

MINUTES

In Attendance: Vilnis Vesma (VV) who chaired the meeting, Stewart Bean (SB), Dr Anthony Lynch (AL); Gill Moseley (GM); Jonathan Gault (JG); Lance Allan (LA); guest Colin Sefton (CS); Steve Holmes (SH); Sue Edwards (SE).

- 1. Apologies for absence** James Joyce (JJ); Aaron Burnard (AB); Pete Brown (PB); Tom Allan (TA)
- 2.** VV welcomed those present, including guest Colin Sefton, visiting LD councillor from Tunbridge Wells, and Steve Holmes from Yorkley. With fewer than 17 members, meeting not quorate, so a vote to proceed was taken and carried unanimously. VV received permission to record the meeting so that AL could be engaged to help with the minutes.

Minutes of the previous Annual General Meeting held on 19 November 2024 were agreed without change. Proposed AL, seconded JG. There were no matters arising.

3. Reports

- 3.1 Chair** – JJ was absent due to illness and had not been able to submit a written report, VV gave a brief summary of the year's activities, highlighting:
- County elections: only FoD election success was GM - re-elected to represent Newent division.
 - Ongoing efforts to improve communications: consolidating email updates, making better use of the website. It was agreed that JJ be invited to submit a written report retrospectively. VV took action to ask him.

3.2 Treasurer – receive 2024 accounts as submitted & circulated before meeting

- Opening balance (Jan 2024): £7,614.09
- Closing balance (Dec 2024): £10,505.82
- Surplus: £2,391.73
- Total expenditure: £6,670.79
- Total income: £9,779.06
- A vote of thanks to JG was proposed by SB and seconded by VV

- 4. Membership** development secretary ill, LA to invite TA to send report. Need to grow membership – engage more directly with members and find out why they joined, what they are looking for. Three new members have joined recently, bringing our current total to 79 and the number of registered supporters has increased by two.

5. Council Group Receive written report from GM for both CC & DC

5.1 County: GM circulated her excellent reports (County & District) at the meeting (they will be attached to minutes). LD control on GCC with 27 Lib Dem councillors. Cabinet all Lib Dem.

5.2 District Council GM is the only Lib Dem on FoD DC but DC will disappear under the Unitary Authority proposals.

- 6. Autumn Conference.** GM reported back on the autumn conference, highlighting Ed Davey's speech and that in the national media he seems to be "punching above his weight". A strong contingent attended from across Gloucestershire. The main political challenge locally remains Reform UK. GM stressed the need to build membership and strengthen local campaigning. GM was warmly thanked for her tireless work at both County & District Level and for her financial support to the local party.

7. Elections.

7.1 Honorary President. It was proposed by VV, seconded by GM, that Dr Anthony Lynch be re-elected as Honorary President. Carried unanimously.

AL addressed the meeting, emphasising the need to combat political discourse based on hate, and calling for members to project decency and Liberal Democrat values in all campaigning. Followed by applause.

7.2 Election of Officers – to new committee (from 1st January 2026) all carried unanimously

Chair - JJ - proposed VV, seconded SB

Secretary – SB - proposed GM, seconded VV

Treasurer and Data Officer - JG - proposed SB, seconded VV

Membership Development Secretary -TA - proposed GM, seconded SB

Nominating Officer – Peter Brown – not present, but it was hoped he would stay in role

Ordinary member – Councillor GM – proposed VV, seconded SB

Ordinary member – Aaron Burnard – not present but agreed to stay

New Ordinary member – LA - proposed VV, seconded SB

New Ordinary member – SH – proposed VV, seconded SB

Ordinary member – SE – proposed VV, seconded SB

The two additional new members, Lance and Steve were welcomed, with VV noting the value of broadening the executive.

- 8. Budget for 2026.** JG pointed out that without action being taken, the budget would run into deficit. JJ & SB are working on a strategy for a better allocation of funds. Fundraising options discussed eg manned stand at public events & other fund-raising possibilities. Cost control was also discussed.
- 9. Appointment of Independent Examiner** It was agreed to exercise the right to disapply the need for audit or inspection as we are below the financial threshold whereby this would be necessary.
- 10. Any other business:** AL expressed appreciation to all volunteers, especially those delivering leaflets, canvassing, and supporting local campaigns

There being no other business, meeting closed at 12:25

Changes to first draft: item4 Membership clarification; item6 Autumn conference clarification.

Reports follow

Report for Forest of Dean Liberal Democrat Party AGM Oct '25

Gloucestershire County Council

Since the election on May 1st, Liberal Democrats have taken control of Gloucestershire County Council. We are also very proud of the fact that Cllr Lisa Spivey is the first woman to be elected to the position of Leader of the Council. The Liberal Democrats are one short of a majority but with the support of nine Green Party and one Labour member, we are confident that we will be able to carry through our manifesto promises.

