



# Johanna Baxter

National Executive Committee

---

## Putting Members First

### Report of the National Policy Forum held on 25<sup>th</sup> June 2011

I love music. But I've never been very good at the time warp. So I found yesterday's NPF was a bit of a challenge. Don't get me wrong – there were lots of high notes but some of the routine was predictable.

I take my role as a representative seriously so I would have liked the opportunity to have canvassed your views before heading up to Wrexham. Unfortunately the agenda and discussion document only arrived late on Thursday evening. I raised this issue at the last meeting of the NPF in Gillingham last November.

It was however encouraging to read though that in the Fresh Ideas consultation we have been able to make almost 4million contacts with the public, conduct 70 public events across the country which 6,000 people have attended, conduct the first Peoples Policy Forum and receive 2,000 contributions to the policy review and a further 16,000 thoughts and ideas through our online activity. This is not insignificant. I don't yet know the exact number of submissions sent in to the Refounding Labour but it is clear that there has been a huge amount of interest in both consultations and I want to thank all of our members who took time out to make a submission. Your ideas and your enthusiasm for this process have been inspiring and I look forward to reading them. (If you want to read my submission you can find that at <http://puttingmembersfirst.wordpress.com>.)

The challenge now is to turn those ideas into tangible changes to the way we do things.

Ed Miliband talked passionately about the need for change – you can read his speech here. He argued that we have in the past ignored the party and the public saying that "We went from six people making decisions in a smoke-filled committee room in the 1980s to six people making the decisions from a sofa in Whitehall. Old Labour forgot about the public. New Labour forgot about the party. And, by the time we left office, we had lost touch with both". He went on to say that if "we are the party for working people, of working people, we need to recognise we lost their trust....they are suffering and we owe it to them to change". There wasn't much there that you could disagree with.

Ed went on to outline what he called his 'down-payment' on some of the ideas coming out of Refounding Labour. He stated that;

- Public petitions gathered by local parties should determine issues for debate at Labour's policymaking forum with either the 10 petitions with most signatures, or any petition with a minimum threshold of signatures, being guaranteed a debate.
- Non-party members, such as Greenpeace or other NGOs, would be entitled to speak at party conference as "registered consultees".
- There should be greater involvement of our 4 million Trade Union levy payers in our local CLPs with a minimum twice a yearly meeting with them.
- Local parties should draw up a register of local supporters who back our objectives but do not want to become members.

- All parliamentary candidates and councillors are to be asked to sign a contract committing themselves to be in regular touch with the public

Whatever your views of these ideas they have been undermined by the fact Ed announced them before the NPF met. If he is serious about handing power back to that body he should demonstrate it by involving them in the process of change.

The party have 2000 paper and 16000 online submissions to work through – Liam Byrne joked in his session that if anyone wanted to help him go through them they'd be welcome to. He was talking to a room full of people that could easily be involved in that process. We could organise them by geography and our NPF representatives to help pull out those key themes and ensure CLPs followed up with those members and non-member who had made them from their constituencies. Giving them this information could be the start of them building that supporters network that Ed talked about and would demonstrate a willingness to continue the conversation with our members.

It was in the Policy Workshops where, with a bit of a mind flip we were into the time slip. There were good discussions in the Rights and Responsibilities and Economy, Growth and Jobs sessions that I attended. But as one colleague said in the plenary between the two the issues we were talking of, and the feedback outlined in the documentation that accompanied those discussions, were to a large degree echoes of the discussions we had back in Gillingham in November. A number of delegates expressed their concern that we were missing a trick by not outlining any policy positions or our vision for the country now. Liam stated that we would start seeing more of the policy principles being outlined in the months ahead with further work being done on the detail which would involve the NPF. He called for members who had a view on those principles to make sure they were fed in by the end of July so they could be taken into consideration when the Joint Policy committee meets to draft the document that will be put to conference.

It was good to have guests from the local area and the CLP in the room and participating in these discussions giving their own view of the discussion document. It was good to see colleagues refer to the importance of the use of new technology to reach out to people (one colleague talking of how she now gets casework via text). And it was good to see that the members of the NPF are still enthusiastic about the change that's been promised. But the next meeting of the NPF will have to reflect that change not just discuss it.

I'll keep you up to speed with the work we're doing on all the responses that have been received and any proposed rule changes that might arise from them that would be put to conference.

*I'm always keen to talk, and provide verbal reports, to CLPs so if you'd like me to visit or help facilitate a discussion on any of the current consultations underway please don't hesitate in contacting me and I'll do my best to get there.*