

[Doorstep campaigning is now allowed in England – and it's never been more important to get out there](#)

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Author:

[Scottish Lib Dems win more than £300million to support mental health, education and councils](#)

Thanks to the Liberal Democrats and the changes we've negotiated to Scotland's budget we are going to improve the lives of millions and put the recovery first.

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[Why we need more Lib Dems elected](#)

Campaigning steps up...

I've just been in touch with one of the Liberal Democrat councillors for the ward up the road from me to line up a Focus delivery round on Monday, 8 March. That's the date from which the latest change in guidelines in England comes in. It gives the go-ahead to a much wider range of leafleting and also to doorstep canvassing.

We will all still need to be mindful of keeping our distance, wearing masks, using hand sanitizer and other safety measures. But we can significantly up our campaigning all across England this month. That's vital with the huge round of elections coming up in May.

The importance of those elections is all the greater in Scotland and Wales with their own general elections, though of course they have different health

guidelines. The party's latest guidance for campaigning in all three countries is [on the party website](#).

That wasn't a Lib Dem budget

The Chancellor's Budget this week has shown how important it is to get more Lib Dems elected. As Daisy Cooper [put it](#):

"Nothing for 3m #excluded entrepreneurs. Nothing to ease debt facing small businesses. Nothing to fix the broken business rates system. Nothing for exporters hit badly by Brexit. Nothing to tackle climate emergency. Nothing on education or for young people. Nothing to fix NHS & social care. Nothing to help those living in or on the edge of poverty."

The May elections

These contests will also be the first opportunity to see the benefits of the big investment we've made in increasing the size of our field campaign team. Thanks to cooperation across the party we've got a much larger team than before. There is a common plan being worked to by regional parties, state parties, ALDC and Lib Dem HQ. That includes a bumper set of training coming up at [Spring conference](#).

Good luck to everyone who will be campaigning for these May elections. A special thank you to the families of all our candidates and agents in particular for whom elections are a big intrusion into their lives.

Our plans for the May elections were one of the main agenda items at the February Federal Board. We reviewed the [Federal Communications and Elections Committee \(FCEC\)'s plans](#) to ensure appropriate support is available to every local party. Target seats are of course the most important in the immediate weeks before polling day. But for long-term, sustained success we also need to build up our strength in a wider range of seats.

Later in the year we will look at the plans from our new Chief Technology Officer for improving our use of data and technology.

Better and cheaper: a new HQ

More immediately, the February Board also gave the final sign-off to our plans to move to new offices. As long as nothing goes wrong at the last moment, and after giving careful consideration to different options, we will be moving to much nicer yet also much cheaper offices.

This year the vast majority of HQ staff have been working from home. They have told us that post-lockdowns, splitting their working week between home and office is their preference. We support them in that choice of doing their work, their way. This has allowed us to secure a smaller office space which will considerably lower our costs.

We have found a space that will give us the flexibility to expand into a general election operation without having to relocate. That will be a major benefit given the Conservative plans to scrap the Fixed Term Parliaments Act and return us to the days of having to anticipate when a Prime Minister may spring a snap election on everyone without warning.

Developing our strategy

Coming up at Spring conference is the next round of consultation with members on our evolving strategy. The February Board had a first look at the new business plan we're developing for the federal party. It ties together all our different strands of activity into one plan to deliver our political goals.

This sort of integration behind a common aim is one of the major gaps in the way we run the party identified by [the Thornhill Review](#). So we're also now running quarterly briefing sessions for those in leadership roles across the party. These are being used to share and get feedback on the directions we're taking and the reasoning behind them.

Two priorities in this work are improving our diversity and our internal communications. On the former, we are working with the experts at Diversity Matters to produce a specific plan to turn good intentions into results. On the latter, we've recruited someone to a new post in HQ.

Improving our handling of complaints

Our complaints system also featured at the February Board. Among other matters, we considered proposals to re-open the previous decision to introduce [a definition of transphobia](#). This proposal was rejected and the definition remains as is.

Steps to improve the working of the system will be coming to Spring conference. In particular, at the moment changing even one comma in the detailed rules requires a measure to go to conference. That makes the system cumbersome and slow to improve. So conference will have the chance to vote for a streamlined process that maintains safeguards over who has to approve changes and how they are reported back to members.

In addition, a new casework management system to improve the administration of the system has been introduced, and a new member of staff has started in the HQ team. Thank you to all the volunteers and staff who work so hard running the system.

Other Board business

The Board agreed improvements to our standing orders, including confirming limits on the powers of the Steering Group. We've also clarified how the Board elects people to various posts, addressing queries that have come up.

Following feedback from party members in last year's consultation, the Board introduced a pilot mechanism for recorded votes so that on big issues people

can see which way Board members have voted.

Paul Fox has stood down from the Federal Finances and Resources Committee (FFRC) as he now has the work of being a regional treasurer. We elected Mayor Dave Hodgson to succeed him and appointed Caris Doig to fill a vacancy on the Federal Audit and Scrutiny Committee (FASC). The FFRC has also co-opted Shelley Snelson in a pilot for having a Deputy Registered Treasurer.

Thank you both Dave and Shelley for putting your names forward, and to everyone else who applied.

Federal Appeals Panel

Having an effective internal party appeals process is one of those tasks which, if it goes wrong, has knock-on effects all through the party.

That's why last year the Board put a lot of effort into recruiting high quality names for membership of the Federal Appeals Panel (FAP). It's also why FASC has reviewed how the Panel works.

The Board met with the new chair, [David Graham](#). We discussed his plans for improving how the panel operates, including implementing the FASC recommendations.

David has a very welcome focus on transparency. That can be seen already with the new [regularly updated list of rulings](#) on the party website. More on his plans is in his [report to conference](#).

His panel is not the only appeals process in the party. I encourage everyone involved in other similar processes to look at the approach he is taking and see what can be usefully applied to their processes too.

Congratulations

Thank you to everyone who has been taking part in our big 'maraphone' telephone canvassing drives.

Congratulations to our colleagues in Hull who topped the rankings for speaking to the most voters in the last one. I'm assured that the numbers have been independently verified and in no way influenced by our Director of Field Campaigns being a Hull councillor himself..

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Today's Budget must support small businesses on the brink

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Small businesses are on the brink and the Chancellor must do more

At a time when millions of small businesses are struggling to survive, to offer them just £5 billion would be an insult.

We need to see a budget with a bold and ambitious compensation package

From beauticians to builders, florists to café owners – the small businesses in our communities are **on the brink and the Chancellor must do more.**

It is now or never to save the millions of businesses in our local communities and the Government must put their recovery first.

At a time when millions of small businesses are struggling to survive, to offer them just £5 billion would be an insult.

We need to see a budget with an ambitious compensation package for those who are facing crippling losses. <https://t.co/Eld9Tkrz5R>

– Liberal Democrats (@LibDems) [March 1, 2021](#)

Those who have been left with no financial help must be brought under the umbrella of Government support.

We need to see a budget with a **bold and ambitious compensation package** for those who are facing crippling losses, and coping with hardship through no fault of their own.

And we must see those who have been left out in the cold, with no financial help, **brought under the umbrella of Government support.**

The Liberal Democrats have set out how the Government can do this, but it will require considerable amounts more in support, to provide what our local businesses and the people who depend on them **deserve**.

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