

Special all-members Liberal Democrat News



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(photo: John Russell)

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Delivering in government

In the first seven months in government we have seen a massive amount of the Liberal Democrat manifesto turned into actual government policy. As Party President Tim Farron points out in his back-page column, 65 per cent of our manifesto commitments are in the Coalition Agreement.

After years of opposition, where all we could do was shout from the sidelines, we are now delivering real reform that will improve people's lives. There have been some tough decisions too - most notably on tackling the deficit and finding a fairer funding system for Higher Education.

But despite these challenges we have made real progress on the priorities that we set out at the General Election.

Fairer taxes

Lifting 900,000 lowest earners out of tax completely

Increasing Capital Gains Tax to 28% for higher rate taxpayers (18% basic rate)

A fair start

The Pupil Premium: £2.5bn extra funding for the poorest children

Extending childcare provision to include poorest two-year-olds
Education White Paper freeing schools from Whitehall control

Fair politics

A referendum on the Alternative Vote and fixed term parliaments

Reform of party funding
Moving towards a reformed House of Lords
Devolution of power to councils and communities

Green economy

The Green Deal: 100,000 jobs to insulate and upgrade homes, reducing carbon emissions and saving money
A Green Investment Bank
Replacing Air Passenger Duty with a per-plane duty
Scrapping Heathrow's third runway

Older people

Restoring link between pensions and earnings with a triple lock to guarantee a 2.5 per cent rise
£140 per week flat rate

pension to be announced soon
Increasing Winter Fuel Allowance
£400m for carers' respite care

Banking

Raising £2.5bn per year via a banking levy
A Commission on separating investment and retail banking
Reforms to get banks lending to businesses

Civil liberties

Abolition of ID cards
Outlawing finger-printing of children without permission
Moving to end child detention in immigration

Regional growth

£1.4bn Regional Growth Fund
- job creation across the UK

Reforming the CAP

George Lyon



This year, my first full year as an MEP, I have been kept busy by setting out the European Parliament's position on the future reform of the Common Agricultural Policy – not an easy task for a new MEP.

But in combining my two great passions - politics and farming - it was a privilege to be at the forefront of modernising the oldest, and often most difficult, EU policy.

Over the years the CAP has been lambasted as a wasteful boondoggle, inefficient, bureaucratic and beholden to special interests. Some have even gone so far to suggest that it should be scrapped altogether.

To simply abandon the CAP would have a devastating impact on food security, the environment and the viability of many rural communities.

Slashing direct support payments to farmers would lead to the demise of food production across vast tracts of poor quality land in Europe.

At the same time, food production would intensify on the good quality land which could lead to serious environmental degradation.

Such an approach would cause untold damage to our landscape, the social fabric of rural communities and the environment.

But the CAP must be reformed to make it relevant for the major challenge of the new century, including climate change.

Under my proposals, for the first time direct support payments to farmers across Europe will be linked to efforts to reduce harmful emissions.

A greener CAP will treat farmers as part of the solution to climate change, not part of the problem.

In the coming years we face the perfect storm; a global population coupled with a substantial increase in demand for food against the backdrop of less land, less water and less energy due to climate change.

Our future food security and the sustainability of our food production system must be at the epicentre of CAP reform. This must be tackled through both direct payments and rural development measures.

But in directing support payments to farmers, we must ensure that the CAP does so fairly.

I see putting sustainability, fairness and green credentials at the heart of the CAP as a Liberal Democrat legacy, something we can all be very proud of.

George Lyon is an MEP for Scotland

Trident replacement deferred

NICK HARVEY reveals *Liberal Democrat success on defence*

Liberal Democrats in government have ensured that the 'Main Gate' decision on the replacement of Trident will be delayed to 2016 – after the end of this parliament. This means that on our watch there will be no final decision to renew.

This was delivered as part of the 'Value for Money Study of Trident and its planned replacement' that Liberal Democrats ensured formed part of the coalition agreement. It

was thanks to this study that the government also decided to reduce the numbers of warheads and missiles on each submarine.

Participating in the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) wasn't easy, especially in the context of Labour's legacy of debt and mismanagement of the Ministry of Defence (MoD). However I believe we managed to strike the right balance between making savings and placing Britain's Armed

Forces on a sustainable footing for years to come.

We have cemented our commitment to Afghanistan and will continue to meet NATO's recommended two percent of GDP being allocated to defence spending over the next four years.

Difficult decisions had to be made regarding the cancellation of Nimrod – and the choice between Tornado/Harrier – but the savings that will be made as a result of this

will allow the MoD to raise Chinook numbers from 46 to 60 and improve operational capability in theatres of conflict.

There is still much work to be done, especially in the exploration of alternatives to Trident. However the results of the SDSR and the Coalition's defence policy reflect a tangible Liberal Democrat influence and this is certainly a cause for optimism.

Nick Harvey is Armed Forces Minister

Saving our local post offices

EDWARD DAVEY on *Royal Mail investment and improving employees rights*

My most immediate priority as a Minister is, without doubt, securing Royal Mail's future and save the Post Office network.

I knew Royal Mail's finances were bad, but I hadn't realised how bad - especially the huge pension deficit. Estimated by some at nearly £10bn, it is proportionately the worst in Britain.

With their core letter business contracting fast thanks to email and the internet, Royal Mail desperately need investment to modernise.

Yet given the massive deficit, there can be no taxpayer investment available. So we must find private capital, with some form of privatisation. This will ensure the pensions of thousands of former and current postal workers.

I'm also clear we should separate local Post Offices from Royal Mail's business of letter and parcels delivery. We will keep the post office network in public ownership, because of the vital social role it plays in the life of communities across Britain.

Along with Liberal Democrat Equalities Minister Lynne Featherstone, I'm also focusing on creating a fairer, family friendly



"We will keep the post office network in public ownership"

society. We have extended the right to request flexible working hours to parents of children under 18 – benefiting nearly 300,000 people.

We will make it simpler for employees to identify whether they are eligible to make a request and we will make sure the law better supports real families juggling work and family life.

We have abolished outright the 'default retirement age', stopping employers firing someone just because they reach state pension age.

In the New Year, we will be naming and shaming employers who deliberately flout minimum wage laws – making sure that 970,000 workers gain with the new higher rates.

Edward Davey is the Under Secretary of State in the Dept of Business Innovation and Skills



Setting councils free at last

ANDREW STUNELL wants *more power for local people*

If I'd said seven months ago that the Liberal Democrats would be in government, and I'd be a Minister, you'd have laughed at me. Yet here we are. I've fought no less than eight general elections. At the first seven all we did was tell people what the Liberal Democrats would do if we got into power. This time we get to show them instead.

