

# Liverpool

a study of Liberal fortitude

A personal perspective

**Councillor Richard Kemp CBE**

Leader Liverpool Liberal Democrats

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This booklet is dedicated to the memory of Jones the Vote. Sir Trevor Jones took the Liberal Group on Liverpool Council from two members to control. He did it by inventing and applying 'community politics'. The techniques that he invented have elected thousands of councillors and are the basis of what we do today. Trevor Jones lives on while we Focus; Good Morning or street letter!

# Foreword

Wherever I go and meet Liberal Democrats who have held on in bad times and advanced in good times I am always conscious that in the background there is an individual or a small group of people who have the leadership and vision to pull people behind them. These people show:

- An absolute belief in the principles of liberalism; and
- An absolute belief that it is essential in their community that those beliefs be put into practice.

I sensed that again when I visited Liverpool both before and after this year's elections. That's why I asked Richard Kemp not to write a 'history' of Liverpool Lib Dems but something which shows how leaders have come and gone and contributed to what has been the most successful Liberal and then Liberal Democrat Urban Group in the last half of the last century and the first decade of this century.

In this City they not only invented community politics in the era of Cyril Carr and Trevor Jones but have delivered liberalism right through to the era of Mike Storey and beyond. Delivering liberal policies that worked and keeping themselves in a position where they could control or influence the city's fortunes.

That story has not ended. This year Liverpool provided one of the best City results for us with a trebling of the Mayoral vote and a doubling of the number of councillors. They stand once more on the threshold of strong electoral success applying new techniques to the decades old community campaigning at which they have become so adept.

Liverpool can write this story because they have been at it for so long but in every successful group there are the likes of Cyril Carr, Trevor Jones, David Alton, Mike Storey and Richard Kemp. Skills like desk top publishing, social media and knowing how to use CONNECT are all important, but unless there is leadership and a determination to win it is of only secondary value.

So this is Liverpool's story. Given our influx of new and capable members I hope that you will make it your story as well.

I am pleased that the LGA Liberal Democrat Group, as part of their work in promoting good practice among Liberal Democrat Council Groups, are supporting the publication of this booklet.



Best wishes,

**Tim Farron MP**  
Leader, Liberal  
Democrats



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# Dear Friend,

Whenever we see accounts of heroic Liberal (Democrat) wins at elections or sometimes even more heroic defeats we tend to look at the techniques of the campaign. Did we get enough on the Shuttleworth? Did we get the leaflets right? Did our targeting work?

The problem is that many in our party have tried to see in these reports a simple formula for success. I am not saying that these are not important and in this brief document I will explain why Liverpool has since 1962 been at or near the forefront of looking at new ideas and techniques. But they are not in themselves enough. Before any of that can kick in you need to have teams of Lib Dems and particularly candidates who:

1. Badly want to win. The orgasm they delight in is hearing those magic words "I therefore declare that the councillor for the Blogsthorpe ward (hushed tones, Liberal Democrat) is..... YAAAAAYYYYYY!!!!!!

2. Have a fierce belief in their beliefs and therefore in the party that most embodies those beliefs. There really is no point in winning if you are not burning to do something which will bring your beliefs into practice.
3. Have a fierce belief that it is the views of you and your party that are needed to take forward the community, ward and city in which you live.

Next year I 'celebrate' 50 years in our party. I joined up in exactly the same place that Tim Farron did more than a few years later in the home of Mrs Neva Orrell at 72, Turpin Green Lane, Leyland.

She embodied all three points. She soldiered on through 50+ years when having eight MPs and 2,000 councillors would have seemed an absolute luxury, but she cared, she believed and she fought.

For 43 of those years I have campaigned in Liverpool having first been elected in 1975. I have seen the tide come in and out and in and out again for our party. It began to come in with a 'cinder under the door' Cyril Carr who alongside Joe Wilmington became the first Liberal Councillors in modern times. He and Joe sat in a Chamber with 158 Aldermen and Councillors from Labour, Conservative and a small Protestant party.

In 2016 I led a group of four Lib Dems out of 91 councillors but between 1975 and 2016 I have been a member of a group which had 72 members and was the largest liberal group at any level in Europe. We went down in 2015 to having just two councillors both called Kemp. In fact for four years you had to be called Kemp to get elected as a Lib Dem!

During those years we have been in control and out of control. We have lacked self-control and have been highly disciplined but always, always, always there has been at minimum a small core of people who embodied the three fundamentals outlined above and put their all into keeping the party in existence; moving ahead and fighting for the City.

I hope you find this brief and biased history of liberalism in Liverpool instructive. This is a story about the themes of campaigning and beliefs and not a blow-by-blow account. Perhaps another day I might do the blow-by-blow account!

