

The best way to meet the big challenges of our time

Our values work best

Tackling the coronavirus epidemic, and minimising the tragic loss of life, is primarily a public health issue. But there's also a consistent political lesson from it too.

The approaches that work best use international cooperation. Viruses don't stop at borders, and scientific cooperation and vaccine supply chains work best when they don't either.

The approaches that work best involve giving power and responsibility to those on the front line. That's why localised public health services in Germany have done so much better than our centralised track and trace fiasco. It would have worked far better to trust councils and [their existing expertise at local track and tracing for environmental health work](#).

The approaches that work best involve a generous society, one that supports those who most need help during such tough times. As with internationalism and devolution, such generosity of spirit and of government [lies at the heart of liberalism and Liberal Democracy](#).

Our party's challenge is to become a more effective political force for those values which are so needed to overcome the big challenges of our time.

Improving how we work

That is why both implementing the [Thornhill Election Review](#) and the other reforms I have talked about in previous reports is so important. Dorothy Thornhill has reported directly to members on [how we are doing at implementing the review](#). She concludes, "I believe the review has been recognised, that the process of making changes has started, and that the path to success is starting to emerge".

With brief exceptions, for a decade now we have been in single digits in the opinion polls. That shows how the challenges we need to overcome are long-term ones.

The good news is we've recovered before. There's a common trigger in previous recoveries: winning elections, whether Parliamentary by-elections or (especially now that such contests are rarer) the big rounds of May elections. It was a [stunning performance in the May 2019 elections](#), remember, that propelled us to those great European results and a polling surge.

That's why we've made a big switch of resources to investing in a hugely increased grassroots campaign support operation. Many thanks to colleagues in state parties, regional parties and ALDC who have cooperated so positively in

making similar and coordinated efforts.

Frustratingly, we have only had the very occasional council by-election since all that work started being put in place. This May's elections are a great opportunity for us with general elections in Scotland and Wales and two rounds of local elections rolled into one, including for many Mayors.

It is an opportunity that the Conservatives in Westminster are cynically trying to stifle by insisting on both holding elections and also trying to ban much campaigning. If it's not safe for people to go campaigning, it's not democratic to hold an election. It should only be dictators who try to hold votes without letting the opposition campaign properly.

Our advice on what campaigning can be safely, responsibly and legally done is kept updated at libdems.org.uk/covid19. Training, resources and bulk-buy deals for paid-for delivery and digital advertising are all being made available by Lib Dem HQ and ALDC. To make sure you always get the latest information on them, please ensure that the key campaigners in your area are on the party's special campaign news email list.

It's never been more important to innovate in our campaigning, which is why the new [Campaign Innovation Fund](#) has been launched to fund measurable experiments so that we learn better what does and does not work.

As well as getting our campaigning right, we are continuing to fix things behind the scenes, and have had two Steering Group meetings so far this year ahead of a one of our day-long Board strategy sessions at the end of February.

You'll see some of the outcome of our work coming to spring conference, including in the Board report and in business and constitutional motions. [Spring conference registration is open](#) and I look forward to the discussions, debates and votes. You can always also [get in touch directly with any questions](#).

At that Board strategy session we'll be looking at how our political and organisational plans fit together into one coherent overall plan. A plan that we can use for guiding the work of the federal party and one that members and supporters across the party can use to understand what we're doing, why, and how they can contribute to it. I'll report back on the plan in more detail next time.

Other Steering Group work this month has included examining how the party manages risk, with a proper risk register and risk management system now in place, along with appropriate oversight of the changes being made at HQ, including ensuring we continue to provide the right pastoral care support to staff and members. Our February Board will also be looking at both the complaints process and the work of the Federal Appeals Panel, meeting with its new chair.

As well as getting in touch with myself directly, you can always also find details of the Board and Steering Group members up on the party website and

reports from federal committees appear regularly in the AdLib section.

I look forward to hearing from you.

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Author:

[Tackling Vaccine Disinformation](#)

Mass vaccination is our best way of pulling through this terrible pandemic.

Sadly there has been a worrying rise in fake news and disinformation about the vaccine. Often this is spread by social media, with no scientific evidence.

That's why it's so important that we have dedicated councillors like Rabina Khan going into her community, meeting with people in a socially distanced way, and addressing their concerns directly.

We will pull through this together – but **we must tackle vaccine disinformation.**

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Author:

[Spring Conference Motions – Explained](#)

Our first ever online conference in September was a huge success – so we'll be back online for our Spring Conference from 19th to 21st March. You can find out more and register for it [here](#).

[Register for conference](#)

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Author:

Scrap the new Cumbrian coal mine

The Liberal Democrats have long called for a rethink on plans on for a new coal mine in Cumbria and I am delighted that's exactly what has happened.

If Boris Johnson is serious about climate action he will call on Cumbria county council to scrap the mine

Cumbria County Council now need to do the right thing and throw these plans out, or the Prime Minister must intervene to make sure the coal mine is scrapped.

It's astonishing that a new coal mine in Britain is even being considered – particularly the year we are hosting the vital COP26 conference.

If Boris Johnson is serious about climate action he will call on Cumbria county council to scrap the mine.

The Government needs to transform its attitude to the climate emergency. That is why I have proposed a £150 billion green coronavirus recovery plan, reshaping our economy to protect the future of our country and our planet.

This is a once in a lifetime chance to solve the massive crisis we are in, we can't afford to miss it.

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Author:

General Election review update

We published the 2019 Election Review as the pandemic swept the UK and, sadly, I write this update during an even harder third wave. We are reminded every day of the failures of this government and the pressing need for convincing alternatives.

I am encouraged by the steps that have already been taken within the party and the plans ahead for reform. **In terrible circumstances, activists, volunteers and staff have stepped up to the challenge my review posed.** We identified three overarching themes in the review, all of which needed profound improvement: re-building campaigning excellence, clarity of leadership and decision making, and vision and purpose.

Our campaigning team is now as well-resourced as it ever has been at this

stage in a Parliament and we should commend local leaders, staff and ALDC for the innovation shown to balance campaigning with protecting public health.

The **party is working with more internal clarity**, and I note in particular the closer cooperation between HQ and ALDC, as well as the work, some of which is coming to Spring Conference, to define leadership roles and responsibilities as highlights.

I am not naïve, however, and there are vital areas where change has been slow. I also **do not underestimate the challenges of maintaining party energy while so many of us are struggling with family sickness, isolation, home-schooling and the like.**

We have made less progress on defining and confidently asserting our party's vision and purpose. Green shoots, for instance the carers campaign and the start of a change in approach to voter research, are springing up, but the truth is many voters remain, at best, ambivalent to us.

Also, as this Parliament wears on we face the challenge of shifting our mindset from borderline single-issue campaigning back to the kitchen-table politics of people's day-to-day lives required to win elections. In the introduction of my review, I said, "If it is at least recognised that this one hits the key issues, starts the process of making much needed changes in the party and points the way to success in the future then the time spent by the diligent and deeply committed panel will not have been in vain".

To end on a positive note, then, I can say that I believe the review has been recognised, that the process of making changes has started, and that the path to success is starting to emerge.

To the members reading this, I hope that as you show patience while the work is done. We must all expect, demand and support the party to be a winning machine again.

In the meantime, **all energy into May's elections!**

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Author: