

# CAN THE GRAND OLD DUKE OF THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

As Liberal Democrats recover from the worst local election losses since the formation of the party, **Matt Cole** examines the place of the coalition years in the quarter-century of the Liberal Democrats' life, and finds that these are not the first local losses, nor did the decline start with the coalition. The fall in local representation began before 2005, and the party's peak of local success lies as far back as 1996. Nevertheless, local politics remains at the front line of Liberal Democrat politics: the most vulnerable to attack, the first to suffer losses, and yet the most essential to the heart and to the recovery of the party.



**I**T WAS ASSERTED in the first major study of the Liberal Democrats that, for both practical and ideological reasons, 'the importance of local politics to the Liberal Democrats cannot be overstated.'<sup>1</sup> Recent setbacks in local council elections are therefore seen by some as more significant than the usual cyclical losses of government parties, and the reputation of the coalition is seen as the

poisonous element. Torbay MP Adrian Sanders complained in the run-up to the local elections of 2011 that:

We have irrevocably damaged our public image. We now face the brutal realisation that we have fractured our core vote, lost a generation of young voters and alienated thousands of tactical voters in seats where it

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makes the difference between electoral success or failure. The message on the doorstep before the election was often 'I support another party, but you seem to have more integrity and do more for local people so you have my vote.' Now it is 'I used to vote for you, you still work hard for your local area, but you are discredited and lied just like the rest of them.'<sup>2</sup>

Analysing the position in 2013, author of the *Local Elections Handbook* Professor Michael Thrasher even warned that Liberal Democrats 'need resurrection, not recovery';<sup>3</sup> and the losses of 2014 prompted pressure for a change of leadership. However, a longer-term view of the Liberal Democrat record in local government shows that the party's participation in the coalition is not the only factor in Liberal Democrat local election performance, and that local politics remains vital to the Liberal Democrats' future fortunes.

## **Liberals and local government<sup>4</sup>**

The Liberal Party was born from the municipal campaigning of Joe Chamberlain, built strength through the campaigns of Lloyd George's rate strike in Wales and E. D. Simon's plans for development in Manchester and found even in the dark days of the 1950s, when the party's MPs could be counted on the fingers of one hand, that council chambers provided the last redoubt of Liberal power, the party remaining in control of a small number of local authorities.

From the 1960s onwards, Liberal achievements were underpinned by the party's commitment to local government. A Local Government Department was established at party headquarters in 1962, the Association of Liberal Councillors first emerged in 1965 and was officially recognised in 1969, and the decade saw a series of parliamentary election victories – including those at Orpington, Colne Valley and Birmingham Ladywood – at least in part built upon success in local politics.

In 1970 the role of local government in the Liberal Party's profile was confirmed by the Assembly's adoption of the community politics strategy, and by the addition of environmental concern to the existing focus on localism and regionalism, to form a policy agenda particularly suited to fighting local elections. In 1977 the ALC's strength was visible with the opening of its headquarters in the Birchcliffe Centre in Hebden Bridge, where its identity as what one supporter described as 'the Liberal Party in exile'<sup>5</sup> was expressed in a programme of publications and campaign meetings, as well as in criticism of the Liberal leadership over pacts and alliances with other parties and departures from distinctive Liberal policy positions.

From a few hundred councillors (some of doubtful association with the party) in the 1950s, the Alliance in 1986 passed the 3,000 mark, of whom 524 were Social Democrats.<sup>6</sup> On the eve of the merger between the Liberals and Social Democrats, the Alliance controlled dozens of councils and took part in administrations on dozens more.

