

HAPPENINGS

Newsletter for the Dundee Liberal Democrat Association

THE COMMITTEE

Convenor: *Cllr Craig Duncan*

Vice Convenor: *Cllr Michael Crichton*

Treasurer: *Cllr Fraser Macpherson*

Secretary & Membership: *Cllr Daniel Coleman*

Ordinary Committee Members:
Thomas Arsenbach, Lewis Miller, Outi Maattanen-Bourke, Lewis White.

Party President: *Dr Jenny Blain*

Hon Party President: *Dr David Stansfield*

Happenings: outi6omb@gmail.com

We have a new website!
All the latest Lib Dem local
and national news:
www.dundeelibdems.org.uk

WEST END FOCUS DELIVERIES
GOING ON AS WE SPEAK...
CAN YOU HELP?
PLEASE CONTACT FRASER ON
07385 936436
Strathmartine Focus deliveries
starting 10th May! If you can
help to deliver in your area
(even couple of streets), please
talk to Daniel.

We must not lose this opportunity to grow

by Cllr Craig Duncan, Convenor



We are now into Spring of 2024 and have, as always, been busy: not only as a council group but as a local party.

Volunteers have been helping our Councillors to deliver the Ferry Focus and we are now also delivering the West End which will be followed by Strathmartine. This is a lot of hard work personally financed but worth its weight in gold, time and again in terms of raising the

profile and credibility of our party in Dundee as proved at the last local elections. It may be three years until the next local elections but we can expect a Westminster one this year and a Holyrood one next year. It will be interesting to see if the unprecedented success of our party locally translates into growth in the share of the vote we get in these elections. We may be some way yet to obtaining a parliamentarian in Dundee but we have to start somewhere. I am optimistic that our hard work and highly visible profile locally will begin to convince voters that our party is worthy of consideration at other levels. No doubt that "regime change" is on its way in the UK and possibly in Scotland. Our party really needs to benefit from the collapse of the votes for the current incumbents if we are ever to grow. I urge anyone who cares about Liberalism to do whatever they can to bring about success and growth. All members are welcome at our local party meetings. I and my colleagues are always happy to discuss anything with members in person or by email, phone etc. I appreciate that each person may have different things they can contribute and I am happy to meet over a coffee, for example. The main thing is that we must grasp this opportunity to grow our party and bring about the sort of values we share and that this country so urgently needs after so many years of maladministration north and south of the border.

ALEX COLE-HAMILTON: SCOTLAND NEEDS A NEW GOVERNMENT

Responding to the resignation of Humza Yousaf as First Minister, Scottish Liberal Democrat leader Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP said:

“Today will be a difficult day for Humza Yousaf. I thank him for his service and I wish him and his family well for the future. Humza Yousaf’s resignation hurls the SNP another step closer towards the end. This is a stale government that has been in power too long.”

“Scotland needs a new government- one that won’t make empty promises but will get the basics right.

“For 17 years, the SNP have been ignoring the people who do most of the heavy lifting. People are working harder but feel like they are falling further behind and are being taken for granted.

“By focusing on what really matters, Scottish Liberal Democrats can bring new hope to everyone who can’t get a GP appointment or see an NHS dentist, new hope to our schools slipping down the international rankings, businesses struggling to make ends meet and islanders left without lifeline ferries.

“We can’t go on like this. This country can’t have yet another First Minister without an election.”

LOCAL BUSES AXED IN DUNDEE

Petitions from local residents fell on deaf ears when the SNP-led Dundee City Council decided to stop funding for three bus routes: 204, 206 and 236, leaving many people without easy access to public transport.

These buses used to serve locals in Broughty Ferry, the West End, Lochee, Stobswell, Mill O’Mains, Linlathen and Claverhouse. Cllr **Fraser Macpherson** said:

“In my own ward area, my ward colleague Cllr **Michael Crichton** and I have received many concerns about the loss of Service 204. It served some streets that have either no alternative bus service – like Windsor Street, Magdalen Yard Road and Roseangle – or very little in the way of an alternative service – like Tullideph Road.”