And we've wasted no time in getting started at the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG). We have abolished the Standards Board for England; scrapped HIPs; stopped garden-grabbing; ended regional spatial strategies, and have ushered in a new era of openness and transparency in local



government by requiring all local authorities to publish receipts for every item of spending above £500. CLG itself has led from the front on this by pledging to publish all of its own invoices over £500. And my Conservative colleague Grant Shapps and I have also been able to announce the new definition for zero-carbon homes as we begin the fight to tackle climate change through our new and existing building stock.

Affordable homes

Last month as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review, I was able to outline some of the details of the Coalition's housing proposals. Labour and Conservative governments alike have, since 1979, presided over a reduction in the stock of affordable homes. Each party sold off more homes than they built. There were 400,000 fewer homes after the Tories 18 years in power, and a further 45,530 fewer after

Labour's 13 years in power. Liberal Democrats in government are ensuring that this trend is reversed and that there will be an increase in affordable homes for the first time in 30 years.

But let's not kid ourselves, times are tough. We've had to make some cuts, and take some difficult decisions. The £1.2bn of cuts required of local government this year is painful to be sure, but we've also tried to make it fair. We have ensured that cuts to CLG centrally are higher than the cuts being faced in local government, and have begun the biggest programme of de-centralisation local government has ever seen.

Local Power

That is set to continue with the publication of the Localism Bill. The Bill contains 40 separate items, making it the largest bill this session. These items will include scrapping the hated capping rules, reform of Housing

Revenue Accounts, complete localisation of planning, with a new requirement for better neighbour consultation, amongst other things. The Bill will also introduce a general power of competence for councils, who will also be able to decide their own governance structures, permitting a return to the committee system.

This has all been achieved because of Liberal Democrat influence in government. Under Labour, local government was run in a command and control fashion from Whitehall. What Liberal Democrats in government are doing now is setting councils free from top-down diktats, and allowing local people to have a real say in local decisions. We already know what localism can achieve for communities up and down the country. Stay tuned – there's much more to come.

Andrew Stunell is the Under Secretary of State in the Dept of Communities and Local Government

More powers for Scotland

MICHAEL MOORE *announces an historic bill*

On St Andrew's Day Scotland's national day I was proud to introduce the Scotland Bill to the UK parliament. It represents the biggest transfer of tax powers to Scotland since the creation of the United Kingdom and makes the Scottish Parliament both more powerful and more accountable. The Bill takes forward the recommendations of the Calman Commission which was set up to improve the financial accountability of the Scottish Parliament and secure the position of Scotland within the United Kingdom. The Bill does this in two ways.

Tax powers

Firstly, the Bill enables Holyrood to raise its own taxes: 10 pence will be deducted from the standard and upper UK tax rates and the Scottish Parliament will have the power to decide the level to which they re-set the rates. The Bill also devolves Stamp Duty on property and Landfill Tax and creates the enabling framework for new taxes to be added in the future. As a result of these powers, Scotland's block grant will be reduced but this change will be carefully worked through.

The Parliament will also be given borrowing powers, with the Bill going further than Calman's recommendations and enabling the government to borrow substantial sums for capital and current spending purposes. Taking the tax and borrowing powers together, these measures give spending flexibility and accountability to the Scottish Parliament and enable them to decide how much of their expenditure to finance from



taxation and how much capital expenditure to support from borrowing. To avoid any risk to Scottish spending levels, these changes will be implemented gradually to ensure proper planning and administrative structures are in place.

Devolved

Secondly, other non-financial powers are also being devolved such as airgun regulation, drink driving and speed limits so that the Scottish Government can make these decisions in response to Scotland's particular needs.

These changes mark the beginning of a new phase in Scotland's devolved government, giving it greater autonomy and power. The measures will improve the way the Parliament works to benefit Scottish people and, for this reason, the Scottish Parliament will

be the first to look at the Bill and their consent will be needed in order to move the Bill forward in Westminster.

It has been my privilege as Secretary of State for Scotland and Liberal Democrat MP to prepare this historic Bill, drawing on the work of countless others from our party, other parties and other parts of civic Scotland.

The Bill promotes the values of empowerment and accountability while strengthening Scotland's future. I hope it will be endorsed by the Scottish Parliament and I look forward to the benefits it will bring to Scotland as well as the UK as a whole.

As Liberal Democrats we can be very proud of our role in this latest chapter in the reform of Scotland and the UK's constitution. *Michael Moore is Secretary of State for Scotland*

Fighting for Wales

KIRSTY WILLIAMS *on the fight to oust Labour's failing government*

This week saw Carwyn Jones, the First Minister of Wales, 'celebrating' his one year anniversary of becoming Welsh Labour leader, First Minister and now the only Labour politician in government in the UK. While he and his colleagues may be celebrating, the rest of the country most certainly isn't.

In Wales, we spend more money on health than England but we get worse outcomes. We flounder at the bottom of all the wrong economic league tables. For the first time since devolution, English students now outperform their Welsh peers at both GCSE and 'A' levels. The gap between life expectancy in England and Wales is growing. Child poverty is on the rise. These are serious failings from a Labour Party that has spent most of the last decade in power in both Wales and Westminster.

One year ago, Carwyn Jones' own verdict on the Labour government in Wales was that 'the people of Wales know we can do better'

But rather than ask questions about how his government can do better, our Labour first Minister now who now seems all too happy to sit back and blame London for every problem.

Our task, as Welsh Liberal Democrats, is to develop a Welsh



alternative. Radical, progressive and not stuck in the past. While Labour seems happy to settle for mediocrity, we must strive for excellence.

By May 2011, when the people of Wales go to the polls, we will set out a clear vision for Wales, a vision they can believe in. We must get Wales moving, to create a new beginning for our economy, where profits and ideas benefit the communities where they were developed.

We need to transform living standards by giving power back to our entrepreneurs who can create the jobs and prosperity Wales needs.

We will give teachers and doctors the freedom they need to succeed so that everyone in Wales has the same life chances regardless of where they were born. We will close Labour's education funding gap, targeting money at the pupils who need it most, when they need it most.

We won't stand by and watch as the Welsh government spends more and more per head on the NHS while our health service slips further behind England, with higher cancer rates, higher spending but lower levels of treatment.