## **The Liberal Democrats' fortunes**

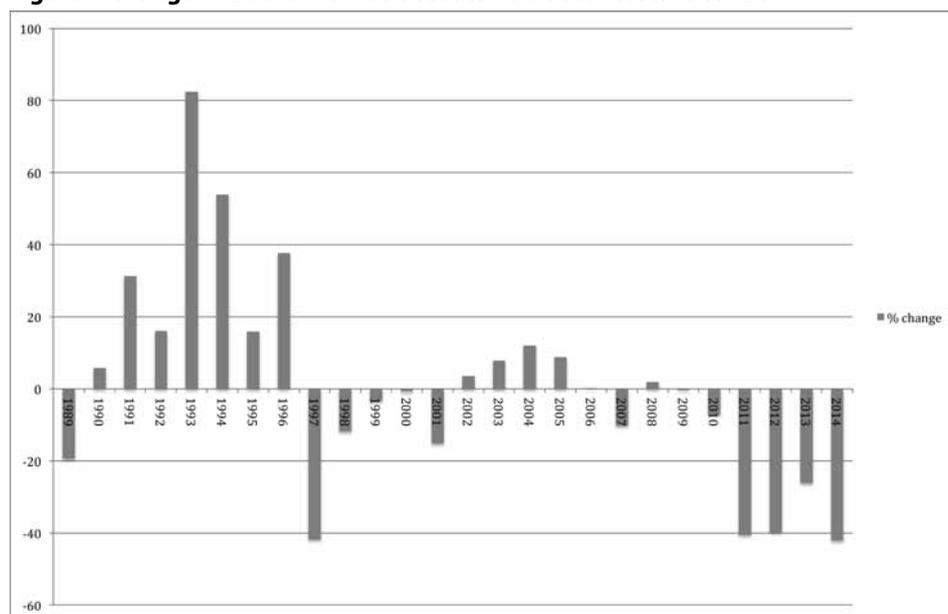
The formation of the Liberal Democrats showed that their strength in local government was an asset at a time of turbulent national leadership. There was considerable continuity in the core organisation of Liberal Democrat councillors, largely because the ALC dominated its Social Democrat counterpart, the Association of Social Democrat Councillors, both numerically and in terms of leadership, experience and resources. SDP councillors were outnumbered by five to one before the merger, and a proportion of these declined to join the Liberal Democrats, leaving their erstwhile colleagues in an even smaller minority. The Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors had its headquarters in the Birchcliffe Centre and the rallying cry for the party's first electoral test in May 1988 was given by former ALC General Secretary Maggie Clay.<sup>7</sup> At a joint ALC and ASDC conference in June a timetable was established (after what was acknowledged as 'some hard bargaining') leading to a launch of the joint organisation in November.<sup>8</sup>

The first two years of local elections were difficult as the Liberal Democrats dealt with the fallout from the merger, and the 1989 county council elections saw the loss of 20 per cent of the seats won in the big advance of 1985. Thereafter the party re-established and expanded its strength, though national circumstances halted and even sometimes reversed the pattern more than once (see Fig. 1).

By 1992 there were 3,800 Liberal Democrat councillors;<sup>9</sup> and

**From the 1960s onwards, Liberal achievements were underpinned by the party's commitment to local government.**

**Figure 1: change in Liberal Democrat seats held at contests 1989–2014**



in 1996 the figure was over 5,000 and the party controlled over fifty councils.<sup>10</sup> This partly resulted from the disintegration of Conservative support during the second Major administration, but had also been growing since 1990 because of the effective targeting of scarce resources on winnable wards, referred to eight years earlier in Maggie Clay's exhortation to activists to 'get on your bike' to a target seat.

The 'soft' victories handed by the national image of the Conservatives, including the near-doubling of the number of Liberal Democrat county councillors in 1993, proved hard to defend as Tony Blair replaced Major as prime minister in 1997, and consequently almost all of the 392 gains made four years earlier were lost in net terms. The whole of the first Blair premiership was a period of damage limitation for Liberal Democrats in local government, each round of elections seeing the party shed up to 12 per cent of the number of seats it was defending. The period ended with the loss of another eighty county council seats in 2001. The Liberal Democrats controlled twenty fewer councils than four years earlier.

From this period onwards, however – prior to the Iraq War, the first trebling of tuition fees or the intensification of the Blair–Brown struggle – Liberal Democrats in local government showed their ability to achieve growth independently of, and prior to, the party nationally. Each of the next five rounds of

elections saw net gains, sometimes of 8 or 12 per cent, in council seat numbers. Significantly, these led to the capture or retrieval of northern, former Labour, administrations such as Newcastle and Pendle – adding to Liverpool and Sheffield, which the party won in 1998 and 1999 respectively. By 2007 the number of Liberal Democrat Councillors had returned to 4,700.

This was, however, a peak. Every year except one since 2006 has seen a decline in the number of Liberal Democrat councillors and councils.<sup>11</sup> Though heightened in 2007 by the party's national leadership difficulties, this pattern clearly predates the formation of the coalition and is reflected in the three case studies below. This strengthens the conviction that Liberal Democrat performance at local elections is only partly a result of national events, and that on occasion the causal relationship can be the other way around.

