



Johanna Baxter

National Executive Committee

A track record of Putting Members First

Report of National Policy Forum held on 18-20th July 2014 And Report of National Executive Committee meeting held on 22nd July 2014

Report of National Policy Forum held on 18-20th July 2014

The National Policy Forum (NPF) met in Milton Keynes, following consultation on the [Final Year policy documents](#), in what was one of the most important meetings before the General Election.

200,000 people had engaged in that process, resulting in a whopping 1300 amendments to the consultation documents. The Joint Policy Committee met in advance to decide how to manage the amendments process and the NPF meeting itself. To bring the number of amendments to a manageable size those that related to grammar or presentation were dealt with separately and in advance of the NPF meeting. NPF reps were then asked to review all the remaining amendments and bring forward up to six to the NPF meeting. In practice this meant that reps liaised within their sections/regions – CLP reps with other CLP reps, Union reps with Union reps etc - to try to pull together as many different amendments as possible. That resulted in 700 odd amendments being considered at the NPF meeting.

Angela Eagle, Chair of the NPF, opened the weekend with [a speech](#) that invoked the memory of Ellen Wilkinson, one of our Party's first women MPs and the co-author of the 1945 manifesto. Angela's message was simple – our challenge as a party is to remember the spirit of 1945 - that social justice can be delivered with big reform even in the harshest of economic circumstances - and that we should face the future, not get stuck in the past. Ed Balls reiterated that message when he led the economic plenary shortly after and in his [speech on the Saturday Ed Miliband](#) challenged us to agree a new programme for a new era, building an economy for the 21st century where no interest is too powerful – a programme which is radical and doesn't make-do-and-mend.

Deliberative workshops introduced some of the biggest debates of the weekend and then we broke into our Amendment meetings. All reps that had submitted amendments on the same topic were invited to meetings with the relevant Shadow ministers to discuss the amendments in detail and to try to reach a consensus about how the issue should be dealt with.

[I wrote for the New Statesman in advance on why I hoped that colleagues would support my call for Employment Tribunal Fees to be abolished.](#) I wasn't the only rep to submit an amendment on this issue but was very proud to lead the negotiations on it which eventually delivered us the following commitment;

"The current employment tribunal system which charges workers for taking their employers to courts unfair, unsustainable and has resulted in prohibitive costs locking people out of the justice they are entitled to.

Labour believes that affordability should not be a barrier to workplace justice. It would be a mistake to return to the broken system of the past, where tribunals were so slow that meaningful justice was not available.

*The next Labour government will reform the tribunal system to ensure that all workers have proper access to justice. **Labour will introduce a system where affordability will not be a barrier to justice.**"*

I also got a commitment on Leveson which says;

"Labour reaffirms its support for the recommendations of the Leveson Inquiry into the culture and ethics of the press. Labour will support the establishment of a low-cost arbitration service recommended by Leveson, to provide access to justice for victims of libel and other press abuses."

Here are some of the other agreements reached at the weekend: a commitment to build a million homes in the next parliament; a new deal on rail ownership kicks the current franchising model to the curb, as well as giving cities and towns new powers on transport; a higher minimum wage; increased support for unpaid carers; greater devolution to towns and cities; tackling energy prices; improved citizenship education; a commitment for a Blacklisting enquiry that is full, transparent and public and a commitment on free school meals that says no child should be too hungry to learn.

With so many amendments being discussed it's impossible to report the outcome of every one of them here. [Labourlist did a brilliant Liveblog](#) of proceedings though which gives you all the highlights and [Cllr Alice Perry has written a great blog on some of the achievements that CLP reps were able to deliver for you in those negotiations](#). In the end there was only one issue that was put to a vote – all other issues being resolved by consensus - and that was defeated in favour of the consensus wording by 125 votes to 14. An over-arching equalities statement was agreed that will pre-face the final documents which will, of course, be published in due course - I'll send you those links when I have them.

Its fair to say that I had low expectations of the weekend – I wasn't on the NEC at the time of the last pre-election NPF in Warwick but had heard enough about it to have prepared for some pretty challenging discussions. But in the end nothing could have been further from the truth. In Milton Keynes the atmosphere was one of hard work, keen spirits and camaraderie – a concerted effort from all sides to get things right and to put the party above everything else. Members were listened to and we were able to effect change on your behalf. Much of the credit for this has to be given to our Chair Angela Eagle who not only put the work in at the weekend itself but had obviously done so in advance and her injection of humour into proceedings lifted the spirits of everyone. Credit too must go to party staff who worked round the clock on negotiations and ensured everyone had everything needed to fully participate in the weekend.

Report of National Executive Committee meeting held on 22nd July 2014

Association of Labour Councillors (ALC) Report

It was noted that nominations for the ALC positions on the NEC closed on the 20th June and there are 4 candidates. Ballot papers have already started to drop (alongside the ballots for the CLP positions). We noted the launch of the [Local Government Innovation Taskforce report](#) which sets out a blueprint people powered public services. We noted the suite of training being provided to newly elected councillors including a number of webinars that will be taking place over the summer.

EPLP Report

The committee congratulated Glenis Willmott MEP whose negotiations as Leader of the Labour Group has secured key positions - securing more committee chairs than any other of the S&D group delegations - for Labour MEPs in the European Parliament. **Claude Moraes MEP** is the new chair of the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committee, and **Linda McAvan MEP** is the new chair of the Development Committee. Three Labour MEPs have also been elected as vice chairs - **Afzal Khan MEP** (Security Committee), **Derek Vaughan MEP** (Budgetary Control Committee) and **Catherine Stihler MEP** (Internal Market Committee). The election of Labour MEPs to these important positions highlights once again that we are the only UK party with real influence in the EU.