Yours in liberalism,

**Cllr Richard Kemp CBE,**  
Leader, Liverpool Liberal Democrats



# 1. In the beginning there was Cyril!

In 1961 the Liberal party got perhaps its biggest ever boost when a young bloke called Eric Lubbock won the Orpington by-election. Suddenly the history books were dug out and interest began to be taken in our party and Leadership. Liberal Leader Jo Grimond declared that the party would “March to the sound of gunfire.” Well he had been Col. Grimond in the war!

One person who heard that call was Cyril Carr a young solicitor who had always been a liberal and for that matter always been a Liberal as well having joined at Liverpool University. The Liberals in Liverpool had never quite disappeared when they had almost everywhere except a few places which were far flung and largely Celtic. When all else failed there was always the Garmoyle to fall back on.

The Garmoyle has been our HQ since the 1920s when people from all over the UK but mostly Liverpool bought £1 shares in a company and bought up the freehold and building at 509, Smithdown Road.

There was always somewhere for meetings, fundraising and whist drives. There was always a prominent HQ which could be seen by thousands of people a day.

Cyril, Joe and a few others including another young man called David Mawdsley who is still campaigning for us today, albeit in Wales, were inspired by Orpington and immediately began to campaign in South Liverpool, the most middle class area of Liverpool which then, as now, seemed to be the best bet for liberalism.

In a way success surprised them. They were used to losing and in some ways they were lucky to have caught the Orpington tide. In politics you have to make your own luck and take advantage of opportunities as they arise. One thing you could be sure of in those days was that no-one joined the Liberal party because they wanted to leap into a good political career. Glorious defeat was the order of the day.

The campaigns for Cyril in Church Ward and Joe in St Michaels were very traditional. Elections addressed where the candidates stood in ‘the Liberal interest’; canvassing; and being around. However, there were three key differences which enabled them to break down the tribal barriers. Being young, being innovative and striking a chord with the electorate.

**Lesson: You don't have to be big to be effective. One person can be the grit around which the pearl forms or can be the burr under the horse blanket which throws the controlling party.**



This was at a time when politics was deeply tribal. 97 per cent of people voted for the two main Parties with many voting against 'them' rather than for 'us'. Discussion with people who were there in the early days tells me that as now many people voted Liberal not necessarily because they were liberals but because they liked the candidates, trusted the candidates to work on their patch and thought that the candidates had the ideas to do things within the city as a whole.

The Liberals had a political base but suffered misfortune. No other gains were made, Cyril Carr held his seat but Joe lost his. For a while Cyril was our sole representative, but he didn't give in. He fought for every vote and every issue with passion as both parties campaigned strongly against him and sought to put out the fire that they knew could eventually challenge them. They needed a push to lift them forward.



Cllr Sir Trevor Jones, Cllr David Alton, Cllr Lady Doreen Jones and the then Liberal party leader David (now Lord) Steel

## 2. Then there was Trevor



Sir Trevor Jones and Lady Doreen Jones. They were described by political opponents as the “Mersey Pirates” – so they got a flag made up!

The big push came when a cocky, brash young businessman called Trevor Jones took objection to the City’s plan to build an inner ring road which would demolish his business premises. He went to see the leaders of both Labour and Tory Parties and left empty handed. What appeared to be two Parties was really just the one that was pushing forward ideas for demolishing communities, building ring roads, and concrete edifices throughout the City.

So who else could he turn to but Cyril Carr? This is to do Trevor an injustice because he was not a political opportunist. He came from the Welsh tradition which had built Liverpool and created more than 40 Welsh Chapels and churches throughout the city. He was very different from Cyril.

Trevor’s liberalism expressed itself in a more practical form than Cyril. He had left school and become a seaman. He had started his own business making rope ladders for ships and had built up a respectable business not only growing his own company but also by acquiring others.

He wanted to fight the Duopoly. He didn’t want to be the second councillor in a group of two. He wanted to be the second councillor in a group of 22 and then 42 and eventually 48 as the Liberals first took control of the Council. He believed in liberalism, he believed in himself and he believed passionately in his City.

He was the first politician in the UK to marry successful business techniques to the practice of building and running

a political party. Until that time politics had either been tribal, i.e. you didn't need to think, or cerebral, i.e. you thought too much.

Trevor realised that in essence a political party is a marketing operation. Like all marketing operations you needed two things:

1. A product or products which are marketable. In the case of a political party this means policies which are relevant and can be agreed on and people who agreed with those policies because of their political convictions and whom people will like and respect.
2. A selling operation to place those products in the market place and get people to buy!

Trevor invented the things which linked the two. We recently produced souvenir mug which says, "I've been to Liverpool – home of Focus" and "I've been to Liverpool – home of the Good Morning".

He invented the community politics activities which have been the bedrock of our continued existence for 50+ years. Go and talk to people, even better listen to them, go back and campaign about those issues, tell them what you are doing, involve them in the politics of the community if not in mainstream politics.