It would be fatuous to dispute that the record of the coalition, and its perception by the public, has damaged Liberal Democrat strength in local government. After four years of losses – not all unprecedented in scale, but previously unknown in succession – there were by 2013 only 2,700 Liberal Democrat councillors, the lowest number in the party's history; in 2014 this fell to under 2,400. The first and heaviest of these defeats led to calls for Nick Clegg's resignation, but the record of the past suggests that leadership change and

national image only determine the shorter-term and most extreme swings in Liberal Democrat strength in local government. The long-term pattern is more complex.

## Functions of local representation

As well as carrying out their own work as representatives, councillors and their campaigns can play three types of wider role in a party – an electoral function; a communication function; and a recruitment function – and for the Liberal Democrats these have been especially important.

Council election success is particularly important in giving credibility to the Liberal Democrats as the third party nationally. The slogan 'Winning Round Here' is often held aloft on photographs in Liberal Democrat literature by well-known councillors supporting parliamentary candidates, and many Liberal Democrat MPs owe their seats to the confidence given to voters to back them by preceding local election success for the party. One MP noted that 'most of the '97 intake have seats built on local government success'<sup>12</sup> and this was quantified by a study showing that eighteen of the twenty-eight new Liberal Democrat MPs in that parliament represented areas governed by Liberal Democrat local authorities. 'For the Liberal Democrats, local election success has been vital to their improvement in parliamentary representation since the 1990s' concluded Russell et al. 'Building a strong local base has been one of the main mechanisms the party has used to bridge the electoral credibility gap,' they continue, adding that 'the Liberal Democrat campaign strategy may have worked on a micro-scale since the victories in Cardiff, Leeds and Manchester reflected gains at the local level short of taking the council.'<sup>13</sup> A particularly clear example is Burnley, where the party went from seven councillors (one less than the BNP) in 2003 to twenty-three (and control of the council) in 2008 before winning the parliamentary seat in 2010. There is also a measurable 'horizontal' electoral effect in which success in one council prompts confidence and improvement in neighbouring Liberal Democrat council campaigns.<sup>14</sup>

Secondly, like other parties, the Liberal Democrats use council representation to assist dialogue within the party. ‘One of my rules for running the Lib Dems’, reflected Paddy Ashdown, ‘is that, whenever the Leader and the ALDC act together, we can always get our way.’<sup>15</sup> Leaders who preside over dramatic fortunes for the party would also receive the reaction from council groups, whether a boost as with Kennedy in 2001,<sup>16</sup> or a backlash such as Menzies Campbell suffered in 2007.<sup>17</sup> This exchange also takes place at constituency level, with Liberal Democrat MPs taking the pulse of local opinion from council representatives, and sometimes feeding back parliamentary business or constituency cases to them. ‘Politics when it works well is about communication other than through the media’, concluded John Hemming after two years as MP for Birmingham Yardley: ‘you have discussions in the council group, for instance. Birmingham’s council group obviously is more than just Yardley constituency, and we have discussed issues there before coming to a conclusion in Parliament.’<sup>18</sup>

Lastly the Liberal Democrats have used local politics to greater effect than other parties in recruiting, training and promoting members in the party structure. Community politics emphasised the importance of year-round campaigning, and the effects of this are reflected in quantitative studies showing that ‘the Liberal Democrats are more able to recruit their members to do election campaigning than is true of other parties’<sup>19</sup> and that 16 per cent of Liberal Democrat members have stood for elected office, compared to 9 per cent for Labour and 3 per cent for the Conservatives.<sup>20</sup> It is interesting to note that at the formation of the Liberal Democrats, the party showed its keenness to promote newer recruits through local government contests by drawing almost half of its council candidates from those under forty-five, compared to figures of a third for Labour and under a fifth for the Conservatives.<sup>21</sup>