We noted the work of our Labour MEPs in cutting roaming charges. This is great news ahead of the summer holidays, with people across Europe now able to keep in touch for less, with European data roaming charges slashed in half from this month. The costs of sending texts, and making and receiving calls will also come down. And from 2016, once agreement is reached amongst EU governments, roaming charges should be abolished completely.

Scottish Independence Referendum

We received a report on the Scottish Referendum campaign. The new Referendum Campaign Director and 12 new referendum Campaign Organisers have settled in and huge efforts have been made in building capacity on the ground and speaking to voters in the run up to the referendum. The journey of the Labour No campaign battle-bus across the UK to raise awareness of the referendum and motivate activists to help was noted as a huge success. I called again for members across the UK party to be given things to do to help the campaign - this is a vote that will affect the whole of the UK and there are lots of members outside of Scotland are keen to help. The NEC placed on record our massive thanks to Gordon Brown for his interventions in the campaign – travelling the length and breadth of Scotland speaking to thousands of members and voters. Dennis Skinner called on all trade unionists to get behind the No campaign, emphasising - as he did in his [recent speech to the Durham Miners Gala](#) - the importance of trade unionists sticking together beyond borders.

General Secretary's Report

- He reported on the Conference Arrangements Committee (CAC) elections held at last year's conference plans to meet with the unsuccessful candidates in the next month to discuss his conclusions. It was noted that one of the constitutional amendment's being put to this year's conference (from Beverley & Holderness, Exeter, Leyton & Wanstead & Liverpool Walton CLPs) called for elections for the CAC to be brought into line with the elections for the CLP Reps on the NEC/NPF in being run by OMOV ballot of all members. It was agreed to accept the amendment.
- Iain took us through all the other constitutional amendments going to conference – one seeking clarity on the '3 year rule' on revisiting the party's rule book or constitution and another regarding who could stand for the OMOV CAC elections – and it was agreed that these should be accepted. The decisions of the CAC in

relation to rule changes submitted in 2013 were noted. Constitutional amendments submitted in 2014 were noted.

- It was noted that the Code of Conduct in internal elections applied to all party staff and candidates.
- We noted the report of the Party's Business Board, the 2013 Audited Accounts and the financial strategy.

Deputy Leader's report

Harriet Harman discussed 'Linton Crosby effect' that we were beginning to see in the political narrative and surmised that this was just the beginning – we would need to be prepared for more to come. She talked about the number of Tory MPs indicating their intention to stand down before their first term in office was even up and the cynical reshuffle conducted by Cameron that might have changed the faces round his table but hasn't changed one bit of their policy agenda.

Leaders report

Ed, straight from his plane back from the USA, talked about his meeting with Barak Obama. He said that on both Europe and the Scottish Independence Referendum the President just couldn't understand why the UK would want to retreat from Europe or why Scotland would want to separate from the rest of the United Kingdom – it doesn't make any sense. Ed talked in detail about the very worrying events taking place on the international stage in the Ukraine and in Gaza. On UK politics he thanked everyone for their efforts at, what he thought, was a really productive meeting of the NPF. He spoke about the attacks that have been made on him personally by the Coalition and expects those to intensify the nearer we get to the General Election.

Other issues;

- We noted the appointment of David Jamieson as our candidate in the West Midlands Police & Crime Commissioner by-election being held on 21st August, following a selection process involving, given the time constraints of the by-election, members of the NEC and the Regional Board.
 - We looked at the draft timetable for conference and agreed the programme of party events and NEC meetings that will take place during conference. I was very pleased that we agreed a stronger role for Women's conference which will now be able to make formal submissions into the policy process based on their discussions (and this year will discuss priorities for the manifesto based on the policy platform agreed by the NPF) and will have a formal report back to full conference during the Equalities debate.
 - We agreed the schedule of NEC meetings for the period October 2014 – September 2015.
- We noted the AWS decisions of the Organisation Sub-Committee which you can read in [my report](#).

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 **Exeter CLP**, **Reading Labour Party** and **Uxbridge & South Ruislip CLP**. I have also been out speaking to members at the **LFIG reception**, the **Liverpool West Derby CLP** and **Hackney South CLP** fundraising dinners, the fantastic **Fabian Women's Summer Reception** and then at the **Labour Business Reception**. Remember if you'd like me to visit your CLP to give an NEC report or facilitate a policy discussion please don't hesitate to get in touch.

NEC Elections

The ballot papers for this year's NEC elections are now out. All members paid up at 26th June 2014 are entitled to vote. You can vote online or by post (though it saves the party money if you vote online). If you haven't received your ballot paper yet you should apply for a replacement by 11th August – call 0845 092 2299.

It has been an honour and a privilege to serve as your representative and I have been truly overwhelmed by the support I've received in recent weeks. A phenomenal 162 CLPs nominated me for re-election - thank you.

But funny things can happen in NEC elections – look what happened to Dennis Skinner – so if you want to see an independent candidate, committed to putting members first and working hard for you all year round, I really need your help in reaching out to members who have a vote. Can you spread the word to your friends in the party?

- All the information about my campaign is in my leaflet here; <http://johannabaxter.com/campaign-literature/> And a few fellow members have recorded a video saying why they're supporting me; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tg0xjnyDxMM> Could you forward these to your friends in the party?
- Tweet your support to [@JohannaBaxter](#) using the hashtag **#JB4NEC** or 'like' my Facebook page – **Johanna Baxter Putting Members First on Labours NEC and invite your friends to do the same.**
- Tell other members you're supporting me – **write an endorsement on <http://johannabaxter.com/johannas-supporters/> or record your own 'vox pop', send it to BackingBaxter@gmail.com and we'll link it to the site.**