Newsletter from James MacCleary MP for Lewes Constituency

July Newsletters

Week 3

I hope you've had a good week.

There has been in particular one important development this week relating to the future of our local government, and another of our national government. In this update, I've got news on the government's final decision on local government reorganisation, my thoughts on the new PM, a recent question to ministers in the House of Commons, and an update after concerns were raised about a possible sewage discharge in Seaford.

As always, thanks for reading.

Keeping Our Communities Together

This week the government confirmed the final boundaries for Sussex's new unitary councils, bringing months of uncertainty to an end.

When the plans were first put forward, there was a real risk that communities across our area would be split apart. Early proposals were that Newhaven, the Ouse Valley villages and surrounding communities should become part of a Brighton-based authority. Then there were threats to carve up Lewes constituency separating Newhaven and Seaford off into a new coastal authority running up to Hastings.

I worked alongside local residents, parish councils and community groups to make the case that our communities belong together. We argued that the Havens, Lewes and the surrounding villages share strong historic and economic ties, and shouldn't be divided by arbitrary boundary changes.

More than that, areas like Seaford I felt would be seriously disadvantaged by being lumped into a new coastal authority and Newhaven and Ouse Valley I felt had nothing to gain from a merger with Brighton. There was absolutely no good reason for residents to accept the proposal and it looked like they just wanted places to park the city's

problems (think bin strikes, i360 debts, and housing crisis) outside the city, and grab space to spread out rather than building more houses in the city itself.

We have our own challenges; we didn't need Brighton's too.

I'm pleased that those concerns have been listened to. The final plans mean proposals to expand Brighton & Hove into Newhaven and the Ouse Valley have been dropped, the county has not been split in two, and Falmer will remain part of East Sussex.

I'm not the MP for Peacehaven, my job is to stick up for my own constituents. However, for those asking, my personal view is that this is very disappointing news for Peacehaven, Telscombe, and East Saltdean who are to be absorbed into Brighton.

Thank you to everyone who took part in the consultation and helped make the case. It shows that when local people speak loudly, with one voice, we really can make a difference.

If you're interested in standing for this new council, my party has begun accepting applications for candidates. You can find out more about that here.

Fixing our broken politics

With Andy Burnham set to take power in a few days, after a Labour coronation with no contest, it's important that our new Prime Minister uses this opportunity to take us in a different direction than we're currently in.

Britain's current unstable political system is the fundamental failure of Westminster – underpinning the crisis in the NHS, sewage pollution in our rivers, and the rise of divisive populism.

That's why alongside my Liberal Democrat colleagues we're calling for proportional representation, to more accurately reflect the will of the people, proper devolution so that local communities have a say on how things are done, a reform of the House of Lords with a proper democratic mandate, and a written constitution to protect our hard-won British rights and freedoms.

If Andy Burnham is serious about changing the way we do politics, then our door is open to working with anyone towards those ends. A revolving door of Prime Ministers and different governments is creating a stop-start approach to policies that make long term stability and growth impossible. At the bottom of this newsletter is one package of

Reforms we're pushing for the new PM to adopt. It's time we chose a new path forward, focused not on factional party politics, but on what is best for our country.

Working for Survivors in Parliament

This week I challenged the government in the House of Commons over the way rape cases are being handled in Sussex.

Only around 3% of reported rape cases in Sussex currently make it to trial. And the 53% conviction rate stands 10% below the national average. When so few cases ever reach court, and conviction rates are so low, it's no surprise that many survivors lose confidence in the criminal justice system.

I asked what progress has been made through Operation Soteria and what further action will be taken to improve the investigation and prosecution of rape cases in Sussex. In response, the Home Secretary reaffirmed the government's commitment to tackling violence against women and girls and arranged for me to meet with the Policing and Crime Minister to discuss the specific challenges facing Sussex.

I was able to raise this directly with the new Chief Superintendent for Sussex Police on Thursday and will continue pressing for more action on this and other policing issues.

Everyone deserves to know that, if they come forward, they will be listened to and their case taken seriously. It's time we made the changes needed to give survivors confidence in the justice system and ensure perpetrators are brought to justice.

Holding Southern Water to Account

Many residents contacted me after an alert suggested sewage had been discharged into the sea at Seaford. Given the dry weather, the report immediately raised questions, so I contacted Southern Water to demand an explanation.

Following further checks, the company confirmed that no sewage had actually been discharged. Instead, the alert was triggered by a fault with its monitoring system, which initially identified what appeared to be a spill before later checks showed it was a false alarm.

While I'm relieved that no pollution entered the sea, incidents like this still have real consequences. Inaccurate alerts can cause unnecessary concern for residents, put swimmers and other sea users off visiting the beach, and affect local businesses that rely on visitors during the summer.

I've made it clear to Southern Water that public confidence depends on reliable monitoring. People deserve accurate, timely information about the quality of our local waters, and I will continue pressing the company to improve its systems while holding it to account whenever concerns are raised.

More broadly my party are calling on the new Burnham administration to abandon the failed privatisation model and hand water infrastructure back to the public via a customer-owned mutual model.

