

Regional Chair's Report 2020
James Read

Due to delays caused by the General Election, it was 1st March when I became Regional Chair, and at that time it was 2 months before what was to be an important set of local and Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) elections.

Within the first couple of weeks, these elections had been postponed as the scale of the Covid-19 pandemic became clear, and shortly afterwards we began lockdown and all usual campaigning activities were put on hold.

Regional Executive meetings, which I had intended to make 50% virtual, have of course all been virtual this year, which I think is likely to continue in the future even after the pandemic is over. The Regional party bought a Zoom account which has been loaned to Local Parties for their virtual meetings as well.

While missing the chance to catch up over a coffee, virtual meetings & our first digital conference have enabled many members to attend and contribute who normally might not have been able to do so. This allows us to be more inclusive and for attendees to be more representative of the membership

We then had a national leadership election conducted purely online. South Central region held an online Q+A session with both, ours was one of the first virtual hustings, attendance of which was higher than has ever been possible before due to room size limitations. I'd like to congratulate our region's MP, Layla Moran, on a valiant fight, and of course Ed Davey on becoming our new leader.

The Regional Party exists to help Local Parties grow, keep everything legal and constitutional, and ultimately to get more Liberal Democrats elected at all levels, whether that is a Local Party trying to get their first councillor elected, all the way up to those Local Parties who are aiming to take control of their local Council, and getting MPs elected.

No elections have been possible this year of course, but we have been working hard to develop our people throughout the region to give us the best chance of electoral success next year. Our Regional Campaign staff have been working with Local Parties throughout the region on campaign plans, development plans, training of members and the reintroduction of campaign activities as the year has progressed.

At the beginning of the year we had 2 Regional Development Officers, Tom Wood and Chris Ward, as well as a part-time Admin Officer, Simon Sansbury. I'm glad to report that all 3 are still employed by the regional party:

- Tom has increased his hours to full time and is now the only Regional Development Officer, working with the Local Parties who don't normally get much support from HQ, those who are trying to win some local council seats, and I know that his work has been invaluable for these Local Parties.
- Chris Ward, along with Colin McDougall who has recently been recruited, are both Regional Campaign Managers jointly funded by HQ and Region, and both Chris and Colin will be working closely with seats through the region to increase the amount of "gold on the map".
- Simon remains our Admin Officer.

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I would like to thank Chris Ward, Tom Wood and Simon Sansbury for all they have done in their roles to help everyone in the Region this year, and to formally welcome Colin McDougall to the team.

I can announce that we now have Police and Crime Commissioner candidates in place for next years' election – for Hampshire & Isle of Wight we have Richard Murphy and for Thames Valley we have John Howson. Congratulations to both of them.

I would like to thank all of you - every member & registered supporter in our region for your continued support, and for everything that each of you do for the party.

Finally, I would like to thank every member of the Regional Executive who have done so much for the Region again this year, in very unusual and trying circumstances, and I look forward to continuing to work with you all next year.

James Read

October 2020