Then when you have done all that win elections because people like and trust you. This does not seem too complicated does it? However, it takes dedication, commitment and passion. Somewhere along the way many of our existing members can talk the talk but not plod the plod!

He also brought razzmatazz, and fun. My abiding memory of the time was a picture of Trevor and the even more formidable Doreen Jones on the Mersey in a small boat with the Jolly Roger flowing behind them. Political pirates indeed who would make their opponents walk the plank in future years.

**Lesson: Politics is about serious things but politicians should not take themselves too seriously.**

Those lessons were scaled up to the national scene. In 1970 the Liberal party went down to just six seats, 300 councillors and 2,109,218 votes. Those figures (or at least the first two of them) are broadly similar to today. Trevor stormed the national scene and was known in the press as 'Jones the Vote'. We began to win council seats by the bucket load. When a complete reorganisation of local government came in for the 1973 elections in England the number of Liberal councillors went up from about 330 to 870. We took control of our first big council, Liverpool. We established ourselves nationally with by-election wins in Rochdale, Isle of Ely, Ripon, and Berwick. In the first of the 1974 elections we moved up to 26 per cent of the vote albeit with only 13 seats. The Liberals were back!

The Liverpool Liberal party began to attract attention. They reached the dizzy heights of seven councillors by the end of the 60s and then began a rapid ascent which took them to 17 (no Aldermen because the other Parties ganged up on them). In fact at that time the Liverpool Group had more members than were on all the other cities of the UK combined but it was only the start.



Chris Graham celebrating the St Michael's by-election in December 1971 and becoming (at that time) the youngest serving councillor. From left to right: David Alton, Trevor Jones, Chris Graham and David Mawdsley



June 1972 when then Liberal leader Jeremy Thorpe visited Liverpool after Trevor Jones stood down as Chairman of the Liverpool Liberal party, handing the baton to David Mawdsley. left to right Jeremy Thorpe, David Mawdsley and Trevor Jones

# 3. Then David joined in!

Joining in the fun was a young student teacher from deepest Essex called David Alton. Another person of absolute conviction to liberal principles which had often been acquired through his deep religious principles. He joined in the campaign and at the age of 21, which was the youngest age you could be elected back in those dark days, he became the youngest councillor in the UK. This was a title that several of us enjoyed over the next two or three years as we took on the Brylcreem brigade of both Tory and Labour Parties.

David was part of a growing number of people who had been inspired by the Jones Revolution. After all these years many of them are dead but still some soldier on. You can always rely on Graham Hulme when there is a hard bit of canvassing or delivering to be done!

David had two agendas. He wanted the party to do well in the City and he wanted to be an MP. He was one of the first people in the party to dare to believe that you didn't have to live on an island or some remote part the UK to be a Liberal MP. He wanted to do it in and from Liverpool. He set about the task of making Liverpool Edge Hill his constituency.

In 1973 in all up elections which had abolished the Aldermanic benches and reduced the size of the council from 160 to 99 the Liberal party took 48 seats, the Tories nine and Labour 41.

The despised Protestant party lost all of its four seats. This was on a good national day for the Liberal party which took about 870 council seats after a huge reorganisation of local government which had swept away urban and rural district councils to create reasonably uniform patterns of local government in either urban or rural area.

It was still fact that five per cent of the Liberal councillors in the UK were on one council – Liverpool. The Tories have never recovered from this. They have been insignificant in Liverpool politics since 1973 and for the last 22 years have not won at any level in the City.

**Lesson: Get rid of your competition so you can concentrate on your opposition!**

In control of the Council the party did some very liberal things. Almost the first act it undertook was to abandon the disastrous proposals for clearing all but 5,000 terraced properties by the end of 1995. Instead Trevor, who had become Deputy Leader of the Council and Chair of Housing produced the BTB – the Big Thick Book which produced the biggest housing improvement programme in Europe with a renovation over 25 years of almost all the 100,000 terraced properties in Liverpool.

Other housing successes included being the first council to bring an end to 'Common Lodging Houses'. They were the first 'build for sale' estates where Wimpey built homes for sale in the inner city so that people did not have to leave to buy the semi-detached property that had always craved.

But growing quickly meant growing pains. The year after taking control the party lost two by-elections in St Michael's and Tuebrook where people without commitment to either service or liberalism left the Council. I subsequently got on the Council at the beginning of May 1975 (having arrived in Liverpool at the end of May 1974) by winning back St Michaels with a majority of 52.

**Lesson: When you are going up you attract people who you don't want and are the first to leave when the going gets tough. Be careful who you recruit – only elect liberals!**

Between 1975 and 1980 no-one really had control of the Council. There had been little understanding of three party politics then, or now for that matter, and the council was branded 'toy town'. Some of the time we led the Council and sometimes Labour did.

