



Annual General Meeting Pack 2020

AGM Agenda

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of the 2018 AGM
3. Report from the Chair & Council for 2019
4. Annual Accounts for 2019
5. Update on current work and priorities from the SLF Director, Dr Ian Kearns.

Report Pack Contents:

Minutes of the 2018 AGM	2
Report from the Chair & Council on 2019	4
Annual Accounts	9

Minutes of the 2018 Annual General Meeting

Annual General Meeting of the Social Liberal Forum held on Saturday 25 May 2019

at Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester M2 5NS at 1 p.m.

DRAFT MINUTES

Present: Iain Brodie-Browne (Chair); Tom Barney; Jane Brophy; Richard Darlington; Suzanne Fletcher; Tony Greaves; Louise Harris; Neil Hughes; John Leech; Gordon Lishman; Virginia Morck; Geoff Payne; John Pugh; Alexander Shaw; John Skipworth; Dick Wilson and Gerald Zuk.

In attendance: Maureen Nolan (Minutes)

1. Preliminaries

Iain Brodie-Browne welcomed members to the AGM and opened the meeting.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from: David Grace; Jonathan Hunt; Roger Jenking; Paul Pettinger; Mary Reid; David Row; James Sandbach; and Joe Toovey.

3. Minutes of the 2018 AGM

The minutes of the AGM held on 16 June 2018 were agreed.

4. Chair's Report

Iain Brodie-Browne thanked members of Council, Virginia Morck, Maureen Nolan and Richard Robinson for the work they had done for the SLF during the year. The newly elected Council met in Brighton for the first time during the SLF Conference. The fundraising dinner was a financial and social success and Geoff Payne and Chris Bowers were thanked for their contributions. Virginia Morck was thanked for organising the three fringe meetings which were successful, in particular the one on whether the electoral system is fit for purpose.

5. Paul Hindley was thanked for his work on overseeing publications. A new pamphlet was published for the York Conference (Am I a Liberal) which has sold well. The pamphlet was launched at the National Liberal Club before the Spring Conference and was well received. A second book of essays following Four Go in Search of Big Ideas is planned for the autumn.

6. Two fringe meetings were held at the York Spring Conference, one of which was a jointly sponsored meeting with Lib Dem Seekers of Sanctuary, with Ed Davey as a speaker, with Suzanne Fletcher and Holly Matthies (Lib Dem Immigrants).

7. Three fringe meetings are being planned for the September Conference in Brighton: David Howarth will lead a session with the ERS on the challenge of regulating elections in the digital era; Will Hutton will chair a fringe meeting; and the new book of essays will be launched.

8. Iain thanked Mark Blackburn, who stepped down as Treasurer during the year. Gordon Lishman took over from Mark as Treasurer at the start of April 2019. A financial appeal was launched to members and supporters which has improved the bank balance and Iain thanked those who have contributed.

9. **Annual Accounts for 2018**

Gordon Lishman introduced the Annual Accounts, which had been prepared by Mark Blackburn. Although the cost of producing *Four Go in Search of Big Ideas* had been covered, this was not yet the case for the other book. The appeal had raised £750, thanks to a few large donors and many smaller donors. The SLF dinner in Brighton made a profit due to the particular arrangements and it is unlikely that a similar profit will be made in future years. The SLF is operating above breakeven and the reserves are increasing each year. However, this did not mean there were large funds available yet to spend on activities.

10. The speaker at the dinner in Bournemouth in 2019 is Siobhan Benita. Members were encouraged to book the dinner via the website as it is a good social occasion and raises funds for the SLF.

11. There were no questions and the Annual Accounts were noted.

12. **Consideration of motions from members**

No motions had been notified.

13. **Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

The meeting was closed at 1.20 p.m. and was followed by a mini conference

Report from Chair and Council for 2019

In a roller coaster of a year the SLF have kept to its course and rallied social liberals. Throughout the year the Council has met regularly and overseen our programme. I want to thank all those –too many to mention by name – who have contributed.

Publications

On our website we continued to post articles on a wide range of issues and SLF members have contributed to Liberator, LDV and national media outlets. We have also published two physical books.

Firstly, **Am I a Liberal?** In this pamphlet, the Social Liberal Forum reproduces the 1925 essay by John Maynard Keynes alongside a new companion essay by Ian Kearns. In it, Keynes wrestles with the same question which Ian wrestled with throughout 2017 and much of 2018, as he reached and then past the point of knowing that he could no longer be a member of the Labour Party. Ian's critique of the national and international situation has won much praise as has his devastating analysis of the then Corbyn led Labour Party. In his essay Ian tells us that he was drawn towards the Liberal Democrats because of the inspiring statement of values found in the preamble to the Party's constitution which he quotes and which commits the party to:

'build and safeguard a fair, free and open society in which we seek to balance the fundamental values of liberty, equality and community, and in which no-one shall be enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity.'