Wales deserves better. It is time for a new vision: A radical vision that is rooted in our Welsh liberal values, focused on the needs of Wales. It is time for a vision of self-confidence and optimism. We may have a fight on our hands but boy, we're ready for it. *Kirsty Williams is the Leader of the Welsh Liberal Democrats on the Welsh Assembly*

December 2010

Join the party at www.libdems.org.uk/join

Caring for the old and vulnerable

PAUL BURSTOW *says real progress is being made*

The funding of care and support is one of the most urgent of all social policy issues we face as a society. In October's Spending Review was a commitment to invest £2bn in social care by 2014/15.

Half of this money will be given to the NHS to spend on social care services such as reablement, which will help reduce the number of elderly people that are readmitted to hospital each year and help people regain their independence at home.

This will kickstart the long sought aim of joining up health and social care.

Meanwhile the other £1bn will go direct to local councils, to ensure they have the funds needed to maintain access to social care support whilst meeting demographic and cost pressures.

Even in these tough economic times, we are providing carers and the people they care for with the freedom to make their own choices by extending the roll out of personal budgets and giving direct payments to carers, so that they will have real control over their lives with better access to respite care. The legislation introducing Direct Payments was passed 14 years ago, but just 13 per cent of eligible people have personal budgets.

Under our proposals, by 2013 councils will provide every eligible person who wants one with a personal budget. That's a fivefold increase in the uptake of personal budgets, which will allow more than one million people to choose the type of services which care for them.

We will also deliver on our manifesto commitment to provide guaranteed respite care by making over £400m available in additional funding over the next four years to the almost one million carers who work over 50 hours a week. We will go further than ever before in ensuring carers decide themselves what they want to do to take a break from caring. This is why we are ensuring

that breaks are delivered through direct payments or personal health budgets wherever possible – to give carers the freedom to spend this money as they see fit.

During the summer, we took the first step to honouring our commitment to reform the funding of social care appointing Andrew Dilnot to lead a Commission with the task of designing a new funding system and report by next July.

We have also started work on a new per patient funding system for palliative care and confirmed that £40m will be invested to help hospices improve the environments where they provide care and support for patients, their families and carers.

This government has demonstrated its commitment to tackling the prejudices and problems associated with mental health by putting mental health on an equal footing with physical health. That is why we have committed £70m this year to give more people the opportunity to access talking therapies. This funding will help tackle the devastating human cost of mental health by ensuring that the right action is taken early in people's lives.

Dealing with the deficit legacy does involve tough choices. But Liberal Democrats can be proud that, despite the economic restraints, we are taking radical action to improve quality and deliver better health and care. *Paul Burstow is the Minister of Health*



“£400m available to provide guaranteed respite care”

Spring Conference Register Now!

11 - 13 March 2011, Sheffield City Hall

Registration is now open

Join us for a long weekend of keynote speeches, important debates and an opportunity to catch up with fellow Party members. Register before 16 December 2010 and save nearly 40%, PLUS for a limited period, members can register for both 2011 Spring and Autumn Conferences for just £89. But this offer is only available online until 17.30 on 16 December 2010 so book your place soon.

Decisive, radical government

VINCE CABLE says the Lib Dems have put Britain back on the right path

The seven months since the Liberal Democrats came into government put paid to the notion that hung parliaments are incompatible with decisive, radical government. My own department – Business, Innovation and Skills – is a clear example of this.

The two parties formed the Coalition in very difficult circumstances, with a European financial crisis brewing. But we saw no contradiction between decisive action to restore fiscal credibility and an unrelenting emphasis on getting the economy working again. Labour was clearly spending too much. But they were also spending it in all the wrong ways, for example by sending cheques to multinational companies to train their staff, while leaving apprenticeships to languish.



Decisive action

In our first weeks we combined decisive action on the deficit with new resources where the economy needed them most – 50,000 new apprenticeships, and a long delayed increase in further education capital spending.

Finding that Labour had left the problem of access to finance in a mess with banks not lending, we boosted key schemes like the Enterprise Finance Guarantee, and launched a thorough review of the financial landscape particularly lending for SMEs. With the Chancellor I appointed five tough, credible thinkers to sit on the Independent Banking Commission that are looking at the practical issues of breaking up banks that are too big to fail and getting more competition.

In terms of tough spending decisions, May was just the start. Even under Labour's plans, my department was due to face cuts of 20-25 per cent. It fell to us to do this in a way that preserved the things we stood for – fairness and a rebalanced economy above all.

We think the higher education package we have produced is fair. Around 25 per cent of – low paid – graduates will pay less than they do at present and higher earners more over their lifetime earnings; all graduates will have lower monthly out goings;

part-time students (40 per cent of the total) will get access to student finance with no up front fees; there will be tougher access rules for the high prestige universities; there will be a large scholarship scheme for students from deprived backgrounds; and there will be more and bigger maintenance grants.

As a result of making difficult choices we have been able to: protect science spending – vital for our long-term economic future; produce a £1.4bn Regional Growth Fund for effective regional rebalancing and protect the most vulnerable learners in our further education system. As I said in my Conference speech, I deplore the artificial barriers between FE and HE, and our reforms should start to bring such barriers down.

Green road to recovery

In opposition, we talked about the vital importance of a green road to recovery, and also argued for a state bank to help restore Britain's woefully inadequate infrastructure assets. We now have the promise of a properly funded Green Infrastructure Bank that will deliver on this commitment, with a billion pounds of funding already found and the potential for much more.

Not everything we have done is about money. I have launched a wide-ranging review of corporate governance, to address, finally, the endemic short-termism in our economy that lies behind so many of our present problems. I am determined to introduce more competition into industries with unhealthy dominance by big companies: energy and the media are examples.

It has been an extraordinary seven months. I won't pretend the challenges haven't posed really difficult questions. The years ahead will be no easier – but I am confident we have put Britain back on the right path, and that without Liberal Democrat involvement the outcome would have been far worse.

Vince Cable is the Business, Innovation and Skills Secretary

Improved pensions for all

says STEVE WEBB

It's not often you get a chance to make history. Thirty years ago, Mrs Thatcher broke the 'earnings link' with the state pension. As a result, the value of the pension has steadily declined year after year compared with the earnings that it is meant to replace. For decades, 'restoring the link' has been the rallying cry of pensions campaigners.

At the last election all the parties said they would do something about it, but only the Liberal Democrats said we would 'restore the link' straight away. Our team in the Coalition negotiations did a great job and got the Liberal Democrat approach – immediate restoration – into the deal. And so it was that a few months ago I was handed a statutory instrument by my officials to sign and was told "...when you sign this you will restore the earnings link."