Things looked bleak for the party in Liverpool as it did in the whole of the UK after the Thorpe trial hiatus. However, instead luck falls your way. The MP for Liverpool Edge Hill died creating a by-election. The day after the failure of the Labour Government to secure a majority in a confidence vote Edge Hill went to the Polls. David Alton stormed to victory winning a clear overall majority.

The day after David Alton made his maiden speech (which might have been his only one) Parliament was dissolved and David was handsomely re-elected.

We would not have won with conviction and action. David lost Edge Hill twice in 1974, once with me as his agent! It would have been easy to walk away and to say, "I've tried, I did my best, I'll move on." That was not David's way and nor was it the way of the Liverpool Liberals. Month after month the 12 Edge Hill Liberal Councillors had knocked on their doors and delivered their Focus. I earned my living by collecting waste paper in fortnightly visits to an area in each ward. It didn't earn us much money but the regular contact we got showed up in massive votes in those areas.

**Lesson: You don't always have to be political to be political!**

In the early 80s the Liberals had two fronts to deal with. The emergence of the SDP and the emergence of the Militant tendency. The SDP in Liverpool were not the bright eyed intellectuals of the Gang of four but failed and failing right wing politicians with whom we had little empathy and with who we could not work. In one election in 1983 we refused to step down and fought a parliamentary seat against them. They ended up electing few councillors but most of the councillors were people with whom we could easily work. Flo Clucas and Barbara Collinge come to mind as people we quickly forgot had different roots within months as they joined and then took on leading roles within the Council in a variety of ways.

We had retaken the Council in 1980 after ward boundary changes with a minority control. We relied on a small and declining number of policies to get things through. Seven of us were dubbed the 'Muppets' by the Labour party. We were young and, it must be said, a bit hairy! David Alton, Mike Storey, Frank Doran, John Watton, Richard Pyne, David Croft and I all became Chairs of Council Committees.

To be Chair of Housing, at the young age of 27 was even more hairy! The problems that Liverpool faced were immense but we still tried to do things differently in a highly unionised and old fashioned Council. While we controlled the Council in this period we were the first council to abolish 'common lodging houses' for the homeless and we established the biggest housing cooperative programme in Western Europe.

**Lesson: If you cannot put everything right (and you never can) do some things which are different, which show your liberalism and can act as an exemplar to others. Running things five per cent better than the last lot is no political ambition at all!**

More difficult to deal with was the Militant Tendency. Born out of a fierce hatred of Thatcherism and Thatcher they swept all before them. They had no analysis of what to do in the medium to long term.

They knew what they were against and didn't care who suffered. On one occasion they gave a redundancy notice to all 33,000 of our employees. They built council houses but could only do so by using money that should have been used to repair the ones that we had. Whilst they repulsed those in our middle class wards they enthused the post riots inner cities. My own ward of Dingle fell to them in three successive years. I remember leading a team of eight canvassers round a corner to be met by more than 50 Militants in one street.

Despite this the Liberals survived, metamorphosed into the Lib Dems and between 1984 and 1998 never had less than 40 councillors. However, we could never quite make it over the magic line to take 49 seats and control of the Council.

# 4. Then Mike took charge

If anyone challenges this booklet for historical accuracy this would be a good point to do it. Councillor (now Lord) Storey played a pivotal role within the party from its inception as a controlling force and from 1979 until 1990. Mike was Deputy Leader first under Trevor Jones and then under Paul Clark. From then he took control of the party and continued to ensure that the party was in good heart, solvent and campaigning on the things that really mattered. His and our break through happened in 1998. Just one year after Blair went to Number 10 we gained 10 seats in the Council going up from 42 to 52 seats and taking overall control for the first time ever.

No-one was more surprised at this than we were. We had expected to do well but not to take control until 1999. Two things took us into power:

Firstly, the people of Liverpool felt released from the need to show themselves to be wholly anti-Tory because the Tories were no longer in government.

Secondly, Liverpool Council was a failing authority. Ranked the third worst of all councils in England for service delivery it had a council tax 20 per cent higher than the next Council. People were fed up with strikes, poor service and high council tax. The contract for emptying the bins came up for renewal and we used this as a touchstone. "Don't let these people run our services again," we said and the people, responded.

They showed what they meant when they decided not to let Labour run any services!

Although we were not expecting to take control we had our priorities and principles ready to hand. We knew where the bodies were buried. We fought off a proposal from the Labour Government to take the running of our schools off us to be run by the private sector. This was achieved by totally changing the service at the centre of the education department. We developed a strategy which led to increasing success for our schools and pupils.

We took a housing department which for eight years had been awarded a below average rating by the Government and brought in more than £1.25 billion to put right years of neglect. Indeed we went up from below average to average within three months when we admitted that the council did not have a strategy but saying what our principles were and how we would create a strategy!

