

HSLD Chair's Report 2024

When I was reelected as chair at the AGM last year I was very clear that 2024 would be a year which was all about working towards a General Election.

As the campaign manager for a Moving Forwards Plus seat my time was expected to mainly be taken up with building a winning campaign and there was a general agreement that the best way to further our aims was to get more Lib Dems elected who shared the same values.

We had a number of other members of the 2024 exec also involved in helping to lead or support other GE candidate teams or indeed being a PPC themselves it was pretty clear that this needed to be our priority!

Nevertheless we managed to plan for Spring Conference in York, with a stall at the exhibition. Thanks to all those who supported HSLD at Spring Conference.

We also worked towards a bigger presence at the Brighton Autumn conference and we were just in the process of discussing plans when the GE was called.

We immediately moved into GE mode. The exec met to discuss supporting some Candidate campaigns and made a joint decision to make a financial contribution to a small number of candidates who support Humanist and secular values.

HSLD activity was then paused whilst we focussed on the election campaign.

Of course, the outcome was just wonderful and beyond anything we could have wished for. 72 Lib Dem MPs elected, including some of those whom we had given some financial support for!

In the following days we watched as our MPs were sworn in. It was amazing to see that 34 of our MPs chose to affirm rather than swear on a religious text. Such a promising number!

Autumn conference felt like a wonderful celebration. HSLD held a packed fringe event on the subject of secularism with guest speakers Andrew Copson, Chief Exec of Humanists UK, Baroness Burt and Tom Gordon MP, chaired by our very own Jenny Wilkinson.

Our stall in the exhibition hall had lots of visitors throughout conference dropping by for a chat or joining up as new members.

I was also honoured to be asked as Chair of HSLD to speak at Humanist UK's conference reception event. It was just so fabulous to hear from so many brand new Lib Dem MPs. Their words said it all. All that was left for me to do was to reflect how wonderful it is to have so many newly elected MPs to speak on Humanist and Secular values!

Conference encapsulated what 2024 had been about for HSLD. There is no better way to further our values than to get more Humanist Liberal Democrats elected. And we have certainly achieved that this year. And what a year it has been!!

It has been quite a change to now have a Labour government in place and to have the Conservatives a much depleted party on the opposition benches. It has certainly opened up some opportunities that may not have been possible before. However, from a HSLD perspective a Labour Government also brings some challenges.

Most recently, Wes Streeting coming out publicly as opposing the Assisted Dying bill has been a real disappointment. This Bill is perhaps the biggest and most significant we have seen this year on a subject that HSLD has spoken about many times before. We will continue to work closely with Humanists UK and our MPs over the next few weeks and beyond into next year

2025 will no doubt offer challenges and potential opportunities for HSLD. With so many LD MPs now on the Green benches we need to work closely with those who aligned with our values to see what levers we can pull.

I will be stepping down as chair this year after 2 years in the role. Now working for a LibDem MP who is a humanist, I feel that my time is best spent making sure we keep him in Parliament.

I will be happy to stay on supporting the exec in either a vice chair role or as an ordinary exec member if the membership would like me to.

Thank you to everyone in HSLD, especially my fellow committee members. Thank you to the organisations and individuals we have worked with who have helped make the year such an amazing one for us!