

UK General Election 2010

Meeting Place Communications

Election Report



Update - FINAL



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1. Executive Summary

It has been a remarkable few days since the general election.

We now have the first coalition since WWII and first in peace time for eighty years. During the heated discussions and negotiations initially a Conservative / Liberal Democrat looked likely. Then, to the surprise of all political commentators, the Lib Dems announced they were in formal talks with Labour. While a rainbow coalition of Lib Dem and Labour, propped up by Celtic nationalists was never realistic, it did cast doubt on the possibility of a deal with the Conservatives.

The Prime Minister Gordon Brown announced his resignation on Tuesday in what some commentators mischievously suggested was timing designed to throw a final spanner in the works as no deal had yet been struck between the Lib Dems and Conservatives. However, soon after, an outline deal was in place and a coalition government between the Conservative and Liberal Democrats was formed.

The Liberal Democrats have arguably done rather well in the allocation of cabinet positions, securing five seats including the role of Deputy Prime Minister. In addition they have 14 other posts in the new government.

A joint policy statement was released on Wednesday which makes for interesting reading.

2. National picture - recap

This has been without doubt the most fascinating UK general election campaign in some three decades. With a lead up punctuated by the expenses scandal, the will-he-won't-he discussion as to when the election would be called and taking place against a zeitgeist of anti-politics, the result has been completely unpredictable.

Initially, polling was pointing to a straightforward landslide for David Cameron's Conservatives. Following a prolonged honeymoon for Prime Minister Gordon Brown, (having taken over the reins from Tony Blair in 2007), some popular announcements on tax and non-doms by Shadow Chancellor George Osborne in his October 2007 Conservative Party conference address saw the beginnings of a Conservative resurgence. This led Brown to call off plans to call an early election to secure a mandate, arguably strengthening the opposition's case against him further.

Adding to this unpredictability, for the first time since the 1920s we have seen a genuine three horse race in the opinion polls, fuelled in no small part by the inclusion of Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg in a series of televised leaders' debates. This was the first time in UK electoral history that such debates took place. The first of these historic debates was watched live by an impressive 8.4 million viewers and it heralded the Liberal Democrat surge in the pre-election polls. The decisive final debate on the economy was watched by 9 million people.

After a month long campaign, highlighted by events such as “BigotGate” and of course those debates, the result of which was nigh impossible to call, the UK awoke last Friday morning to find no party with a majority.

Following the count, the national distribution of the vote was as follows:

Party	Number of seats		% of vote
Conservative	306	+97	36.1
Labour	258	-91	29.0
Liberal Democrats	57	-5	23.0
DUP	8	-1	0.6
SNP	6	0	1.7
Sinn Fein	5	0	0.6
Plaid Cymru	3	+1	0.6
SDLP	3	0	0.4
Green	1	+1	1.0
Alliance Party	1	+1	0.1
Sylvia Hermon - Independent	1	+1	
UKIP	0	0	3.1
BNP	0	0	1.9

3. The Cabinet

The allocation of seats in the new cabinet is as follows (Conservative unless otherwise stated):

Prime Minister - David Cameron

Deputy Prime Minister - Nick Clegg (Lib Dem)

Chancellor of the Exchequer - George Osborne

Foreign Secretary - William Hague

Secretary of State for Education - Michael Gove

Secretary of State for Work and Pensions - Iain Duncan Smith

Secretary of State for Health - Andrew Lansley

Secretary of State for Scotland - Danny Alexander (Lib Dem)

Secretary of State for Defence - Liam Fox

Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change - Chris Huhne (Lib Dem)

Secretary of State for Home Affairs and Minister for Women and Equality - Theresa May

Secretary of State of Justice and Lord Chancellor - Kenneth Clarke

Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills - Vince Cable (Lib Dem)

Chief Whip - Patrick McLoughlin

Chief Secretary to the Treasury - David Laws (Lib Dem)

Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government - Eric Pickles

Secretary of State for Transport – Philip Hammond

Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs - Caroline Spelman

4. Policy

The new coalition government released a joint policy statement on Wednesday.

http://www.conservatives.com/News/News_stories/2010/05/Coalition_Agreement_published.aspx

Headlines:

- Deficit reduction to start this year with £6bn cuts to non-frontline services.
- Personal allowance on income tax to be increased with an aspiration to reach a threshold of £10,000.
- Greater regulation of the banking sector to reduce risk-taking.
- A switch from per passenger duty to a per place duty on fliers.
- A pledge not to join the Euro in this parliament.
- A cap on non-EU immigrants.
- Fixed term five year parliaments.
- Radical education reform and the creation of “free schools”.
- Radical devolution of powers to local government.
- Scrapping ID cards.
- Extending the scope of freedom of information act.
- Safeguards against misuse of anti-terrorism legislation.
- Review of libel laws to protect freedom of speech.
- Ending storage of internet and email records without good reason.
- Roll out of smart meters in homes.
- A commitment to nuclear power generation with a Lib Dem abstention clause.
- Cancellation of Heathrow third runway and no new runways at Gatwick and Stansted.
- Establishment of high speed rail network.
- The promise of a whipped vote on a referendum on the Alternative Vote electoral system.
- The setting up of a committee to look into reform of the House of Lords to either partially or wholly elected via proportional representation.
- A limit on donations to political parties.

5. Implications for national planning policy

There is little mention of planning policy in the joint policy document released on Wednesday, however the following extract would suggest that we are likely to see little deviation from the Conservative manifesto pledges on planning:

“The parties will promote radical devolution of power and greater financial autonomy to local government and community groups. This will include a full review of local government finance”

The key elements of the Conservatives planning commitments included:

- No top down housing targets
- Locally agreed housing and development targets
- Scrapping regional spatial strategies
- Scrapping LDFs replacing them with Local Plans

The agreement with the Lib Dems is likely to see little change to Conservative policy. Key figures such as Vince Cable have made clear his support of localism and the end of national targets.

A point to note, the Conservatives omitted references to Third Party in their election manifesto, whereas the Liberal Democrats retained it in theirs. It will be interesting to see how this plays out.

6. Department for Communities and Local Government

Many will have been unsurprised to see Eric Pickles appointed as Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, a department he is very familiar with in his previous role as shadow before being replaced by Caroline Spelman. Spelman moves to DEFRA where she takes up the position of Secretary of State.

Grant Shapps, the architect of the Conservative’s proposals for planning and housing, has become Housing Minister. He is joined as a Minister of State by Greg Clark MP. Greg Clark’s title is Minister for Decentralisation. They are joined by Lib Dem Andrew Stunell, and Conservatives Bob Neill and Baroness Hanham as junior ministers. Andrew Stunell will cover local government and Bob Neill planning.

Unlike the last government, the housing minister will not automatically attend Cabinet meetings.

It should be noted that Jeremy Hunt is expected to be appointed as Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport. His brief will cover architecture and heritage.

7. Conclusion

- David Cameron as Prime Minister and Nick Clegg as Deputy Prime Minister head a coalition government with a fixed term parliament
- The date of the next election is 7th May 2015
- A joint policy statement has been published by the parties and will be followed by a series of policy announcements and a budget on 22nd June
- The appointment of Grant Shapps as housing minister will put energy behind the policies set out by the Conservatives before the election
- Therefore we are likely to see planning reforms not too dissimilar to those put forward in the Conservative manifesto and policy documents such as Control Shift and Open Source Planning.
- Both sides have made concessions, although fewer than might have been expected
- There seems to be a lot of common ground on certain areas such as civil liberties and localism