



# Johanna Baxter

National Executive Committee

## A track record of Putting Members First

### Report of National Executive Committee meeting held on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2014

#### Leaders Report

Ed Miliband congratulated Cllr Ann Lucas on her OBE as well as Jackie Stacey and Eric Wilson on their MBEs. Ed paid tribute to Paul Goggins MP and said that the Wythenshawe and Sale East by-election would be a referendum on David Cameron and George Osborne on the cost of living, led by our new candidate Mike Kane.

Ed noted the discussion the NEC were having later in the meeting on the Scottish Independence Referendum and stressed we all have a role to play in campaigning for [United with Labour](#) to protect the UK, and that along with the forthcoming local and European elections this was a big year for the party. Since conference, Labour has set out some key policy milestones, such as the abolition of the bedroom tax, energy freeze and childcare.

He stressed the importance of showing not only what a Labour Government would do straightaway but the long-term changes it would bring, for example on banking reform, house building and professional development for teachers. He said that Ed Ball's announcement on the reintroduction of the 50p tax rate was about ensuring that those with the broadest shoulders bore the greatest burden. It was about us setting out a clear framework for economic policy. He stressed that we would help businesses to grow and prosper and that on the deficit it was important to have a framework, defined by us, where the national debt as a proportion of national income would be falling by the next Parliament, and the current budget would be balanced.

He said that the cost of living crisis is about who gets the rewards, those at the top or ordinary people. It is about security at work, affordable housing and decent prospects for our children. He stressed that deficit reduction alone was not a vision for the country and Tory statistics, implying people are better off, were catastrophic for them as so many are struggling and it showed how out of touch the Tories are. He felt the next 15 months campaigning up to the general election would be tough, but that there was a great sense of optimism. He stated that the campaign will be about building momentum and making the political weather by putting the case for Labour with clear policies that demonstrate to the electorate that we are on their side.

#### Scottish Independence Referendum Campaign Report

We welcomed the Scottish Leader and Deputy Leader, Johann Lamont MSP and Anas Sarwar MP, and the Scottish General Secretary, Ian Price, to the meeting. Johann said it was a privilege to attend the NEC and she thanked the General Secretary and Scottish General Secretary for their support in achieving the excellent results in Dumfermline and Cowdenbeath. She gave a report on the Scottish Referendum Campaign, and emphasised the importance of defeating the SNP well, with the UK taking on this challenge together and how important this was to achieving social justice for the people of Scotland and the rest of the UK.

She spoke of the toxic nature of the current debate around the Referendum and Salmond's spin machine – 140 press people employed at Holyrood – aimed at neutralising the voices of those that should, and need to, be heard. She stressed the importance of ensuring that those who have concerns about the consequences of independence, including those in the trade union movement, were able to voice them. The SNP are posers of the left – trying to re-write history and the story of our movement – but at a time when they are even ambivalent about the 50p tax rate, have already pledged to cut corporation tax by 3p – more than Cameron – and have attacked local government, no one should be fooled about their values.

Anas reported on the political and organisational strategy of the United with Labour campaign, which will be a launchpad for the General Election. The referendum is the biggest decision the people of Scotland would face for 300 years and it is important to have strong voices from across the UK Labour family, who believe we are better working together, speaking out.

I asked if members outside of Scotland, who've told me they are desperately keen to be involved in the campaign but don't always know how they can be, can be given something to do to help. Anas confirmed that everyone across the Labour family is welcomed by the campaign and he is working with Shadow Cabinet colleagues to ensure that people south of the border are signposted to activities that would help. I asked that the NEC hold one of our meetings in Scotland before the referendum so everyone can participate in the United

for Labour campaign and this was agreed. I asked also when the [Devolution Commission Report](#), which will set out our positive vision for Scotland's future, will be published and it was confirmed that this will go out in March. I welcomed [Douglas Alexander's recent article emphasising the need to engage the 'Network Generation'](#) which I'd recommend if you haven't had a chance to read it yet.