Someone retiring today on a full basic State Pension will receive £15,000 more over their retirement than they would have

done under the old prices link. We are also working on longer-term plans to establish a single decent State Pension to help encourage people to save more for their retirement and to tackle the endemic problem of non take-up of means-tested benefits.

We have also kept the universal benefits which so many pensioners rely on. These include free bus passes and the Winter Fuel Payment. We have also been able to improve funding for the Cold Weather Payments which are made to individuals on low incomes to help with heating costs when temperatures plummet. Labour had planned to reduce the payments to £8.50 but we have restored them to £25. This will be a substantial boost to help vulnerable households keep the heating on in the midst of a freezing winter.

We are also taking forward plans to make sure that as many people as possible have access to workplace pensions. Gone are the days when

having a job meant that you could be part of a company pension scheme. Barely one in three workers in the private sector is now building up any pension of their own to top up the state pension.

From 2012 we will be going ahead with plans to 'automatically enrol' millions of workers into workplace pensions, starting with the largest employers. People will be free to opt out, but if they stay in their pension will be made up of their own contribution, a contribution from the employer and a top-up from tax relief. Over time we estimate that millions of people, especially those on lower incomes and in part-time work, will for the first time start to have a pension of their own.

Sorting out pensions takes more than a few months, but the changes we have already made will have a profound impact on the dignity and security which people can expect in retirement.

Steve Webb is Minister for Pensions

Equality here and abroad

LYNNE FEATHERSTONE is on the case

Being Minister for Equalities has been a busy job in this government! It is my role to be at heart of the Home Office and government driving forward the equalities agenda in government that we did so much to promote in opposition. In short, to make sure that nobody is enslaved by conformity.

On civil rights we are moving forward on civil partnerships in the UK whilst leading the fight for more EU wide recognition and making clear statements to other countries about the importance of gay rights.

I'm proud to have already implemented 90 per cent of the Equalities Act and to be working with Lib Dem Ministerial colleagues on tackling the gender pay gap, improving flexible working and shared parental leave and generally shattering that glass ceiling!

And Liberal Democrats will have noticed that longstanding party campaigns such as Body Confidence and name blank employment



applications are now being taken forward by government, not just commented on in the abstract.

My Ministerial role also sees me leading for the government on the extremely significant area of tackling domestic violence. I've been appointed overseas champion against Domestic Violence Against Women and will be taking the issue up at the UN and in conflict zones globally.

And at home I've published the new strategic narrative against Domestic Violence against women and girls which puts £28m extra in to support specialist services for victims.

We have already done a lot on equalities in our short time in office; over the next four and half years I know we will do a lot more. Lynne Featherstone is Equalities Minister

Massive transport investment

NORMAN BAKER reports

Rail investment has always been a top Lib Dem priority, and since May we have given the green light to:

- HS2 - the new high speed rail
- Crossrail in its entirety
- The full Thameslink programme
- The London Underground upgrade
- Electrification of key routes
- 2100 new carriages

On light rail, we have confirmed extra money for the Newcastle Metro, and given approval for extensions to the Birmingham and Nottingham systems.

In aviation, we have cancelled Labour's wholly unsustainable plans for a 3rd runway at Heathrow and

told the industry to live within its footprint.

On roads, we have progressed with key schemes while axing expensive and environmentally-damaging ones, such as the £1.4bn (yes billion) that the last government wanted to spend on the A14 alone. To help decarbonise road transport, we have provided £43m to incentivise the purchase of ultra-low carbon vehicles, continued with the plugged-in places programme, and provided financial support for R&D in this area.

On buses, I have announced another £15m for low-carbon buses, and £20m to roll out smartcard technology. At the same time, bus service operators' grant has been protected from the worst of the cuts.

But for me, perhaps the most exciting development has been the creation of a brand new pot of money, a £560m Local Sustainable Transport Fund, which I was able to announce at Lib Dem conference. If we are to tackle carbon emissions in the short term, before electric cars hit the streets in numbers, we have to tackle those car journeys of five miles or less, which actually make up half of all car journeys. There is enormous scope to replace such trips through bus, cycling or walking. A White Paper on local transport will be published in January.

Lib Dem ideals are alive and flourishing at the DfT. Norman Baker is the Under Secretary of State for Transport

The big tuition fee debate

ADRIAN SLADE *listens as Evan Harris puts tough questions to Nick Clegg*

Never let it be said that our party leader isn't willing to takes his critics head on. When Nick Clegg agreed to a wide ranging no holds barred interview on the issue by former Oxford West and Abingdon MP Evan Harris, it had the makings of a real confrontation.

Strong feelings and some real disagreements certainly came across but at least to this outside observer sitting in; it was a rational and measured discussion. It was also lengthy and so sadly I can only give you a taste. Fortunately a fuller transcript is available on the party website (www.libdems.org.uk).

Evan began by questioning what Nick's views of an ideal university funding policy would have been if there had not been the need for negotiation with another party and the country had not been under such serious financial constraint.

"Well, of course, if we didn't have a financial crisis and we had won the election outright, which - I keep having to remind people - we didn't, we came third," said Nick, "of course we should try to implement our manifesto commitment.

Manifesto

"It's worth remembering that our manifesto did not commit us to abolish tuition fees overnight but to phasing them out beyond one parliament, because we had agreed that our preceding electoral pledge was not consistent with the funds available."

Nick also took the chance to promote the importance of the pupil premium - a policy he returned to regularly in the interview as a fundamental driver of social mobility - as being of huge importance to him and the party, "we put that at the front of our manifesto because all the evidence pointed to the need to start early in the education cycle."

Throughout the interview Nick explained that his, in many ways very personal decision, to secure a fully funded pupil premium was one of the reasons difficult decisions were being made on Higher Education funding. There is no doubting that Nick passionately believes that the pupil premium will fundamentally change the life chances of those from poorer backgrounds in a way that changes in HE funding may be too late to achieve.

Graduate tax

Nick then moved to take head on Evan's suggestion that at this moment in time Higher Education costs could be met by general taxation or a graduate tax.

"You are then calling for contributions from those who don't benefit from university to pay for those who do" he said. "I have no theological problem with the idea of personal contribution from those who benefit most. Personally I also found the idea of a graduate tax seductive. We looked into it very carefully, but it just wasn't workable for all sorts of reasons.

"Most importantly there are elements of a graduate tax that make it less progressive than what we are proposing now - it doesn't surprise me that it is not being used in any other country."

