



Johanna Baxter

National Executive Committee

Putting Members First

Report of National Executive Committee meeting held on 17th July 2012

This NEC meeting was preceded by a visit to the European Parliament on the 9th & 10th July (my report of that can be found [here](#)), a Shadow Cabinet/NEC reception the evening before to open the new HQ building and a meeting of the Organisation Sub-committee on the morning of the same day. It was followed by a meeting of the Community Campaign Working Group immediately afterwards, which meant that those of us on all three committees had a marathon of a day.

Organisation Sub-Committee

At Org Sub we considered a paper from Angela Eagle on reform of the policy making process which was then amended through our discussion and presented to the NEC later in the day (more on that below). We also discussed NEC rule changes to conference – the majority of these related to incorporating Police Commissioners into our structures. However I requested that we add a rule change which reinstates Women's Officers as core officer positions in CLPs or alternatively includes an Equalities Officer as a core officer position. While the intent of Refounding Labour was rightly to give CLPs greater flexibility in their structures I, and I know many others on the committee, did not intend for that to mean the work on engaging under-represented groups could be regarded as optional. I have been contacted by a number of members across different parts of the country who are concerned that this is exactly how it could, and in a few isolated instances has been, interpreted. The proposal provoked strong debate amongst the committee but the majority who spoke were in favour of making some change to reflect the fact that this work should be considered as core activity and party officers have committed to coming back with concrete proposals for dealing with the issue at our next meeting.

We agreed the process for selecting candidates for the next European elections which is largely the same as the process used in the last round of elections – every MEP will go through a trigger ballot, which will complete by the end of this year, new candidates will apply to a selections board who will select candidates and reserves by end of Feb 2013 and members will be able to vote on the order of preference on the Party list during July 2013. Results would then be announced at conference next year. The party's list will again be a 'zipped list' i.e. men and women will appear alternately on the list.

We also agreed that proxy votes can be used in parliamentary selections for those who have a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out day to day activities and/or they are the carer of someone in this position.

General Secretary's report;

Iain reflected on the fact that it was a year since his interview for the position and he continued to feel privileged to be in the role. He gave an update on the party's financial position, the Nations and Regions Board which he has created to bring together the work of the Directors across the country and the Management & Commercial Review, in which he confirmed that the JTUC was and would continue to be fully consulted.

Deputy Leader's report;

Harriet stressed that we cannot rely on voters to come over to us just because the Government were doing badly – we give them a reason to do so. She spoke of the policy review being undertaken by John Cruddas and the fact that it is not opinion polls that determine an election but marginal seats and we have a similar number of front benchers as marginal seats so the intention is to pair them up.

Harriet also spoke of the need to ensure that we are more representative of the country and she would like those organisations in our party who train under-represented groups – the Labour Womens Network, the trade unions etc - to pool their experience and deliver that as part of the Future Candidates Program.

Campaign Co-ordinator's report;

Tom spoke of the 21 Organising pilots we had agreed at the Community Campaign Working Group and confirmed that he and Ed Miliband would be trying to visit each of those in the coming months. Tom spoke about the need to embed community organising in our party, for a national BME strategy and the forthcoming elections in November. It was noted that staff numbers had already been boosted in Bristol to assist the Mayoral campaign but that expectations for the Police Commissioner elections were low due to the anticipated poor turnout – he anticipates a win in only 8 of those 41 seats. Looking ahead he noted that the party now controls 50 of the local authorities covering our 100 key seats and that Shadow Ministerial visits and messages will all take account of our strategy to win back those who feel they have been 'let down by Dave'.

Are we turning a corner in policy making?

Angela Eagle presented a paper on proposals to reform the party's policy making process and that paper, following some discussion, was agreed. The reformed process contains some fundamental changes to the way we do policy making much of which can only be welcomed with open arms. The key elements of the package are:

- The creation of a new 'Policy Hub' – an online home for our policy making process, where members and the public can read papers, make submissions and amendments, read others' ideas, and respond to them. This would be caveated to ensure that it was clear not all of these views reflected party policy.
- A greater role for the NPF, building on the current final year amendment process with representatives having a role right across a Parliamentary cycle, with a new power to take decisions on key issues of importance at annual meetings of the NPF. There was some discussion about electing NPF representatives for a 5 year term so that they could see through an entire cycle of policy making across a parliament but it was agreed not to proceed with that at this time.
- A process and cycle which gives members more of a voice, with a fixed timetable providing certainty on what is happening when.
- Reformed policy commissions, reflecting our key policy priorities and how the world has changed post-financial crisis, linking in with the work John Cruddas is doing on the policy review.
- A streamlined system which places greater focus on topical and key issues where we seek to deliver real engagement and focused discussion.
- A new power for Annual Conference to shape the work of the National Policy Forum via a Policy Ballot which will identify key topics for in depth consideration and consultation. This is in addition to the existing Contemporary Issues ballot which takes place at the start of conference.
- An enhanced emphasis on community engagement, with Party units rewarded for maximising engagement and building broad support for their policy initiatives.
- Better feedback for Party members who get involved, with an online audit trail for submissions and amendments alongside published papers and newsletters on NPF business.