We put service to our customers, the people and businesses of Liverpool, at the core of service delivery and not the people who provided the service. We cut back on waste and kept council tax down for three years. We reduced the staffing levels but cutting out unnecessary layers and overwhelmingly bureaucracy. We installed the first council one stop shops and the first 24/7/365 call centre staffed by people who could deal with 95 per cent of calls at the first call.



**Lesson: Be prepared. You never know when you are going to get the opportunity to put your principles into practice.**

From 1998 to 2006 things went well. In 2004 all up elections on new boundaries produced 60 Lib Dems against 27 Labour and three Independent Liberals. The most important decision which Liverpool has ever made took place well before then. In a casual conversation, the then Chief Executive, revealed that the Council had been invited to bid to become European Capital of Culture in 2008 but he was sure that the Leader would not be interested. WRONG! Retrieving the letter from the bin Mike realised that this was a big chance for Liverpool.

Perceived as being the first class city for whingeing, hub cap stealing and self-pity the Capital of Culture was the chance to show the real City. The City first mocked itself and was mocked by others as we prepared for the Bid. Then people began to take it seriously. The mocking turned to support. We developed a programme which included our 800th birthday and other years of sport and faith! The country was astounded when we were shortlisted and gob smacked when we won.

They were even more astounded when we delivered not only a superb year but one which is still recognised as the best that has been held. We also worked with the private sector and Europe to deliver a huge shopping centre utterly different from anything else being built; an arena and conference centre; a new Museum and major improvements to our cultural and transport infrastructures.

Then things started going wrong. In 2006 a major dispute between the Chief Executive and Leader led to the Chief Executive leaving and Mike stepping down as Leader. Although the Capital of Culture was put in place and delivered superbly there was nothing to replace it. We needed more big ideas around which we could manage the City but our intellectual well was dry. We were so busy running the City and delivering a highly successful Capital of Culture that we lost our eye on the big picture.

**Lesson: If you want to run a council you always need to be looking at least 10/15 years ahead.**

In 2008 we held the City only because a Labour councillor defected to us at the Count. It all got more difficult. People who had got in easily on the crest of the wave found that they did not have what it took to hold a seat when things got tough. They didn't know what to do and didn't want to do it anyway. They believed that things would come right in the end. They believed their own propaganda. They lost touch with reality and the electorate. The electorate in many cases decided to end the contact with them.

**Lesson: Always make sure you get liberals elected by vetting them thoroughly.**

On the way up you attract all sorts of people who do not really share your beliefs but want to be someone. On the way down they desert you faster than rats in a sinking freighter.

# 5. Then came the Coalition

We always knew that things would be difficult in Liverpool in a Tory/Lib Dem coalition. Ever since Thatcher there has been a visceral hatred of Tories in our City. We were associated with them and were branded as being quasi Tory ourselves.

The slump came quickly but was not helped by our own actions. In 2011 I scraped in with a 230 seat majority with only one other ward held in Woolton by a similar majority. Mike Storey lost his seat as did seven others defending their seat on that day. Our then Leader was suspended by the party after being charged with perjury (he was subsequently found guilty). We had 20 seats which became 10 which became three which became two. I became the Leader of the 10 in 2012 but didn't target properly and had inherited a party that had almost entirely lost heart and hope.

In 2014 we lost every seat we were defending including Church Ward by a whisker. In 10 years we had been reduced from a big controlling party with 20 wards to third party (behind the Greens with three). We were determined that this would not happen again. We were determined that our legacy would not be lost in our City.

We knew that our City needed our party as the Labour party committed error after error under the autocratic rule of an Elected Mayor a position which had been imposed on the City by an autocratic Labour party.

We had faith in ourselves, that small band of brothers and sisters. We had faith in our beliefs and we knew that our City needed us.

**Lesson: When times get hard dig in. Winning just one ward keeps you credible and in the press. Six good second places are worth next to nothing if you are going down and show you did not target properly if you are going up!**

## 6. Then came Andrew and Kris



Door knocking on referendum day with Kris Brown leading the team

I'd like to take credit for what happened next and the beginning of the turn round but that would not be true. All I did was make the bullets to fire in the council, in blogs and in the media. It took two people to make the gun to fire them with and to direct the fire on the enemy!

The Lib Dems took a decision within hours of the 2014 election. That was simple. They would never again allow us to take no seats in our City. They would defend to the hilt one ward in the City. The only one that we had held since 2011 and would ensure that the whole resources of the party, such as they were, would be directed to that one end.

The bad news was that the ward they wanted to defend was Church and it was me that they intended to keep on the council. I had decided many years before to stand down in 2015 after 32 years' service. Logic said that it was likely that only I could save the seat and provide a nucleus around which the party could reform.