The cabinet comprises wholly of Liberal Democrat members who have rapidly set the tone for a change of culture within the council and when dealing with residents.. If you wish to sample that change, you can do no better than to watch the recent cabinet meeting or catch one or two of the videos made by individual cabinet members, describing current actions and proposed improvements.

https://gloucestershire.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/1014429

Videos can be seen on the GCC Facebook or Instagram accounts.

Our council consists of 27 Lib Dems, 11 Reform, 9 Green Party, 6 Conservative, one Labour and one Independent (ex-Tory) members. That is a change as of May '21 from 28 Conservatives, 16 Lib Dems, 5 Labour, 4 Green Party. The total of seats was increased by two to 55 in this year's elections with several boundary changes in other parts of the county.

In the Forest of Dean, the Reform party took five of the eight county council seats, defeating four Tories and one Labour councillor. Two Green Party councillors held onto their seats comfortably, but mine was a close shave with a majority of 33. It is significant that in all four of the Forest towns, the Reform vote was very high. In Coleford, Cinderford and Lydney, four longstanding councillors were defeated. My seat in Newent has the only town in the FoD that did not fall to Reform.

In the Council Chamber, Reform members have brought two controversial motions about flags and immigrant hotel accommodation under the guise of national pride and planning law respectively. Language descended into what was questioned at the time as verging into race hate. Both motions were carefully considered in advance by our Group and deftly deferred to cabinet or defeated after robust debate.

Meanwhile, Cabinet member Cllr Roger Whyborn is bringing forward the very popular Community 20s and road safety scheme. Cllr Paul Hodgkinson has announced a new tranche of community funding through each councillor (£20K for two years), Cllr Ben Evans is delighted that Children's Services have come out of Special Measures, Cllr Dr Kate Usmar is pushing to build GCC residential homes to save elderly and vulnerable residents from having to be placed in privately run, expensive homes, Cllr Martin Horwood is pressurising adjacent councils to accept waste and recycling from residents of Gloucestershire who live nearer to out-of-county recycling centres and Cllr Joe Harris is innovating in Highways with new methods and surface treatments.

However, it takes time to turn around a tanker and GCC is no speedboat. Results should be evident shortly and we will celebrate them to show that we are the party of change that can be trusted to do a decent job for all of our residents while acting prudently with regard to expenditure.

I have added two more committees to my list. I still sit on Environment Scrutiny and Planning, but also on Economic Scrutiny and Adult Services, as well as putting my hand up as a panel member for Appeals. Casework continues to take up a good deal of my time.

Forest of Dean District Council

As a District Councillor I am now the sole Liberal Democrat on the FoDDC. Our Dymock candidate, Gill Kilmurray, elected in 2023, defected at no notice to the Conservatives earlier this year.

In spite of having an excellent candidate in Tony Clifford-Winters, to replace Julie Hudson, my erstwhile colleague in Newent & Taynton ward whose ill-health forced her resignation, the election was lost to a Conservative. This was due to a highly speculative but vigorous campaign by a Green Party candidate, added to a significant number of new Reform voters who, when faced with a ballot paper with no Reform candidate, put a cross by the closest match. All over the country, the swing to Reform was much underestimated by expert pollsters and had we been aware of the level of the threat, we might have been able to campaign in a more targeted way and held the seat.

However, the FoDDC will be abolished in about three years' time under the Local Government Reorganisation and there will be no more elections for this district authority unless a councillor resigns and causes a by-election. Fortunately, I have retained my place on the Development Management Committee and was re-elected as Vice-Chair. This was not an automatic process as without a Group I have no entitlement to a committee place.

The Local Plan is absorbing a great deal of energy and officer attention at the moment as they, and members who are appointed or choose to be involved, race to get it produced in time for approval before the Authority ceases to exist. Without a plan in place, we are in danger of speculative development and no legacy as we move forward into devolution.

Devolution is all about major funding for large projects being channelled through elected Mayors of Combined Authorities who will have the authority for planning and transport amongst other things. Once the government has decided which of the unitary options will go forward for our county, (one unitary, east-west split or Greater Gloucester and the rest) the unitary authority(ies) will need to join a combined (but unelected) authority such as The West of England Combined Authority (WECA). Only the Mayor is elected at this level.

A Shadow election for the new unitary(ies) is predicted to take place in May 2027. The vesting date will be a year later and the former county and district authorities will cease to exist at that point.

Gill Moseley