Broughty Ferry councillor **Craig Duncan**, whose ward is served by Service 206, said :

“I am angered by the needless loss of the 206 and other similar community lifeline services elsewhere in the city. Bus 206 has been a great help to many residents taking them into central Broughty Ferry for shopping and also to Dobbie’s at Ethiebeaton Park. All credit goes to the locals who have organised petitions against the loss of the 206 but the SNP council administration has ignored all calls to save these three bus services.”

“I do sometimes wonder about the sense of priority of Dundee City Council. Saving the 204, 206 and 236 bus services would have cost just £136 000 out of a total council revenue budget next year of £462 million.”

“Furthermore, the SNP administration last year spent £85 000 of public money on hybrid equipment to run council committee meetings simultaneously online and in-person. This was, in the view of the Liberal Democrat Group not a priority while vital services are under pressure.”

“I think if you asked the Dundee public if £85 000 should be spent on council committee hybrid equipment or on vital bus services that are used mainly by older residents, I think we all know what they would say. It shows how out of touch the SNP administration has become.”

A new start for Liberal International Scotland

The Liberal International (LI) Scottish Committee will be formally re-launched at the Spring Conference in Hamilton in May 2024. The new Convenor, ex-MEP Sir Graham Watson is a well-known veteran of international politics. There is space for liberal thinking, he says.



LI, a forum for liberals around the world to debate, share ideas, analyse and influence international affairs, has been on a backburner in Scotland since the pandemic but no more. A newly formed Committee has already met on Zoom a couple of times and is busy planning for future activities. One of the aims is to raise the profile of international issues in party conferences. In Hamilton, LI Scotland will hold a fringe meeting and set up a stall to catch party members who might want to join.

Liberal democratic values do not seem to feature much in the avalanche of news about wars and conflicts, the rise of populist governments and polarisation of politics in general. In recent years, the tone of debate and dialogue has also hardened around the world. Still, liberalism is not a spent force according to Sir Graham.

“As the great **Russell Johnston** used to say, Liberalism is often most neglected when it is most needed. Yet I detect that Liberal ideas are once again gaining ground, perhaps as a counter-reaction to the rise of the populist right,” says Sir Graham and adds:

“As the need for Liberalism grows, more and more people seem prepared to call themselves Liberals. The Liberal International has raised its game to respond to this new demand and is doing hugely valuable work, for instance in defending and promoting human rights in international fora.”

Liberal parties around the world share a common ground, but there are differences as well. According to Sir Graham, there is more that unites than divides. The main differences are between those who are fundamentally economic Liberals and those who espouse social liberalism.

“In my experience, this narcissism of small differences is overblown. Liberals all believe in the dignity and worth of the individual as the cornerstone of society. When I led the Liberal Group in the European Parliament (2002-09) we were sometimes dismissed by our opponents as being a broad and disparate coalition; in fact our members had much more in common than that which divides, for example, the UK Labour Party and Greece's PASOK socialist party,” he says.

“With the possible exception of South America, where Liberalism currently has a distinctly free-market and anti-statist flavour, most Liberals remain neither enamoured of the market or overly attached to the state, but healthily sceptical of both for their tendency to abuse of power if unchecked.”

Sadly, Brexit has weakened Britain's position in the international arena.

“Brexit has been hugely costly to the United Kingdom's reputation among democracies and I fear it will take us many years to recover. Already we are having difficulty securing international diplomatic posts for UK citizens.”

“Membership of the EU - even more so than of bodies such as NATO, the UN and the Council of Europe - gave us huge heft in the world. Unless the UK moves soon to re-join the EU, the danger of its losing Northern Ireland and Scotland will grow. Both Scotland and Northern Ireland voted clearly to remain in the EU and have been taken out against their will, which is a recipe for trouble,” Sir Graham says.

He has had a lifelong interest in international politics. Sir Graham was a Vice President (1977-79) and Secretary General (1979-81) of the International Federation of Liberal and Radical Youth, a Member of the European Liberal Democrats' Council from 1983-93 and a Member of the European Parliament from 1994-2014. He is probably best known for having become the Leader of a group of just 43 Members of the European Parliament and building it up to 108 MEPs, the largest third party ever in the EP, between 2002 and 2009.

