

**DOVER & DEAL LIBERAL DEMOCRATS
ANNUAL REPORT 2024
November 16, 2024**

2024 has been a busy year for me as Chair of our local party. Not only have I been your Chair, but I have also held the position of Communications Lead and, last but not least, stood in Dover & Deal as your Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Candidate.

Busy or not, I am pleased to be able to report that during the past three years of my tenure as Chair, we have been steadily building our local party in terms of our membership, events, fundraising and profile.

MEMBERSHIP: Although we are in regular contact with our members, like many local parties of all hues, we struggle to maintain and grow our membership. Whilst we have lost some members this year due to inevitable churn - they have moved from the constituency, passed away, or simply changed their allegiance - I'm pleased to say we have also gained some new members and supporters, so that we have succeeded in maintaining our membership level. But, of course, we desperately need to do better if we really want our local party to grow. Membership is the life-blood of any party.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE: Over the past three years I've worked hard, along with our Secretary/Campaign Manager, Christine Headley, to ensure we have a manageable structure of regular Executive Committee meetings across the year, which are well-attended and move our local party business forwards. However, we still need to establish a range of sub-committees from Events to Fundraising and Membership to ensure our local party works more effectively and efficiently, so if you are interested in getting involved in any of these areas, do please get in touch.

EVENTS & FUNDRAISING: Despite our lack of properly functioning sub-committees this year, I'm pleased to report that we have been able to organise and run a regular number of popular social and fundraising events across the year. These have included our regular, monthly Lib Dem Gatherings and Coffee Mornings; a most enjoyable Strawberry Afternoon Tea in August (at which the sun shone!); two thought-provoking and well-attended Pizza & Politics evenings to which we invited Razia Shariff, CEO of Kent Refugee Action Network and the General Manager of CPRE Kent, Vicky Ellis; as well as a Quiz Night run by our Vice-Chair, Rick Blackwell. These events have been very successful and raised sufficient funds for our General Election campaign and as well as ensuring we have funds in the bank to start work on our forthcoming Kent County Council elections in May 2025.

COMMUNICATIONS: We've worked hard at improving our communications with our members and supporters and we now send out a much-improved monthly

Newsletter via e-mail with reports on various issues and activities, as well as details about our forthcoming events. This is summarised in a postal version which is sent out every four months to those who do not have e-mail.

Our media profile has improved over the year, with more news releases and letters to the newspaper. We have a busy Facebook page, as well as X (Twitter), Instagram and TikTok accounts and have increased our following on Facebook and Instagram by around 20% year on year. This is good news because it is difficult to get our message out via our local, mainly conservative-owned newspapers and it costs only time, however we still need to do better to raise our profile.

COUNCILLORS: In 2023 we succeeded in ensuring that two of our members were elected as Town Councillors, Rick Blackwell for Walmer Town Council and Martyn Pennington for Sandwich Town Council. They are both doing an excellent job, and we hope to be able to elect more councillors to support them going forwards.

GENERAL ELECTION: We were somewhat taken by surprise by the announcement of the General Election in June, as we had been expecting it to take place in the Autumn, so much of what we achieved was somewhat rushed. Nevertheless, we stood one candidate in the Dover & Deal constituency – Penelope James (me), and we supported a second candidate in the recently formed Herne Bay & Sandwich constituency – Angie Curwen. (We contributed 15% of funds towards Angie Curwen's campaign as Sandwich falls within our local party area.) We put considerable effort into supporting both candidates.

In Dover & Deal we paid for a postal election address, leaflets which were hand-delivered by me and other members and promoted my campaign with a series of 12 excellent videos focussing on the key Liberal Democrat policies, which were posted and boosted on Facebook and TikTok. The videos were played 3,000 times on Facebook and reached 5,522 accounts and had 14,415 views on Tik Tok!

In Herne Bay & Sandwich we contributed towards the cost of leaflets and the candidate and local members assisted with delivering leaflets.

Both Angie Curwen and I attended a number of hustings in our respective constituencies and TV interviews, and I responded to nearly 600 e-mails from constituents in the last four weeks leading up to the election.

While neither Angie Curwen nor I resorted to bungee-jumping or paddle-boarding to rustle up votes, I am delighted to report that we both retained our deposits. And the fabulous result from the General Election is that Liberal Democrats now have 72 seats in parliament, including Mike Martin MP for Tunbridge Wells, in whom we feel we have a small-vested interest, as several Dover & Deal LibDem members travelled

to Tunbridge Wells to help out with his campaign in terms of leafleting and writing envelopes.

KENT COUNTY ELECTIONS: Our campaign plan for May 2025 – the Kent County Council elections – is to stand a candidate in every one of Dover’s seven electoral divisions. If you are interested, please contact Christine on 07570 026989 or ChristineDoverLD@gmail.com And, we also plan to stand a candidate in every one of Dover District Council’s 17 Wards (that’s 32 candidates) in May 2027. Every voter in Dover, Deal & Sandwich should be able to vote Liberal Democrat, whether it be a national, county or district council election.

LOCAL PARTY PROFILE: I have been keen to raise our Local Party’s profile on as many levels as possible and, as chair have ensured that one of our officers attend the South-East Regional Local Party briefing every two months. I attended an event in January at the National Liberal Club hosted by Jamie Sharpley, its Vice President and the LibDem Spring Conference in York in March, and our Campaign Manager attended the Liberal Democrat Conference in September in Brighton. And, of course, I attended many regular meetings and briefings as your parliamentary candidate.

TRAINING: Training is a very important element of being an Executive Committee member, as we need to keep current and learn the best methods of attracting new members and raising funds so that we can achieve our goal – winning seats in our county and local elections. One of our Executive Committee members attended a Kent Regional Training Day in September, I attended Meta training and security training in my role as Prospective Parliamentary Candidate and of course I and Christine Headley our Campaign Manager, attended several of the many training sessions offered at Conference.

THE FUTURE: Looking to the future, we are committed to growing our local party via the recruitment of new members, standing candidates in county and local elections and ultimately winning seats. We have set ourselves a number of goals including:

- giving all Dover, Deal and Sandwich electors the opportunity of voting Liberal Democrat in the forthcoming Kent County Council election
- becoming a leading contender in one Kent County division in 2025
- winning at least 2 seats on Dover District Council in the 2027 election

So, for those of you who are not directly involved and would like to be just get in touch with our Campaign Manager, Christine Headley, or via our web site. There are lots of roles available to suit the time you have available to give to the local party.

THANK YOU: This is my last year as Chair. It’s been challenging, and a bit of a roller-coaster at times, but I have thoroughly enjoyed my tenure, and I hope I have

succeeded in putting in place some important building blocks for our young local party to develop in the future, as well as growing our profile.

I would like to thank all of you who have worked hard in assisting me in this task including our Executive Committee members. In particular, I'd like to thank Christine Headley, our Campaign Manager, who also doubles as our Agent and Secretary. She has been a fantastic support. I'd also like to thank two of our members: Patrick Papougnot, who assisted me tremendously during the General Election campaign by filming and editing 12 brilliant videos which we used to promote the key Liberal Democrat policies in the last few weeks of the General Election campaign, and also Mauro Moraes, who spent many hours running my social media campaign on Facebook, Instagram, X (Twitter), and Tik Tok.

I am hugely appreciative of everyone's commitment and support, whether it be attending events, delivering leaflets or serving on the Executive Committee. Every little bit of support, no matter how big or small, makes a huge difference.

So, here's to a bright future for Dover and Deal Liberal Democrats, one which sees us recruiting new members, building a strong local party and winning seats.

Penelope James
Chair
Dover & Deal Liberal Democrats