

Women Liberal Democrats



Spring Newsletter 2006

Inside - a look
at the women
on the Lib Dem
front bench

Ming Campbell signs pledge to WLD!



Sir Menzies Campbell MP signs pledge to WLD to tackle the under-representation of women in the Party

Ming Campbell honours pledge to Women Liberal Democrats!

Sir Menzies Campbell MP, leader of the Liberal Democrats, signed his promise made to Women Liberal Democrats during the leadership election to tackle the under-representation of women in the party.

During a surprise visit to Women Liberal Democrat fringe at Harrogate, the new leader promised more action to increase the number of women at all levels of the party.

As part of his pledge to Women Liberal Democrats, Ming Campbell said "I want to make sure we have better

answers than we have done in the past for tackling the gender pay gap." Elspeth Campbell and Baroness Barker also attended the event.

Read more about
our fringe inside!



Welcome to our Spring Newsletter!

Welcome to the latest newsletter from Women Liberal Democrats. We hope you enjoy reading it. If you have any comments, please let us know. Want to know more about WLD? Exec member Pauline Jenkins sets out the vision of WLD...

WLD is an organisation that exists to support women within the party, to work for changes to improve their opportunities and to represent the Liberal Democrats to outside groups concerned with women's issues. The main responsibilities include:

- supporting women taking up roles within the party.
- ensuring that key policy issues are discussed.
- providing many networking opportunities.
- being consulted by the Party on national policy.

Why do we still need a women's organisation in the 21st century? Because we have still not achieved equality! Only 18% of MPs at Westminster are women, and the percentage is even lower on the Lib Dem benches. In a wider context, women working full time earn on average £559 less per month than men and it is 30 years since the equal pay act (report from the Equal Opportunities Commission). Until we do have equality women will continue to need a separate organisation to fight for equality, but WLD does not discriminate - we have a large male membership, including many of our male MPs.

WLD also runs campaigns on issues that particularly affect women, recent examples have been tackling the inequality in the criminal justice system and examining high levels of personal debt which blight the lives of so many women. If you have an issue that you think is worth our support please contact us.

In this Issue...

Lizzie Jewkes reports back on a successful Conference for Women Liberal Democrats. We also get a view on the Local Government Elections from Watford Town Mayor, Dorothy Thornhill. Flo Clucas keeps us up to date with the work of women in Europe, and in this issue we launch our membership recruitment drive – the Membership Challenge – see page 11 for more information. Finally, we also celebrate the impressive female line-up in the Liberal Democrat Shadow Cabinet.



Executive Update

Executive Committee 2006

President - Sue Doughty

Vice-President - Sandra Gidley MP

Chair - Liz Wheeler

Vice-Chairs - Miranda Whitehead & Lizzie Jewkes

Treasurer - Vera Head

Executive Members - Voting

Poddy Clark, Emma Coakley, Sheonaidh Cumming, Thoraya El-Rayyes, Margaret Fairman, Claire Jackson, Pauline Jenkins, Brenda Smith & Sue Vincent.

Executive Members - Non-voting

Ruth Coleman - *International rep*

Ros Kissell - *WACUNA*

Monica Howes - *Womens National Commission*

Executive vacancies

Vacant positions may be filled by co-options by the new exec. If you are interested in being considered for the exec next year, please send a short cv on your political background and why you would like to be involved to the WLD office.

To get in touch with members of the exec, please contact the office (details below)

WLD Pin Badges

As some of you may know, WLD launched a stylish black and yellow pin badge (pictured below) last year. We still have badges available, if you would like one please send £1.20 to the WLD (which includes postage and packing).



Executive Meetings

Exec meetings are usually held in the Board Room in Cowley Street, starting at 1pm. All members are welcome to attend. Upcoming meetings are scheduled for: 3rd June (Accord Rooms, Westminster), 2nd September and 18th November.

WLD Office

From January to July 2006 WLD's Head of Office is Vicki Adamson. Debbie Enever is on maternity leave. You can contact Vicki at -



WLD,

4 Cowley Street, London, SW1P 3NB

Phone : 020 7227 1208

Email : women@libdems.org.uk

The office is staffed on a part-time basis but days can change from week to week. If we are not in, please leave a message and we will get back to you!



A View From Europe

Flo Clucas tells us about the work of women in Europe.

It is probably 25 years since I discovered the 300 Group, which was set up by Lesley Abdella, to help put 300 women in Parliament. We are, after all, 52% of the population, so it seemed fair!

