



Johanna Baxter

National Executive Committee

Putting Members First

Report of National Executive Committee meeting held on 19th March 2013

Party Organisation

- The General Secretary (GS) thanked members of the Organisation Sub-Committee for meeting in both February and March which has allowed us to progress AWS decisions in nearly all the battleground seats, enabling them to start moving to selection. It was noted that 83% of battleground seat candidates have already been selected and our aim is for all battleground seat candidates to be in place by conference.
- It was noted that all regional offices now have Regional Press/Comms Officers in place and Campaign Organiser positions have been created which nearly all trainee organisers have been recruited into. The one vacant Regional Officer position has now also been filled.
- The Campaign, Diversity and Democracy Fund Panel met recently and received an exceptional bid from HQ from the fund. I expressed concern that this bid was received, and put before the committee, before the new round of funding applications had been advertised to CLPs. The GS responded informing us that there would, in total, be an extra £136k in the fund that CLPs could bid for this year. That, along with the assurance that the money would be used to launch a new trainee organiser scheme which will recruit 15 new Organisers, led to us agreeing that bid. We know having Organisers in place locally works – at the last election the party polled an average 2% better in those seats where organisers were in place.
- It was noted that Arnie Graff will be back to the UK at the end of the month to do a further round of Community Organising training.
- On the back of Apprenticeship Week we're bringing an apprentice into the GS office who starts next week.
- LGA – new local government officer, Katy Neep, has been asked to look at ALC structures going forward and will bring a paper back to the next NEC.
- I'm very pleased my previous request for the NEC to receive regular reports on the party's preparations for the Scottish Independence Referendum has resulted in us now receiving a new regular Nations & Regions report updating us on the work of all our national/regional offices.

Campaign Organisers Report

- Looking to May we noted that 35 local authorities are up for election - 27 shires, 7 unitary authorities and 1 Welsh unitary authority covering 2921 council seats, some of which are marginal but most of which are in Tory heartlands. It is anticipated that 250 would be the maximum number of gains we could make.
- Target wards have been identified in every area that has elections – some because they would give us a foothold, others because they're key to winning the council. It was noted that 45 of our battleground seats have shire elections and those will all be getting targeted support.
- We noted this is only the second time since 1990 that county elections haven't been on the same day as a general election which is likely to result in a lower turnout and a better than expected performance by UKIP. Over half of county councils have had a full review of their electoral boundaries and new electoral registers have been published late which hasn't helped.
- In terms of the short campaign the national theme will emphasise our One Nation vision - rebuilding the nation together. Each Lab Group will have their own local manifesto and the Lab Group leaders are in regular contact to share best practice. The PEB will emphasise the dividing lines with the government – Labour working for the country, the Tories only working for the few. Week commencing the 1st April there will be a campaign launch event in Lancashire at which we're expecting 300+ members and organisers to be present.
- It was noted that 55 local/regional protests against the bedroom tax had taken place the previous weekend and it was agreed that spontaneous local campaigning action was positive and would be encouraged.
- In Eastleigh the party went from 0 to 20,000 contacts during the period of the campaign and whilst we might not have been in the position we would have liked at the end of it there was fantastic member mobilisation throughout and a good amount raised for the campaign.

Ed Balls

- Ed Balls gave a report on preparations for the party's response to the budget the following day. He expected this to be a deja vu budget but warned against presuming there would be another omnishambles. It should be anticipated that the government will have some things to say and get some positive coverage but that won't change the fundamental fact that the government has not delivered. In 2010 George Osborne said it would take him 4 years to get the deficit down but by 2015/2016 he will be borrowing £80m more. Ed recalled that we warned in 2010 that their plan would fail and now we see the deficit rising, growth stagnating, youth unemployment growing, spending on small businesses having fallen every month of this government and the loss of the UK's triple A credit rating. He warned again of the damaging effects of the government's strategy, which fails both on fairness and execution, and said there was an open invitation to George Osborne to pop in to his office at any point for help in re-writing it!
- The government could change course - not proceed with the April tax cut for millionaires, consider big changes in exec/non-exec pay and review procurement procedures but they have no long term plan at the moment.
- Ed was clear that if we were in government tomorrow we would: build 100,000 homes, cut VAT, introduce a mansion tax, cut NI for small firms, bring forward infrastructure investment and introduce a jobs guarantee for young people.
- Ed took questions on the need for greater clarity re the party's position on public spending, reversal of the millionaire's tax cut and the bedroom tax, performance related pay and quantitative easing. He made the point that we've changed the terms of the debate – commentators are now asking him whether our proposals will be enough rather than

questioning their fundamental premise. But he doesn't want to get to a place where he's making commitments he can't deliver or which could end up causing the party problems in 2 years' time – we'll take a position about what can be reversed at the point we agree the manifesto. On the bedroom tax Ed stated it's the worst piece of policy he's ever seen - a shocking symbol of unfairness. He said that every time the government tries to claim that it isn't a bedroom tax, but a community charge, people just think of the poll tax. He pointed out that the average Tory MP has 6,500 constituents in work that will be affected by the charge. He also noted that the callousness of the government's attack on the poor will be revealed with the news that Ian Duncan Smith gave Job Centres targets for cutting the number of people claiming benefit.