Moving to the Commons, two-thirds of the largest-ever group of Liberal Democrat MPs (2005) had council experience, including thirteen former leaders or deputy leaders of authorities, six leaders or

deputies of party groups, two cabinet members or committee chairs, and two mayors. Although in 2010 the proportion of Liberal Democrat MPs with council experience fell to 60 per cent, it remained above the comparable figure for Labour (54 per cent) and far ahead of that for the Conservatives (21 per cent). Whilst some have regarded this as regrettable because of its tendency to exclude ‘big personalities’ or because it inhibits the selection as parliamentary candidates of women, others argue it improves parliamentary discipline. Either way, the distinctively clear role of local government experience in Liberal Democrat parliamentary candidate selections is evident.<sup>22</sup>

**Three case studies**

Three case studies serve to illustrate at ward level the principles first observable through the national data, and to indicate the impact of local variables in such contests. The cases examined here, echoing the regional examples of Orpington, Colne Valley and Ladywood in the 1960s, are from the Midlands, Yorkshire and Greater London.

*Birmingham City Council*

The West Midlands – and especially its urban areas – have proved difficult territory for Liberal candidates at all levels since the Second World War. Birmingham, in particular, suffered until 1940 from the effects of the Chamberlain dynasty’s departure from Liberal ranks

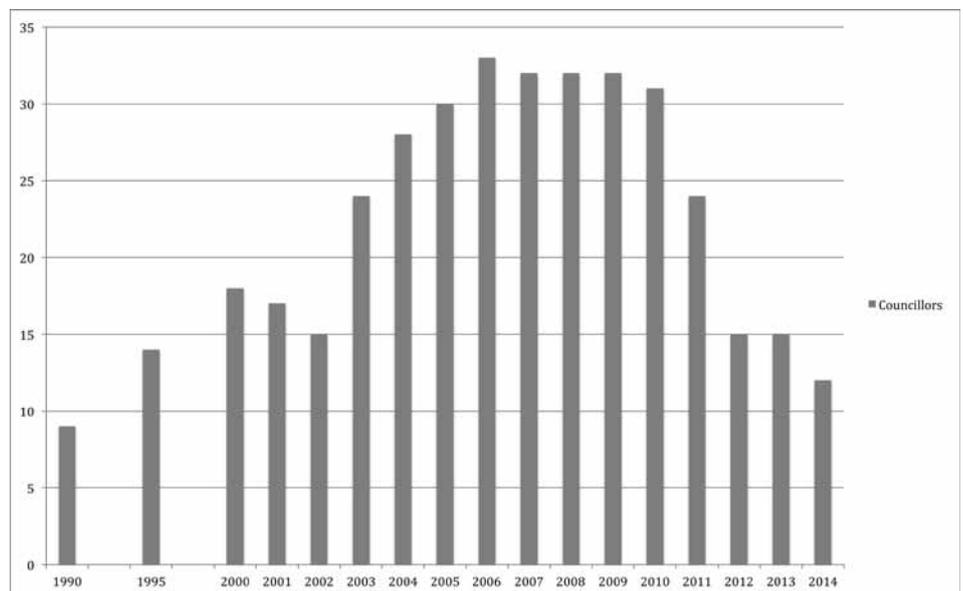
two generations earlier. By 1953 there were no Liberals on the city’s 120-strong council and no candidates at council elections. But Liberal Democrats built on the revival of the 1960s to achieve joint control of the city, from which came their first general election victory in Birmingham since before the First World War (see Fig. 2).<sup>23</sup>

The experience of Birmingham Liberal Democrat council group’s longest-serving members dates back to the 1960s when Wallace Lawler used community campaigning and extensive casework in the north of the city to build a group of eight councillors and win the Birmingham Ladywood parliamentary seat at a by-election in 1969. Lawler lost Ladywood at the 1970 general election and died the following year, but his colleagues maintained Liberal representation on the city council through challenging circumstances.

The turbulent fortunes of the Liberals nationally in the late 1970s coincided with major demographic change in the Aston and Newtown areas, which were Lawler’s political base, and the Liberal group declined to only two councillors. A strategic decision was made to target wards in the east of the city around Sheldon, and victories there were supplemented by three SDP councillors established by 1986 from neighbouring Hall Green ward.

