

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

TO THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2026

Yvette Riley, Chair
Winchester District Liberal Democrats

A YEAR OF CHANGE AND ACHIEVEMENT

When I took on the role of Chair at the beginning of 2026, there were two things I felt certain about. First, this was to be the last year we would fight Winchester City Council and Hampshire County Council elections, ahead of the planned introduction of unitary authorities in Hampshire. Which meant it was essential we maintained our momentum in May's elections and entered the new arrangements from a position of strength.

Second, after more than four years in which we had been able to rely on the Dr Joan Read legacy to help cover the gap between income and expenditure, our finances would need much closer attention. That legacy, together with generous donations from individuals, businesses, branches and councillor tithing, had been put to very good use. It helped us win a new MP, gain seven additional City Council seats and secure four additional seats on Hampshire County Council and a new office.

The year has proved more complicated than I ever expected, particularly because of the uncertainty surrounding local government reorganisation and the election timetable. Even so, our priorities remain clear: make the most of every campaigning opportunity and put the local party on a more sustainable financial footing. It has been a real privilege to work alongside so many committed members, long-standing friends and new faces as we have tackled these challenges together.

OUR ELECTION RESULTS

The May 2026 elections were phenomenal for the local party. We won all seven Hampshire County Council divisions in Winchester District and 13 of the 15 Winchester City Council seats contested. We gained seats from the Conservatives and Greens, including our first-ever City Council seat in Wonston & Micheldever. These results strengthened our position on the City Council and helped deny the Conservatives a majority on the County Council. Although their subsequent working arrangement with Reform has, at times, been bewildering.

These results were the product of a huge collective effort by new candidates, experienced councillors, campaign teams, deliverers, canvassers, volunteers and donors. We fielded a full slate of candidates and followed the election with thank-you Focuses across the district. The election wash-up report has now been completed, giving us valuable lessons to carry into future campaigns. Will Tench deserves particular recognition for bringing that work together along with Nathan Eve, our organiser and Martin Tod as Campaign Director for going the extra mile needed to deliver our huge success.

BUILDING A STRONGER ORGANISATION

Alongside the election campaign, our slimmer Executive has continued to improve the way the party operates. The Operations, Elections, Fundraising and Staffing committees (now renamed HR Committee) have met throughout the year, and we have established an Events Team supported by volunteers. Many thanks to Peter Roberts who has taken on the Secretarial role with great enthusiasm and humour.

Refreshing our strategy was an important aim for the year, but the election campaign and the work to develop a shared candidate approval and selection process with Test Valley, East Hampshire and

New Forest took priority. We wanted candidates to be selected early for the proposed Mid Hampshire Unitary Authority. That work now looks premature following the Government's announcement that Hampshire's plans for unitary authorities would not proceed on the expected timetable!

I want to recognise Anne Weir's dedicated work on this process. Under her leadership, we ran 11 approval panels and interviewed 26 candidates. The uncertainty has inevitably slowed our wider strategic work, but the Executive has commissioned a separate piece of work on local party reconfiguration, which continues despite the lack of clarity about the future shape of local government in Hampshire.

BRANCHES, MEMBERS AND VOLUNTEERS

We have three active branches, and they remain vital to local campaigning and member engagement. We introduced regular meetings with branch chairs this year to improve communication and give us a better opportunity to share updates and address common issues.

The Meon Valley Branch BBQ was a particularly enjoyable event, and I'm grateful to everyone who helped organise it and keep branch life active. The branch's annual dinner is planned for 13 November, and I would encourage members to attend. And the IV Branches are planning a joint event for 2027 to help with our fundraising.

There are many ways for members and supporters to get involved, from canvassing and delivering Focus to helping in the office, organising events, fundraising, communications and administration. It has been encouraging to see new faces offering their time and skills. Our next task is to make those opportunities easy to find and build a sustainable volunteer network, so that responsibility does not always fall to the same people.

FUNDRAISING AND FINANCES

At the start of 2026, our fundraising target was £20,000. The Fundraising Committee subsequently increased it to £30,000 and put a plan in place for the year. We have now raised £23,000, with two months still to go. We need to maintain the effort to give ourselves the best chance of breaking even and providing a workable budget for next year's campaign. If the election timetable comes to include a General Election, we will need a more focused fundraising effort to meet the additional demands.

