

OUR FUTURE

Plans to Develop the Voluntary Party
through Local Action



Conservatives

INTRODUCTION

Plans to Develop the Voluntary Party

Dear Colleague

These plans set out how we, the Voluntary Party, will develop and build an even more effective grass roots machine that will help us win future elections.

These are the plans of the National Conservative Convention. All Members of the National Convention were consulted over the summer of 2010. We received a comprehensive response and the final plans reflect the comments we received. Most importantly, an overwhelming majority of the National Convention voted to support these proposals. These are now the proposals of the National Convention. These plans have also been endorsed by the Conservative Party Board which has agreed to allocate the Professional resources required to make them a reality. Finally, our plans have been endorsed by David Cameron who has welcomed the changes we have proposed – changes based on personal responsibility, localism and community engagement.

We have resolved that we should develop a more progressive Voluntary Party. We will be welcoming and outward looking, we are committed to Political and Social Action in our communities, and we are committed to increasing our Membership and attracting new people and new leaders.

We are committed that we, the Volunteers, will run ourselves and that we will improve our performance. The prime responsibility for running our Party lies with Local Associations and the role of Areas and Regions is to help Local Associations, and only if Local Associations fail, to step in.

We are all agreed that we want to attract new people to join us, and that Campaigning, Social Action and Political Discussion are the right ways to attract new people. However, we are a coalition of Volunteers and we value and rely on our existing Volunteers – we will build on the success we already have.

To achieve our aims we will work as a team with our Professionals. An Office for the Voluntary Party has been created in Conservative Headquarters, and Professionals have been appointed to help us promote Best Practice, Membership, Social Action and Policy Discussion. The elected Officers of the National Convention are tasked with working with the Field Directors, Voluntary Party Managers and the Regional Chairmen to agree how we use the resources we have in each Region. A summary of the plans we have agreed is set out below.

A Summary of the Plans

1. To focus all Local Associations on campaigning in their communities. We will encourage all Associations to set up or continue Campaign Teams modelled on those in our target seats. In some cases this will just mean a continuation of “best practice” others will need to set up new teams. Where appropriate Associations may choose to form a joint Campaign Team with other Associations. These are local decisions.

2. To grow our Membership. We are determined to measure it, to target it and to grow it. Conservative Headquarters will invest to help us recruit.

3. To embrace Social Action. We will ask all Associations to encourage local Volunteers who want to be involved to join new Social Action Teams. This will attract new people to our Party.

4. To embrace Policy Discussion. We will form new Policy Discussion Groups that will reach out into our communities. We plan to create a two way flow of ideas between our communities and our Party.

5. To embrace localism. All decisions that can be taken locally will be taken locally. In particular we need great local leaders to hold responsibility for selecting local and parliamentary candidates (within the rules), for Party discipline, for Party organisation and for performance improvement.

6. To attract and involve new people with our Party.

We will encourage Associations, Areas and Regions to co-opt people of talent to join the new campaign teams at every level. We must bind the new talent that has flocked to our target seat campaigns into our Associations and use our Parliamentarians and Councillors to help us find more people willing to contribute to political and social action.

7. To expand the leadership of the Voluntary Party at all levels.

We need to embrace all those with a stake in supporting the Party – we will encourage the Volunteers at Association, Area and Regional levels to invite Parliamentarians, Councillors and Treasurers to join their campaign teams and to participate in decision making as they have done in the best target seat campaigns.

8. To make the hierarchy in the Voluntary Party clearer.

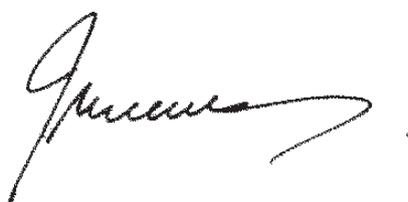
Areas will be encouraged to take responsibility for helping Associations as centres of best practice, and Areas and Regions will be encouraged to take on responsibility for improving performance. They will be encouraged to use the full powers of the Board to promote leadership and remove road blocks to reform, and to restructure the organisation in the best interest of the Party in their patch. We will empower our organisation from the bottom up.

9. To launch a new “Campaign Action Fund” modelled on the Target Seats fund.

This will distribute “pump priming” funds to local Campaign Teams to facilitate a reorganisation, to find new supporters, or to back a social action project. This fund will be raised by the Voluntary Party, working in partnership with the Party Treasurers.

