

# **Open letter to Local party AGMs from Catherine Bearder, Chair South Central region. November 2024**

Dear fellow Liberal Democrats,

The first thing I would like to say is thank you all for being part of the most successful Liberal Democrat party in living memory. The results we had this July were down to our members and supporters being there, helping out locally, going to our targets, raising funds, spreading the word about our policies and philosophies and generally swelling the party. Without this movement from the ground level we would not have had the successes we did. Winning 72 MPs and becoming the largest 3rd party has certainly put us back on the political map! The evidence shows that the Lib Dems out campaigned all the other parties and it really paid off.

But they aren't just MPs, the skills and experiences that they bring to the legislative processes is stunning. We have climate experts, train and travel experts, experts in the fields of charitable organisations, education, businesses, medicine, law enforcement, farming and veterinary science of course and just about every aspect of daily life. They will serve us, their country and their local communities very well indeed.

And of course in this region we now have elected 12 excellent champions. I remember Tom Wood telling us last year that in order to double our previous general election result we just needed to elect 2 MPs, but that we were targeting 4 and that was going to be a massive ask, so we were in for a lot of work. Well he underestimated what our members could help us achieve! So a massive thank you from the region, for whatever you managed in the General election, every single bit helped.

The general election came hot on the heels of local elections for some, as well as the Police and Crime Commissioner elections for the whole region. A huge thank you to all the candidates who stood for us, thanks to those who won and to those who didn't and for those who stood in frankly very unwinnable places, the fact that we put candidates up in nearly all our seats showed the voters that we are serious about winning and the policy of not standing aside is paying dividends. Next year we have county council and unitary elections and that means a lot more candidates need to be found, but I am pleased to report that this work is well underway and I look forward to seeing great results next spring.

But, and there is always a but, the others are learning and watching our successes. Reform are starting to copy us and are beginning to make inroads at local by elections. They see what we do and are trying to copy. At the moment we are holding our own and doing well in those by elections but the signs are there, we've lost in a few places where we stopped working. A good result in one election is no guarantee that it will always be so, we still need that work outside of election times. We also need new members, who direct and support the party.

However, there again we need to be vigilant. With the collapse of the Tories and their new leader being from the right, many one nation Tories will be looking for new homes. As members can join online it's not always certain who is actually a real Liberal at heart. It is for the local party to check new recruits as you only have 6 weeks to shout if you see, say, ex councillors joining that you think should not be in our midst. Please keep an eye on this, you know your community in a way which the HQ membership department cannot.

Finally, this is my last year as your Chair. It's been an enormous privilege to chair the region, seeing your successes over the last 3 years has been a delight, and coping with some of the more challenging hiccoughs has taken my time. But I've enjoyed working with you all. Now it's back to a quieter time with more time for leaflet delivery for me. I bow out with a big thanks for your support and I wish you all good luck in the coming year.

**Catherine Bearder**

**Chair South Central Region Liberal Democrats**