**Lewes Executive AGM 2024 - Minutes.**

**Date:** Friday 15th November 2024

**Venue**: Ringmer Village Hall.

A minute’s silence was held at the beginning of the AGM to remember those no longer here.

1. **Welcome and apologies for absence (Chair, Rob Parsons)**

**In attendance**: Roger Beasley, Joyce Bell, Lesley Boniface, Christine Brett, Peter Flake, Olivia Honeyman, Edwina Livesey, James MacCleary, MP, Paul Mitchell, Kate Palmer, Rob Parsons (Chair), Tony Parker, Sarah Pitt, James Stovold, Christine Tutt, Victoria Vincent, Romanie Palmer

**Apologies:** Janet Baah, Rob Banks, Shaun Boniface, Stephen Gauntlett, Gina Hawthorne, Freddie Hoaureau, Richard Honeyman, John Lamb, Tim & Ann Locke, Sally Markwell, Richard Morland, Imogen & Roger Taylor, David Tutt, Maggie Wearmouth

Zoom attendance - due to an error with the zoom set up, a new code had to be sent out at the meeting. The code was put on various Whatsapp groups. James Partridge attended on zoom.

**2. Approval of draft minutes of the 2023 AGM-** It was suggested that the minutes are sent out to all members when the AGM calling notice is sent out. This will be discussed at an Executive meeting.

**3. Reports from**

3.**1 Chairs report** - **Rob Parsons** gave his report, and thanked various members who had been on the committee during his time as the chair.

Lewes LibDems 2024 AGM

I will start with the crowning achievement of this year. Not every local party chair gets to see a LibDem MP elected on their watch, and I have been extraordinarily lucky to see that happen to me. I am also delighted to find that so many Liberal Democrats have been so enthusiastically celebrating the fact that I am 72 years old.

I am lucky that I happened to be the person here when James was elected. It wasn’t luck that got him elected, though. That was due to the outstanding quality of our candidate, to the message that he was able to communicate to the voters, to the fact that those things attracted the money we needed, and to the relentless hours of work put in by a veritable army of volunteers.

I’m supposed to report on what we’ve done over the last year, but I’d like to take a longer perspective, looking both backwards and forwards. I’ve been the chair for three and a half years. I was first installed as acting chair when Simon Burall became too ill to continue, and I then rashly put myself forward for nomination. We were still in a recovery period back then, and we have spent the entire time since rebuilding, reshaping ourselves and honing our efforts. We’ve had help, from the national party and from other local parties, but mostly it has been our own hard work. It is a long road to being a fully functioning campaigning organisation, and in my estimation, we are about halfway along that road. I have always said that we are nothing if we are not a campaigning organisation. We want power. Not for its own sake, but because that gives us the wherewithal to help people make their lives better.

We took a major step in becoming the campaigners we should be when we appointed a full-time organiser, Freddie Hoareau, who proved to be so excellent that James has now poached him for his Parliamentary office. We still have him part time, and we have supplemented him with Harry Garoghan who is proving to be just as excellent. Harry is jointly employed by us and Wealden and will prove to be a very capable bridge between the two parties. Appointing paid staff is always a key sign that you mean business.

Achieving your goal – in this case the Parliamentary seat – is one thing. Keeping it is another, and that must now be the focus of our endeavours. It will be hard work. The Tories made it easy for us this time; people voted against them. To be fair, they made themselves an easy target. That target will not be there next time, and we need to give people reasons to vote for us rather than against somebody else. We are moving against a background of the current greatest failure of western liberal democracy, a failure to grapple with the uncertainty of the world today. Many people in our world, mostly men, but women too, have been led to believe that they should be invulnerable. But they are having to confront the reality that they are vulnerable, insecure, exposed, and they do not know how to deal with it. We’ve just seen the results of that in America. Liberal democracy has the answer, the primacy of the individual person – the rights, the freedom, the opportunity, the security of every single individual. To assert that, we have to go against the grain of the world where money, safekeeping, and security of identity are all siphoned upwards to those who already have more than enough.

Going against the grain is always an effort. But it’s worth it. And it is necessary, vital, for the freedom of every single person, not just the elite. One way we do this is to speak up for what is now the mass of the British people, but not to the taste of those in power, and urge stronger and deeper ties with the European Union, with its foundations in solidarity and human rights, for which we now have, in James, a very able spokesperson. The other way we do it is by fixing potholes, by working on the daily conditions in which most people lead their lives. That is what we set out to do for the next five years, at every level of government from town to Parliament. That means enormous expenditure of money and of shoe leather. Be in no doubt that we will be asking all of you for both, because this is a team effort.

