



# Johanna Baxter

## National Executive Committee

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## Putting Members First

### Report of National Executive Committee meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2013

As this was the first meeting of the committee since the New Year's honours were announced NEC colleague Margaret Beckett was congratulated on her damehood and former committee members Michael Cashman (MBE) and Norma Stephenson (OBE) were also congratulated on their awards.

#### Campaign Organisers Report

Tom Watson gave a presentation on the party's recently published [106 battleground seats](#). It was noted that the list was entirely offensive – it assumes all Labour held seats are retained in the 2015 general election. That decision was based on analysis of the work already being undertaken in those seats by CLPs and MPs and the support which will be provided to MPs in marginal constituencies. The list is based on basic win-ability (measured on the basis of the national swing required to take seats), demographic/regional vote share models and actual vote shares achieved in recent local election results. It was noted that 4 out of 5 of them were held by Conservatives, a 88 of them were last held by the Party in 2010, 15 were last held in 2001 and 3 were not held at all during the party's last term in government. This is not a definitive list – local results and levels of campaign activity on the ground would be reviewed on a continuing basis to establish whether seats should be taken off or put on the list. It was also noted that clear expectations would be set for candidates in those seats through a new candidate contract, there would be a trained community organiser in every ward of each of those seats and paid organiser resource covering all of them. We agreed to continue twinning CLPs/MPs and, in response to representations from me at our recent meeting of the Organisation Sub-committee, to ensure that support for seats with local/other elections prior to 2015 was linked in with this battleground seat strategy.

I stressed to Tom that there was a concern amongst some, already very active CLPs, about [the tenor of debate around community organising which I had written about further here](#). I asked for his assurance that voter identification would remain a key element of our organising approach. Tom agreed that it would and the training provided with Arnie Graff would cover it – the main difference in approach will be the level of investment in and trust in our volunteers to deliver.

#### Leader's Report

Ed Miliband said that 2013 for him was about strategy, ideas and organisation. Strategy - in terms of developing his One Nation vision, of a country that can pull together and where everyone plays their part. Ideas – in terms of the work being done by John Cruddas and Angela Eagle on the policy review in developing our next manifesto. And organisation in terms of getting our candidates selected early and our resources in place to support our battleground seat strategy. On Europe Ed said that the position had not changed – we will argue for change within Europe to ensure that it works for the people of Europe but an in/out referendum is not the way to deliver that. He noted that if there was to be any further transfer of powers there would have to be a referendum at any rate. We will look at what the Conservatives propose in terms of any repatriation of powers but if they simply want to reduce workers' rights then we won't support it.

I joined others in thanking Ed for the position the PLP took in voting against the welfare cap but pressed again, given the vote was passed by the government and will lead to a real term cut in wages for many at the same time as the economy was continuing to contract, for us to further develop our narrative around 'good work' and expose the scandal of under employment. Ed agreed with this point and stated that the Tories' position on welfare was instructive – they thought they had set an elephant trap for Labour but it backfired because people in the country are beginning to see that austerity isn't working. I asked Ed to explain how the One Nation agenda fitted in with the decision taken recently not to stand candidates in Northern Ireland. Ed acknowledged the good work undertaken by members in Northern Ireland and pointed to the proposal, welcomed by all sides, to establish a consultative forum in the form of a 'Council of Labour for Ireland' as progress in the debate on this issue. However he remains concerned that standing candidates would undermine the party's ability to act as an honest broker in Northern Ireland. It was agreed that further work would be undertaken to see whether representatives of the local CLP could be directly involved in the forum.

Ed took further questions on pension reform where he stated that whilst the party might favour a flat rate pension the devil will be in the detail of the government's proposal and our position will be determined by the effects of the change

and how they would be implemented. Ed was also pressed on the issue of whipping the vote for equal marriage – he stated his, and the shadow cabinet's, full commitment to equal marriage.

### General Secretary's Report

Iain stated that his teams focus for the coming year was about getting our organisation in place to support the battleground seats. To that end the adverts for the Regional and Campaign Organisers had now been agreed and issued. If you're interested in being part of our party's campaign frontline [check out the adverts here](#). I asked Iain to look into progressing under-represented groups through the organisation and to sanity-check the consistency in contracts.

We discussed and agreed a selection procedure for parliamentary candidates. Following the trial of new procedures in a number of seats it had been felt that the decision to remove the BLP/affiliate nominations as a key part of the process hadn't worked as effectively as hoped, despite shortening the process, so those have been put back in. We also agreed the candidate contracts which would be put in place and candidate codes of conduct.

There was some considerable discussion about the proposals to proceed with selecting mayoral candidates in London particularly, in relation to their effect in Tower Hamlets. It was noted that there was no application to re-join the party from any individual which would, in accordance with previous NEC decisions, have prompted a review or investigation prior to any future mayoral selection. The proposals to commence those selections were therefore agreed by an overwhelming majority.

### Scottish report

Margaret Curran, Shadow Scottish Secretary of State, attended the meeting to give a report on the work of the Scottish Labour team and relayed apologies from Johann Lamont who was attending budget talks in the Scottish Parliament. Margaret spoke eloquently about the political and economic climate in Scotland, noting: that unemployment continued to rise; long-term unemployment had increased by 380% in Scotland; the disastrous effects of the welfare reform bill; local government had received its lowest settlement ever; waiting times continued to increase; there was a shortage of blankets in hospitals and over 10,000 college students were not getting a place. She noted that Salmond's answer to that context was to break away, ours is that we absolutely should not. Margaret spoke of the good election results in Scotland last year and the work being done to provide a positive alternative to the SNP. She spoke of the changes to the party's structure, the unity that has driven behind Johann and the strength of Johann's performance in parliament.

I relayed to Margaret the high level of interest in the referendum from members across the UK that has been fed back to me during my visits to CLPs and asked that we work on giving members south of the border something practical they can do to help win the argument, which they are clearly looking for. I also asked that the NEC have regular reports of preparations for the referendum on our agenda so that we can ensure the Scottish Party has all the support and resources they need to win the argument. We also touched on ensuring that best practice was shared across the party both in terms of organisation and policy, and then we discussed the launch of the party's campaign to retain the union and how that interacts with the Better Together campaign.

### Other matters

- **Agenda 2015** - Angela Eagle spoke about the launch of the party's new policy hub - the [Your Britain](#) website. She noted that the site was still evolving and encouraged all to contribute to the debate. Angela is working on 'mainstreaming' the site so that it becomes a regular port of call for members on policy matters. It was noted that the dates for the policy commission meetings throughout the year will likely be set at their first meeting so can then be communicated. It was noted that welfare issues fall under the Work & Business policy commission and this will be clarified on the site. There will be a policy engagement in March, details of which will be circulated as soon as possible.
- Dave Sparks gave a **local government report**, noting that a lot of work had been put in to developing the party's narrative on localism and databases of good practice throughout the country. Discussions were being held with the [Convention of Scottish Local Authorities](#) and the [Welsh Local Government Association](#) to create an Association of British Local Authority Labour Groups – it is hoped that those discussions will be complete by April.

*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 and talk with members in **Oxford and District Labour Party** and **Ilford North CLP**. I also enjoyed meeting members at the **Nunhead BLP Christmas quiz** and the **Fabian Society's annual conference**. I was also very pleased to attend my own MP, **Harriet Harman's, celebration of her 30years in Parliament** – huge thanks to her for all her work in our CLP and for continuing to inspire members across the party.

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.