This group formed the foundation of Liberal Democrat success in Birmingham, which grew from single figures after the merger to

**Figure 2: Liberal Democrat councillors on Birmingham City Council 1990–2014**



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double in size within ten years and peak at 33 out of 120 councillors in 2007. By this time the Liberal Democrat group had shared power with the Conservatives for four years, with Paul Tilsley, first elected to the council in 1969, as deputy council leader. The partnership with the Conservatives was made easier than one with Labour not by ideology, but chiefly by Labour's reluctance and the electoral politics of Birmingham local government, in which only one ward is a genuine contest between Lib Dems and the Tories. In 2005 the Liberal Democrats were able to use the support and credibility they had developed in local government to secure the election of city councillor John Hemming as the MP for Birmingham Yardley, in which constituency the party had already won every council seat.

This success arose in part from the failings of the Conservative and Labour governments of the period, with the controversy over Iraq consolidating support in wards such as Sparkbrook. Added to this was the discredit brought to Labour in Birmingham by the overturning of three of its 2005 election victories following successful prosecutions for fraud.<sup>24</sup> It also relied, however, upon careful targeting of resources and the maintenance of the community politics philosophy of 'actively seek out and deal with constituents' grievances', as group member Roger Harmer puts it. Veteran of the 1960s and 1970s revival David Luscombe

was reproached by the city council chief executive for leading a group which brought more cases to the administration than any other, and thanked the chief executive for the compliment.

The formation of the coalition in 2010 clearly raised the prospect that the Conservative–Liberal Democrat administration in Birmingham would become victim to public dissatisfaction at government policy. The Liberal Democrats' support slipped to the point where the group was reduced to less than half its original size, and Labour retrieved control of the council. However, the equation of coalition with collapse of support is simplistic: the support of the Liberal Democrats was in decline from 2007 onwards, and in its heartland the party remained popular, winning the popular vote in the Yardley constituency at the local elections of 2011, 2012 and 2014, when all four wards in the seat were won by the Liberal Democrats.

The impact of the coalition has been to return Liberal Democrat council representation in Birmingham to its pre-Blair level. The long-term resilience of Birmingham Liberal Democrats which was visible in the 1980s, and the continuing higher base in seats which have been won and then lost in the interim, will be important in restoring the balance in the future.

### *City of York Council*

The roots of the Liberal Democrat group on the City of York Council

are also to be found in an earlier Liberal revival, and as in Birmingham the Liberal Democrats were able to go from the secure but limited representation this achieved to take control of the council.

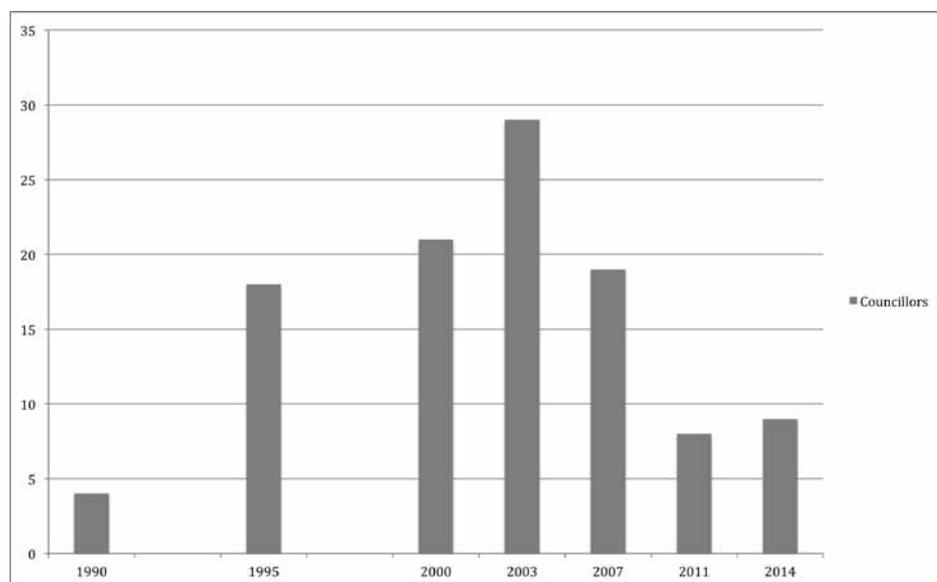
A small but determined Liberal group was established on York City Council from 1973 onwards under the energetic but controversial leadership of Steve Galloway, a Liberal activist in Yorkshire since the 1960s. Galloway was Liberal parliamentary candidate in York in 1974, but when in the 1980s he was denied the opportunity to stand again by the decision to assign York to the Social Democrats, his hostility to the Alliance inhibited its electoral progress in York.