I stressed that the Policy Hub must be interactive and user-friendly – we have only a small opportunity to rebuild trust in our policy making process so if it fails at members first attempt they are unlikely to give it another go. There was some useful discussion on weighting of submissions depending on whether they were submitted by members of the public, members of the party or party units, which is being given further consideration.

Overall I think these proposals have a real possibility of working and I sincerely hope they do because members will not view the party as being Refounded unless we see real change in this area. My remaining concern is that the system is still so complex but I suspect members will forgive that if they actually see it working. The Joint Policy Committee also needs further reform and we need to be clearer about the role of conference.

John Cruddas;

John reported on the audit he has completed of the effectiveness of the 36 Shadow Cabinet Policy Working Groups. He stated that he wanted to streamline these in 3 broad areas – rebuilding the economy, rebuilding

society and rebuilding trust in our political system though he is mindful of Harold Wilson's quote that this is the list of little things that are important to people so will develop detailed policy streams which sit below them. He wants to ensure we win – as we did in '45, '64 and '97 – by contesting the national story. He is mindful of Harold Wilson's quote that this is the list of little things that are important to people.

Leaders report;

Ed Miliband spoke of how much he enjoyed speaking at the Durham Miners Gala and how he would ensure it was not another 23 years before he returned. He spoke of the 3 big problems he thought the Coalition faced – that they stand up for the wrong people, that their economic plan is failing and that they are out of touch with the lives of most ordinary working people. He stated that we had to use that opportunity to expose them, continue being an effective Opposition but turn our minds also to our program for the future. He stressed the importance of community organising to ensure we are speaking to people's concerns and his commitment to getting out to CLPs. I pressed Ed to ensure that the unfairness of the Beecroft proposals and the recent proposals to charge people to take employment tribunal claims are resisted at every opportunity and he agreed that they are a blatant attack on worker's rights. I have written in more detail about my concerns with these proposals [here](#).

Other issues;

- I called for a review into how we run internal elections to ensure that in future ballots arrive in a timely manner and members are given every opportunity possible to participate. I have also asked for a copy of the recent results broken down by CLP – this information has previously been provided, albeit only in hard copy.
- We noted the decisions of the campaign, Diversity & Democracy Fund panel, on which I sit. I was very proud that the rest of the panel agreed with my recommendation that we spend the total fund, after all the funds were created to help CLPs, not build up surpluses. By the deadline we received 65 bids and agreed to fund 43 of those in addition to the 6 that we had already approved as part of the emergency bid process. These bids covered everything from part-funding an Organiser's salary to paying for a Labour leaflet for a CLP that had never before been able to afford one.
- Annual conference – we agreed a provisional grid for party events at conference and expressed concern that a number of small organisations, many of whom have never before been asked, had been sent substantial bills for having a stand at conference.

Community Campaign Working Group

- We received a presentation on a proposed strategy for working with local trade unions from a Bradford West NEC Panel visit. I urged us to ensure that, as well as building better links with our trade union affiliates, we develop a strategy for engaging with the thousands of trade union members who are currently in non-affiliate unions.
- We agreed a BAME engagement strategy and a membership and supporters recruitment drive which will be rolled out this summer badged the '1+ Challenge'. We also received an update on the Community Organising pilot projects that we had agreed earlier in the year.
- At our previous meeting I had argued that we should extend the remit of the group to cover Technology & Social Media issues. This was agreed and this will be on our agenda at our next meeting.

This is my personal account of this meeting and should not be taken as the official record but please do pass on to other Labour members who may be interested.

Keeping in touch...

Since my last report I have been delighted to visit Putney CLP and talk with members in Twickenham CLP. Those visits, added to the others I have undertaken, means **I have now visited 75 CLPs in the last 19 months (full details [here](#))**. If you'd like me to visit your constituency to provide an NEC report or facilitate a policy discussion please don't hesitate to get in touch.