

Central Bedfordshire Liberal Democrats

Chair's Report 2025 AGM

As we approach the end of my third and final year (party rules set the limit at three consecutive years) in office as chair of the local party, I look back both at the past twelve months and the previous two years and think where has the time gone and how busy we have been. As we entered this year, we knew that it was likely that we would have at least one by election and one level or another. Alongside which our CBC elected members would also remain challenged by the ever changing and challenging political scene at CBC.

On the election front we had two challenges to meet, the first being the loss of town councillor in Leighton Buzzard due to a family issue in Spain which meant he had to return to Spain. This after much discussion with the other local parties was resolved through a co-option when no residents or opposing parties submitted a request for an election. The result was that two candidates came forward, and our member Nanci Hogan was selected by a majority at a full council vote meaning that we retained the seat.

The second came about when a Labour member for the CBC Stotfold seat stepped down. This proved to be a major challenge with all major parties putting forward a strong candidate (with the exception of the Independents). Our candidate Neil Stevenson ran a fantastic campaign and increased our share of the vote, but was sadly beaten by the Reform candidate who when elected became the second Reform member at CBC, the other being a sitting member who walked the floor earlier in the year. Disappointing but a good indication how we can really challenge the other parties, and it sets us in good stead for 2027.

Elections at whatever level raise our profile and often see an uplift in membership and whilst our membership development officer will report on this specifically it's worth noting that all political parties are finding it increasingly difficult to build their member base, that is with the exception of one, which I don't need to name. This is quite clearly a symptom of the general view of the public in respect of politics. At Central Bedfordshire our membership has been quite static, 231 this time last year and currently 211 a small drop, nevertheless this equates to 8.7%, a mix of members passing away and some not renewing their membership. Any help that you can give to grow membership would be appreciated, currently by constituency within Central Beds its stands at (last year's numbers in brackets): Dunstable Leighton Buzzard – 86 (95), Mid Beds – 58 (62), Hitchin County – 31 (37), North East Bedfordshire – 18 (22) and Luton Sth & Sth Beds – 17 (15).

We should remember that in May 2027 we will be going to the polls to elect both candidates to Central Bedfordshire (we currently hold 8 out of 63) and many local Parish and Town Councils (where in Leighton Linlade alone we currently hold 14 out of 21). Against this backdrop 211 members leaves us at significant risk of being unable to field sufficient candidates to match the elections held in 2023. Clearly there is a serious job of work to be done to build a membership base, perhaps the main challenge for our new incoming chair.

For my own part as one of our team of eight CBC councillors and Leader of Leighton Linlade Town Council my schedule has been jam packed full with council responsibilities and party duties. As always it becomes a matter of prioritising tasks to be able to meet and deliver and much as can realistically been done. There is never enough time. As I come to the end of my role as chair there are three areas that I wish I had been able to do more to move things on. These are firstly building

the party membership and with that getting a better focus on the East of our Region as we are somewhat weighted to the West and we did used to be many years ago stronger in the East.

The second is to have written a detailed business plan for the local party to focus on the next five years. Having given this some detailed thought and looked at others around the region I would like to propose that the new Executive set up a Task and Finish group to prepare a draft document during the early part of next year, much as we did this year to review the constitution.

The third was to improve local party communication which I have hoped to achieve through a quarterly printed and posted Newsletter, which we started but work pressure and time have meant it has progressed. Sadly, for similar reasons we have not sent out anywhere near enough party wide email bulletins which has left some members very much out of touch with what is going on. I hope that next year given the need to work towards the 2027 elections that this can come to fruition under the direction of our new Chair.

As I come to the end of my three years of office I look back and know that I played a part in getting the best results that we could from a General Election, Parliamentary By Election, Police & Crime Commissioner Election, Central Bedfordshire Council Election, and local by elections. Not all chairs get a chance to get behind every level of election and I am glad have been given the opportunity.

Finally, after such a busy year I would like to end by thanking a small group of individuals who have worked tirelessly on behalf of our local party and supported me in my role. They are Liz Owen our secretary, Peter Snelling our treasurer, Jake Holland Lindsay our membership development officer and campaign manager, Joe Symes for the work he has taken on as Data Officer and finally Liz, Andrea and Miranda for the work they have done to update our local constitution. Thank you all including our elected members for all that you have done and continue to do tirelessly on behalf of the party to keep us going forward. Well done.

Nigel Carnell

Chair CBLD 2025