If you want to know more, copies of Ian's publication are available via the Social Liberal Forum website

Our Second publication was a mammoth undertaking overseen by Paul Hindley and Gordon Lishman. It is a collection of essays gathered under the title '**Wolves in the Forest- Tackling Inequality in the 21st Century**'. In his introduction David Howarth lays out the challenge that faces us today:

It has been 110 years since David Lloyd George delivered his radical liberal "People's Budget" speech. He described a time when "poverty, and the wretchedness and human degradation which always follows in its camp, will be as remote to the people of this country as the wolves which once infested its forests". The wolves of poverty, wretchedness, human degradation and inequality are still with us. Far from them being remote to modern Britain their infestation of society is becoming more widespread.

In addition to David's introduction, there are essays by the two editors. The book is divided into four sections. Firstly, Inequality and the Economy with

contributions from Stuart White, Beverley Nielson and Steve McCabe and Mark Blackburn.

The second section Inequality and Society has contributions from Chris Willmore, Robert Brown, Kirsten Johnson and Rabina Khan.

The third section examines Inequality - Britain and the World with essays by Chris Bowers and James Sandbach. Finally, there is an Afterword on Austerity with contributions from Peter Hain and Geoff Payne

The **Wolves in the Forest** was very well received and underlined the SLF's commitment to tackling inequality. The UK is crying out for a "progressive alliance of people, ideas and campaigns", which can foster new ways of thinking and develop new ideas to transform our politics. A new Social Liberal politics is needed to unite the liberal concern for liberty with the progressive concern for tackling inequality. As the renowned Social Liberal thinker, L.T. Hobhouse, stated in 1911: "Liberty without equality is a name of noble sound and squalid result".

This publication is a must read for social liberals and is still available from our website.

Meetings

The SLF had a full programme in the far off days when we met together in conference halls to take forward our work. Our first meeting of the year was held at the **National Liberal Club** where we launched the Keynes and Kearns booklet referred above to a full room. It was followed by a lively question session. Our thanks to the NLC for their hospitality.

Next up was the Lib Dem Spring conference where we held a fringe meeting "**A More Effective and Compassionate Approach to Immigration and Asylum**". The Immigration Bill was to be debated that spring. Sir Ed Davey MP proposed amendments to the Conference motion that celebrated the positive contributions that immigrants and asylum seekers offer our communities and our economy. He was joined at our meeting by LD4SoS Chair Suzanne Fletcher and Holly Matthies from the pressure group Lib Dem Immigrants. The meeting was chaired by Denali Ranasinghe.

Our second meeting was to promote the Keynes and Kearns booklet when Ian and I tried to answer Keynes's question: 'what is the repulsion that keeps me away from the Labour Party?' The meeting was again chaired by Denali Ranasinghe.

Our **AGM** was held in Manchester after the local elections but before the European Parliamentary election. Our guest speaker was Cllr (Lord) Tony Greaves who presented a thoughtful and challenging commentary on the political situation. This was followed by a Panel Session with Cllr Jane Brophy, Cllr John Leech, Cllr John Pugh and chaired by Cllr Louise Harris. A few days later Jane was elected as an MEP for NW England.

The year was punctuated by unexpected events. Against all expectations there were election for the UK to the European Parliament which produced arguably the best election result for a generation. This was followed by months of unrest as the national mood hardened against Brexit. Demonstrations of a million plus people were held and were supported by many of our members. One of these marches coincided with the SLF Annual Conference. We decided to go ahead and were rewarded with an excellent group of speakers and members who fully participated in the event- even if from time to time people left us temporarily to join the march. The programme for the day was:

<p>Introduction: Cllr Iain Brodie-Browne</p> <p>Keynote speaker: Irina von Wiese, MEP</p>
<p>William Beveridge Memorial Lecture:</p> <p>Climate justice – how to decarbonise capitalism and tackle poverty</p> <p>(followed by questions)</p> <p>Speaker: Sir Ed Davey MP</p> <p>Chair: Cllr Louise Harris</p>
<p>Speaker: Sophie in 't Veld MEP of the Dutch D66 (followed by questions)</p>
<p>Lunch</p>
<p>Session 1: Housing and Homelessness</p> <p>Leader: Wera Hobhouse MP</p> <p>Chair: Paul Hindley</p>
<p>Session 2: Disruption and Realignment</p> <p>Leader: Lord William Wallace and Iain Brodie Browne</p> <p>Chair: Cllr Louise Harris</p>

The final events of the year were held at the Lib Dem Conference in Bournemouth. They began with a fundraising dinner at which **Siobhan Benita** was the guest speaker. The event was a great success politically, socially and financially. Thanks are due to Geoff Payne for organising it.

We held three fringe meetings at Bournemouth:

Observer commentator and author of 'The State We're In' (and much else besides) **Will Hutton** spoke on: Remain and Reform – why the core Social Liberal Agenda is now at the heart of British Politics

New Book Launch: **The Wolves in the Forest** contributors introduced their essays.

