

Spring Conference

**MARCH 26**  
**BROMSGROVE**

The official calling notice for the Spring Conference will be issued very shortly.

Work is in hand to produce keynote speeches, the always-popular policy debates and an associated programme of workshops.

Local parties should have elected voting reps at their AGMs in the late autumn and any constituency secretary who haven't already done so is asked to email names to the secretary as soon as possible (email address below).

The conference is, of course, for all members. Everyone is encouraged to take part in the debates but only registered reps are able to vote.

Motions for debate can be submitted ten voting reps, local parties, SAOs, and Lib Dem groups on the principal local authorities. They should be sent to secretary@westmidslibdems.org.uk



# NewslineWM

February 2011

the online newsletter for **west midlands liberal democrats**

## Fair Voting: as easy as 1, 2, 3

If the party knows you have email, you've probably received a note about the strange decision of the BBC to ban the words 'Voting Reform.'

'Voting Reform' is deemed to be too biased! You can either believe the conspiracy theory that they've been leant on by 'powers that be' or you can just believe that this is yet another infliction on our language of a desire to make simple things complicated and generally obfuscate (I love that word) wherever possible.

If you haven't already done so, protest the BBC today! Auntie has upped the ante: we need to respond.

**The good news** is that polling says more people are in favour of voting reform than against it. ICM says Yes 44% No 38%, Angus Reid says Yes 37% No 20%, ComRes says Yes 40% No 30%.

**The bad news** is that we are still around 10% adrift of what we need. On the day - May 5 - 51% of those voting have to vote YES. Otherwise, Britain is bundled back into its museum-piece electoral system for another generation.

**We don't need to believe** AV is a perfect system. It isn't but it is dramatically better than our current system, in which only a tiny percentage of votes cast really make a difference. More importantly, the referendum itself will be taken as proof one way or the other as to whether the public want a fairer voting system.

**We need to be absolutely clear** about this: the

## ***BBC bans use of 'reform'*** Campaign FOCUS by Martin Turner

*Fairer Votes* result will have more impact on the future of liberal democracy in Britain than any campaign we have ever fought. This is the culmination of twenty-five years and more of campaigning. If we win it, we prove once and for all that the public have an appetite for voting that makes a difference. If we lose it, we hand power back to those who say that the voters don't care, and shouldn't be trusted.

What to do today? Three things.

**One:** You can get ready-made drop in artwork at [www.yestofairervotes.org](http://www.yestofairervotes.org), to put straight into your next leaflet. Remember to label it as an advert. This is very important.

**Two:** EARS now has a field for gathering people's views on Fairer Votes. Getting that information early will make a huge difference in the final weeks of the campaign.

**Three.** Tell everyone who is sympathetic about weblink and get them to register so they can be kept up to date on the campaign. This is not just about getting the occasional newsletter. When things really heat up, we want to be able to mobilise tens of thousands of people in a matter of hours to protest against unfair media coverage (see first paragraph), to tweet, facebook, or just tell their friends in the old fashioned way.

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To have your say,  
newsline@westmids  
libdems.org.uk

## Election success for Chris



Chair of Hereford LP, Cllr Chris White, has been elected to the key Campaigns and Communications Committee in the final round of federal elections. He is also a member of Federal Executive.

In the same elections, regional president Jock Gallagher won a place on the Diversity Engagement Group. He chairs the new Regional Diversity Group, whose other members are Martin Turner, Josie Wilkinson, Shazad Iqbal and Will Mievell-Hawkins.

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## We've changed - at your request

**W**ell, we did say this was your newsletter! You took us at our word and asked us to kindly re-arrange the deckchairs...in the interests of making the journal more readable.

We've abandoned the fancy fonts and reverted to plain and simple Ariel and we undertake not to reduce it below 10.5 points. *We would have switched to the much-lauded Helvetica Neue but we can't afford the costs.*

It's worth remembering, of course, that if you have any difficulty reading the print you can always hit **VIEW** and increase the scale to whatever suits.