"But you would not object to, for



(photo: John Russell)

"In the end I believe people will see in the round that, combined with our other education measures, this an ambitious and progressive package"

example, the party re-examining it in even fuller detail as a possible policy for the next election?" asked Evan.

"Of course it can. I would be very keen to share the information we have, for example, on the Labour report of 2004 that rejected the graduate tax. And I would be delighted if it could be made workable in a way was progressive and fair and that didn't undermine the independence of universities or leave open the risk of wide scale tax avoidance. All I am saying is that I don't believe we left a stone unturned in trying to make it work."

It was clear that Nick and Vince had given graduate tax a considerable amount of thought - not surprisingly because as Nick noted it would undoubtedly have provided a rather more politically elegant solution than the one currently on the table.

Evan then rightly raised concerns that the government's plan, however unfairly, might act a deterrent to would be students. Nick shot back that, "that there was a real tragedy that it was being portrayed in this way."

Nick clearly regretted his and the government's failure to successfully communicate the strengths of the policy. And instead that they had let emotional allegations run wild and all too often unchallenged.

For the Leader, the problem was that the government's justification was cerebral and evidence based rather than emotional. Hence the seemingly unanswered stream of negative headlines, the understanding gap, the passionate language and the endless vitriol.

Nick however was in no doubt that they were not reflective of the actual package but they would risk having an intimidating effect unless Liberal Democrats got into the

schools and "talked to parents, talked to teachers, talked to head teachers and talked to students." And made sure that the actual benefits of the government's policy - particularly for those from less privileged backgrounds and those that went on to earn less - would be considerable. Indeed that the government's policy for many lower earners would be more progressive than any of the range of alternatives.

Evan was clearly doubtful that the political realities would make that possible. "Given the difficulties faced, particularly by the Liberal Democrats, and because of pledges not kept or whatever it can't be got across politically," said Evan. "If you can't get the political message across is it too big a price to pay and do you regret having done it?"

"No, we are not at present getting the hearing and we are not winning the argument," admitted Nick, "But I intend to go on and on and on patiently explaining some facts: no-one will pay up-front fees, for the first time ever ending the unfairness in Labour's system against part-time students; you will only pay much later when you reach a level higher than under the current scheme; if you come from a poorer background, you will get more help

than currently. In the end I believe people will see in the round that, combined with our other education measures, this is an ambitious and progressive package."

These were obviously the facts that Nick was especially keen to stress. And they have been consistent refrains of his in recent weeks to all who will listen. And these are unquestionably the messages the government must successfully convey if it is to win the argument.

Evan had his doubts about whether or not this would be possible; "I think people from my perspective in the party recognise that - no doubt about that, but getting it across to a media, which simply ignores part-time students, is impossible at the moment and may always be so."

Nick admitted that it was certainly a challenge - in his own Sheffield constituency which contains two universities he was currently being subjected to a great deal of hostility and vitriol from the large student population, but was resolved to go on repeating the argument week after week, month after month, particularly to make the point of what students will actually have to pay. And he was confident that "when people start asking questions about what they and their relatives will actually be paying month in month out, they will see the sense in this."

Evan also probed Nick on some underlying principles of the funding of the package. "The party is hostile to a market in higher education - that is the language of the Conservatives. They see raising tuition fees as being about students deciding what subjects to study and not offering certain courses if there is low demand. So it's a market."

"That's not the way I see it," said Nick forcefully. "We should use less emotive language and recognise some basic facts. Not all universities are the same. The big universities like Oxford, Cambridge and other big research institutions simply have higher costs than others universities. It isn't creating a market; it is recognising what already exists. I don't see anything 'market' - or indeed illiberal - in getting the universities, who are big bureaucracies, to gear themselves more to student needs - a point the NUS makes powerfully. Empowering students is fundamentally liberal."

Coming to the difficult issue of the NUS pledge, Evan asked: "Party members recognise that we can't deliver the whole manifesto when we don't have a majority. But on top of that, there was this pledge which you and I and many other candidates signed, in which we promised to vote against an increase in fees, and from which you have said, in retrospect, lessons need to be learned. What are those lessons?"

"I think the main lesson is," said Nick, "that if you decide, as we did, to have four key manifesto priorities then those must be, as they were, the priorities on which you campaign. Nothing should detract from that. We were really clear what those four key promises were - political reform, rebuilding and rebalancing the economy, introducing the pupil premium to drive social mobility, and the lifting of the income tax threshold to £10k."

Progress

Nick added, "I regret anything that has subsequently distracted from those very clear messages that we as a party chose to prioritise. And in the last six months we have made a lot of progress in government on all four of our promises."

Evan pushed Nick more on the pledge, and Nick responded, "People sometimes get a little too clever with hindsight. Clearly if you sign a pledge as a Lib Dem candidate you do so on the assumption that you will deliver it if we win a majority. That didn't happen, we came third. In the real world of competing priorities and compromises, I'm afraid the inescapable fact that the two other parties were implacably opposed to what we were committed to doing - and given the fiscal crisis - it was highly improbable to imagine that we would be able to deliver that pledge in the way that we would have liked to if we had won the election outright."

As a final question Evan asked if in six months or a year's time we would be over the worst on this. Nick answered by saying that he knew this was the hardest thing we had done as a party and that he was hugely grateful to Westminster colleagues and party members.

Notwithstanding some pretty stark differences of opinion, everybody was dealing with it with enormous resilience and maturity and talking to each other; we could disagree without rancor and continue to work to deliver a more liberal Britain.

Lib Dem Justice

TOM MCNALLY *on making real changes ...*

At our party's Special Conference in Birmingham in May, which endorsed the decision to go into Coalition, I described myself as the minister for the party's conscience. Six months later I think I can fairly claim that the Ministry of Justice is carrying through a programme with which Liberal Democrats can identify and support.

In my own areas of direct responsibility I am carrying out a review of the Data Protection Act to ensure that its protections have kept pace with modern technology. I am drawing up a new Defamation Bill to get the balance right between press freedom and personal privacy and I am looking to extend the range of the Freedom of Information Act. In addition, next year, I will be initiating a review of the Human Rights Act, building on the European Convention on Human Rights and working to see that its provisions are better understood and applied.

The MoJ has also taken a long hard look at rehabilitation and sentencing in our justice system. The Green Paper published this month takes a radical look at how we approach the punishment of crime. For too many, prison has had a revolving door with unacceptable levels of reoffending. Our prisons are too often 'universities of crime' with inmates leaving with anti-social skills and habits acquired in prison. Others have drug and mental health problems which need treatment if further re-offending is to be



avoided. These, and the alternatives to prison proposed in the Green Paper, are not 'soft on crime' options. They are the first genuine attempt in a generation to promote a serious national debate about how best to protect our citizens from crime other than through a punishment system which is too often costly and ineffective.