Andrew Makinson really picked himself up off the floor within weeks. He has narrowly lost Church ward by 101 votes after a false Liberal had got 190 votes and more than 100 Labour activists flooded the Ward on election day and in preceding campaigning and canvassing. Andrew produces some of the finest and most imaginative leaflets and other literature that I have even seen.

He needed to – his job was to make me look good! We fought on two fronts:-

Firstly within the ward we began a process of knocking on every door in addition to the regular delivery of Focus. This was not new to Church Ward. The fact we were still there was because we had always done lots of door knocking and Focus. Our leaflets became sharper and much more aggressive about a Labour party which was threatening things to our parks, services and community because of their own incompetence almost as much as the savage cuts that we had received from the Government.

Much to our surprise (and Labour's) we not only won but won handsomely. I took 48 per cent of the vote, 11 per cent more than Labour. We lost Woolton where we had made a token effort and only just maintained second place. So the entire group was composed of two Kemps both with a CBE.

We changed our Group standing orders so that our meetings would take place in the front bedroom of our house every Monday at 10 – no observers allowed! We even thought of saying that instead of being adopted by the party you would need to be adopted by Erica and me and change your name!!

In fact you would have thought we had taken control of the City such were our celebrations at holding just one seat. However, this was not the only thing that had happened. In this maritime city we knew that within minutes of the Exit Poll in the General Election the wind had changed direction in Liverpool. It was no longer blowing us on to the rocks but to a safe berth out at sea.

We had also been joined by more than 60 new members. Some have not stayed the course but we have a good success rate in turning many of them from members into activists.

**Lesson: Never underestimate the effect of one small piece of good news and in our case two can make on the morale of a party.**



Erica Kemp who served as a councillor for 23 years including being one of 14 Lib Dem Lord Mayors in recent years

# 7. And then we started on 2016

This is where the experience of Kris Brown our newly appointed Chair of Liverpool Constituency came in. He joined us from John Pugh's office but before that he had been a Labour councillor in London. He brought to our campaign stability and solidity.

Kris proposed the 2020 strategy which would take us into holding six seats by 2020 from the 2/3 of one which we currently held. The first year was not to try and take all six we had neither the resources nor the in-depth experience to deliver six wards so we set a target of two seats (a hold and gain) and four other wards which we would develop to a point of future victory.

Every week without fail a door knocking team went out at least once in Woolton and Church Wards. Sometimes the team might be one or two but they still went out. By the time we had reached the start of the election we had been round Church ward 1.5 times since the previous June and Woolton had been 90 per cent door knocked.

Crucially we learned how to use CONNECT properly. The CONNECT system is absolutely marvellous. It encourages competition both to do more as individuals but also as teams. We wouldn't go home until we had 30 contacts even if Hell was freezing over around us. (Of course Church always had bigger and better returns than Woolton!) The canvassing in Woolton was led by Malcolm (now Councillor) Kelly.

Through rain or storm he was out. When he wasn't out he was bullying me to print leaflets for him or was out causing trouble for Labour in a number of ways. Malcolm is another example of endurance. He was a councillor for Woolton for 17 years and then lost his seat in 2014 and failed to gain it back in 2015. He was not going to lose three times in a row.

**Lesson: Like Neva Orrell in Leyland all those years ago the best liberals just keep at it until the wind changes direction.**

At the same time excellent leaflets were being put out in these two wards and in the other four although we soon realised that of those four only Allerton/Hunts Cross and Mossley Hill had potential for 2016. Even though we thought that we were not deflected from our two ward goal. Mirna (now Councillor) Juarez complied completely with the two ward strategy although it did not include her Allerton/Hunts Cross ward where she had lost three times already. She regularly joined the Woolton and Church teams. BUT at the same time she recruited 19 new deliverers some of which are now being converted to members and long-term supporters. She also took up local issues brilliantly including getting local and regional publicity by camping out on land to stop council bulldozers invading a Park.

**Lesson: Gather ye roses while ye may!**

It was clear almost from day one that the coalition only existed in the minds of those who would never have voted for us anyway. One anecdote sticks in mind from the election itself. It's about one person who had been viciously and vehemently opposed to us since day one of the coalition. He would chase us down the path and be downright rude to us if we were nearby. Whilst tiptoeing past his house in 2016 he charged down the path, shook hands with everyone; said he was voting for us again and would never vote for that f\*t t\*\*t Anderson for Mayor.

However sometimes luck comes your way. The luck in this case being the incompetence of the Labour party and their philistine approach to Green Spaces. Across South Liverpool they identified sites for the sale of land to Redrow Homes. This after Redrow had contributed money to the Mayor's election funds! As we got into the last 10 days of the election three things became clear. It had been our intention to close down all wards except Woolton and Church. In fact we closed down Church because we learned that Labour had pulled out and put extra resources into Allerton and Mossley Hill.