There are many people for me to thank. I’m going to start with Olivia without whom this AGM would not have happened, and who has been a most reliable secretary to the executive during my tenure. Peter Flake, whose meticulous work on data prevents the entire system gumming up. Tony Parker, who was our treasurer till last year, and John Ashcroft who succeeded him and has done battle successfully with Lloyds Bank’s fearsome authorisation system. Rob Banks, the Stakhanovite’s Stakhanovite; James King who never misses a canvassing opportunity, and Kevin West who I think holds the Fitbit record for most steps taken on an election day. Imogen Taylor who with her team has delivered event after event. John Lamb who has done ten rounds with Eventcube and lived. Joyce Bell who has taken on the membership development role with no little effect. Edwina Livesey, whose management of a conveyor belt of work experience students during the summer was impeccable. Sally Markwell and Janet Baah who have done great service on the executive. I’m sure there are some I’ve missed who I should have mentioned, for which I apologise. But I have said enough, and that is that. Thank you to everybody.

**3.2 Treasurer (John Ashcroft) Lewes Liberal Democrats - Financial Report to the AGM on 15 November 2024**

The accounts for 2023, separately circulated, showed **a deficit of around £11,000 in 2023**, leaving a balance of just under £11,000 at the start of 2024. Fortunately, the General Election, the associated enthusiasm for removing the Tories, and some very effective fundraising activity, meant that we were able to raise enough money to finance the campaign to elect James MacCleary as our MP, whilst leaving the party comfortably in pocket for the rest of 2024. Hence, **a significant surplus is expected in 2024**. The remarkable level of donations was augmented by grants received from HQ and other sources totalling.

**2025, however, will be a financially tough year**. The grants from HQ have stopped. There will be substantial running costs of staff and office plus expenditure on refreshing life expired office equipment. And we have the county campaign to fight which could well result in a significant deficit.

To **be successful in 2025** we need to:

* **Grow further our regular standing order income** from councillors, members and supporters. The party should be very grateful to everyone who contributes this way, as the money is vital to give us the confidence that we can meet our fixed expenses relating to premises and staff month-on-month. We need as a minimum to sustain it at the current level, but ideally grow it further, especially as running costs keep rising. So, we need more members/supporters setting up standing orders and those with standing orders looking to increase them.
* **Digging further into our pockets** to provide one-off donations well in advance of the county elections – we need to run a strong campaign before the tight limits on spending during the short campaign period kick in. So, that means starting about now!
* **Put effort into fundraising events and campaigns** so as to finance what we really need to spend to run the type of campaign needed to win county seats. This means significantly beating my forecast. We might wish to launch a **separate fundraising drive for office equipment**, so that we can spend enough on replacing our office equipment so that can be relied upon when most needed.

A request for funding is required for the new office and equipment.

A discussion was held at the AGM, which was to send minutes to all members, after each meeting, those in attendance of the AGM raised. To be discussed at the next Executive meeting.

**3.3 Secretary report: Olivia Honeyman -** The agenda is drafted and sent to the chair for any amendments, or additions. I send out the report reminders

**3.4 Membership Development Officer - Joyce Bell**

The current data are:

All current members: 397 All current supporters: 97 Members needing to renew: 5

It was discussed at the AGM that members are to be encouraged to do a membership drive. The membership team of Joyce, needs more people to be involved in the gaining of members. We need to try to turn deliverers into members. Do we have recruitment drives to get more members? We need a team of people to help gain members. Willing hands ae needed!!

**Lewes have the highest membership in the South East, James told the AGM.**

James is producing a monthly newsletter, that is sent to all members.

**3.5 Data Officer - Peter Flake**

 I chair the Information Policy Committee, which meets only occasionally. We have had resignations and we would welcome anybody with interest in data or information technology.

Connect is the database management system for voters and supporters, and is integrated with Fleet, which provides our web sites. Connect has a Targeted Email function, which is used to communicate with members and voters. There is a limited set of users, and only HQ can grant permission. This is to ensure control over the quantity and quality of emails.

The constituency boundary has changed, and so the area of the Lewes party and the Connect database has been enlarged. New walks have been added.

I would like to remind everyone who has files of contact details of members or voters that these are confidential and must be deleted from a computer as soon as no longer needed, and destroyed securely if hard copy.

Peter put a request out for more help with the data team. Targeted email, is done on connect. Only HQ can confirm who can send the mailing list out. John Lamb has just been confirmed. All lists of members must be deleted once completed.