Galloway refused any Liberal cooperation in York general election campaigns, leading the SDP candidate Vince Cable to despair that 'even by the standards of a party with more than its share of bloody-minded individualists, he was (and I understand, remains) in a league of his own.'<sup>25</sup> At local elections this isolation of the Social Democrats restricted them to winning only one council seat at a by-election in 1986. When the York Liberal Democrats were formed (with Galloway as their group leader) they had only six seats, quickly reduced to four by the early troubles of the merged party. In most York wards by the early 1990s the Liberal Democrats had fallen into fourth place behind the Greens.

As Liberal Democrats, however, the group prospered, growing from four seats to eighteen by 1995, and peaking at twenty-nine in 2003 (see Fig. 3). As in Birmingham, there were both external and internal factors involved. Significantly, the former included the creation of the City of York Council in the 1990s, which broadened the authority's territory to include the areas of Harrogate and Ryedale and thereby brought the activist body to what former group leader Andrew Waller calls a 'critical mass.' Deployed effectively around target wards, these supporters could make a telling difference to results. York Conservatives, meanwhile, did not learn this message, and allowed their activists to spread randomly, leaving them with no seats in 2003.

The Conservatives also lost the parliamentary constituency of York

**Figure 3: Liberal Democrat councillors on City of York Council 1990–2014**

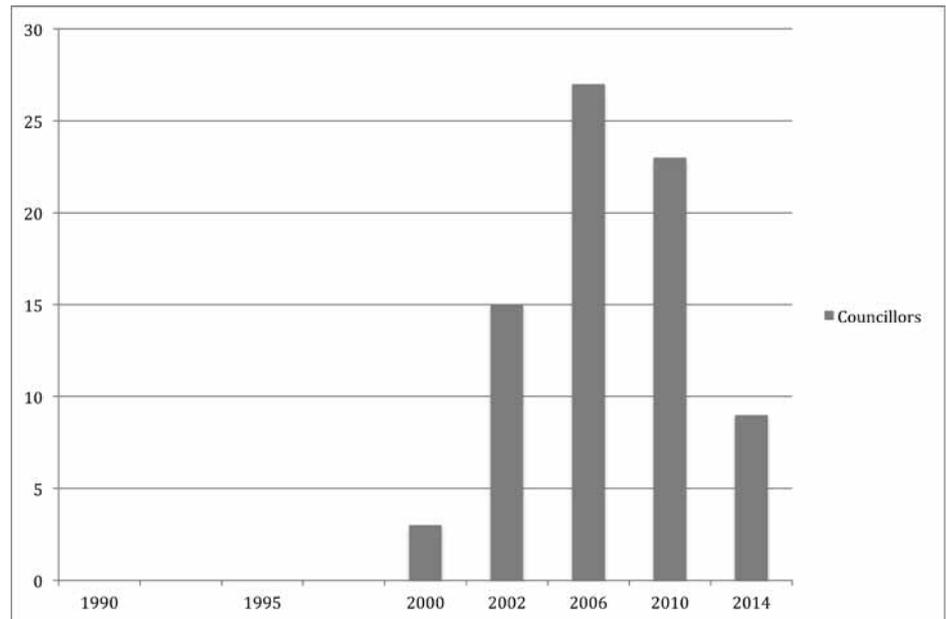


in 1992, and between then and 2010 the local government success of the Liberal Democrats was matched in general elections, at which Andrew Waller was three times the candidate and the party's poll share rose from 10.6 per cent to 25.2 per cent, the latter figures less than 1 per cent behind the Conservatives. Waller attributes the growth in general election votes partly to the training and recruitment of activists at local elections, though the increase in support did not mirror the ward-by-ward pattern as clearly as in Birmingham, and this effect has been reduced by the introduction of 'all in' local elections at four-year intervals.

Responsibility for the more recent decline of the York group's size and influence is placed squarely at the door of the party leadership by Waller, who, along with ten other Liberal Democrat councillors including Galloway, lost their seats in 2011. Waller pointed to 'a very serious change of approach that's needed at the leadership of the party'<sup>56</sup> and claims that local government representatives of the party have been treated as 'road-kill'. Though the raw vote of established Liberal Democrat councillors held up, he claims, the ineffectiveness of the Liberal Democrat leadership in imposing the party's identity positively on the coalition's image led to a rallying of the Labour vote to overhaul him and his colleagues.

