



**BRAINTREE CONSTITUENCY CONSERVATIVE ASSOCIATION**  
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## **Braintree Constituency Conservative Association Chairman's Report for AGM 11<sup>th</sup> March 2021**

Members, Colleagues and Friends

It is with some sadness that I write this report to all the members of the Association as this is will be my last report as your Chairman; after 3 years it is time for the baton to be passed to someone new. It has been an honour to serve the Association and the party and as I look back I think we can take some satisfaction that the Association has achieved most of what it set out to when the officers created the Strategy for the Association. In 2019 we maintained the majority on the District Council and with the exception of Coggeshall where independents removed Lynette Bowers-Flint which was disappointing, we won all the target seats and as a campaigning team performed better than any of our near neighbours in Chelmsford, Uttlesford and Colchester. That same year we supported the European Elections and then in December 2019 fought a General Election campaign returning James Cleverly with an increased majority polling 34,112 votes up 4.7%, and the campaign team had sufficient time and resources to assist both Vicky Ford in Chelmsford and Will Quince in Colchester.

However, in March 2020 the pandemic struck making last year a difficult year to manage and maintain the energy and enthusiasm in the Association following the election of Boris Johnson with an 80 seat majority. However, we did identify three new candidates and two sitting councillors to fight the upcoming Essex County Councillors and initiate a campaign strategy to introduce the new candidates into their Divisions before the formal campaign starts in the next few weeks, at the time of the writing the Fire, Police & Crime Commissioner and Essex County elections in May are still planned to take place. Unfortunately, the fund raising activities during the past 12 months have been curtailed and your Association has been forced to use reserves to run the office and administration services, this is recorded in the Treasurers report, however the newly elected Chairman and Officers have sufficient financial resources to maintain the operational activities, however when the situation is more normal, fund raising will be a high priority for the new Officer Team.

This AGM will usher in more changes than usual as two further officer positions are being decided by election at the meeting due to resignations:

First Nigel McCrea is standing down after six years on the Executive, three as Chairman and the last three as Treasurer where he has been an enormous help to me and has overseen the selection process of candidates for both local government elections during his term despite managing some serious health issues. I would like to recognise Nigel for his hard work and level headed advice over the past year, I am sure we will all wish him well as he moves his family to Dorset.

Secondly, Dean Wallace has resigned from his role as Deputy Chair, Political for personal reasons. Dean was elected into the role at the AGM in September 2020 after serving on the Executive as Campaign Support Officer co-opted to stand in for Kevin Bowers who had to stand back from active service due to health problems in 2019. Dean brought an enthusiasm and work ethic that was exemplary and during his short term focussed on the achievements that raised the Association up the leader board of the CCHQ Incentive Scheme such that we elevated from bottom quartile to top four position. I am sure we all wish him well and I am sure he will remain active in campaigning.

### **Local Government**

As of writing this report, there is still some possibility of postponement of any elections in May and it will depend on the ability of the Government to lift the current restrictions and allow a campaigning effort including delivery of election address material and for local authorities to safely set up and manage the electoral process. The officers are currently preparing for the election whenever it is held, led by Tom Cunningham who is standing in as DCP until the AGM elects the new Officer group. However, there is a campaign plan, activities as allowed, such as telephone calling and delivering some leaflets by 3<sup>rd</sup> party companies into target wards, is under way so that whenever the election takes place the new Officer Group can manage and continue an effective campaign.

Whatever the outcome of the uncertainties, I am sure as an Association we will support the Party and remain ready to campaign and work for a Conservative Government in Braintree, Essex and Westminster.

### **Association Activities:**

#### **Party Constitution and Association Rules**

In September the Party Board notified Chairman that the National Convention would agree the wording of a new Conservative Party Constitution including amended Association and Branch Rules, furthermore that the Association through the Chairman would be invited to vote in a national poll to agree the final wording before publication. The draft documents were reviewed by a small working party agreed by the Executive Council chaired by Graham Butland. Prior to meeting, Iona Parker undertook a comprehensive comparison and summarised the changes making the working party's job significantly easier and I would like to thank her for this. The working party reviewed both documents and in detail compared the current Association Rules with the Draft. The Group agreed that in most cases the proposed rules were acceptable with some comments therefore your Chairman took part in the on-line vote in favour of the new Constitution. The most notable change is the

requirement for a larger Executive Council with the need to have geographic representation across the Constituency and a greater balance towards Non-Councillor representation. The New Constitution and Association Rules came into force on January 1<sup>st</sup> 2021 and will be put before members to approve at the AGM on 11<sup>th</sup> March.

### **Conservative Policy Forum**

On the political front the membership has continued to play an active part in steering the Conservative Party policies by holding quarterly Conservative Policy Forum (PCF) meetings with the agenda item for these meetings set by CCHQ. The most recent meeting considered an important issue, the merging of Health Services and Social Care. These meetings are and will be held in a virtual form using Zoom for the foreseeable future. I would again like to thank Iona Parker and those members that attend regularly for their persistence in maintaining the momentum of the Association meetings and contributions to the Party Policy making. I know Iona would welcome additional members to join in and widen the contributions from across the Association.

### **Social Events and Fundraising**

These have been difficult over the past year due to Covid-19 restrictions and your Association Officers led by Mary Cunningham have been doing what we can to raise small amounts wherever we can and as such the Association joined the central Party Christmas draw for the first time. To boost sales of tickets James Cleverly offered to take the person selling the most books to lunch, won by Amy Lewis.

During 2020 a small number of virtual quiz nights were held and have proved popular not only as an opportunity to raise Association funds but a way of engaging with friends and colleagues, so more will be set up in 2021. Other on-line events are planned including Virtual Race Nights. Planning is under way for a Patrons Club which will include 2 dinners in the constituency, thus supporting local businesses rather than holding them in London. The fee will include membership subscription and will be launched as soon as it is possible to plan with certainty that a social gathering can take place.

Lyn Waters has continued managing the 999 club. This currently has 26 members most of who have more than one number and we continue to encourage members, family and friends to join.

My personal thanks again to Mary and Lyn for doing all they can in difficult times to fundraise for the Association.

Last but not least, my thanks to the Office Manager, Karen Skinner without her support the Association would not have been able to function especially during the last year. Karen is willing to roll up her virtual sleeves and assist with all the functions of the Association including buffet for Will Quince, MP evening, Quiz Nights, Selection meetings and managing

the administration of ECC, Officer Meetings. Without her support undertaking the Chairman's role would have been impossible.

John McKee

Chairman

1<sup>st</sup> February, 2021