What next? The success of these plans is dependent on the action of Volunteers. If we are to improve our performance, if we are to increase our Membership, and if we are to attract new people interested in getting involved in their communities, then there is a challenge within these plans for all of us. In particular, the Chairmen of every Association, every Area and every Region will need to think carefully and ask themselves some challenging questions. Change will not come from above – it can come from below. Now it s up to all of us.

Yours faithfully



Jeremy Middleton

PLANS

Plans to Develop the Voluntary Party through Local Action

This paper sets out plans to take the Voluntary Party forward. Our aim is to create welcoming and vibrant Associations focussed on Political Campaigning and Social Action within their communities, and, with Professional support to help Associations grow in size and impact. These plans require a concerted act of will from the Voluntary Party, from our professionals and from the Party Board. However, they do not depend on raising new money and they do not require Constitutional change.

Who are the Volunteers and what do they do?

Volunteers who support the Party are a large group of people. There are around 200,000 Members, up to 100,000 recent Members, “Registered Supporters” and “Friends”, approximately 500,000 club Members, plus several hundred thousand people who support Members of Parliament, Councillors, candidates or Conservative campaigns who are not in any of these other groups. These Volunteers are the source of activists who deliver our campaigns on the ground. Our activist base is probably somewhere in excess of 100,000 people. These people are critical to our campaigning success. Volunteers also raise large sums of money. Local Associations raised over £25m in 2008, approximately twice the sum raised by Conservative Headquarters in that year. This pays for the local campaigning that, amongst other things, elects our around 10,000 Councillors and runs the Party across the country. They are also the original source from which our Treasurers raise much of the money for Headquarters.

So, what is the Problem?

The Conservative Party is the UK's largest political party. It has more Members than any other party. It has more local Councillors, more MEPs and more MPs than any other party. There is much about our organisation of which we can be proud. However, although significant numbers want to engage with the Party in a variety of ways, for some time, in common with all membership organisations, our “traditional” membership has been in decline. In much of the country there is no professional support locally and with Conservative Headquarters single-mindedly focussed on winning the “air war”, and on building effective campaigns in target seats nothing

has been done to reverse this decline. In most of the country where there has been little in the way of party resources to manage, train, guide or support the Voluntary Party some Associations have become very internally focussed, insufficiently involved with their local communities, and sometimes not even welcoming to new people.

This lack of support has contributed to the Volunteer organisation becoming weaker in some places, with problems that would at one time have been handled by Volunteers at Area or Regional level not being addressed. This has encouraged the Centre to directly fire fight problems. However, centrally directed initiatives rarely have the insight to produce long term solutions and this can produce disenchantment locally as Volunteers see solutions forced on them from the Centre. Finally, when Associations are bypassed, Volunteers have less responsibility for managing the Party in their patch, and the cycle of decline has been exacerbated. If we continue down a route of central direction with no roots in the country, the Voluntary Party will slowly decline, and also become more troublesome. In contrast in target seats Campaign Teams, with professional support, have attracted large numbers of people to volunteer to help the Party and active campaigning groups consisting of hundreds of people are common, even if many are not “signed up” Members.

What is the way forward?

There are some who argue that modern technology and campaigning techniques have removed the need for a mass voluntary organisation. However, it is the view of this paper that politics is becoming increasingly local and that only a vibrant local organisation will ensure that the Party is engaged with local communities, aware of local issues and campaigns effectively on them. We believe effective local Associations are a necessary condition for political success. This approach is in tune with the political direction of our Party. A Conservative government is committed to initiating change based on personal responsibility, localism and community engagement – “the big society”. This paper proposes that we align the Party with the direction of a new Conservative government.