Specifically, we are calling on Prime Minister Andy Burnham to:

- Put water companies into special administration immediately, permanently restructuring the company as a mutual run for the benefit of its customers.
- Transition all existing water companies into public-benefit mutuals, owned by the people rather than the state, ensuring they are run for public health and the environment instead of private profit.
- Abolish the toothless regulator Ofwat and replace it with a powerful new Clean Water Authority with statutory powers to enforce strict environmental standards and crack down on repeat offenders in rivers like the Ouse and across the country.
- End the Great Sewage Cover-Up by forcing water companies to report the volume, not just the duration, of sewage spills.
- Implement an immediate, legally binding ban on all water company executive bonuses, free from loopholes.
- Ensure full accountability by recusing Number 10 advisor James Purnell from any involvement in decisions regarding Thames Water, given his previous work for a firm advising private utilities and major investors.

It's time to hand control of the water companies back to the people that actually use it, privatisation of our water has failed. It's time we stop companies from riddling our essential services with bad debt, and start making them work for the people they're meant to serve.

Week 4

It’s been a busy week running around the constituency on my village's summer tour. Thanks to everyone that’s come out to talk to me about your most pressing issues. See below an update on the summer tour, my thoughts on working with the new PM, and an update from one of our local councillors on Reform cancelling summer food vouchers.

Summer tour

I’ve just finished my first week of my summer village tour and it’s been great to meet so many people from all across the rural parts of my constituency. This week I’ve been to Piddinghoe, Rodmell, Ringmer, Bishopstone, South Heighton, East Chiltington, Ditchling and Westmeston.

Naturally our current drought has been a frequent topic of conversation, with many rural areas experiencing water shortages with residents who are understandably frustrated. I will continue pushing their concerns and pressing for action. We must make our water infrastructure more resilient as we face the impacts of climate change.

Rural connectivity be it roads, buses, trains or internet access has also come up a lot. On our rail connectivity I met with Govia Thameslink yesterday to raise some specific local issues and will keep pushing to keep rural areas on their agenda.

The successful campaign to stop Brighton & Hove's expansion into our area also came up a lot. The last time I visited these villages faced uncertainty over the proposed boundary changes. Thanks to everyone who got involved I’m proud to say we've secured a major victory by keeping our communities together in East Sussex.

Sadly for security reasons I’m not able to publish the dates and times of the visits online. If you’re from one of the villages in Lewes constituency, please reach out to your local parish council and they’ll let you know when I’m coming to visit.

Working with the new PM

Politics works best when people are prepared to put party differences aside and focus on getting things done. That’s why I was very happy to see Andy Burnham reach out to us and meet with Ed Davey this week to discuss how we can work together on some of the biggest challenges facing our country.

For me, one issue that desperately needs addressing that we might be able to work with Labour on is fixing our broken social care system. Too many families are left struggling to find the care their loved ones need, while the NHS continues to suffer because people can’t get the support they deserve closer to home. It’s a crisis that has been ignored for far too long, and I hope the new Government really is ready to grasp the nettle with us.

There are other areas where I believe we can make real progress too, from rebuilding our relationship with Europe to help tackle the cost of living, to cleaning up our rivers and seas and restoring trust in our politics through electoral reform.

Where the Government is prepared to work constructively, Liberal Democrats will always engage in good faith. But I'll also continue holding ministers to account where they fall short. The new Prime Minister has a limited window to restore trust in politics and show that communities like ours are being listened to. I'll be doing everything I can to make sure the voices of people here in Lewes are heard in Westminster.

East Sussex County Council cancels food voucher scheme

Incredibly, one of the first major decisions taken by Reform at East Sussex County Council has been to end the summer supermarket voucher scheme for the most vulnerable families who rely on extra support during the school holidays. Here's an update from Liberal Democrat county councillor for Newhaven whose been working on this issue, Lesley Boniface:

"Liberal Democrat councillors have challenged Reform's decision to scrap holiday food vouchers for some of the most vulnerable families in East Sussex. Although the Government has provided funding through its new Crisis and Resilience Fund, Reform has chosen not to use that money to continue the scheme, instead relying entirely on holiday activity programmes.
"We raised concerns that many families, particularly those in rural areas or facing other barriers, may struggle to access these programmes and asked why no impact assessment was carried out before the decision was made.

"Several neighbouring councils, including Reform-run Kent County Council, have chosen to continue providing targeted food support over the summer. At a time when many families are already struggling with the cost of living, we believe East Sussex should be doing the same. Please see below the statement from the council, and helplines that are available for people in need. You can visit the website for more information here. We know that these alternative programs aren't accessible to many people, and will continue fighting Reform County Council to reverse their decision."

Over the summer, families eligible for benefits-related free school meals can access free activities and nutritious meals through the Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programme. ESCC has used resource from the Crisis and Resilience Fund to expand this programme this year so more families receiving free school meals can benefit from this programme.

In addition, families experiencing financial hardship can seek support through the Council's Family Information Service, cost of living support services, and, where eligible, the new Crisis and Resilience Fund arrangements.

For any family concerned about accessing support during the summer holidays, assistance is available through:

• Family Information Service: 0345 60 80 192
• Holiday Activity and Food programme: free activities and meals for eligible children https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/children-families/childcare/welcome-to-holiday-food-and-fun
• Cost of Living Support services https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/community/cost-of-living-support
• Crisis and Resilience Fund support, where families meet the eligibility criteria following assessment of individual circumstances and need https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/social-care/benefits/crisis-and-resilience-fund

Best wishes,

James MacCleary
MP for Lewes, Seaford, Newhaven, Polegate and our East Sussex Villages
Liberal Democrats