

# Conference Report from Liverpool



The Lib Dem Conference in Liverpool has just finished. As ever, the media decided what the story was to be, and then went looking for stories about splits etc...  
To counterbalance that, we asked some Conference reps about their experience.

## Health & Wellbeing

*David Rogers*

Back in July, our Coalition Government published a White Paper about social care and health, called *Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS*. Almost all the media coverage at the time was about the proposals in it for GP consortia to commission health services, and the implications for local government were ignored. That was regrettable - but at Federal Conference in Liverpool there were fringe meetings almost every lunchtime and evening about this issue. Our Minister of State in the Department of Health, Paul Burstow, spoke at most of these, as well as answering questions from the conference as a whole during a Ministerial Q&A session.

We should warmly welcome the proposed return of Public Health to local government, as it is that profession which has many links to housing, healthy leisure activities, and environmental health services. The White Paper also proposes setting up Health and Wellbeing Boards to help further integrate social care and health. Local government will have a leading role on these, and the boards will include input from the GP commissioning consortia and others. So Conference provided the opportunity to interact with Paul Burstow and Lib Dem lead members from around the country on all of this, before the consultation period ends in October.

## Interpreting the “Big Society”

*Gail Bones*

At a fringe meeting, both Simon Hughes and Sarah Teather emphasised the fact that this is what Lib Dems believe in and have campaigned for, whatever it's called - pluralism, liberalism or localism. We must see beyond the name and make this our own, which to some extent we already do. We need, as councillors and activists, to engage with the voluntary sector, community groups and public service organisations. Matthew Taylor (CE RSA) said we can use this to show a real differential between us and the Tories.

Ideologically it's very strong and the Conservatives who are not pro-reform, are unhappy with the Big Society concept. We can give it credibility with our record of community politics. It was clear from our two MPs that this is seen as something which can work well for us on the doorstep if we are willing to work, building capacity in poor communities, encouraging public service organisations to work with the third sector and volunteers and to do this under the umbrella of local government. But must come from ground up, with quick decisions seen to be made and kept.

There is a good campaigning format for us here, particularly in a rural constituency where services are not over-abundant.

## Government Minister to visit Lifton - do come along!

No less than the Minister of State for the Armed Forces – otherwise known as our friend, Nick Harvey, Lib Dem MP for North Devon. He will be at the Lifton Hall Hotel on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> October from 7pm – 9pm, where he will give a short talk, followed by questions and answers.

Tickets (£3.00) cover tea, coffee and biscuits, though stronger beverages will also be available.

For more information, please contact Gail on **01566 783 415** (and leave a message on the answerphone if there is no reply!)

## Even the Olympics.....

At the Party's conference Cllr Alison Clish-Green lobbied Olympic athlete Jonathan Edwards about ways to attract a team to West Devon, which has been approved as a training camp area.

Alison told Jonathan "We desperately need to attract funding if we are to be successful in getting a team to train in West Devon. It would be a real boost for West Devon if we succeeded."



## Fairer Votes

*Alison Clish-Green*

At the launch of the Fairer Votes Campaign, hosted by the Electoral Reform Society, Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg called on Liberal Democrats to support this all-party movement.

"People now have the opportunity to throw out the archaic First Past The Post system in a referendum on the 5<sup>th</sup> May," he said. "AV is a fairer system which forces MPs to work harder to earn and keep your support."

Other speakers at the rally were Pam Giddy and Martin Bell.

You can find more information at:  
[www.fairervotes.org.uk](http://www.fairervotes.org.uk)

## Record Numbers

Chris Fox (Chief Exec of the Lib Dems) told us that over 7000 people attended Conference – a record number.

For more information, please see the Federal Party website: [www.libdems.org.uk](http://www.libdems.org.uk)

## Winning Here!

*John Farrand-Rogers*

The Labour spin machine would have everybody believe the Lib Dems are in terminal decline, and the BBC and most newspapers have been obediently following this line.

But, between the formation of the Coalition Government and our Conference, the Lib Dems have made seven net gains in local elections – three from Labour and four from the Conservatives.

At a training session organised by the Campaigns Department, we were strongly encouraged to pass on the good news - so here it is!

## Academies and Free Schools

*John Farrand-Rogers*

The debate on this was interesting because it highlighted strong differences between ourselves and the Conservative's hardliners. We are not ideologically opposed to the efficient organisation of resources through local government.

The motion came forward from the floor, rather than the leadership. There was an amendment which shifted the emphasis for action from ordinary people to the Parliamentary Party, but this was defeated.

## Devon & Cornwall and Western Counties Joint Regional Conference and Regional AGMs

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More details from: Val Cox: [val.cox3@btinternet.com](mailto:val.cox3@btinternet.com) (Devon & Cornwall)