We have also started working with colleagues across Hampshire on Project Wessex, a county-wide fundraising initiative for held and target Westminster seats, and have discussed opportunities for joint events and fundraising. We need to continue building regular income, encouraging more and larger donations, and ensuring that our spending plans are sustainable.

I owe Mark Allinson a particular thank-you for the work he has done to develop our fundraising plan and keep us compliant with the many Electoral Commission rules. Compliance is essential, but it is an increasingly significant burden for local parties. Mark has been supported by our treasury team, and I'm grateful to everyone who has shared that work and for keeping our accounts up to date. We are still looking to fill the Deputy Treasurer role; if you have the time or skills to help, please do get in touch.

EVENTS AND COMMUNICATIONS

Our events have helped bring members together while raising much-needed funds. The ever-popular monthly Willow Tree Gathering gives people a regular chance to meet and catch up. Gillie deserves a big thank-you for organising the evenings and making everyone feel welcome. The gathering now also hosts the new 100 Club draw. Richard Eve's idea has proved popular and provides another useful source of income.

Other highlights included the Shake off the Blues event in March and our talk with Professor Anand Menon, which attracted around 160 people. In September, after a three-year gap, we held our Members and Supporters Dinner, with Josh Babarinde MP, the Liberal Democrat President, as guest speaker. Generous donors contributed prizes for the raffle and silent auction, helping us raise just under £5,000. I'm very grateful to everyone who donated, helped organise the evening or came along to support it.

We also brought back the Members' Newsletter after a five-year break. A special thank you to Cam Allinson who has been the driving force behind its return and who is now working on the third edition of the year. Feedback has been 100% positive, which is really encouraging. Alongside email, social media, WhatsApp and branch meetings, the newsletter is helping members stay up to date and see how they can get involved.

You can tell us your thoughts on this years events programme and any suggestions you might have here at winld.org.uk/events

CANDIDATE SELECTION AND WORKING ACROSS HAMPSHIRE

As mentioned Anne Weir and I have worked with colleagues across Mid Hampshire to develop an approval and selection process agreed by the local parties. With unitary elections now not expected before 2028, and potentially later, we need to keep reviewing our plans as the timetable becomes clearer.

The Mid Hampshire Co-ordinating Committee has been an important forum for discussing the future of local government and the proposed combined mayoral authority. It is chaired by Martin Tod; I represent the local party, and Cam Allinson provides the secretariat. The committee has helped us build relationships with Liberal Democrat colleagues across Hampshire, which will be valuable as we prepare for future elections and look for opportunities to work together.

For 2027, our current working assumption is that elections will be held for Winchester City Council. Sixteen seats are due to be contested: 12 held by us, two by the Conservatives and two by the Greens. The Executive has taken a pragmatic approach and agreed that candidates approved through the unitary authority process can be carried forward for the City Council elections. However, we still need to find candidates for all the seats.

LOOKING AHEAD

The timetable and structure for local government reorganisation remain uncertain. The mayoral election is currently expected in May 2028, although it could be brought forward to 2027. We need to stay flexible while continuing with the work we can control: strengthening the party, supporting our branches, completing candidate selection and preparing early for whichever elections take place.

Our priorities for the coming year are to:

- complete candidate approvals and field a full slate for future elections;
- make sure we are prepared for the possibility of an early General Election;
- build sustainable fundraising and strengthen financial oversight; and
- continue offering members and supporters a varied programme of events, training and volunteering opportunities.

THANK YOU

I want to finish by recognising the many people whose work makes our local party what it is. Whether you have delivered a leaflet, knocked on doors, canvassed, donated, organised an event, helped with

administration or supported a candidate, your contribution has mattered. I'm also grateful to our councillors, Danny Chambers MP, our staff team, branch officers and Executive members for the time and care they give to the party and to residents.

Our 2026 election results were the outcome of that shared effort. The challenge now is to build on them and make sure Winchester District Liberal Democrats are financially sustainable, well organised and ready for what comes next. Thank you for everything you have done this year.

Yvette Riley
Chair, Winchester District Liberal Democrats

Winchester District Liberal Democrats | AGM 2026 | 4 Page