“I consider myself immensely fortunate to have been introduced to international politics at an impressionable age within the framework of the Council of Europe's international political youth work which evolved after the anti-Vietnam-war student riots of the late 1960s.”

“I met the woman who became my wife at a Young Liberal summer camp which we hosted near Broxburn in West Lothian; she was the leader of the Italian YL delegation there. I had the honour of working for Party leaders Russell Johnston and **David Steel**, each a great international Liberal thinker, who opened my mind to a broader horizon; as a linguist I was able to thrive in that environment. “

“Perhaps the most fascinating moment of my career was taking part in the European Parliament's first official delegation to North Korea, about which I have written in the books I published between 1995 and 2015.”



Outi Maattanen-Bourke

LI is a worldwide federation of liberal parties and politicians around the world and for organisations sharing liberal ideas. Founded in 1947, it's a network of liberals based on shared ideas of human rights, multi-party democracy, free and fair elections, social justice and tolerance. Activities include conferences, meetings and seminars, manifestos, lectures on current topics and fund-raising for LI.

<https://liberal-international.org/who-we-are/our-mission/#>

The Scottish Committee is part of Liberal International British Group (LIBG). The current chair of LIBG is former MEP Irina von Wiese, a civil rights activist and lawyer.

More on how to join on <https://www.libg.uk/about-libg>

What happened to the SNP vote?

by Lewis Miller, senior politics lecturer, Dundee University

Up until now, it has been widely assumed that the SNP would continue as the largest party at the next general election. The SNP themselves clearly expect this, agreeing in 2023 at their conference, that a majority of seats would empower the Scottish Government to ‘begin immediate negotiations with the UK Government to give democratic effect to Scotland becoming an independent country’. But the major issue for the SNP is that even if they get their majority, they are almost certain to lose a significant number of seats.

Their current vote is very efficiently distributed, where 45% of the vote wins 81% of the seats. But a recent YouGov’s MRP projection has the SNP losing 29 seats, winning only 19 seats. The question is: can a party win 19 seats from their notional 48 seats, win under 40% of the vote, and then use this as a platform to negotiate independence?

The answer is probably no and the SNP knows it. This is why their conference voted to use the 2026 Scottish Parliament elections as a de facto independence referendum. This will probably also not work.

The SNP's independence strategy is not the only thing at risk - their majority is too. The SNP has a significant number of seats to defend, with fewer members and finances to defend them with. Meanwhile, opposition parties will almost certainly focus their resources on fewer target seats; Labour in the central belt, the Liberal Democrats in their traditionally strong areas, and the Conservatives most likely in the North East. The SNP will have to cut seats loose.

What has allowed this is the SNP's faltering voter base. Recent polling shows the SNP retaining only around two-thirds of their 2019 vote, with most of this vote turning to Labour. Ipsos has shown for some time that only around a third of SNP voters choose independence as one of their top three issues facing the country.

Two main trends

As with all election predictions, there is always the chance that the campaign causes a change in direction. Assuming no significant change in circumstances before the election, colleagues and I are asking – what’s happened to the SNP vote? We have been exploring two broad trends that may explain it.

One hypothesis emphasises the changing economic environment. Ipsos’ political monitor has shown for some time that voters are prioritising material issues – healthcare, inflation and the economy - over post-material issues such as identity. The current rising issues for voters include housing and unemployment, again material issues. It is in these areas that the SNP’s lead has declined most substantially, signalling that their reputation for public management has been slowly eroding.

The second is that the SNP can no longer monopolise the anti-Conservative vote as they once did. One of the most commonly given reasons for support for independence is dissatisfaction with Westminster. As we appear to be moving towards a large Labour majority, the SNP's plan for how to best to escape the Conservatives must now compete with others.

The result will likely be that both the Conservatives and SNP will try to politicise the Union throughout the election campaign. Ironically, both parties need the threat of the other to mobilise their voters. Yet what the two factors above show is that times have changed. Both parties, by failing to engage with the issues that matter to voters, may find themselves even more alienated as we proceed through the campaign.