That organisation - and women who were themselves parliamentarians from every party - taught me a great deal. In those days, there was a hope that things really would change, and for the better, for women in this country and in Europe. It is with real dismay therefore that I read of the recent research into discrimination which shows that women - especially those with children - are still at the bottom of the pile!

So, have we got anywhere? Are we actually getting anywhere? Well, let's look at what is happening in the EU.

Gender is a big issue, not least because the Commission insists on gender equality when it can. But even the Commission knows the difficulty of complying with such a rule, when member states fail to include enough women as representatives to various bodies. So, a Gender Unit has been set up to try to ensure balance and opportunity especially in new member states, where the status of women is not very high and where very few are appointed to EU institutions.

There are a number of institutions in the EU, one of which is the Committee of the Regions and Local Government, or CoR for short. This body acts as a sort of revising chamber for EU legislation and European Parliament proposals. Members, of which the UK has 24 'full' and 24 'alternate or deputy' members sit on a range of committees and produce opinions, or policy statements, relating to proposals. They have a right to be consulted on a range of matters.

For the first time this year, at the start of the 4 year mandate, two of the parties - the European Socialists and the European Alliance - have female Presidents or Leaders. The ALDE group, representing Liberal Democrats, has a female First Vice president, who will become President in 2008.

Mercedes Bresso, Maria Corrigan and Flo Clucas are the first to find themselves in such positions at the same time and certainly for the ALDE group, a female First Vice President/President Elect for 2008, is a first. So, things are changing, but not fast or far enough.

Through the work that is done in European institutions we can influence decisions that are made particularly in terms of opportunity. So that, for example, in any proposals for cities that come through the CoR, we can inbuild changes that will enhance life chances for women. We can, and have, proposed the creation of Women Friendly Cities, encouraging women to be, not just carers, but Entrepreneurs and Decision Makers. We can seek to establish venture capital funding that will help women, rather than put artificial barriers in their way.

But even within EU proposals, women and the role of women can be, and often is, forgotten. That is where we - all of us - can begin to make a real contribution. Within the CoR, we will propose the setting up of a Women's Group, to ensure that we have a voice that is heard. Cross party, transnational and inter-regional, it will provide a focus for women to support one another in the work that we do.

Within Merseyside, we have created a public/private partnership group 'Enabling Choices', which will look to work with other EU regions on a transnational programme to support women into, and in, the decision making process. This will be eligible for EU funding and has attracted a great deal of attention.

Local Government Update

The only Liberal Democrat Mayor and the only woman Mayor, Dorothy Thornhill, gives us her view on standing for local government.



Four years ago when I won the election to become Watford's first elected mayor, it seemed to take most people by surprise outside Watford Liberal Democrats. Labour, who had run the council for the previous 30 years, looked stunned when they realised that their candidate had lost. And even Liberal Democrats from other parts of the country regarded it as a bit of a shock.

In fact it was the result of determined community politics campaigning by a small but growing band of Liberal Democrat campaigners over many years. In 2002, due to some serious mistakes by the Labour administration in Watford, and hard work on our part, the time was right for a breakthrough.

Elected Mayors are still relatively rare in British local government. There are still only 13 of us, including Ken Livingstone. I am the only Liberal Democrat and the only woman. In some ways the role is that of a conventional council leader: I am the political head of Watford Borough Council. But rather than just representing a single ward, I have been elected by the people of Watford as a whole. This also gives me a wider mandate as a representative of the town, which is similar to that of an MP. People expect me to get involved in a broader range of issues than things that are the council's responsibility. I am mayor of the town rather than just leader of the council.

Progress has been rapid and we have also implemented key Liberal Democrat priorities such as kerbside recycling collections, tackling anti-social behaviour and greater involvement of council tenants in decision-making. I am particularly proud also of the proposed 'health campus' project, which involves a partnership between the council, health authorities and Watford Football Club, among others, to create a new hospital for the town, with a range of health-related activities on adjacent sites.

The change in the council's performance has been recognised by the Audit Commission and we were also shortlisted in the Local Government Chronicle Awards for 'Most improved council'. In addition, the electorate have elected an overwhelming majority of Liberal Democrats to the council in the years since I was elected. As I write, my re-election campaign is under way and while I never take success for granted, I can take to the electorate a positive track record and policies for moving the council forward.