Regenerating the Voluntary Party

This paper proposes a programme of change that focuses on local Associations as the most important public facing bodies in our Party, and aims to help them become more welcoming and outward-looking, more relevant in their local communities and to help them to attract new people and new leaders. To do that we need to encourage our Associations to move their attention from committees to their communities. We want people of 18-90 to be engaged with the Party and to feel welcomed and respected. We need to offer different ways for people to be engaged. Some of our older Members will want to work in the way that they always have done and they should have the opportunity to continue. Many of them have given great service to the Party for many years and we need to show them that they are very much valued and appreciated. However, others will want to engage in different ways and we must make sure that our organisation can accommodate this. Our best target seats are models for Volunteer Associations. With the right leadership, teams that generally run into 100s, have worked over prolonged periods to deliver electoral success. Generally led by a committed Volunteer (a Candidate or an Association Chairman) and with professional support (from Campaign Directors and the Take Your Seat programme etc) they have penetrated their local communities through effective political campaigning and social action. Our vision is to offer this successful model to **all** Conservative Associations. What we need to do is clear. We have growing, welcoming and vibrant Volunteer organisations when we have the following fundamental building blocks in place:

- Clear objectives
- Strong local leadership
- Aligned and inclusive teams
- Clarity on responsibilities, accountability and transparency
- Appropriate professional guidance and support

We propose a new deal between the Board of our Party and the Volunteers to regenerate our Volunteer Organisation by putting these building blocks in place throughout the country. Importantly we want to fully engage all wings of the Party with this project including those Members of Parliament and local Councillors

who are willing to work in partnership with us. We propose:

1. To link Political Campaigning and Social Action and make them the mission and purpose of our Associations
2. To help Associations broaden their appeal in their communities by involving more people in Campaign Teams, including Parliamentarians, Councillors and new supporters.
3. To help Area Teams deliver best practice to all Associations
4. To empower Regional Teams to create a culture of responsibility, accountability and expectation
5. To provide the Professional support necessary

To succeed this needs to be accompanied by a devolution of power to the most local level possible within the Party to encourage local people to take responsibility. This is what we mean by localism.

Localism

The Party Board includes representatives from all parts of the Party, including Volunteers, Parliamentarians, Professionals and the Party Leadership, and is the supreme decision making body in the Party. The Party Board working through headquarters has and should retain primary responsibility for the professional organisation, the party branding, the candidates selection procedures, the research department, Treasurers and all support departments. However, all decisions that can be taken locally, should be taken locally, as it is local units that are best placed to take local decisions and because delegating power encourages personal responsibility and the development of leadership skills.

Key responsibilities that should be held locally include:

1. Party organisation including mergers and groupings
2. Party discipline, including recommendations for suspensions, expulsions, and Supported Status applications
3. Selecting local election candidates (and most importantly, on occasion, deselecting them)
4. Selecting Parliamentary candidates, off a centrally approved list, and in line with guidelines approved by the Board

Local responsibility for performance improvement will be taken by local Volunteers themselves. We believe that as responsibility is devolved to local people, so Volunteer leaders will emerge to drive improvement. Each of the 5 proposals is explained in the following pages.

Plan 1

To link Political Campaigning and Social Action and make them the mission and purpose of Local Associations

Our objective is to focus Local Associations on reaching out to their communities through the delivery of Political Campaigning and Social Action programmes. Our target seats demonstrate what can be achieved when focussing on effective Political Campaigning and Social Action. Each target seat had its own Campaign Team. They were outward looking and focussed on delivering results. Campaign teams were generally chaired by the PPC or by a proactive member of the Association with leadership qualities. The teams were **developed locally**, made up of **co-opted Members** who brought **unique skill sets** to the fore such as fundraising or project management. Campaign Teams successfully attracted large numbers of **new Volunteers** by a single minded focus on reaching out to their communities through both political action and social action. The teams were generally highly motivated to achieve their goals, whether that was the pledge base, distribution network or embracing new ideas like **Social Action** projects. Importantly although there was pump priming, **more than 80% of the funds spent in target seats were raised in target seats.** Campaign Directors have worked closely with the Campaign Teams. This allowed the work of the Campaign Team to be more focussed and results driven. Target seat conferences and training days run by the Professional Party proved an excellent way of passing on best practice. This direct level of professional support was crucial to their success. Many Associations are of course highly focussed on political campaigning already. However, although many of our Members are involved with a range of community / voluntary / charitable groups, Social Action programmes are not currently integrated into Local Association activities. We believe that placing Social

Action at the heart of Local Associations can shift the focus of Association activities into their local communities, can attract new people and can provide a platform to involve others including people who are not necessarily Members. We also believe there are opportunities to develop a new type of Policy Forum that can attract new people to discuss politics and help the Party build links with local communities by engaging with local issues, holding public meetings etc. While some Policy Forums are well run and involve large numbers of people, many do not. Indeed, despite being in the constitution, current practice is that Policy Forums are not integrated into Associations, nor do they generally reach out to non-members of the Party. The opportunity is to encourage the transformation of inward looking groups into advocates for our cause, who can embrace the views of those in the community, and give Local Associations a welcoming public face.