Reining in the Political 'Wild West': Digital Campaigning, Electoral Transparency and Security. Panel: Chaired by Professor David Howarth (former Electoral Commissioner), the panellists discussed the academic,

political and campaigning perspectives of this subject with Dr Jessica Garland (Electoral Reform Campaign), Kyle Taylor (The Fair Vote Project) and Wera Hobhouse MP (member of the All Party Group on Campaign Transparency).

All the meetings were very well attended often with standing room only. Once again, Virginia Morck was in charge of organising these events and all those involved wish to thank her for the calm and efficient way that she organised the events.

Engaging with Green Party members

The SLF again took a stall at the Green Party Conference which gave us the opportunity to meet with many of their members. We were very pleased with the reception that we received and in interest in the SLF and our publications. Thanks to Neil Hughes for organising our attendance.

In the summer, as Brexit loomed and a General Election seemed inevitable, we arranged to meet the Green Party joint leader, Jonathan Bartley & Siân Berry AM. Paul Pettinger, Chris Bowers and I had a very fruitful meeting and confirmed our view that there was a need to challenge the tribal nature of our politics which is especially true at an election conducted under first past the post. This was reflected in the discussion at the SLF Conference during the session Disruption and Realignment and in the statement published on our website.

Tiggers, Change UK et al

One sign of the disruption in our politics was the resignation of leading members from both the Labour and Conservative party. The Council welcomed that, like us, they demanded a Peoples Vote and would campaign to Remain in the EU.

In a statement the SLF made clear that it is not only over Europe that that our [outdated](#) political system has failed. Our antique electoral system, designed for people who could not read and write, has squeezed out radical voices with important things to say including the Greens and ourselves. We invited TiG and all like-minded people to join us in campaigning for a fair voting system that will enable diverse and progressive voices to be heard and have influence.

The statement concluded:

As social liberals we support the widest possible distribution of wealth and income. We do not believe that the market alone can achieve this objective. We are committed to eradicating the gross inequalities of power, health and wealth. The freedom, dignity and wellbeing of individuals is our chief concern and we will work collaboratively with those who share our objectives.

Another Leadership election

After Vince Cable decided to stand down, the Liberal Democrats embarked on another Leadership election. After consultation with our members, the SLF put a series of questions to the candidates to ascertain their stance on a number of key issues. Their responses were made available to members.

Elections

During the year there were three public elections; the European Parliament, Brecon and Radnor by election and the General Election.

In summary you could say two good, one bad!

SLF members were heavily involved in elections but this is not the place to rehearse critiques of the campaigns. We were of course delighted by the election of some of our members. The election of our long-time supporter and Leader of the Welsh Liberal Democrats, Jane Dodds as MP for Brecon and Radnor was greatly welcomed and many of our members helped in her campaign. A couple of bright spots in the General Election were the return of Daisy Cooper as MP for St Albans and Wendy Chamberlain as the MP for NE Fife.

Thanks

There are too many people to thank. I will make an exception for the three people who joined the Executive to carry out specific roles: Maureen Nolan, Richard Robinson and Virginia Morck. We are grateful to all those who gave their time and energy to the SLF in 2019. It is appropriate to thank some of those who have worked hard for the SLF over many years but have decided to bow out in 2019 these include Mary Reid, Helen Flynn and Seth Thevoz and Geoff Payne.



Councillor Iain Brodie-Browne
Chair, Social Liberal Forum

Annual Accounts - 2019

	2019	2018
	£	£
Income		
Membership & Donations	5735.08	6556.30
SLF Conference Income	3857.70 (1)	4466.47
Publications	3555.59	1172.82
Spring Conf: collections & stall	318.62	0
Autumn Conference: collections & stall	684.79	283
Autumn Conference: Dinner	1920	1123.33
Website Sales	1480.48 (2)	0
Sponsorship for Fringes	0	400
Sub-Total	17552.26	14001.92
Expenditure		
SLF Conference	4116.58 (1)	4345.70
Autumn Conference	3803.83()	3680
Conference Dinner	825	705.05
Spring Conference	1305.18	552.85
Publications	3445.76	1866.71
Design, print, fulfilment		
AGM	324.50	0
Council Meetings	229.81	483.60
Council Members Expenses	397	0
Website Sales	1480.48 (2)	0
Nationbuilder	770.96	632.05
Green Party Conference	480	340
New Banner	0	72.79
Sub-Total:	17179.10	12678.75

Reconciliation:

Bank at start:	4655.99	
PayPal Account:	127.71	4783.70
Income		17552.26
Expenditure:		17129.10
Bank at End:	4727.05	
PayPal at End	479.81	5206.86

Notes:

- (1) SLF Conference income was down as a result of the Brexit March in London which was on the same day. We managed to cut costs and still deliver a credible event.
- (2) These are balancing amounts to reflect the actual costs of the agency which manages the process. Income has been allocated to appropriate heads.

Gordon Lishman
Treasurer