We also get the message about the problem of scrolling down an A4 portrait format and we present our new landscape version. Each page should fit neatly in your PC window.

Twelve pages also proved tiresome for many - although it was just a little showing off to illustrate that there's an abundance of information around - and we have retrenched to a more comfortable four pages for this issue.

What did surprise us somewhat was the decidedly cool view of our pictures. Too many was the consensus! That may have more to do with the time taken for downloading rather than the appearance of the newsletter. We hope so.

Thank you for all your suggestions. We couldn't concede to all the suggestions but we hope you approve the changes we have made..

*We did get some things right, of course, and we're grateful for the many nice comments including these:*

The newsletter is a fantastic read and highly informative! Best we have ever had locally.

**Lionel King, Solihull**

The cockles of my heart are much warmed. Thanks for the WMLD newsletter. It's really appreciated. If only more people could communicate as effectively as you and your colleagues.

**Pat Aidley, Shrewsbury**

I was most impressed with the e- newsletter, both layout and content. The internet has opened up great communication opportunities, far quicker and cheaper than in the past.

**Ian Bradley, Stoke-on-Trent**

This is really good. Good content and good to look at, too..

**Cllr Heather Kidd, Chirbury and Worthen**

The caption *Canvassing: Whatever the Weather* reminded me of a quote from a voter which we used in a *Focus* in the Oldington and Foley Park ward of Kidderminster in the 1980s and which definitely gained us some votes:- *You even came round in the snow!* - and we did!

**Val Harrison, Birmingham**

The newsletter is a very good step towards making us members at the bottom of the chain feel that we are part of the party!

**Jerry Evans, Coventry**

To have your say, e-mail your comments to [newsline@westmidslibdems.org.uk](mailto:newsline@westmidslibdems.org.uk)

## Tribute to a very loyal member

One cannot imagine a more dedicated, committed and unswervingly loyal Liberal Democrat than Edward Pringle.



A member of old Liberal Party he remained true cause of liberal democracy through all the subsequent changes. On the foot-slogging side, Edward delivered enormous quantities of *Focus*, served as branch chair of the SW Branch of Wolverhampton Lib Dems and often hosted party meetings at his home. He has held other positions of responsibility and Appropriately, he became came the first President of the local party. He was a generous supporter of fund raising appeals and events. Edward always wanted to know what was going on and regularly contacted colleagues to discuss current issues and share opinions.

In these testing times, Edward's record of dedication to the cause is suitably inspiring.

**Roger Gray**

**POLICY CORNER**

Policy chair JON HUNT asks

## Do you have views on no-win-no-fee lawyers?

The introduction of "no win, no fee" options for lawyers has opened the way to justice for many people.

But has it also loaded extra costs on to businesses And public authorities?

Have they become excessively risk averse for fear of minor problems escalating into costly legal action? Are the sort of systematic procedures that avoid problems too much for small businesses to manage?

The regional policy committee has appointed a small group, led by Neville Farmer, to investigate this issue. If you have experience, knowledge or views please do contact Neville on [NevilleFarmer@aol.com](mailto:NevilleFarmer@aol.com)



## The new regional power house!



**81 Warwick Road, Olton, Solihull B92 7HP**

The regional office is now up and running, thanks to three volunteers; regional conference chair Christine Tinker and Mary Garside and Kathryn Ball, both from Wolverhampton SW.

They have been busy ensuring the installation of telephones and computers.

Also on site is Claire O’Kane, the regional training officer, who won last month’s by-election to become a councillor on Solihull MBC.

Claire is also organiser for Lorely Burt MP, who’s office is in the same building.

The office will become the power house of the region. All the records are stored there and it will also be used as a training centre and a phone bank for campaigning.

The three volunteers are each

**To volunteer call 0121-707 8460**

giving one day a week and the rest of the time is covered by the answering-machine..