**3.6- Liberal Democrat Group on East Sussex County Council - David Tutt sent a report, which Olivia read out.**

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County Group Report

The current position on ESCC is officially one of “no overall control” but with the Conservatives who hold 24 of the 50 seats continuing to form the administration, normally supported by 2 Independents.

We approach the 2025 County elections with a group of 12 members. We form the official opposition. The results from the district elections in Lewes and Wealden last year and Eastbourne in 2023 suggest that we have an opportunity of gains next May and we are working hard to ensure that candidates in all target wards have been selected and are following a campaign plan.

The bad news is a financial one. The Conservatives budgeted for a £14m overspend this financial year, but after the first 3 months this is estimated to have increased by another £10m. This week’s Cabinet meeting received a report saying that the deficit for 2025/6 is £29m increasing to £84m by 2027/8. The Conservatives are already consulting on a range of cuts in Adult Social Care amounting to £4.1m which includes closures at Linden Court, Hooksted and Milton Grange. In addition to this the Cabinet report proposes additional cuts that would impact all departments. These would include ceasing nearly all non-statutory services including Economic Development. It would also result in the loss of 160 staff, reduced services in: waste; rights of way and libraries.

Even if they were to make all of the cuts detailed above, they will still be circa £13m short of being able to set a balanced budget. This also assumes that they will increase Council Tax by 5% next year. Currently the unallocated reserves stand at a mere £10m and my suspicion in that they will take all of this, but these monies can of course only be used once, which will leave a massive problem for the net administration.

Should we therefore find ourselves in a position to be running the Council for the next 4 years, we will need to make some radical changes to the way that things operate, and we are currently investigating possibilities for change which will have the least impact upon the vital services that our community rely on.

The full Council meeting scheduled for 3 December has been cancelled as detail of the financial settlement from Government will not be known until 19 December. We are therefore using that morning to hold a group meeting via Teams, to which approved candidates will be welcome to attend. Please let me know the email details of such candidates and I will ensure that they are invited.

David Tutt

Leader of the Liberal Democrat Opposition

Edwina shared that she is on a task and finish group for Lewes town hall, Ask Edwina for the exact details. All the libraries are also in jeopardy in the constituency.

**3.7 Liberal Democrat Group on Lewes District Council Stephen Gauntlett - Christine Brett read out the report in Stephen’s absence.**

1. Local Plan.

Important to note that is for the area outside of SDNP (their Local Plan production is running roughly in parallel to LDC). Cllr Daniel Stewart-Roberts represents LDC within SDNP.

a) We await the publication of the Government’s revised NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework), as the result of the national consultation. Indications are that the centrally driven “Standard Method” for calculating house building numbers per year will remain with a small increase. LDC ( like Wealden DC), has written to Government stating that these targets do not reflect actual local needs but are arbitrary. Hopes are not high that any District or Borough will be able to change the methodology and LDC is extremely unlikely to be able to meet the targets.

This makes the preparation for the examination in public after submission ( LP draft goes to LDC Cabinet Dec 2024), absolutely critical.

b) The final submission identifies sites ( work largely complete) and comprehensive Policies setting out the ground rules for what is required (ranging through affordability, type of housing, density, water and waste water and nature recovery/bio diversity….to name but a few).
The cross party LP Steering Group has met weekly for 2 hours for past 6 weeks ( at least 2 more to go…) ensuring that these Policies  reflect accurately the needs of the District.

c) After submission to Government ( likely by Easter), the timing of the Examination is in their hands. Until then, the “tilted balance” in favour of sustainable development, remains in place.

d) There is also the added complication the the LDC planning function has been “designated” by Government as requiring special measures to ensure that its target of no more than 10% of planning refusals overturned on appeal to the Planning Inspectorate is met. In 2022/3 the figure was over 30%.
One example of this is that all development applications over 10 units have to go direct to the Planning Inspectorate in the first instance and events locally monitored thereafter.

2. Financial

The Government central grant to Local Authorities will increase by 3.2% but this will not significantly improve the situation for many, especially those carrying homelessness volumes such as Eastbourne BC. Lewes does not have these issues to the same degree and is likely to be able to set a balanced budget for the next year. It is too early to know the final position but we will be seeking to influence the spending decisions through our shadow cabinet roles. The budget will be debated and set at the February 2025 Council meeting.
It is hoped that from 2026/7 the government grants will be multi-year settlements rather than annual.