We also did something that ran counter-intuitive to our normal way of working. We concentrated on the Mayoral election and not the ward election. I was the Liberal Democrat candidate for the mayoral election. We did this because our canvassing showed that the Mayor was a very unpopular person in our areas at least. We reasoned that if I could do well at the Mayoral contest I could pull votes to our ward candidates.

We knew that our belief was right when the Labour party hardly mentioned him during the election. He was elected like "a thief in the night!" We were also the only party to produce a manifesto for the election and printed some and set it up so that it looked attractive if people downloaded it.

**Lesson: If the evidence says do things differently do things differently.**

**Lesson: Sometimes people want to know the bigger picture as well as the local ones.**

In some ways we were held back by our own lack of confidence. We believed from about 1 April that we would take Church and from mid-April that we would take Woolton. Had we switched resources then we might have gained Mossley Hill as well as Allerton. However, we were desperate to ensure at least two wards and thought anything else would be a bonus!

# 8. And then came the results in 2016

The results exceeded our expectations. I won't mention the person who sagely advised me that I would get 13 per cent based on his reading of the evidence on CONNECT!

**Lesson: Hard quantitative information on CONNECT needs to be allied to qualitative information based on experience of the areas.**

In the Mayoral election I got 21.1 per cent of the vote up from 6.25 per cent in 2012. We held Church ward with Andrew Makinson by 2:1 over Labour despite a very popular councillor (my wife Erica) standing down. We gained Woolton Ward with Malcolm Kelly with a great majority and we took Allerton comfortably with Mirna Juarez. I took Mossley Hill at the Mayoral level but we narrowly lost it at the council level. We also did well in a number of other wards.

In doing all this we surprised Labour who had no idea it was coming despite evidence that they must have seen at the Postal Vote Counts. They tried to retaliate at the last minute with things about Nick Clegg from 2011! They had nothing to say except pour abuse on us which people were not receptive to. So many of the Labour councillors fell into the same trap that so many Lib Dem councillors had done. They were great; they would win for ever; their well would always be full!

**Lesson: Never underestimate the arrogance of the Labour party in our big cities.**

The Greens could not believe it. I often think that the Greens live in another universe and they certainly show it in Liverpool. Almost until the declaration of the Mayoral result they were confident that things were close between us but they would be second. They cannot understand that a General Election is always a game changer and were pinning their hopes on what had happened during the coalition years. They now have nowhere to go. They have one safe ward and their fourth councillor is almost certain to lose his seat in 2018 and there are no good second places for them to exploit.

**Lesson: Never underestimate the naivety of the Green party and their inability to face facts.**

# 9. And then came the results in 2018

When this booklet first came out I predicted that we could have made seven gains in 2018. In fact, we made three. There are a number of reasons for this but I did qualify the prediction by saying that this would depend on us finding sufficient good candidates. But two things happened which we need to reflect on:

1. We found the candidates but not the organisers! All the seven candidates for our super seven worked very hard but the Party failed to back them up sufficiently with strong training; a good agent and proper systems. Therefore, some of the time that was expended was not used to maximum effect. In particular we failed to use our phone bank properly. We would go out canvassing in the freezing cold for an hour and see 20 people when we could have been using our internet phone bank for two hours in the warm and talk to a lot more people.

**Lesson: Use technology properly and maximise the effectiveness of your candidates. Telephone canvassing is not as good as doorstep canvassing but from mid-October to early March it is the best way of making contact and talking to people. Do not make assumptions that all candidates, especially new ones, know what an election looks and feels like!!**

2. Corbyn and Momentum came along. We are still not sure how to handle this despite our experience in Liverpool 30 years ago with

Militant. The fact is that most of our gains in 2018 came from the Tories with limited success in places like Sunderland, Haringey and Liverpool. In Newcastle and Birmingham there was basically no change but in these two cities there was a strong defence of the status quo in all up elections.

Our experience tells us that in two to three years Momentum will fade but they will be present and able to do some bussing in for at least the next two years. We now feel that we should have played up the Momentum/Militant threat more especially when their canvassing schedule was sent to us!

So, we now look ahead to working effectively within the Council. We still only have seven out of 90 councillors and the rest of the opposition together is the same number but already things feel very different. seven is actually a magic number in our standing orders for two reasons. Firstly, it gives us the chance to call special council meetings if Labour do not give us more speaking time at ordinary council meetings. Secondly, it gives the opportunity to move that recorded votes be taken. This will help accentuate every internal split in the Labour Party. They will always vote together but the squirming on some issues will be a sight to see! It will also be something we can use in our newsletter and newspapers.

**Lesson: The council's standing orders are boring but if you know them at**





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**least as well as your opponents then you may be able to turn them to your advantage.**

We are now on every committee most of which are totally tedious. However, we have designed our manifesto in such a way that at most committees we can move a resolution based on part of it to capture press attention through press releases. Of course, the press does not attend the meetings but they are quite keen on press releases which Labour often refuse to comment on!