Much of the focus for women in politics has been in getting more female MPs. Sometimes local government can seem like the poor relation in our democracy. But it does provide the opportunity to put Liberal Democrat principles into practice and make a real difference in improving public services – something which our parliamentarians (except in Scotland) have not yet had the opportunity to do.

So I would encourage women in the Liberal Democrats to get involved in campaigning and put themselves forward for public office whether as councillors, mayors or MPs. I well remember sitting at a meeting discussing who should stand in a promising target ward and assuming that since no one suggested that I should stand that must mean I wasn't good enough. In the end I did pluck up the courage to put my name forward and that set me on the path to becoming a councillor and then elected mayor. You can do it too!

**If you'd like to help Dorothy campaigning
contact her at**

**TheMayor@watford.gov.uk or telephone
on 01923 278371**

Women Liberal Democrats at Party Conference!

Equal? Men, Women and Work.

Vice Chair of Policy, Lizzie Jewkes, updates us on WLD fringe at Spring Conference.

Thirty years after the Equal Pay Act, women are still paid far less than men. Women who work full time earn about 18% less and part time women workers earn a massive 40% less. It's a topic worth debating. A crowded room at Spring Conference heard David Laws MP, Sandra Gidley MP and Munira Hussain discuss the issues. David Laws told us that girls consistently out perform boys at school, yet go on to earn much less. Sandra Gidley explained how one of the problems is that women have a tendency to be employed in only five job types – the five Cs – caring, catering, clerking, cashiering and cleaning. Every one of them low paid.



While women earn substantially less than men, 1 in 5 jobs are unfilled due to a lack of qualified applicants. About a third of the way through our meeting, Ming Campbell arrived. He'd asked if he could come and meet with us and we were happy to have our meeting disrupted in order to meet with him.

Ming got off to a good start. He spoke about the emails he'd received from women candidates describing the discrimination they have faced when seeking selection, such as the women who was told she should not apply for a seat as she had children. Ming said he had never realised women are so discriminated against. He added that he wanted women to participate in every level of the party.

“as we review our party policy on poverty, I want to make sure that we have better answers than we have done in the past for tackling the gender pay gap” - Ming Campbell to WLD

He went on to tell us that he believes we need to increase the involvement of ordinary party members in the party, especially in policy making. As he put it 'People join the party because they want to talk about politics and all we do is give them a pile of leaflets to deliver'.

During the leadership election, WLD wrote to each of the candidates asking for their views on the role of women within the party. We used part of Ming's reply to create a poster for the stall. Vera produced a copy of it and asked Ming to sign it, which he did. Then, Liz Wheeler explained to Ming that we are keen to update the 1994 policy paper 'Equal Citizens' as it is now seriously out of date and asked for permission for us to do so.

Ming agreed that it did need updating and told Liz to talk to Greg Simpson, head of policy at Cowley St. After Ming had departed, Sandra Gidley added that when she first applied to become a parliamentary candidate she was told that being an agent would be more suitable for her as she had children. I for one, am very glad she did not take this advice as we would be deprived of one of the most able MPs. And I wonder how many more we are missing?

Update from Scottish Women Liberal Democrats



Jacquie Bell with Deputy Minister Euan Robson MSP

SWLD rep Jacquie Bell reports from Scotland

In October we held an Inspiration day at Glasgow University with Jo Swinson MP. 22 people attended and many more expressed an interest in being more active whether as candidates or within their local party.

The SWLD AGM was on 3rd December following a joint lunch with the Scottish Executive.

Secretary

As Helen Watt became Convenor of Scottish Conference Committee we were without a secretary. However, at Scottish conference we were delighted to welcome new member Joanna Toomey as Secretary. Joanna was a Cambridgeshire county councillor but has just moved to Edinburgh with her partner Iain.

On 8th December Helen and Jacquie attended a cross party conference arranged by the Electoral Reform Society and Engender on how STV may benefit women in the 2007 Scottish local elections. It looked at the difficulties faced by women and measures to overcome them.

SWLD successfully submitted a motion to Scottish Conference in Aviemore on Hospital Nutrition. We also had a stall with a Political Women quiz and a new version of the popular 'Find the woman elected member' tombola. Over £200 was raised and we recruited new members.

Jacquie has joined a Scottish working party on Health policy chaired by Deputy Minister Euan Robson MSP. To date she is the only female member of the group. The intention is to update Health policy for the Scottish elections of 2007.