“There is still an awful lot of work to be done in creating the really efficient communications the region needs,” says chair Jonathan Webber.

The regional executive has already benefited from the new HQ. It has held its last two meetings there. It has cut out the all-too-often hurried search for a venue.

### Webber world-wide

**Regional chair, Jonathan Webber, has been elected as the English Council’s representative on the International Relations Committee**

## Sits Vac: region needs vice-chair

Underlining the fluidity of politics, there have been two key changes to the new regional executive in its first few weeks.

Recognising the importance of planning for the Federal Conference visit to Birmingham in September, Jan Arkwright has been re-deployed to help on the working party handling it. Grant Williams replaces her as Regional Secretary.

The second change is due to the good fortune of Vice-chair (urban) David Nickel. His new job will take him away from the West Midlands and that leaves us with a vacancy, The executive decided that rather than make an immediate co-option at its February meeting, it would invite expressions of interest from colleagues outside the current group.

The role of the vice-chair (urban) is more or less what it says on the label: it carries responsibility to look after the interest of local parties and members in the major conurbations. There will also be deputising duties for the chair and the holder will be expected to take on a portfolio appropriate to their experience and expertise.

Interested? E-mail [secretary@wesmidslibdems.org.uk](mailto:secretary@wesmidslibdems.org.uk)





LIFE ON CAMPUS

by Will Mievile-Hawkins

# The tide may be turning

**A** month has passed since my hugely pessimistic last entry to NewslineWM. I am happy to report the situation on campus is very slowly improving.

We held our bi-annual 'Get Involved Fair' designed to advertise all the different societies on January 31. I was expecting a day of abuse and haranguing from the student body. In fact people just passed us by and we even recruited a few members!

In the current climate I was very pleased with this result. We also managed to collect over 50 signatures to our petition campaigning against the gay blood ban. Perhaps our reputation is in the process of restoring and rebuilding itself.

### Chair again

At our AGM, I was returned as chair. Part of my speech was devoted to a strong feeling of resurgence from the grassroots that I believe is starting to manifest itself on campus. As a result, we have decided as a group to become more oppositional in our stance to government proposals we dislike, and more vocal in our support of the ones we applaud.

We are also in the process of developing our own 'line' on certain policy issues, which will be communicated via twitter (@ublibdems for the media savvy ones amongst you) and our blog which can be found at [www.bhamlibdems.livejournal.com](http://www.bhamlibdems.livejournal.com). This new stance has already attracted

*'Perhaps our reputation is in the process of restoring and rebuilding itself'*

attention from the student newspaper Redbrick. It included a lengthy article accusing the party of being 'in coalition with itself.' A quick glance in to the history books for this writer may have been appropriate.

On March 2, the group will be in Brussels to visit the European Parliament, courtesy of our very own Liz Lynne MEP. We are very much looking forward to it and I will report back in the next newsletter.

All the best from the red bricks of Brum.

## Who's who in LP membership?

Regional Membership-development Officer, Jacki Boyle, is keen to update her files. She would appreciate it, if every LP membership officer could send her a quick email at [jackiboyle@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:jackiboyle@hotmail.co.uk) giving name and which local party represented.

"This would be a quick way to help us establish more effective communications with local parties," she says.

## WINNING TEAMS UPDATE

The next stage of the West Midlands winning teams programme will be taking place in March. The series of evening sessions are aimed at preparing local groups for May's elections. They include important lessons from the Oldham by-election and a confidential update on the fairer votes campaign. Dates and venues are:

### Stoke on Trent

6 30pm March 2 Civic Centre, Glebe Street, Stoke-on-Trent  
Wolverhampton

6pm March 7: Committee Room 1, Wolverhampton Civic Centre, St Peters Square  
Herefordshire

6 30pm March 8 Dawleys, Ashburton Industrial Estate, Ross-on-Wye,

**Please come along to the session nearest you, armed with your local election plan and as many of your local team as you can.**