The plan is that all Associations adopt the Campaign Team model and set up Social Action Teams and new Policy Forums.

To deliver Plan 1 we propose the following actions: Actions

- a) To encourage all Associations to create a standing Campaign Team, appoint a Social Action Co-ordinator in the Team, appoint a Policy Forum Co-ordinator in the Team and invite the Campaign Team leader to join the Executive
- b) To encourage all Area Teams to appoint an Area Social Action Co-ordinator and a Policy Forum Co-ordinator to offer extra help, guidance and support to local Associations
- c) Conservative Headquarters to provide appropriate professional support from the Centre to service a national network of Social Action Teams and Policy Forums. See the section on Resources at the end of this paper for details.

Plan 2

To help Associations Broaden their appeal in their communities by involving more people including Parliamentarians, Councillors and new supporters

Our objective is to develop Local Associations and ensure that they are fully involved with their communities. In particular, we hope to help them attract new people and to move the emphasis from committee meetings, onto activism. At the grassroots level, the Conservative Party wants to change. Long term members are aware of their declining numbers, and they know that new members – of which there are many – will only be retained if they are engaged in ways that are appropriate to their varying interests and outlooks. If the Conservative Voluntary Party is to be revitalised effectively it must come from the level of the Local Associations. We know from the experience of target seats from Conservative Future and from Campaign North that when local people are given responsibility then they can rise to the challenge. A new intake of MPs provides new opportunities too. Many will have come to Parliament used to working with Campaign Teams and we must create opportunities for those people who have fought hard to help our candidates to get elected to continue to be involved in their Associations and with local campaigns. **This paper proposes that local Associations set out to involve new people, and that they embrace technology to help manage performance and to reach out into local communities.**

To deliver Plan 2 we propose the following actions: Actions

a) To encourage Local Associations to involve **all** those with an interest in the Conservative cause in their Campaign Teams. The composition of the right team is a matter for local people. However, it should include all wings of the Party, including when possible the local Member of Parliament, representatives of local Councillors, any local professional agent and a representative from the local business club.

b) To encourage Local Associations to attract new people to leadership roles. Specifically to use the Campaign Team to find capable people and “fast track” or co-opt them into posts to deliver the work that needs to be done. Appointing Volunteer “headhunters” is one way of approaching this. New positions running the Social Action Teams and Policy Forum would provide opportunities for new people.

c) To encourage Local Associations to set appropriate targets in Membership, pledges etc, (ie Key Performance Indicators) as in target seats. These should be summarised in the annual Association s Strategic Plan (as required in the current constitution).

d) To encourage Campaign Teams to embrace the latest electronic campaigning methods especially MyConservatives.com as this provides an ideal platform to reach out into local communities. Once bedded in MERLIN can produce the objective data. Associations need to monitor and improve their performance.

e) The National Convention and Party Treasurers to launch a “**Campaigning Action Fund**” to provide financial support for development initiatives for the Association or to provide “seedcorn” for Social Action and Policy Forum projects. Associations will be encouraged to apply to a centrally funded grant. This will follow similar processes to securing funding as was applied in target seats.

f) The Party Board has reconfirmed that Local Associations run themselves within the rules set by the Board. In particular they are responsible for their performance and they select their councillors and their parliamentary candidates.