The other half of my responsibilities, as Deputy Leader of the Lords, means that I have to pilot Nick Clegg's exciting constitutional reform agenda through the Upper House. Success in that will transform our politics. For me the twin agendas of penal and constitutional reform have given me the most rewarding period of my political life. At the same time I have been in awe of colleagues who have taken the responsibilities of office with great skill and stayed true to the principles of our party. *Tom McNally is Minister of State for Justice and Deputy Leader of the House of Lords*

A fair start for every child

by SARAH TEATHER

I am privileged to be at the heart of delivering Liberal Democrat manifesto commitments to give every child a fair start.

The Pupil Premium is our flagship policy and by the end of the Parliament, we'll be spending £2.5bn, on top of the existing schools budget, to give every disadvantaged child, wherever they live, the support they need. Schools will start receiving the pupil premium this coming September, and we're making sure that every parent will be able to see how their child's school is spending this money. Policies we campaigned for in opposition are now being embedded in the way the school system will work in the future.

I've also been very proud to be able to make progress in delivering the commitments to expand Early Years education that featured in our manifesto. As Liberal Democrats, we know that education is the engine of social mobility, and that starting early makes a real difference. It just isn't right that, in the 21st Century, your parents' income should determine how well you do at school.

So from this September we made sure that every three and four year old could take up 15 hours a week of free early education, and, by finding an extra £300m, we'll now be able to widen that offer to every

disadvantaged two-year old, so that children whose parents are unable to give them the support they need can really benefit from high quality childcare and education.

In the next month or so, I'll be publishing a Green Paper on improving the support for children with special educational needs – where I've been drawing on lots of expertise from party members to try and make the system less adversarial for parents, give families greater choice of provision and remove a lot of the bureaucracy that

surrounds the current system.

I've also been working with colleagues across government, chairing a group on tackling child poverty, linking with the Department of Health on plans for extra health visitors, and working with the Home Office to deliver on our commitment to end child detention.

It's a huge privilege to be able to deliver in government the commitments we made over many years to give every child a fair start. *Sarah Teather is Minister for Children and Families*



(photo: flickr/educationgovuk)

"Schools will start receiving the Pupil Premium this coming September"

Engaging and empowering Sheffield's citizens

PAUL SCRIVEN *shows what can be done ...*

When the Liberal Democrats took control of Sheffield City Council in 2008, the Council was still tarnished by its reputation as the Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire.

Having controlled the Council for 37 of the past 40 years, Labour's local Leninists left us the most centralised council in the country, run through Bolshevik diktats and Stalinist central planning. The attitude of Labour's local politicians was dominated by a Town-Hall-knows-best mentality, with a focus on enacting a socialist utopia first and worrying about local people's concerns later.

Liberal Democrats were elected in Sheffield on a clear mandate: to hand power back to communities. People were tired of the culture under Labour whereby local people remained disenfranchised, except for the one day they were – begrudgingly – allowed to vote. Once we had disposed of the various hammer and sickles from the town hall, we got straight down to the work of empowering local communities.

We believe that giving communities a say in their future is a key cornerstone of liberal ideology, and delivers a more accountable and effective system of governing. A one-size-fits-all plan cannot be imposed on both rural areas and metropolitan centres;

small high streets and busy city centres. Each community is unique, with individual needs and we believe no-one understands a community's priorities better than the people that live there. It is these people we wanted to engage in the future of their area.

The lynchpin of our reforms has been our Community Assemblies. We replaced outdated and ineffective area panels with seven community assemblies, one for each of the famous hills of Sheffield. Each community assembly covers four wards and is made up of the twelve councillors representing the area, who regularly meet in local public buildings, bringing doorstep democracy to the heart of communities.

The idea of the assemblies was to give residents a greater say over the decision making process for their neighbourhood. The assemblies seek to increase participation, specialise services to local areas and make local councillors more accountable. Each assembly has a discretionary budget and asks communities how this should be spent on local projects. Residents are able to influence decisions on how much is spent on parks, street cleaning and libraries, and more services will be added in the future.

The assemblies run 'You Say' and 'You Choose' events, which engage the opinions of local



residents. 'You Say' meetings are where ideas and projects are floated and discussed among local people. 'You Choose' sessions use 'participatory budgeting', allowing residents to vote on spending priorities. Local people are presented with a number of local projects and are then able to vote for their favourite ideas, with the most supported projects gaining grants from the assembly.

This idea of giving residents a vote in the decision making project has become an ideology we have spread

across town hall. In 2008, we launched a scheme called 'Driving Me Crazy', in which residents had a chance to tackle their most infuriating congestion hot spots. Drivers nominated improvements to the road network and local people voted on which suggestions should be tackled by the Council. Following great success, we have repeated the scheme in following years and are looking to expand the principle to excessive and vexatious signs.

We have also applied this principle to youth services, giving

young people a say in how the money allocated to them is spent, through 'Youth Choose' events. Perhaps most radically, we gave local people say over the recruitment process of our Chief Executive. We selected four local people to sit on the recruitment panel, representing the voice of Sheffield in the selection of a candidate.

However, we don't intend to stop here. It's nice that the progress we have made has been recognised, most recently by the European ALDE group, but the real judges are the people of Sheffield. If we remain in power, we want to continue the process we have begun. Our next goal is to radically personalise budgets, with plans already in motion to introduce to 'Choose and Use' schemes for youth services. We want to be continually driven by the idea of handing power back to local people. We want a customer focused council rather than a town hall focused council; giving service-users a greater say over services, and communities control over their destiny.

This is a fundamental driving force for all Liberal Democrats and a cornerstone of Liberalism. As our former leader David Steel said "Power is like muck – no good unless spread." *Cllr Paul Scriven is the Leader of Sheffield City Council*

High Court throws out Oldham's Labour MP

In December the High Court upheld an earlier decision to remove disgraced former Labour MP Phil Woolas from Parliament for lying about his Liberal Democrat opponent in the General Election. There will now be a by-election in the Oldham East & Saddleworth constituency where Liberal Democrat candidate Elwyn Watkins is just 103 votes behind.

Phil Woolas made false statements as part of a series of reckless and irresponsible steps in his campaign - using doctored photographs, misrepresenting facts, stooping even to inciting racial divisions and tensions. Internal Labour emails revealed during the court proceedings made it clear that he did it because he feared he would lose.