Austin Rathe Campaigns Officer 07749354448

## DIARY DATES

### Regional Spring Conference

(hosted by Bromsgrove LibDems)

### Bromsgrove Middle School

10am Saturday March 26

#### March

Wednesday, March 2: 7 30pm  
Green Dragon Hotel, Hereford

**FUND-RAISING DINNER**  
Guest speaker: Party President

**TIM FARRON MP**



#### Federal Spring Conference

March 11-13 Sheffield

#### May

**5 Thursday FAIRER VOTES REFERENDUM and local elections**



*Another view of student funding* by Lee Dargue

## Remember who introduced fees

*Critically assess the new funding scheme of the HE sector from 2012, in specific reference to tuition fees, in contrast with the current system. That's an essay I'd like to be able to give some politically-independent economics students graduating this year.*

I think I have a unique perspective. I'm a Lib Dem who agrees with many (but not all) of the proposals in both principle and reason. I'm a part-time student and a part-time teacher so I can look at the whole issue from the view of the supplier, customer and legislator!

It's odd that some members have moved to Labour in protest over this because Labour not only introduced fees, they increased them too.

I'm happy to debate areas where Lib Dems have either chosen, or had to, change their ideas but let's not kid ourselves that Labour are somehow the clean party who stick to everything they say.

There is also a great wave from the NUS saying that "students" are all outraged. I'm a student and I was never asked. I challenged "my" NUS president twice, with no response. I was not allowed a voice in student circles just because I took a step back and looked at the proposals with a reasoned pair of eyes. I tried to argue at the regional conference that we should take a wider-view of the whole set of proposals, including the non-mentioned 40 per cent of part-time students who will now get help.

I totally get the feeling of betrayal felt by some of the students but please remember that some MP's did indeed stay true to their pledge and voted AGAINST the government. This was barely mentioned.

Finally, I'd like to suggest that every voter, student included, vote for a party with the whole picture in mind. For example, if they insist on voting for a party on one issue, would they vote BNP if they suddenly said they would scrap tuition fees?

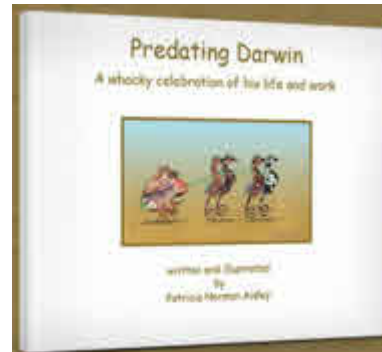
Wouldn't a LibDem vote count on so many other fronts: abolishing Trident, our policy of scrapping tuition fees if we had a Lib Dem-led government, lower taxes for lower earners and many other positive areas (including in the FE crisis that doesn't get discussed). So please, let's look at this from all sides, also allowing people like me (who are students too) to have an opposing view, to allow for debate. After all, we are all Liberal Democrats and policy and debate are in our souls.

## FROM THE GRASS ROOTS Local Party round-up

### Lib Dem literati

Two party members are enjoying the warm glow that comes with seeing the finished product of their literary endeavour. Sandra Johnson (Aldridge) has published a novel, *The Love Child's Mother*, about adoption and reunion, under the pen name Suzanne Wright.

She says: "My creative influences include being a Lib Dem since 1993...is it really nearly 20 years?" You can get Sandra's book on Amazon or contact [sj2001@btinternet.com](mailto:sj2001@btinternet.com)



Pat Aidley (Shrewsbury) describes her tome *Predating Darwin* as "a wacky celebration" of the scientist's life and work. It includes a selection of her own drawings.

Her editor says: "Somehow encapsulating a return to more gentle family-orientated times *Predating Darwin* is for parents and grandparents, and even students. If a book can be said to be unique, perhaps this is one." Contact: [patriciaaidley@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:patriciaaidley@yahoo.co.uk)

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