

## **131st Assembly in York.**

The York Assembly was well attend and provoked some spirited debate about the future of our Party. For the motions passed as amended download the document at <http://liberal.org.uk/assembly/2016/assemblyMOTIONS.pdf>

### **Why Assembly Matters : Not just going through the motions.** Alison Micklem.

It was good to welcome Liberal Friends to York once again. It is important to have an opportunity to get together to debate specific areas of policy and the general position of the Party, particularly in times of such political upheaval. However, perhaps the most significant function of the Assembly for our small and widely scattered Party is to bring people together for mutual support and encouragement.



Many of our councillors operate in isolation in a political environment which is at best indifferent, at worst actively hostile. Their attempts to stand up for principles of justice, fairness, freedom of speech, open government, participative democracy and equality before the law are all too often dismissed as unnecessary boat-rocking and trouble-making, but while others in authority may wish they could be silenced, the fact that they get re-elected indicates that their efforts are appreciated by the communities they represent.

The Liberal Party may no longer have much of a voice on the national stage, but in the local communities where it still operates it punches far above its weight, because the individuals concerned are motivated by deeply held convictions. If meeting with others of like mind and good will helps generate the energy needed to keep our local campaigners going then the Annual Assembly still serves a significant purpose.

### **Liberals demand tougher action on the blight of vacant housing.** By Cllr Steve Radford, President of the Liberal Party.

A key debate was how to tackle the blight of long-term vacant houses The government treats as long-term vacants those being vacant for more than 6 months continuously.

These often attract anti-social behaviour, detract from the local neighbourhood as well as limit the availability of domestic properties for sale or rent at a time when higher numbers are homeless or living in grossly overcrowded homes.



According to figures from the charity Empty Homes, there are at least 600,000 empty properties in England, of which 200,000 have been unoccupied for over 12 months continuously.

Cllr Steve Radford proposed that properties left vacant for more than one year should automatically become liable for payment of at least double or more than the relevant level of council tax decided by the local council which can judge the housing market. A liberal alternative to government which often imposes a policy suited for London on the whole country.

Once such a property had been brought back into occupation for a year, the landlord would be able to claim a rebate on the fees paid.

We also called for financial assistance to qualifying landlords to return properties to the market, paid for by the funds raised in the original proposal, in order to increase the availability of accommodation for those in need.

The call for action on vacant homes was welcomed by Liberals from throughout the country.

Liberals believe in property ownership and encouraging people to have their own homes, we also recognise the need for an adequate supply of affordable rented homes giving people security and a base from which to obtain employment.

We always want to hear from Liberals around the country so feel free to send us your articles, letters or news items. Liberal News is your forum to reach every other member of the Party. Liberal News can be contacted at: [cjlenton@gmail.com](mailto:cjlenton@gmail.com) or [northwestliberalparty@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:northwestliberalparty@hotmail.co.uk).

By mail at Liberal Party, 41 Sutton Street, Liverpool, L13 7EG.

# **Why go on Hunger Strike?**

**Liberal  
News.**



**Winter 2016.**

**Cllr John Clark of Ryedale, North Yorkshire explains the lengths he is willing to go to when public authorities fail to listen to serious concerns.**

### **Why go on hunger strike?**

This is a question I asked myself many times before deciding to pitch my tent on the doorstep of North Yorkshire County Council.

A friend of mine had been struggling to stop her mother being abused in a nursing home. The nightmare had gone on for two years. As neither the daughter nor her mother lived in my County Division I helped as an advocate member of the public – not as a Liberal County Councillor. My first piece of advice turned out to be completely wrong; did I think it would be a good idea to have a camera installed in her mother's room? Civil Liberties, privacy etc. all sprung to mind. Certainly not, was my view. The camera was duly installed.



This has produced much more evidence of the abuse in the last 12 months than in the previous two years.