On delivering the verdict,



Steve Webb (right) campaigns with Oldham Candidate Elwyn Watkins

the Court thanked Elwyn for bringing the case, saying that he had done Parliament and the electorate a service.

It is expected the election to be in January, possibly as early as Thursday 13th. There could be as few as eight working days between the New Year and Polling Day.

Many members, MPs and Ministers have already made the trip to Oldham to help with the campaign.

HOW TO HELP WIN

You can help make difference by doing one, or all of the following: Helping out at Oldham campaign HQ, telephone canvassing or donating towards the campaign.

Call 01457 810993 or email hq@elwynwatkins.co.uk for further details. You can also find travel details on the campaign website - elwynwatkins.co.uk

Championing human rights

JEREMY BROWNE on effective action by the Foreign Office

Standing up for Human Rights, both in the UK and abroad, has long been a passion of liberals and Liberal Democrats. So I consider myself hugely fortunate to be the Minister responsible in this coalition government for promoting Human Rights.

Torture

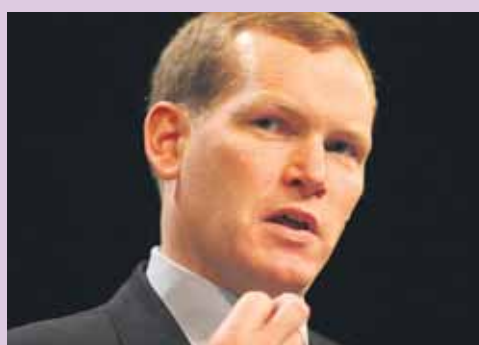
Our liberal human rights agenda means that we prioritise individual freedoms with vigour. Liberal Democrats have not only delivered on our promise to hold an independent - judge led - inquiry into allegations of complicity in the torture of terror suspects, but we are also campaigning passionately for the abolition worldwide of the death penalty. Last month, the government's efforts helped encourage three more countries vote for a moratorium at the UN

for the first time in their histories.

This is part of a wider Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) strategy which advances British national interests and universal values. This means improving bilateral relationships with countries like China, Brazil, Mexico and Indonesia; as well as promoting UN Security Council reform.

Freedom

We are also putting individual freedoms at the heart of our agenda in government; including recently working with a range of partners from like minded countries such as France and the Netherlands to companies such as Google and Facebook in our on-going efforts to



promote global freedom of expression on the internet.

Under Labour fundamental British values were traded far too easily, under this government that has changed. Not only is that both right and liberal it is also a change that will improve our standing in the world.

Jeremy Browne is a Foreign Office Minister

Keep up-to-date with news from the Liberal Democrats

There are lots of ways that you can keep up-to-date in between the all-member mailings.

By email

You can receive regular updates by email. Just contact membership@libdems.org.uk and ask to have your email address added, or go direct to the website and sign up there.

Online

All members can also use the Lib Dem Members' Website which has a huge amount of news, information and resources on campaigning, policy and party organisation. If you haven't visited the site yet, just click the 'Members' button and follow the simple 'Create an Account' instructions.

Every week

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LIBERAL DEMOCRAT NEWS

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Getting rid of dinosaurs

DAVID HEATH on reforming parliament

Parliament has its dinosaurs. They are anxious to maintain the status quo and are resistant to common sense, democratic changes. In recent months we've seen them popping up to shout about how wonderful the current electoral system is, on the basis that any system that returned them to Parliament time and again must be perfect.

As a reforming party, with a keen interest in upholding democracy, we understand that the present electoral system is deeply flawed. The self-styled 'reformers' of the previous administration spent 13 years procrastinating on the subject.

Reforming

We will not stall on this issue. Indeed, we are set on bringing about great changes to our democratic processes. As Deputy Leader of the House of Commons, I've been charged with the task of helping to bring in those reforming pieces of legislation.

As a party we've consistently spoken out against the practice of the prime minister of the day choosing, or delaying the date of the general election for their own convenience. Only a year ago, whilst in opposition, I brought forward a bill to provide for fixed term parliaments. Needless to say, it made no progress, because it was not in the interests of the majority.

But now I am helping to take through the government's Fixed Term Parliaments Bill, which will finally put an end to the abuse of prerogative.

But that is only one example of the tide of reform that is now flowing through Westminster. As well as the legislation on fairer votes and fixed term parliaments we will give to back-benchers the right to decide the agenda for parliament, not the executive, and for select committees to be chosen by all MPs and not by the whips.

House of Lords

We are drawing up proposals for recall of MPs, for regulation of lobbyists, for parliamentary inquiries, for greater public access to the business of parliament. And, of course, work is well under way - by a committee on which I sit - to introduce a bill for fundamental reform of the House of Lords early next year.

The dinosaurs don't like it. They invent ever more bogus "constitutional" reasons to oppose change. But the Coalition has already made significant progress in changing policies for the better on constitutional and parliamentary reform.

And we all know what happened to the dinosaurs in the end, don't we? *David Heath is the Deputy Leader of the House of Commons*

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Delivering a low carbon future

CHRIS HUHNE says our Green Deal is a win, win, win

I am determined that this will be the greenest government ever, and over the past months my focus has been on making the low carbon economy a reality. Despite the difficult economic circumstances we are committed to the green agenda that is central to our vision of the economic recovery.

Investment

The spending review includes: £200m for low-carbon technologies, including £60m for infrastructure to help create a vibrant offshore wind manufacturing industry; £1bn for a dedicated Green Investment Bank; £1bn for a commercial scale Carbon Capture and Storage plants – enabling us to capture the carbon emissions from coal and gas power stations and safely store them underground.

In a world-first, £860m will fund a Renewable Heat Incentive, enabling a 10-fold increase in crucial technologies such as solar thermal panels, biogas, wood pellet boilers and air source heat pumps. Around half of all the UK's carbon emissions are from heat production, and yet have been ignored for too long.

But the cheapest and best way of cutting carbon is not to use energy in the first place. A quarter of UK carbon emissions come from housing, and our homes are chronically inefficient.

Green Deal

That is why the cornerstone of the energy bill published in December is the Green Deal – a key Liberal Democrat policy for a once in a generation push to future proof our homes through comprehensive insulation and energy efficiency.

Under the Green Deal householders will pay nothing

"Over the next two years we expect to insulate 3.5 million homes"



upfront, with finance provided by the private sector and the cost recouped through savings on the energy bill. The Green Deal will provide trusted and accredited advice and installation of energy efficiency measures to households and business.

