will have limited, if any, face-to-face campaigning and so we must look to improve our digital presence and skills.

Despite these challenges there are also opportunities. The postponement of the GLA elections has also allowed the London regional campaign to regroup and to find an excellent new Mayoral Candidate in Luisa Porritt, former MEP for London. Following a review of the London Mayoral/GLA campaign and the revised timetable for May 2021, the campaign team have refocussed their strategy and objectives to use this as a springboard for the 2022 local elections, which can only be a good thing in terms of supporting local boroughs.

We were also delighted to be chosen as one of twelve London borough parties who will receive extra support from London Region to try and win our first councillor for some years in 2022. This is in part due to our hard work over the last couple of years in contesting by-elections, and our willingness as a local party to undertake the development and hard work needed to have improve our performance. I believe that this extra support – coupled with the growing frustration of how Labour are leading the council and distrust nationally in the way that the Tory government are handing Covid-19 – mean that we have a real opportunity to break the stronghold on the council in May 2022, and I hope that the new executive in 2021, local election candidates and everyone who gets involved in our campaigns in some way will take up the challenge.

I would like to thank all those who have been involved on the executive committee this year, and all those who have helped with campaigns, organising events and delivering leaflets. In times of such global uncertainty plans are made and changed often at the last minute, and this requires flexibility, tenacity and patience from everyone.

Of course, although we may not have been doing much in the way of Lib Dem focussed campaigning, many of our members have stepped up to support their local communities during the pandemic and I want to thank each one of you who has done this. We haven’t done this as Liberal Democrats but as people who are putting their ideals into practice by believing that no-one should be left behind and that being active members of our local community is the way to bring about change.

I’m grateful to all those who have been part of our development this year, and look forward to building on that in the coming year.

Claire Bonham

October 2020