I attended five or six safeguarding meetings. Evidence of abuse, lying, falsifying evidence, changing professional recommendations were present at these meetings. At the last but one meeting I came to the conclusion nothing was being done. I asked which organisation has the power to do something? I was told the police or the Care Quality Commity. Neither of these organisations had been to any of the earlier meetings. Both were invited to the next meeting. Neither turned up.

Evidence showed that abuse was still happening nine months after 'almost criminal' abuse had been viewed by the police. The Crown Prosecution Service had turned down the 'criminal case'. Leaving me with the question who should be prosecuted; if not the abusers should it be the safeguarders?

In a meeting with the Regional Head of CQC, she said "We cannot take action; it is up to the Local Authority." This was 'pass the parcel'. No organisation was prepared to act. Meanwhile the abuse was now approaching three years. I took the personal decision to go on 'hunger strike'. Within four days this forced a very senior meeting of the police, NHS, North Yorkshire County Council and the CQC.

I suspended my hunger strike. Now, a month later, there are still no explanations for what has gone wrong. More importantly there has still been no enforcement action. I am left with the question "why go on hunger strike".

**Liberal News Opinion.** Cllr Clark's provocative protest was a necessary response to the failure of various public bodies to take action . It is our worry that in the coming months and years as budgets in the NHS & Councils come under further stress from both growing need and financial constraints cases of this nature could well grow. It is time that the long term funding of these services be put on a sustainable basis.

The requirement is for more money and certainty that higher taxes are being spent on care not management consultants and profits for private firms. Public health is a matter for the public sector and the common good not the profit motive.

This letter was recently published in the weekly Oxford Times.



### **Redistribute Wealth.**

Sir - Liberals who voted to leave the EU will be pleased to know that at the 131st Liberal Assembly in York, the Liberal Party welcomed the result of the Referendum. The Liberal Party, unlike the Liberal Democratic Party, has been broadly EU-sceptic since at least 1990, when it opposed the UK adopting the Euro.

One example of taking back control is that the EU will no longer be able to prevent, on grounds of discrimination against young EU-born UK citizens, the Liberal Party policy of gradual introduction of a UK Universal Inheritance endowment of capital for all UK-born UK citizens at 25. This endowment would be financed by the abolition of current unlimited exemptions and reliefs from Inheritance Tax for land and businesses, together with a shift of progressive taxation towards total lifetime inherited and gifted capital received, including the endowment itself, and away from lifetime total capital given and bequeathed. Such a universal endowment is in keeping with the traditional Preamble to the Liberal Party Constitution, regrettably dropped by the Liberal Democratic Party at the time of their merger, which calls for Liberty, Property and Security for all.

The real Liberal Party is the radical Liberal alternative to Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrats for those who genuinely care about greater equality of opportunity in health, education and the inheritance of wealth. Why, with the growing awareness of the iniquities of vastly and dangerously increasing inequality of income and wealth, is there so little mention generally of the positive redistribution of inherited wealth? Liberal Party policy is to reform dynastic capitalism into liberal opportunity capitalism in each new generation, and to put VAT on private health and private education in order to increase resources for the NHS and for non-selective State schools and their sporting facilities.

Dane Clouston, Oxfordshire Liberals Member, Liberal Party National Executive Committee.



**Cllr Chris Ash of Peterborough considers the nature of democracy** after the political turmoil of the recent past. This article was first published in a local leaflet over the summer.

Over the last few weeks I have asked myself what is democracy ? For some a new voting system is all that's needed to sort things.

I believe we need a good look at how government works for us (or doesn't work) Our national government system is stuck in the 18th century.

A modern voting system is the icing on the cake – I want the cake to be baked properly first not half baked and not 250 years old.

Those who are in a position to take control will happily remind us that they are there because of our democratic system, they now take charge. The cabinet system is a classic example of that.

We may have open and fair elections, but is true democracy the beneficiary or the victim? I think with our system, it is the victim.

We have a free and fair voting system, we can disagree publicly with our rulers, our press is free to ridicule governors. It's democracy that allows me to be where I am today.