Plan 3

To Help Area Teams deliver Best Practice to their Associations

Our objective is to help Area Teams ensure that Associations are vibrant and are challenging themselves to play a bigger role in their communities. The Area Team should be closest to local Associations and is best placed to disseminate best practice to Local Associations. The composition of Area Teams is a matter for local people. However, The Area Team should embrace all those who want our Party to succeed. There are opportunities to co-opt members onto the Area Teams such as local Parliamentarians and Councillors, local professionals and fundraisers who bring with them different skills. The Teams should also include the various parts of the Party such as CWO and CF. Area Teams need to focus on helping local Associations improve their performance. This means they should be encouraged to offer expertise in a wide range of skills including Campaigning, Social Action and Performance Improvement. Area Teams also need to be experts in managing disciplinary issues and be familiar with the full powers of the Party Board. Area Teams should be able to access the management information about the performance of all their Associations available through MERLIN, eg Membership, pledges, etc and to be able to use this to help target their efforts. Area Teams should also play a critical role ensuring that the infrastructure of the Voluntary Party is fit for purpose. Area Teams need to be able to offer potential solutions to help Associations become more effective such as cooperation between Associations or the establishment of Campaign Centres. Area Teams should include talent spotting as one of their roles to find supporters who could be encouraged to become more involved within the Associations. Area Teams should have more authority in some areas – for example Area Chairmen should be empowered to take difficult decisions with non performing Associations using the full power of the Party Board. To help Area Teams deliver against these demanding objectives they will need support. In particular a structured programme of guidance and a suite of tools that will allow them to disseminate best practice. These have to come from Party professionals. No one wishes to

see Area Teams impose change upon Associations, and there will be different solutions needed in different Areas. However the Area Team should be able and empowered to encourage and facilitate changes within the Voluntary Party structure where it is needed.

To deliver Plan 3 we propose the following: Actions

- a) To encourage Area Teams to build teams with the right skill sets for their area. This means including a representative for Members of Parliament, local Councillors, CWO and CF and offering expertise in all areas where Associations may benefit from support and guidance. This is likely to include Volunteer recruitment, fundraising, Social Action, the Policy Forum, management information (MERLIN) and disciplinary procedures.
- b) To encourage Area Teams to take responsibility for performance monitoring of local Associations using MERLIN.
- c) To encourage Area Teams to attract new people into leadership roles using headhunting and co-opting where appropriate.
- d) Regional Officers and the Professional Team to provide the right support for Area Teams. This to include support in recruiting new Volunteers, induction training, provision of best practice materials and ongoing advice and support.
- e) The Board have confirmed that Area Teams, or if needed, Regional Teams have primary responsibility for Party organisation including assessing opportunities for campaign centres, cooperation agreements, mergers and groupings. Also, in the event that Performance Improvement and/or disciplinary issues are not addressed at an Association level then first Area, and then Regional Teams, are responsible and authorised to act.

Plan 4

To Empower Regional Teams to Create a Culture of Accountability, Responsibility and Expectation

Our objective is to help Regional Teams oversee a change in mindset and ensure that their region is focussed on effective political campaigning and social action. The Regions need to create a culture of responsibility, accountability and expectation that feeds down to Area and Association level. Talented and motivated individuals are more likely to come through the Party ranks if they believe there is a structure that can bring about real change. One of the most important relationships that will determine the success of these proposals is the relationship between the Professional Party and the Voluntary Party. A close working relationship between the Regional Team and the Professionals responsible for the Region is therefore vital. They must have aligned objectives so that our professionals in the field can offer an outstanding support service. This paper therefore proposes a dotted reporting line between the relevant Regional Professionals and the Regional Chairmen. The Regional Teams should hold Areas to account and work with Area Teams to bring about changes where they are needed. Regional Teams need to focus on supporting the Area Teams, communications within the Region, liaising with Conservative headquarters and the National Convention Team and the raising and spending of funds in the Region. Regional Conferences provide an ideal opportunity to deliver best practice throughout a Region even to those minority seats which get little professional help. The Regional Chairmen should formally report on progress each year at the Regional Conference. Regional Conferences can also be used as a way of communicating directly with Members, some of whom may feel there is nothing going on in their Local Associations and are keen to get more involved. Regional Conferences could become more open, attracting non Members and community based groups and increasing engagement on Social Action issues. Regional Teams need to ensure good communications with all Members and may wish to produce Regional Newsletters. Regional Teams need to act as the final port of call on disciplinary issues. Regions should monitor those on the Candidates list

in their Region and play a proactive role in sourcing and assessing new candidates. Regions should also take on more financial responsibility for raising money, budgeting and the targeting of resources. Regional Teams should be made partners in Regional budgets and be more responsible for how money is raised and spent in the region. As Campaign North has shown regions that demonstrate that donors' money can make a real difference locally tend to raise more money. A greater focus on local projects is more likely to lead to an increase in smaller donors and better understanding about the finances also leads to greater efficiency as all stakeholders are acutely aware of financial limitations.

