

HSLD Chair's Report 2023

2023 has been a year of change and transition. At the end of last year, as well as me being the new chair of a HSLD a number of new people joined the exec committee. It's been quite a learning curve!

I would like to say a big thank you to our committee members, but particularly to our treasurer, Kay and secretary Sue who have been with the organisation for many years now and have brought their knowledge and skills to help to make sure we kept things moving.

Like many of the other AO's this year, the biggest challenge and workload has been the movement from one website and email provider, to another and a different way of keeping our membership records.

It is fair to say that none of the officers on the committee were very familiar with the old system. This has very much been something the previous Chair had led on.

As we came into office, it became clear to me that we needed to find new members with skills in certain areas. I was delighted that the exec committee agreed to co-opt two new members of the committee; Ganesh Sittampalam, and John Grout.

At times, it has been very frustrating as there have been delays, and sometimes difficulty getting information about when transitions were happening between the two systems. I would like to say a huge thank you to Ganesh for holding the executive committee's hand through the transitions.

We have now successfully moved the website onto Fleet and now have a new email system working.

Communication with our members has been challenging this year, but I hope that adopting these new systems will make that easier for 2024.

Apart from the issues around transferring systems, we have had a relatively quiet but nevertheless successful year. We attended both spring and autumn conferences and put on successful fringe events at both as well as having a stall at the exhibitions.



In York, we were supported by Karen Wright, the Campaigns Manager from Humanists UK, and in autumn this year, we were pleased to have Andrew Copson, the chief executive of Humanists UK at both our fringe event and on our exhibition stand.

The fringe event at Spring conference was on education, and the place of religion in education.



At Autumn conference, we had a very successful fringe, which was well attended, chaired by Christine Jardine on the Liberal case for assisted dying. It was an impressive panel with Sal Brinton, Andrew Copson, and Graham Wynyard.



I think there is more that can be done to push forward with a more liberal approach to assisted dying in this country and I hope HSLD will continue to work on this important campaign in future.

In the summer I was pleased to be invited to represent HSLD at the 2023 Humanist UK Convention in Liverpool, as part of a panel considering Humanism in politics. There were panelists from across the political spectrum, including a Conservative member of the London Assembly and an SNP MP. It was a privilege to be able to talk about the Liberal Democrat policies and how so many of them echo the aims and work of Humanists UK.



Looking ahead to 2024 I am sure that we will continue to pursue many of the areas of interest to us. However, it is important to recognise that 2024 almost certainly will be a general election year.

As an organisation within a political party, we must acknowledge that the biggest way we can have an impact on humanist and secular values is to ensure that Liberal Democrats are elected at all levels. So, as the current Chair, and as someone who has offered to stand again as Chair, I should be honest that my priority for 2023 is to get Lib Dem MPs elected to parliament, especially those who support our values. As well as being Chair of HSLD I am also the campaign manager for a very promising seat and fully intend for our fantastic humanist candidate to be elected to parliament!

Should I be reelected as Chair, I look forward to continuing our work to represent humanist and secular values in the Liberal Democrats.