As in Birmingham, however, this is only part of the story. The organisational recovery of the Conservatives meant that they gained eight seats and deprived the Liberal Democrats of overall control in 2007. Cable also blames Galloway's divisive leadership for some loss of support in his five years as council leader: whilst significant improvements were made in environmental policy, and the Liberal Democrat council pioneered the 'York Pride' project, Cable claims Galloway 'made mistakes which led to them being swept out.'<sup>57</sup> Whatever the reason, there can be no dispute that, as in Birmingham, the ebbing of the Liberal Democrat tide began before the formation of the coalition. York's 'natural' state is one of no overall control, a balance that was lost in the Liberal Democrats' favour before 2007 and to their disadvantage after that date, as a result

**Figure 4: Liberal Democrat councillors on Haringey Council 1990–2014**



of circumstances both within and outside the group's control.

The Liberal Democrats continued to run York as a minority administration, finding the Conservatives realistic partners compared to Labour, whose councillors are accused by Waller of 'sabotage'. Labour ministers at national level, however, Waller found more helpful than coalition ones after 2010: he found the Liberal Democrat national leadership 'did not care about local government'. In York, a Liberal Democrat group with a strong tradition of independence and radicalism has found itself alienated from the party leadership. This is not an unknown scenario in party history, and blame for it may be placed on either side. Whatever else is true, the coalition environment amplified the scenario's unwelcome features.

#### *Haringey*

Liberal Democrat representation in the Borough of Haringey disappeared in 1990 when the party's lone councillor was beaten at the nadir of the merger process. This left the authority a virtual one-party affair, with Labour holding fifty-seven of its fifty-nine seats, running an administration which earned national publicity for the poverty of its standards. It was not until 1998 that three seats were secured by the Liberal Democrats, rising rapidly to fifteen in 2002 and peaking at twenty-seven (only

three behind Labour) in 2006 (see Fig. 4). At the previous year's general election Lynne Featherstone, one of the 1998 victors, secured Hornsey and Wood Green, one of the two parliamentary seats in the borough. The Liberal Democrats' first attempt to win the seat only thirteen years earlier had garnered less than one vote in ten.

Mark Pack, who joined the Liberal Democrat campaign team in 1997 after cutting his electioneering teeth in York and at various parliamentary by-election campaigns, attributes the party's success there to three factors, any two of which are in his experience necessary for success: the right demographic base, party organisation, and external factors such as national politics or failure locally by other parties.

Pack argues that, as well as targeting, organisation in Haringey has benefitted from the integration of campaigns at all levels: council, mayoral and London Assembly, parliamentary, and European elections. The largely interlocking cycles of these elections has meant they have become 'building blocks' for continuous campaigning by consistent teams: each ward team in Hornsey and Wood Green shows MP Lynne Featherstone as a member on local campaign literature.

Pack also points to the importance of the atmosphere and culture of campaign teams; of avoiding a 'self-reinforcing circle' of veteran

activists; and of recognising the point at which charismatic personalities – best for ensuring the survival or revival of small and threatened groups – need to step back to create the collegial atmosphere which sponsors growth. Campaigns can also be inhibited by ‘lack of experience of knowing what winning an election means.’

Opponents on both sides supplied Haringey Liberal Democrats with a great deal of ammunition: local Conservative tactics are described by Pack as ‘inept’, leaving them with no seats at all after the last three elections; the ruling Labour group, on the other hand, has gained national notoriety for low standards of service. In 2009, Haringey’s performance was placed by OFSTED in the bottom nine in the country for children’s services, and the whole council was listed by the Audit Commission in the worst four nationally, the worst in London.

National image effects were limited until 2014, with Labour’s decline (as in York and Birmingham) preceding the party’s difficulties in government. Similarly, the peak of Liberal Democrat success was 2006; three councillors were lost in 2010, and two more resigned the party following the formation of the coalition. The 2014 elections, when the party lost over half of its councillors, showed how far this pattern has been extended by the Liberal Democrats’ time in national office – especially with a local MP who is a government minister – but, as in Birmingham and York, the tide was already receding from the Liberal Democrat high watermark before 2010.