Jacquie successfully submitted an amendment to the Royal Mail Motion at Harrogate calling for the retention of Post Offices as a point of payment for pensions and benefits. This follows the Government announcement that it plans to abolish Post Office Card Accounts by 2010 – a move that will lead to the closure of thousands of post offices and affect many women amongst over 4 million pensioners who currently have the accounts.

Newly promoted Women to the Shadow Cabinet!

WLD congratulates the talented women in the party on their recent promotions. Here we feature some of their biographies. The WLD website now has a live feed from most of our women MP's news pages. So if you want to see what our women MPs are up to this week, check out our website www.womenlibdems.org.uk



Julia Goldsworthy MP

Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury

Julia's first involvement in Lib Dem politics came through her interest in Cornish issues: working as a parliamentary researcher for Matthew Taylor MP. Following this experience she went on to become a policy advisor for the Liberal Democrats, focusing on education issues and the economy.

Before her election, Julia worked in Cornwall for Carrick District Council, focusing on regeneration issues, building and developing links with local businesses in the area.

As Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Julia will be working alongside Vince Cable to hold Gordon Brown and his treasury team to account. She shadows Labour's Des Browne.

These women did it, so can you!
If you'd like to be a local councillor, campaign agent, MP, MSP, AM or MEP then contact gbt@libdems.org.uk

Susan Kramer MP

Shadow International Development Secretary



Susan made her mark in the London mayoral election in 2000. She was a working mum with 2 children and made her career in the world of finance as a Vice-President of International Citibank before joining colleagues to set up FutureWater International developing an environmentally friendly waste water recycling project in Hungary.

Susan is a Vice-President of a national cancer charity and has been a school Governor of two primary schools.

Now Susan shadows Labour's International Development Secretary Hilary Benn.



Jo Swinson MP

Shadow Secretary of State for Scotland

Jo was brought up in East Dunbartonshire, where she attended Douglas Academy in Milngavie. Jo graduated from the London School of Economics with a First Class Honours degree in Management, and then moved to Yorkshire where she worked as the Marketing & PR Manager for the radio station Viking FM.

As a student Jo was Secretary and Vice-Chair of the Liberal Democrat Youth and Students. Since 2003 Jo has been Vice Chair of the Gender Balance Task Force.

As Shadow Secretary of State for Scotland, Jo will now be holding Labour's Alistair Darling to account.



Sarah Teather MP

Shadow Secretary of State for Education

Sarah was elected to Brent East in a sensational by-election victory in 2003, when she took the former Labour stronghold with a swing of 20% from Labour. Following her re-election in 2005, she became the Lib Dem Shadow Secretary for Community & Local Government.

Before becoming an MP, Sarah worked for a major cancer care charity, Macmillan Cancer Relief, where she advised on health and social policy

A scientist by training, she previously worked in science policy both in the public and private sectors, first at the Royal Society advising the UK government on controversial aspects of science, and later at a science policy consultancy, evaluating public policies on science and innovation for Governments across Europe. Sarah will now be at the forefront of the Liberal Democrat Education policy and will be shadowing Ruth Kelly and the Department for Education and Skills.

Other women MPs have been given great promotions.

- Lorely Burt MP is the new spokesperson on Women and Equality.
- Lynne Featherstone MP is the new Lib Dem Spokesperson for London.
- Jenny Willott is spokesperson on Young People as well as Deputy Chief Whip
- Annette Brooke MP speaks on Children and Families issues
- Sandra Gidley MP is deputy spokesperson for Health.

Deserved congratulations to all our talented and hardworking women MPs. Watch this space as we profile different MPs each time!

Sue Vincent reports back on the WLD Annual Dinner at the National Liberal Club

On Friday, 10 March WLD held its annual dinner in the imposing surroundings of the National Liberal Club. The guest speaker was Sarah Teather MP, Shadow Education and Skills Secretary. She took time from her busy schedule preparing for the debate on the controversial Education Bill to give an inspiring talk to the dinner guests covering aspects of the Education Bill and, in particular, why more women should come forward to be placed on the approved candidate list. Her mantra was "Just fill in the form". She also answered many questions on the Education Bill.

Sarah recalled the time when, having just won the by-election in Brent she was facing her first press conference when she realized that she had put her heel through the hem of her only suit. Naturally, she was worried about this but Vera Head (WLD Treasurer) was sent for and mended the skirt there and then. A good example of women helping women in any way required!



Baroness Sarah Ludford MEP, Liz Wheeler and Sarah Teather MP

A raffle was held and also an auction of a special bottle of wine signed by Sarah Teather. It was noted that people had travelled from many destinations to come to the dinner including Brussels and Cologne, Germany.