#### **Deputy Leader's Report**

Harriet Harman reported on her visit to the Wythenshawe and Sale East by-election, the General Election campaign and her work with our PPCs. She stressed that we won't be anticipating a coalition or minority government when we draw up our manifesto – our sole focus would be on securing a Labour majority.

#### **General Election Campaign report**

The Chair of General Election Strategy, Douglas Alexander, and the Director of the General Election, Spencer Livermore, gave a presentation on strategy, message and organisation for the 2015 General Election and the 2014 Elections. They thanked the NEC and General Secretary for putting the finance and organisation in place to deliver for 2015 and noted we now have more organisers on the ground than ever before, with all key seats covered. They reported on our national, local and European messages, the strategic challenge and phasing to the General Election, the work of the General Election Strategy Group and field operations and campaigning. They stressed that we will set out what we will do to deal with the cost of living crisis, why there can be no confidence in the Tories dealing with it and how a 2015 Labour Government would be different to previous governments.

Douglas echoed Harriet's comments by stressing that anything reported in the papers claiming we're doing anything other than working for a Labour majority are completely fictional. We will adapt to new campaign techniques (e.g. social media) and environments (where there is a low level of trust in politics and tribal affinity to political parties is in decline) with new capabilities in the digital team and through community organising. I asked that we be clear community organising needs to go hand in hand with voter ID (I've written about this previously [here](#)), that we ensure we are visibly seen to support the [National Voter Registration Day](#) being held on the 5<sup>th</sup> February, organised by [Bite the Ballot](#) and that we review the contact rate for key seats but do not change the order or number of those without consultation with the NEC.

#### **Collins review**

You will have read much about the Collins Review in the press. It was noted that a paper, outlining draft recommendations, would be circulated to us prior to our **special NEC meeting on 4 February**. We have just received that and I will be working through the detail of that paper in advance of our meeting. It is at that meeting we will agree the recommendations that will be put to the Special Conference on the 1<sup>st</sup> March and I'll let you know what those are as soon as possible after the meeting. In the past weeks I've tried to read all the submissions you've sent in to HQ and have discussed the issues with numerous CLPs. As I've said previously, when we take these important decisions I will seek to ensure the relationship with trade union members is strengthened. I have argued strongly against primaries – I don't want to see us put up additional barriers to selection for the most under-represented groups - and I've sought to protect the rights of members in choosing their parliamentary candidates. Whilst it could be argued the London Mayoralty is such an exceptional election as to justify exceptional measures, I do not believe the case has been proven to extend the use of primaries to parliamentary elections and I made it clear that would vote against any measure to introduce them there.

#### **Other issues;**

- The General Secretary gave an update report on his work over recent months including the head office and regional conferences that have taken place. He gave a presentation on Budget 2014 and reported on the work of the Business Board over the past six months. I fed concerns that had been raised with me regarding the One Nation magazine and asked that these are taken into consideration when we produced the next issue.
- We noted the Cowdenbeath by-election result, sent our congratulations to Alex Rowley MSP, and thanked the staff and activists for all their hard work in achieving this successful result.
- Angela Eagle gave a report on Agenda 2015, including the work of the Joint Policy Committee, final year consultation documents and process, [Your Britain](#), and the work of the policy commissions. An email circulated to CLPs on 10 Dec which had the key dates for policy commission reports, will be re-circulated to remind them of the deadlines for consultation responses.
- We noted the work of our Nations and Regions and agreed to discuss public service reform in Wales at our next meeting.

*This is my personal account of this meeting & 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've been delighted to visit and talk with members in Chelmsford CLP, Bristol East CLP, Orpington CLP and Colne Valley CLP. I've attended the Scottish Labour Gala Dinner, Camberwell & Peckham CLP's Gala Dinner, the LFIG dinner, the Dulwich and West Norwood CLP Christmas social, the Fabian New Year conference, East Ham CLP's fundraiser and the Hampstead & Kilburn CLP fundraiser. I also chaired the Falkirk Selection process. 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.