

## **‘A Time of Monsters’ – Reform and the Rest. What is to Be Done?**

### **Excerpt of meeting notes**

Brighton & Hove Compass Coffee Morning, 31 January 2026 - Friends’ Meeting House

#### **Top take-aways**

- Listen – hear issues. Empathise. Engage with them and respond to the way they’re raising it.
- We feel deeply about these issues too. Develop your own narrative, including your emotions.
- Be careful about uniting. A diversity of views is more real and avoids falling into Reform’s binary view that politics doesn’t work.

#### **How should we respond to Reform? What should we do to reinvigorate politics?**

Paul Taggart suggests:

- Take on their agenda, to rob them of their appeal? Doesn’t work, because “Why go for the copy when you can have the original?”
- Be pluralistic. Not ‘gather all the progressives’. Don’t mount a united front, as that plays into the binary theme. Have different reasons for criticising politics.
- Take them seriously. Listen to their concerns. Empathise. Accept that they think that. Engage with them and respond to the way they’re raising it. Communicate without ‘othering.’ We are part of the problem if we don’t understand why they and Trump are popular.
- Politics is about tradeoffs. Not winners. Think long-term.

Lena Swedlow suggests:

- Hope is local and we do get to build that here.
- What are you angry about? Sharing = commonality.
- Look for a connection of emotion, not of agreement
- Do uncomfortable things. Go to spaces you’re unfamiliar with.
- Practice principled, grounded disagreement. Noone has disagreed with these people well. Lena shared a personal story about how conflict within a thriving movement stopped it in its tracks.
- People who feel abandoned will look for someone to listen.
- Compass members show direction. Politics can be hostile. We need to do it differently.
- Show up. We don’t have all the answers, but we have a process.
- Route is to be tolerant, curious, negotiated – ‘I don’t know. Let’s work it out together.’ Not control.
- Most Reform members are not extreme.
- We need a progressive anti-system narrative. Politics should be about un-rigging the system.
- Charities can help shape narratives, even if they can’t be in politics. Wellsbourne GP center is an example of that.
- Keep our compass pointed to the good society.
- Focus on “What do we want from a mayor?” Take that around Sussex.
- AI and algorithms – think about how to use independent media orgs to get around algorithms. We need work-arounds. Progressives are typically strong outside of media. Social media isn’t where we’re going to win.
- It’s up to what WE decide to do. A fun, inclusive democracy event. What do we want the Mayor of Sussex to be like? What issues can we get behind locally? Let’s protect what we’re already doing? Get people to feel involved.
- Tell us about orgs we can reach out to. Talk to your groups about Compass. Be a bridge.
- Create a narrative about our emotions. We feel deeply!