To deliver Plan 4 we propose the following: Actions

- a) To encourage Regional Teams to build teams with the right skill set for their Area. This means including a representative for the Members of Parliament and local Councillors, the Regional Field Team, the Professional fundraiser, CWO and CF.
- b) To create a “dotted line” report between the relevant Regional Professionals and Regional Chairman to ensure focus on delivering objectives and to create alignment.
- c) To encourage Regions to monitor appropriate targets in Membership, pledges etc (ie key performance indicators) for the Associations in their Region.
- d) To establish budgets for all Regions in the North and consider for other Regions. This responsibility means that the concept of “additionality” will apply – if more funds than budgeted can be raised locally then they can be spent locally.
- e) To encourage Regional Teams to “headhunt” capable people and fast track or co-opt them to drive forward the work that needs to be done.

- f) To encourage Regional Teams to agree that their scope should include:
- Representing their Region to Conservative headquarters and to National Convention Officers
 - Working with Area Teams to agree their objectives and plans
 - Performance reviews and talent spotting in the Region
 - Regional communications including newsletters, conferences etc
 - Candidates eg monitoring and sourcing candidates
 - Disciplinary issues not dealt with at Area level
 - Management information from MERLIN and its dissemination to Area Teams

g) Regions and Areas to be encouraged to use the power of the Party Board to resolve performance issues and allocate resources better.

A summary of the Professional support we will have to deliver the step change in performance is set out overleaf.

Plan 5

Professional Support

No Voluntary Organisation can thrive without professional guidance and support. A step jump in performance demands a significant reallocation of resources within Headquarters. This plan will be supported by a new partnership with the professional campaigners and the creation of a Voluntary Party Office to build a large outward-looking Voluntary Party. At its heart is a Deputy Director in Conservative Headquarters who will lead the programme to grow and develop an outward-looking voluntary organisation. This senior professional will work closely with the Chairman of the National Convention to lead the programme of change that is needed. The Voluntary Party Office in Conservative Headquarters will have a new level of professional support leading national projects in the following areas:

1. Best practice.

Performance will improve when Volunteers in positions of authority know what is expected of them and when they have a common set of roles and responsibilities, and a common approach to setting objectives. Measuring performance and supplying management information is critical. A team of Volunteers will work with a **Best Practice Manager** and work closely with the Field Force to deliver this.

2. Recruitment.

A very large number of people are willing to help our Party in one way or another. Many support our campaigns, many are known to Parliamentarians or Councillors. However, we do not currently always capture their contact details or persuade them to join us. This requires a focussed and joined up effort. A team of Volunteers led by a **Membership Manager** will supply the advice, tools and motivation for Local Associations to communicate effectively with potential supporters and manage their Membership.

3. Social Action.

A **Social Action Manager** will be appointed to initiate ideas and promote best practice and manage communications with the new Volunteer Social Action Team.

4. Policy Discussion.

A **Director of the Policy Forum** will be appointed to drive the work of the Policy Forum Teams throughout the country.

This central team needs to work in partnership with the Professional Field Force in the country. The **Field Director** in each Zone will work in partnership with one of the National Convention Officers and each Regional Chairman to agree the overall strategy and plan for each Region/Zone. The Field Force of campaigners will work through the network of Campaign Centres. This proposal does not increase costs – it does mean that staff and associated costs are reassigned to the Voluntary Party Office. This is a serious financial commitment, but it is made with existing resources.

There is one proposal that is incremental, the creation of a **Campaign Action Fund**. This will operate on the same lines as the incremental funds distributed to target seats who produce a credible plan – and ensures that the money is well spent. These funds might be used as pump priming to facilitate a reorganisation, to find new supporters, to start a branch or to mount a recruitment campaign. Importantly any plans would be initiated locally. The Campaign Action Fund is to help regenerate the Voluntary Party and funds will be generated by Volunteers working closely with the Party Treasurers.

Summary

We believe that this plan is essential and we know that it is wanted by the National Convention: it needs no change to the constitution, but will build a more engaged and effective team of Volunteers as it takes what we know works and allows even more Associations the freedom to make it work for them too. This programme of change has the support of the Leadership of our Party and the endorsement of the Party Board. However, it is only a plan. Real change will only come when we, the Volunteers, make the ideas outlined in this document a reality. It is now our personal responsibility to action what we have all agreed. To use a well worn phrase – we are all in this together.

Jeremy Middleton
Chairman of the National Convention

