

# **Braintree Constituency Conservative Association Chairman's Report to AGM March 2020**

Members, Colleagues and Friends

This has been an interesting and busy year for the Association and without the support of the officers of the Association: Nigel McCrea, Kevin Bowers and Lynette Bowers-Flint we would not have been able to achieve the things we have this year.

Last time when I reported to the Association, the UK was approaching a new April deadline for the UK leaving the European Union, and the country was in an uncertain position with regards to Brexit and the parliamentary arithmetic that was not favourable to a decision being made. However as you are all acutely aware, that period of uncertainty and national debate is past and we have made the step and left the European Union, which I am sure will herald a new chapter in the UK history and will with the new Prime Minister and his government in Westminster lead us to a successful relationship with our trading partners inside and outside the EU.

## **Parliamentary Report**

In July 2019 James Cleverly was promoted again to become Co- Chairman of the Conservative Party and continued what he started and pressed on with Party modernisation, organisational change, recruitment of new members and reviewing and resetting the way CCHQ manages campaigns. In October James and I met in CCHQ and we started the detailed preparation for the General Election campaign to start on November 6<sup>th</sup> after the dissolution of Parliament. Throughout the campaign James was active across the country, on TV interviews, BBC Question Time and with his team in CCHQ setting the strategy to focus on the disaffected Labour support in the North of England, leading to the most successful General Election Campaign since the days of Margaret Thatcher's leadership, with a Conservative Majority of 80 on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2019. Most recently James was promoted again to Minister of State for Middle East and North Africa in both the Foreign Office and Department for International Development, and this change I am sure will still allow him to be actively involved in the local issues of the Braintree District.

The GE2019 campaign in the Braintree Constituency which was a snap election however the Association was prepared before the start of the campaign with

an Agent in place chosen by James and the Association Chairman as Campaign manager supported by a team of the Association Officers, James and Susie Cleverly, Alice Hopkins from James' office and many of the Association Members prepared to deliver leaflets and posters, we managed the same targeted and focused campaign that was deployed earlier in the year for the local Elections. The outcome was a huge success with increased share of the vote polling 34,112 (67.5%) of the overall vote which was an increase on the last election in 2017 with 32,873 (62.8%) of the overall vote.

### **Local Government Report**

In May 2019 the Association successfully fought the Local Election campaign for the Braintree District Council and maintained overall control for the Conservative Group with 34 of the 49 councillors elected and the Executive were overall pleased with the way the campaign was managed and executed. Whilst these results were pleasing, and much better when measured against the national trend, it was with a heavy heart that some exceptional candidates lost their seats and it is hoped that they can be welcomed back at the earliest opportunity. Work will need to continue in Halstead to win back the seats which are now all held by the Residents Association and Independents.

The success was due to a structured campaign, which started in the summer of 2018, the main focus in terms of literature, surveys and activity being in selected target wards, in the Braintree, Bocking and Coggeshall where there was the highest chance of attracting the swing Labour voter and that the strong campaign message linked with the successful track record of delivery by the Council resonated with voters including those in the more challenging wards. This strategy was clearly successful as we held all three seats in Braintree Central, two in Braintree South,

It was hugely disappointing that Lynette Bowers-Flint was not re-elected in Coggeshall, however this was due to a local "issue" campaign fought by Independent Candidates supported by the CAUSE campaigners. A huge thanks to Tom Cunningham who acted as campaign manager and was responsible for running such a successful campaign.

The Executive has been active in the last quarter of 2019 interviewing through the Approval Panels a slate of Candidates for the ECC elections to be held in May 2021 culmination in selection meetings held in early February 2020 where the Divisional Membership selected their chosen candidates for all but one County Division, Bocking where the election was inconclusive and the

Association has reverted to the Membership for applications to be included in the selection process, and we hope to reconvene an Approval Panel and selection meeting as soon as possible. The selected candidates and approved by Executive Council on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2020 are:

- Cllr David Finch Heddingham Division
- Cllr Graham Butland Three Fields and Notley
- Cllr Tom Cunningham Braintree Town
- Chris Siddall Halstead Division

### **Association Activities**

The members across the Association wards have been active supporting the District Council's vision and strategy with activities that are aligned with our Local Election manifesto commitments and thus funded from Association funds:

- In late summer 2019 we delivered 11,000 leaflets encouraging residents across all areas to take part in the Consultation on the Local Plan resubmissions to the Planning Inspector that closed on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2019. It was important that the residents were made aware of the Local Plan process that included the three Garden Communities, and the possible outcomes if the plan was not found to be sound.
- In February 2020, in support of the ambitious plans for the pedestrianisation of Braintree High Street, which is in a poor state, the Braintree and Bocking members delivered 2,500 leaflets encouraging residents to contribute to the public consultation that was being held online and face to face in a High Street Restaurant.

On the political front the membership has continued to play, an active part in forming the Conservative Party policies by holding quarterly Conservative Policy Forum (CPF) meetings with set the agenda for the Association meetings that are charged with considering one area of government policy e.g. recent subject was The Queen's Speech. This valuable contribution to policy direction is recognised by CCHQ and recently fed back some statistics:

- 57% of commitments in the published manifesto could be traced back to ideas proposed by CPF groups
- 47% of ideas in the CPF Members' Manifesto were reflected in the published manifesto.

The CPF continues to be ably led by Cllr. Iona Parker who chairs the meetings and writes the reports for submission to the PCF team. These are lively affairs with a range of opinions put forward and held in a different local hostelry across the district, they are most enjoyable social events and if any member wants to join in please contact Karen in the Office.

The Association was well represented at the 2019 Party Conference with Chairman, Treasurer and Iona Parker, Diana Garrod, Saif Rehman, Dean Wallace and Andrew Hensman and Karen Brown. The theme was Get Brexit Done and we all were seated, thanks to James and his team, for the Boris Johnson's rousing speech. Nigel McCrea and I attended the Treasurer's Lunch and presented a cheque for £1000 to Boris with James which ensures the Association remains a member of the Blue League.



### **Social Events**

I am pleased to report that 2019 was a big improvement on fundraising from the previous year.

We had a very successful Annual Dinner held at Stisted Golf Club where, the then Defence Secretary, The Right Honourable Penny Mordaunt was our guest speaker and was received extremely well by those who attended.

We had another successful Quiz Night at Great Notley Village Hall, which has proven to be a popular event.

In November, we tried something different which was a buffet and were fortunate enough to get Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Welfare Delivery) Will Quince MP as a speaker, again this was well supported and feedback was very positive on this kind of event.

Hedingham Branch was active during 2019 with a Garden Party and Brunch event.

**The total raised by BCCA was £2670.74**

**Hedingham Branch raised £979.93**

George Courtauld organised a clay pigeon shoot and raised £450.00

The 999Club is still going but more participants are needed. This club is open to non-BCCA and BCCA members alike.

### **COVID-19**

At the time of writing the report, the AGM that was due to be held on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2020, had been postponed in line with advice given by Conservative Party HQ and will only be re-instated and a meeting date set when it is safe to do so. I have decided to publish this report by email and make available to all members now for information. I would welcome any feedback or comments

John McKee

Chairman

17<sup>th</sup> March, 2020