So why do I think democracy suffers?

Let's start with the whipping system which tells our representatives to follow the party line. It puts political rulers first, not us. Political control is put ahead of true representation. There are some mavericks within parties and I wish them luck.

A few of us look to represent local residents not the party. We prefer to work outside party political control to represent you. This is hard at local level but with the national media it would be virtually impossible at Westminster.

Power to govern at local level is a favour from central government, not a right. That favour can be taken away any time and changes are often made. For example local concerns with recent ward boundary changes were over ruled by officials in London. Surely true democracy is about people and I believe that power should be from local level upwards, not top down, The great thing about local Councils especially Parish or Community Councils is that your representatives are fairly close by. Even if they don't live around the corner they are approachable. Can you say that about the Police Commissioner or your Euro MEP? Government proposals for so called devolution and a single Mayor to be in control of a large area will , I am sure, add to bureaucracy with its expensive set ups to run it all. Money that should be spent providing services not gravy trains. *Continues on next page.*

A lot of effort was put into escaping the strangle hold of Cambridgeshire and enable us to develop links with our neighbours to the north and west.

Our system is set up for controllers not true democracy representational or otherwise. Our only input above local level is putting a cross on a piece of paper once every four years.

Had we the opportunity I would have voted No to the Maastricht and Lisbon treaties.

Our political masters allowed the EU set up we now have now – no wonder most at the top want us to stay. Its ideal for those control freaks.

I also suspect those in the out camp who aren't in full control see leaving as an opportunity for them to have more control over you and me.

Either way the gravy trains will thunder on.

For me the EU vote is not a case of what is best for us but what is the least worst – I still don't know but one thing I am sure of: democracy will be the victim.

**Letters to the Editor of newspapers and articles in our local leaflets concerning issue beyond pavement politics help remind people that the Liberal Party is not just about local issues and has a wider set of ideas that need to be presented to the public.**

### **NEC Elections:**

The NEC agreed the following extended schedule for nominations for the NEC and Party President to encourage maximum participation

Anyone wishing to nominate or self nominate for the NEC should e mail [cjenton@gmail.com](mailto:cjenton@gmail.com) or write to: The Liberal Party, 38 Horsfield Way, Dunnington, York, YO19 5RH. Only 3 members are required to nominate anyone standing for the NEC.

For the position of Party President 40 nominations are required. The closing date will be 10th February 2017.

### **Special Assembly**

There will be a special assembly at 12.30 on Saturday 25th Feb at 12.30 at the Briar Rose Hotel, Bennetts Hill Birmingham with a view to update Education and Penal Reform policies.

However members are welcome to table any other items of interest for debate and should e mail them to Danny at the earliest opportunity at [danielwood24@hotmail.com](mailto:danielwood24@hotmail.com)

### **Pharmacies**

**The following motion was passed at the Birmingham National Executive Saturday 26th November. NEC motions indicate campaigning priorities suggested by Party members or officers and allow for an action focused expression of established policy already passed by the Assembly.**

**Pharmacies in England have noted with alarm that the Government is making a 12% reduction to their budgets by the spring of 2017 with further reductions indicated for the financial year 2017/18.**

**The NEC of the Liberal Party believes that pharmacies in communities are a vital part of both the health service and the retail mix which keeps our high streets vibrant.**

**It welcomes the fact that all organisations representing pharmacies are offering to undertake more work for the NHS in a range of services which would relieve pressure on our GPs. This would mean that the GPs could then spend more time with ill patients and in turn relieve hospitals of some of their burdens.**

**Pharmacies could be commissioned to undertake additional services by the Local Authorities and CCG's.**

**The Liberal Party Chair on behalf of the NEC will write to the Secretary of State for Health when these reports are produced to protest about the short-sighted approach of the Government in making huge cuts in a valuable and valued front-line service which could be better harnessed to save large amounts of money and provide a more localised service to patients.**