### Conclusions

Several issues worthy of further examination are raised by this survey, including the regional patterns, parliamentary and electoral records of Liberal Democrat councillors. From these introductory observations, however, it is clear, firstly, that local government remains more important for Liberal Democrats than for other parties in sustaining electoral credibility, conveying ideas internally and preparing the next generation of implementers of party policy. The coalition has made each of these processes more difficult, but at the

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same time even more important for the future. It is likely – and this was confirmed by the experience of the Eastleigh by-election victory in February 2013, based upon decades of success in council elections – that the inevitable challenge to the Liberal Democrats’ parliamentary number arising from the experience of coalition in 2015 can be offset to some extent by strength in local government.

Secondly, Liberal Democrat success in local government often builds on the achievements of Liberal and Social Democrats over decades, but at its height produced results greater in scale than even the Alliance’s most prosperous periods. Recent detailed studies of Liberal Democrat activity in local elections show that, contrary to widespread assumption, campaigning and organisation remain key factors,<sup>28</sup> and the survey above suggests that national images of the Liberal Democrats and their opponents are variable in their impact on local election results.

The idea that the coalition has killed the Liberal Democrat representation in local government is far too simplistic: decline in the party’s number of councillors began before 2010, as did the weakening of the transfer of local success to parliamentary representation. The analysis by Russell et al. of the 2005 intake of Liberal Democrat MPs shows that ‘only Cambridge followed the 1997 stepping stone pattern’<sup>29</sup> and suggests that the party’s general decline in local politics began before 2005. Indeed, the Liberal Democrats’ peak of success in terms of numbers of councillors and councils lies as far back as 1996.

The rises and falls in Liberal Democrat local government fortunes before and since that date demonstrate the persistency of the party at municipal level: even the loss of three-quarters of Liberal seats fought in the 1977 county council elections (held as the Lib-Lab Pact got underway) did not signal the end of the party; and it was strength in local government which helped all but three Liberal MPs hold their seats in the general election two years later. The Grand Old Duke of York (or Birmingham, Haringey or anywhere else) has been further down the hill and will march up again. Local politics remains at the front line of Liberal

Democrat politics: the most vulnerable to attack, the first to suffer losses, and yet the most essential to the heart and to the recovery of the party.

*Matt Cole is a Teaching Fellow in the Department of Modern History at the University of Birmingham. He is grateful to Roger Harmer, Andrew Waller and Mark Egan for interviews, from which quotation not otherwise attributed is taken.*

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- 6 *The Social Democrat*, 15 May 1986.
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# The Liberal Party and the First World War

A one-day conference organised by the *Journal of Liberal History* and King's College, London. Saturday 1 November 2014, Room K2.40, Strand Campus of KCL

In this year, 100 years since the coming of war in August 1914, the conflict is remembered chiefly for its impact on the millions of ordinary men, women and children who were to suffer and die and over the following four years. Lives were altered forever and society transformed. But the war had political consequences too: empires fell, new nations emerged and British political parties and the party system underwent profound change, a transformation which plunged the Liberal Party into civil war and caused it to plummet from a natural party of government to electoral insignificance within a few short years. This conference will examine some of the key issues and personalities of the period.

Papers already confirmed:

- Lloyd George and Winston Churchill (**Professor Richard Toye**, Exeter University)
- Asquith as war premier and Liberal leader (**Dr Roland Quinault**, Institute of Historical Research)
- The First World War papers of H H Asquith and Lewis Harcourt (**Mike Webb**, Bodleian Library)

Papers are also being sought on:

- Sir Edward Grey and the road to war
- The Liberal Party and the politics of the First World War
- The Liberal Party, the Irish question and the First World War

The day will conclude with a panel discussion on whether or not the war was the destroyer of the Liberal Party (the Trevor Wilson thesis).

Full details of all speakers, guest chairs and papers will appear in the autumn edition of the *Journal of Liberal History*.

**The cost of the conference will be £15 (students and unwaged £10) to include morning and afternoon refreshments.** (Lunch is not provided but there are plenty of cafes and sandwich shops in the vicinity of the Campus.)

To register please send your name and address to **Graham Lippiatt**, 114 Worcester Lane, Four Oaks, Sutton Coldfield, B75 5NJ, or [gjl29549@aol.com](mailto:gjl29549@aol.com). Payment can be taken on the day.