View from the Chair



Well it's been a hectic start to 2006! WLD had a successful fringe meeting at spring conference with our newly elected leader stopping by to reiterate his commitment to gender equality, something you can be sure that we will hold him to!

With the local elections looming I'm sure many of you are out campaigning, there really are some encouraging stories of dedicated women standing in all areas of the country, for example Exec member Poddy Clarke is one of three women standing in the Brunswick Park Ward who stand an excellent chance of overtaking Labour in May.

I was delighted to see so many of our fantastic female MPs getting promotions within the new Lib Dem front bench team, something I think will prove hugely inspirational for women thinking about becoming prospective parliamentary candidates.

With the recent reshuffle Lorely Burt MP has now become the spokesperson for Women and Equality and I am very much looking forward to working with her on raising the profile and importance of WLD within the party. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Sandra Gidley MP for all the hard work she has done on behalf of women in the party and am delighted that she will remain involved through her role as Vice-President of WLD and President of GBTF.

One of the goals for WLD has been to try and raise the profile of women within the party and I'm pleased to report that membership numbers are up. We have an excellent and enthusiastic Executive Committee who are keen to develop innovative campaigns and events, to influence policy, to continue coming up with ingenious fundraising ideas, diversifying our membership base and continuing to fight for equality of representation for women at all levels of elected office.

If you would like to become more involved in WLD then please contact Vicki in the office as we have lots of exciting campaigns and events in the pipeline that need your help!



The Membership Challenge!



At our fringe, Sir Menzies Campbell challenged us to double our membership to 1000 members by the end of the year. As women, we are never shy of a challenge!

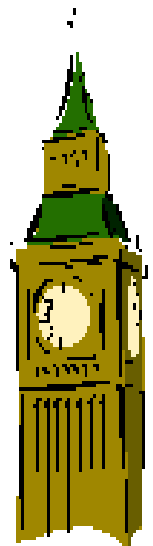
In order to increase our membership we are asking all of our current members to sign up one more person. We have enclosed a separate membership form for you to give to a woman you know in the party who you think would like to join.

Why do we need more members?

- more clout when campaigning nationally for issues that matter to women, such as our recent **Women in Prisons** and **Women in Debt** campaigns
- more credibility when raising women's issues within the Party
- more financial ability to pursue campaigns and ensure key policy issues are discussed
- more financial ability to support women candidates for election at all levels
- more capacity to provide networking opportunities

So thanks for all your support and let's make sure women in the party are given the profile and opportunities they deserve. Let's also make sure we work hard and play our part in making life better for women across the UK by campaigning on the difficult issues.

All new members (those joined since January 2006) will be put in a prize draw to win Tea for Two on the Terrace. This way they can bring the member who signed them up! Draw to be taken at our fringe meeting at Autumn Conference in Brighton. Prize will be drawn at the end of the year. Happy recruiting....



WLD Events -

please contact the office for more details:

Local government elections!

If you can help leaflet for a woman candidate in a target ward, then contact the WLD office and we can help you get in contact.

The Membership Challenge

Do help us recruit new members to make WLD are more effective campaigning organisation. See inside for more details.

Next WLD Executive

3rd June 2006 1pm, The Accord Rooms, Westminster

www.womenlibdems.org.uk

WLD MEMBERSHIP FORM

Title _____ Name _____

Address _____

Postcode _____

Tel Nos _____

Email _____

Party Member No _____

Membership Fee (*Please tick the appropriate amount*)

£20.00 (recommended) £7.00 (minimum)

Other £

I would like to pay by Cheque/Cash (payable to:
Women Liberal Democrats)

I would like to pay by Standing Order (see box
across)

Please return this form to: Women Liberal
Democrats-4 Cowley St.- London-SW1P 3NB

BANKERS ORDER FORM

To The Manager _____ (Name of bank)

Acct No _____ Sort Code _____

Branch Address _____

Postcode _____

Please Pay: £ _____ Annually/Quarterly
starting on _____

Please make any missed payments immediately
and cancel any previous standing orders to WLD.

To: The Women Liberal Democrats-4 Cowley St.-
London-SW1P 3NB

Account No: 71574175 Sort Code 15 30 00
Royal Bank of Scotland - London Victoria A Branch
119/121 Victoria Street - London SW1E 6RA

Name of Account _____

Address of Account Holder _____

Postcode _____

Signature _____ Date _____