Over the next two years we expect to insulate 3.5 million homes, with a renewed focus on those in fuel poverty who need it most. Then from 2012, when the Green Deal begins in earnest, energy saving packages worth thousands will be installed in millions of homes.

Vulnerable

The Green Deal will also protect vulnerable householders in the worst quality homes. A new 'ECO' obligation on energy companies will help fund measures for those in fuel poverty and in hard to treat homes. The private rented sector also have too many leaky lofts and icy drafts and were often ignored under Labour, only receiving two per cent of previous installations. Over half a million have the lowest F or G energy rating. The Green Deal will change this.

Landlords will face no upfront

cost, and will benefit from an improved property. Tenants will benefit from warmer homes at no extra cost. And the climate benefits from reduced carbon emissions. This is a win, win, win and we expect responsible landlords to embrace this opportunity. However if they don't we will take powers to ensure that by the end of the parliament local authorities can insist landlords improve the worst performing homes.

Leading

Our actions in this parliament will define Britain's ability to build a sustainable low carbon economy. The UN talks in Cancun may not have delivered a global legally-binding deal, but we are doing all we can to make real progress on climate change. That is why I have been leading the charge for the EU to increase our emissions cut target from 20 per cent to 30 per cent. Liberal Democrats in government are delivering now to create a low carbon future - because it is the right decision for the success of our economy, for our children and for our climate.

Chris Huhne is the Climate Change and Energy Secretary

A sustainable economy

DANNY ALEXANDER shows where Liberal Democrats made the difference over the hard economic decisions ...

Entering into a coalition government and taking responsibility for Britain's future at one of the most difficult times in our economic history was not an easy decision but it was the right decision for both our country and our party. Now, for the first time in over 60 years, Liberal Democrat principles and priorities are at the heart of central government.

Next year 900,000 low-income workers will stop paying any income tax at all – a major first step to our goal of making the first £10,000 you earn tax free. We have increased Capital Gains Tax, introduced a substantial bank levy and restored the earnings link to pensions.

Fairer

At Conference I announced a clamp down on tax avoidance and evasion that will mean an extra £7bn being collected in tax each year by the end of the Parliament. We are making our country substantially and permanently fairer.

Labour said they would make spending cuts but failed to spell out where they would be made. In

October, the Coalition government set out the tough decisions that Labour dodged. We are clearing up a mess created by Labour - working together in the national interest. The worst thing to do would be to burden future generations with the debts that Labour left us.



Jobs and enterprise

Instead of relying on rising public spending and growing public debt for growth as Labour did, we have directed scarce investment towards transport, science and education – things that will help rebalance the economy and support jobs, exports and enterprise. This government did not have a choice about the deficit it is now tackling, but we have ensured that Liberal Democrat priorities are written through both the coalition agreement and our spending plans.

Children

So, even in these toughest of times for public spending, we will invest in fairness for the future by changing the life chances of our poorest children. This is the most effective way to lift them out of poverty and help them achieve their full potential.

The Spending Review also ensured the UK can meet environmental goals more efficiently, while remaining on track to meet carbon and renewable energy targets. The Green Investment Bank, will unlock substantial new private investment in green infrastructure projects such as offshore wind farms.

This is a new beginning for the British economy and will set us on course to recovery. It will be bumpy ride but our destination - a balanced and sustainable economy both financially and environmentally - is the right one for the country and something I as a Liberal Democrat am very proud of.

Danny Alexander is the Chief Secretary to the Treasury

VIEWS FROM THE PRESIDENT

TIM FARRON MP



Thank you

This is the first opportunity I've had to write to all members since the Presidential election – so I'd like to say a huge thank you! It's humbling to receive the support of thousands of members and to have the opportunity to be President of the party I first joined as a sixth-former.

I also want to pay tribute to Ros Scott – she has been a great President who leaves me with big shoes to fill. Ros – you've done a lot for this party, especially through the uncharted waters of recent months, and you deserve our thanks.

And of course not forgetting my opponent, Susan Kramer, who I would like to pay tribute to for making the election fun, interesting and challenging. Susan – I am delighted that you have been made a peer, and I look forward to working with you again.

Over the New Year it's traditional to look back at the year just gone, and forwards to the next. 2010 is certainly one I won't forget in a hurry! The euphoria of winning my Westmorland seat by such a huge margin, followed straight away by meetings and negotiations that would lead to the Lib Dems taking their place in government for the first time since 1945, certainly wasn't the May I was quite expecting.

Gains

All of this followed an election campaign like no other I've experienced. The leaders' debates – and Cleggmania – the 23 per cent of the vote we won on polling day, and some fantastic results including the fantastic gains of Ian Swales in Redcar and Tessa Munt in Wells to name just two.

As ever, our successes then, and our successes in the future are all down to you. It's only with the support of our members and supporters across the country that we can succeed. I know only too well in Westmorland that, when I'm delivering my leaflets in Milnthorpe with my kids, we have our morale boosted by knowing there are 500 other people across the South Lakes doing their leaflets too.

Governing in a coalition was never going to be easy – as we said many times before the election, grown up politics and compromise are a foreign concept in Westminster – but we can be proud of what we've achieved as Liberal Democrats.

65 per cent

A whopping 65 per cent of our manifesto is in the Coalition Agreement. A huge number of Liberal Democrat policies are being put in place by Nick Clegg and our outstanding team of government ministers. It's thanks to them that we are taking thousands of people out of paying tax, introducing a 'triple-lock' guarantee for pensions, introducing an increase in capital gains tax, implementing a bank levy, increasing the amount of social housing, establishing a pupil premium, and of course a fairer votes referendum where we have a real chance of changing our voting system for the better.

Labour, and for that matter the *Guardian* and *Independent*, are bound to attack us. But we must remember that it was Gordon Brown and his Labour government that got us into this mess – and that they don't have a plan to get us out of it.

Next May we face our first big electoral test as part of the Coalition. The signs are good – we have had encouraging results in the countless council by-elections we have had since May. The old adage still applies though – where we work, we win. I pledged to make sure that our distinctly Liberal Democrat voice is heard – and I'm determined to make sure that happens in the run-up to next May.

Oldham

Finally, after I was elected, the first thing I did was travel to Oldham to support Elwyn Watkins in his campaign to be the next MP for Oldham East & Saddleworth. Labour's campaign there during the General Election really crossed the line – and it's right that local people get the chance to go to the polls again. Please get yourself to Oldham as soon as possible! (Helpers ring: 01457 810993 or go to: elwynwatkins.co.uk)



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