3. Opposition Role.

As the result of an away day facilitated by ALDC, we are now defining/redefining the shadow cabinet roles in order to better inform our overall responsibility to hold the Coalition to account.
Because, as a Party, we were in Alliance with the Greens and Labour prior to the 2023 election it is not always easy to discharge this but we are challenging an attitude among some, which is to act on ideology without due consideration of financial or community impact.

4. Resignation from LD Group

Cllr Sean MacCleod has resigned and will now sit as an Independent.
His given reason is that he is unable to agree with the (ALDC template) protocols for group working, especially regarding statements to the press and use of social media.

An Addition to the agenda-Wealden District Council report by James Partridge**-** James explained the background to formation of the Alliance for Wealden, an alliance between the Liberal Democrat, Green and Labour parties, which now controls Wealden District Council (WDC).  He explained that the Alliance has a clear strategy with three priorities:  climate change and the environment, community resilience and well-being, and the local economy.  The absolute priority is to get a Local Plan in place and a draft was brought to regulation 18 stage very quickly.  Progress has been delayed by the new government’s proposals to change the NPPF, but it is believed that the changes will not affect the basis of the draft and so hopefully this can be moved forward again early in the New Year.  WDC continues to provide a high level of service to residents and be well placed financially”.

**3.8 Member of Parliament – James MacCleary**

Previous LD MPs so few, now lots of MP’s which means that the roles can be shared.

In parliament from Monday to Wednesday. An interesting place to operate in. Gave anecdotes of being in parliament, of how they vote in parliament. Only 338 seats in the parliamentary chambers, therefore lots of MPs standing. Lindsay Hol, speakers of the house, The Assisted Dying Bill, is coming soon, James is receiving lots of emails about this. Railway nationalisation, coming through soon, Lib Dems like trains.

Youth mobility scheme is an area that James wants to work on.

Office in Lewes, near Fishers Street in Lewes. Responded to over 1000 emails in his first few weeks of being a MP, on his own, a massive task.

Aim in the next 2027 district council elections to win overall control. James needs to continue getting funds in to help cover all of the money that is needed for all; to raise more money, we need more volunteers. Will need to find lots of people to stand in the next elections. We are one of the better performing parties in the constituency, we need to get out there and knock on doors. We need to hold our seats, and gain more.

Onwards and upwards.

James led a q and a session.

The advance of the Reform Party is a notable change in the political scene; something for us to take seriously and challenge.

**4. Election of Officers - Julie Carr acted as the returning Officer for the elections of the officers.**

Here is the list of the Officers and Committee members for the Lewes Constituency Executive 2025.

**Officer Name Proposer Seconder**

**Chair**  Edwina Livesey John Ashcroft John Lamb

**Vice Chair** Rob Parsons Chris Bowers Olivia Honeyman

**Treasurer** John Ashcroft John Lamb Edwina Livesey

**Secretary** Olivia Honeyman Imogen Taylor Richard Honeyman

**Elections Officer** Kevin West Rob Banks Peter Flake

**Membership dev. Officer** Joyce Bell Julie Carr Rob Parsons

**Diversity Champion**  Vacant

**Data officer** Peter Flake Kevin West Helena West

**Ordinary Members** Lesley Boniface Christine Brett Shaun Boniface

 John Lamb Edwina Livesey Joyce Bell

 Rob Banks Gina Hawthorne Kevin West

Julie Carr Rob Parsons Olivia Honeyman

We can still co-opt with the 2 ordinary member vacancies

**Thanks to Rob P, who has been the Chair of the Lewes Executive for the past three years, and to all of the Executive Committee members who are standing down for all of their work on the Executive.**

5. To note the Accounts for 2023 (attached). The 2023 Accounts for the Local Party were approved by the Executive Committee (section 10.4 of Local Party Constitution) before the end of March 2024. The Accounts will only be noted by the AGM.

The accounts were noted

**6. Election of an Auditor for 2024 for the local party accounts. Independent examiner - Peter Flake**.

**7. AOB-** James MacCleary raised an AOB

 Note in the minutes to Rob Parsons, who has steered us through the General Election, lots of various challenges, thanks to Rob for his chairing of his work for the past three years.

Well done everyone.

Freddie’s campaign organiser report, please note that this report was not read out in AOB due to time constraints, but has been added to the minutes.

**Freddie Hoareau organiser AGM report 2024**

**Introduction**

2024 has been a significant year for the Lewes Liberal Democrats, marked by a major success… the election of James MacCleary as MP! This report provides a short overview of our achievements, strategies, and some of what's to come.