**Lesson: Design your manifesto in such a way that it does not go back on the shelf for revision every year (or four) but can be used as a thought through tool within the council.**

We have been lucky with the experience of our new councillors. Carole Storey was a Merseyside County Councillor and is married to Lord Storey a former Council Leader. Kris Brown was a London Borough Councillor for four years. Liz Makinson is married to Our Deputy Leader, Andrew. She has

campaigned for the Party for 20 years plus. Together with the existing four the Lib Dems have a strong team more than capable of being able to punch above its weight. We have more good candidates waiting in the wings having been through the mangle of an election for the first time.

So, this is another chapter in this booklet and another chapter in the history of Liverpool Lib Dems. BUT it will not be the last! We are now fully recovered from our near-death experience of having just two councillors both called Kemp! We have a capable group and more members than at any time in our history. We even have some money left after the elections when in the past we have been overdrawn.

We will take control of the Council again and we will rescue the City from Labour's inward looking and short-sighted decision making. It will however be someone else writing to tell you of the final approach to power and what we did when we got there!

# 10. Then came the hard-headed analysis

Having looked at the figures we believe that we can take seven seats the next time the council is up which is in 2018. I am not revealing any secrets here because anyone can see the results and draw their own conclusions.

We believe that we have the people resources to take this on. I think we have 10 people who want to be councillors and seven wards to put them in. We might go up from that but not to begin with. Some of the people who we adopt in September 2016 for May 2018 might not last the course. They will all have to sign a contract which gives the outputs we expect from them. Fail to deliver and they will be replaced.

We will have to fight hard to find the cash resources but are always hopeful that we can get help internally and externally. We have already been awarded £600 towards our thank you newspaper which is mostly about Liverpool but has a back page for Liverpool and the EU campaign in the City for a Remain vote.

We will only believe that we can take seven wards if we have seven fighters doing the day to day, week by week, month by month work that has been done over the years by those in Church, Woolton and Allerton. Find the fighters and we can help them as they help themselves. At Christmas Mirna had no deliverers. By the end of the elections she had 19.

## **Lesson: People love a winner.**

We are now better resourced with access to better information and resources of the Council to carry out work in three wards not one. Success breeds success. Some people who have not been too active for some time now are getting active again and weighing up the chances of getting seats. I hope that in 2018 we can write another booklet or an appendix to this one.

But there will be an election in May 2017 which is not for the City but for a Mayor for the City Region. It may be thought that this is not so important. We believe it is. We are going to work up wards for that election as if were trying to win them. We fight every election because we do not want people to get into the habit of not having a Lib Dem candidate and looking elsewhere.

## **Lesson: Fight every election even if you only fully fight your best areas to keep and develop them**

# 11. Then came the conclusions

Throughout this tract I have tried to give lessons as I have gone along. But there is one over-riding conclusion which brings together those that I put out in the opening letter in a posher form. If you are to win you need to be big, bold and brassy. Set out to do OK and you'll do badly. Set out to win and you won't always achieve this but you have a much better chance of success.

This can be seen so well in our three winners this year. They came back from successive defeats because they never lost confidence in themselves; our party or the ability of our team to put right the problems of our City. They are truly workers and winners.

At the end of the day our party is about people. If you look at where we are successful either in good times or bad there are always one or two people who know how to get things done; who stick together as a team around which others can feel confident.

**Lesson: Only people who want to win will win when times are hard.**

As I said at the beginning this is not a history of the party in Liverpool but a broad sweep through key eras to pick out key themes. A history would show massive gratitude to people like Flo Clucas; Paul Clark; Frank Doran; Paul, Eddie, Pam and Jan Clein all of whom did sterling service for many years.

In fact more than 250 people have been Liberal or Liberal Democrat councillors in this city since 1962. Nor should I fail to mention some of our newcomers like Steve Atkinson, Leo Evans, Joe Harmer, Anna McCracken and Tom Sebire who are contributing so much to the richness of our party in the City.

# 12. Then came the apologies

I have already mentioned them but I do so again to conclude. In Church Ward Councillor Makinson and I truly represent a tradition that has been handed down through the years. Since 1962 there has always been a Liberal or Liberal Democrat Councillor for Church Ward. In the 54 years since we first took it we have only lost the ward three times. Andrew and I will play our part in making the next 54 years just as successful. We both build on the modernised versions of our great predecessors Cyril Carr and Trevor Jones. We will not let them down. I can't speak for Andrew but I don't intend to be around on the council in 2070. Perhaps I will still be able to do a bit of telephone canvassing though? I intend to be a very young 117 year old!



Council Leader Mike Storey hearing that Liverpool had won the title – European Capital of Culture 2008



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