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***Annual Report 2020***

I took up the post of President on 1 February this year, the day after the first two cases of coronavirus in the UK were confirmed and about six weeks before the first lockdown came into force.

This has been the first year of the new Party Constitution, with Committee Chairs replaced by Executive Officers, who have more power to act in an executive capacity. This new way of working has allowed the party to respond more quickly to events but has also resulted in a significant additional workload for those who have been elected to the Executive Officer posts.

My thanks go to all of them and to all those who have given up their time to serve on committees this year. The constitution allows for co-option to committees and if you have particular skills which you think you could offer to any of our committees to help spread the workload, we would be delighted to hear from you.

In the first half of the year, both I and the Board spent a great deal of time on reviewing the staff team and recruiting to new posts. This was of course a very difficult process for our existing staff and I want to pay tribute to those members of the team who had to leave us as a result: Steffan John, Matt Palmer and Sebastian Bench.

The objective of the review was to form a team of specialist skilled workers to support local parties in campaigning for the Senedd elections and for the local government elections in 2022. Our existing staff had been recruited as non-specialists to cover, between them, all the roles the party required, and they have served us very well in the last few difficult years. Perhaps inevitably they found it difficult to compete for roles which required longer experience and higher skill levels but that should not detract from the hard work they put in for the party in the previous years. I thank them on behalf of the Welsh party.

Our new staff team began work between July and early August and have already made a huge difference in the support the Welsh party can offer to local campaigning. This includes training of all sorts, help with campaign planning, the production of literature templates, digital training and the formation of a digital response team, as well as behind the scenes work on policy and administration, without which the Welsh party could not continue.

The whole team is held together and driven on by our highly effective new Chief Executive.

In the early part of the year, the Board found itself dealing with matters relating to the coronavirus epidemic, notably cancelling the spring conference, furloughing staff, and deciding to invest in additional web conferencing facilities to be shared with local parties. Since the Operations Manager was amongst those furloughed, I acted as direct line manager for the remaining member of staff and the digital contractor, which gave me considerable insight into the workload demands the Welsh party makes of its staff.

The Board has also set up a Senedd Election Planning Team under the chairmanship of Mike German. The function of this group is to coordinate and drive planning for the election in May. It meets weekly and has members leading on different aspects of the campaign and acting as liaisons between the SECT and committees, with the CEO liaising with the staff team.

The Board received a presentation on the review of the General Election from Mark Pack, the Federal Party President, and Baroness Dorothy Thornhill, the review’s author. There was a robust discussion of Wales’s experience of the General Election and the review’s findings were warmly welcomed.

The Board then agreed to commission a group to consider the implications of the review’s findings for Wales. I invited Mike O’Carroll to put together an independent team to carry out this task and suggested the group should also take into account the results of a survey of members’ views on the Thornhill report.

That report has now been published and received by the Board and Mike O’Carroll and the team are presenting it to members at this Conference.

Paula Yates

**President of the Welsh Liberal Democrats**