**General Election 2024: A Major Win**

James MacCleary’s election as MP was one of the biggest wins for the Liberal Democrats in the general election, with a 9.5% increase in vote share. Our majority was bigger than several held Lib Dem constituencies, and James had a clear mandate with a turnout around 70% and over 50% of the vote. We had been working to win back the seat since we lost it in the 2015 general election, and it’s a big achievement from a large number of volunteers over years, not just to win but to win with a big majority.

* **Result**:
	+ **James MacCleary (Liberal Democrat)**: 26,895 votes (50.6%, +9.5%)
	+ **Maria Caulfield (Conservative)**: 14,271 votes (26.8%, -21.7%)
	+ **Others**: Reform UK (11.9%), Labour (6.7%), Green (3.5%), SDP (0.4%)

**Key Campaign Highlights**:

* **Visibility**: Hundreds of poster sites coordinated by Rob Banks and Tom Hawthorne.
* **Canvassing**: 33,000 doors knocked and 11,118 people canvassed from January 2024 to election day.
* **Messaging**: Our campaign maintained a disciplined focus on the NHS, James’s local credentials, sewage issues, and tailored local messages. These were delivered in large volume thanks to our brilliant team of deliverers. They were backed up by social media campaigning, including paid ads. We used specific local campaigns to acquire sign ups, including over 1000 signatures on our ticket office campaign.
* **Fundraising**: Strong fundraising (which will be touched on by John and Kevin) to support campaigning and materials.
* **A bigger team:**  We put a big focus on growing our team and had hundreds of volunteers help through the campaign, including a buzzing campaign office in Malling Street. Thanks to Lesley Boniface and Gina Hawthorne for leading in the office so often and making it friendly and welcoming.
* **Full coverage:** We made sure all parts of the constituency received an active campaign, including traditionally less visited parts. This was vital to our win with James gaining support across the constituency.
* **Data:** Our team made sure to track performance and use data to make our campaign as efficient and targeted as possible

**Other Elections**

* **Polegate South Town Council By-Election**: We finished second by just 12 votes having not even stood before. This by-election set us up well for the general election where we performed better than expected in this part of Polegate. Dionne was a dedicated and strong candidate and deserves our thanks.
* **Wivelsfield Ward 2024 District Council By-Election**: Beginning work in the parts of Lewes district outside the constituency, we campaigned hard in Wivelsfield, increasing our vote by 18% with a 14% swing from the Green party. We finished second behind the Green Party and knocked the Tories into third. Thank you to Nadine Stothard for being a great, hard-working candidate.
* **East Grinstead and Uckfield Constituency**: We achieved a 2nd place finish, with growth potential in Lewes District wards and a clear future constituency target is we can achieve a squeezed labour and green vote. There were less than 30 Lib Dem second places at the election, and this is one of them.
* **Brighton Kemptown**: 3.7% increase to 9.7% meaning deposit comfortably retained despite minimal campaigning. Future of Lewes District wards here should be discussed, especially with Labour in government.
* **Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner Election**: We used the PCC elections to test some of our systems ready for the general election, and put up some posters. There was no coordinated Sussex campaign, and we chose to continue our focus on the coming General Election.

**Looking Ahead**

* **2025 County Council Elections**: Targeting a Liberal Democrat County Council leader needed to maintain GE campaign momentum. We’ll need lots of help to achieve this.
* **2027 Lewes District Council Elections**: Preparing to challenge the Greens with a strategy based on year round campaigning and high visibility with our MP starting now.
* **Future general election** our substantial majority does not guarantee us any future success in a world with highly volatile voting behaviour. It’s essential we establish James as a hard-working local MP to retain an MP here. Work on that has to begin now, and a visible campaign is essential to that.

**Staffing and Media Coverage**

* **Staffing**: Special thanks to Jeremy Halley for his dedicated and exceptional service as Membership and Volunteer Officer during the election campaign. We also welcome Harry Garoghan, our new full-time organiser, and look forward to his contributions. Harry will be working across Lewes and Wealden districts for the vital County Council campaign. I will continue as organiser for two days a week and am working as a Communications Manager for James as our MP for three days a week.
* **Media Coverage**: In my new post we have already achieved significant media coverage on key issues, including the NHS and sewage concerns, with coverage across BBC South East, Meridian, and local newspapers. Despite my efforts, our most memorable press reach occurred when James rolled his eyes in the Commons at Nigel Farage!
* **Thank you to Rob Parsons** who has consistently shown sound judgement, liberal values and humour as chair. He's guided us as a local party towards our win.

Thank you to everyone involved in making 2024 a successful year. We look forward to building on this foundation for even greater achievements.

Meeting finished at 8. 38pm