NPF Report/ Policy Review

- Angela Eagle reported that the consultation on the challenge papers published on [Your Britain](#) in November (and delivered electronically and in hard copy to CLPs) closed on 6 March. The final date for submissions had been extended from 28 February in response to feedback from members and the NEC thanked Angela for responding to that. It was noted that over 750 submissions had been received via Your Britain, from CLPs, affiliated unions, socialist societies, charities, NGOs, businesses, individual Labour members and members of the public. This represents a threefold increase in submissions compared to the whole of the previous policy making cycle which was warmly welcomed.
- It was noted that all policy commissions have met twice since the start of the year to consider submissions received in response to their challenge papers and to draft policy documents to take each of the priority issues forward. Those documents have now been agreed by the Joint Policy Committee and will be circulated to CLPs and uploaded onto Your Britain for a further round of consultation that will run until shortly before the Summer National Policy Forum (NPF) meeting.
- It was noted that the Your Britain website continues to develop - NPF rep profiles are currently being implemented among other new features. I raised the point that whilst this was very welcome members in the CLPs I have visited too often still seem unaware of the site and it's benefits. Angela acknowledged the concern, despite the site having been promoted to individual members and externally through all-member emails, an online Agenda 2015 and Your Britain user guide, and the offer of live and online training sessions. She will see if a flyer can be created for reps who are visiting members to advertise the site.
- Plans for the People's Policy Forum being held in the West Midlands on 23rd March were discussed and agreed.
- I pressed again for the directory of NPF rep contact details to be made available so that they can not only be contacted by their constituents but also able to share best practice amongst their peers.
- It was noted that alongside continuing online engagement through Agenda 2015, CLPs and other Party units are organising Your Britain events across the country. These events, which will involve members of the frontbench, local MPs, Councillors and NPF reps, will be an opportunity to involve members of the public, community groups, local union members and others directly in our policy development work. Regional offices are working to support this activity and have appointed from, Jan until April, Regional Policy Coordinators to coordinate that activity. Notes from local, regional and other events are placed by organisers and NPF representatives on Your Britain as submissions.
- Jon Cruddas reported that he is 6mths into the 2yr Shadow Cabinet policy review process. Three Shadow Cabinet sub-committees will be looking work in the broad policy themes of economy, society and politics. They have split out to look at specific areas of work within those themes – 20 pieces of work are being undertaken on which policy proposal papers are being written. We sought clarity on how these work streams link in to the work of the NPF Policy Commissions and requested that the policy proposal papers come through the NPF as formal submissions.

Leader's report

- Ed Miliband said he was pleased with progress on Leveson, noting that it was unprecedented for the government to go to the opposition party's offices to draft proposals to resolve issues. On the budget Ed M echoed the sentiments of Ed Balls stating that George Osborne had failed, his plan has failed, he was defending the wrong people and in 17 days' time the country will see the richest becoming richer and the poor being hit harder. He pointed out that our commitment to restore the 10p tax rate, funded by a millionaire's mansion tax, was a clear dividing line and commitment to making the economy fairer.
- I and a number of colleagues pressed Ed on the party's position in respect to the Welfare vote. Ed stated that the vote was not about the Poundland case but the 22,000 sanctions the DWP have imposed since 2011. He said the party would be abstaining because of 2 safeguards that had been secured – that the individual right to appeal would be protected (so if people believe they have been wrongly sanctioned they still have the right of appeal) and, following wider concern about the numbers involved and that Job Centers had been given targets for the number of people to get off benefit, a commitment to a wholesale review of the sanctions regime. On being challenged that the party apologises too often for our record in government Ed was clear that he is proud of our record but stressed we cannot simply act as if the voters had got the last election wrong – we must and will spell out how we'd do things differently and put things right. On Trident he confirmed that he is a multilateralist but wanted to have the minimum deterrent necessary.
- I also pressed Ed about the number of people who were disaffected with the political system and asked him to ensure those people were at the forefront of his mind when he responded to the budget. In making this point I raised the bizarre case of [Mr Mozzarella](#) – a candidate in the recent Corby by-election - who, whilst polling 72 votes after standing on a manifesto of encouraging more people to eat takeaways, amassed an enormous £72,000 in campaign donations from just one company. I was heartened to hear Ed describe himself as "an eternal warrior against complacency" and commit to doing everything possible to re-engage voters.

Deputy Leader's report

On Leveson Harriet warned that it wasn't quite there yet - we want a proper complaint system where if a complaint about a breach of the code is made an independent body will take a view on that. She stressed that whilst we've now got political agreement we do need the press to come forward with their system of regulation and if they don't, progress will not have been made. If they do, then all of the press will have to join it and if they refuse we will have failed. She noted that if this works it will be an enormous thing that Ed M has achieved, particularly since these media barons have held power for decades and don't plan to let it go.

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 see and talk with members at the **London Labour Conference**, in **Barnsley CLP**, **Wyre Forest CLP**, **Guildford CLP**, **East Hampshire CLP**, **Burton CLP** & **Bury North CLP**. I also enjoyed **meeting the Worshipful Mayor and Chief Minister of Gibraltar** and have been busy helping to organise **candidate selections for the 2014 local elections in Southwark**. 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.