



Johanna Baxter

National Executive Committee

A track record of Putting Members First

Report of National Executive Committee meeting held on 4th November 2014

This meeting was our annual 'away-day' (albeit we don't actually go 'away' anywhere) where we spend time considering the party's political strategy and departmental plans for the year ahead, alongside our usual business. This was also the first full meeting of the new committee following the recent elections to the NEC in the CLP, PLP and Councillor sections – new members Kate Osamor, John Healey, Jim McMahon and Alice Perry were welcomed to the committee and thanks were expressed to colleagues who had served on the NEC.

Executive Director Reports and Plans

We received a report from each of our Executive Directors on their work during the last year and their plans for the year ahead:

- The **General Secretary** spoke of the work that had been done over the past year to ensure that all our regions were fully staffed and organisers were on the ground where we need them most, and that key seat and digital teams were in place. In the year ahead he will focus on ensuring that the party's structures, finances and staffing are prepared for the election and that the Party is ready for the result that provides.
- On **General Election Strategy**, we discussed the context of the election, recent polling and the campaign environment - high multi-media consumption of news and campaign messages combined with low levels of trust in politics and politicians, which means that we will have to work harder and smarter to be heard.

We discussed the framing to the campaign and the fact that the Tories will seek to try to make this a digitally updated re-run of the 1992 campaign, with added 'smear and fear' and personal attacks on our leader. We know that the Liberal Democrats are likely to seek to maximise any dividend they have as a Coalition partner, whilst at the same time trying to differentiate themselves from the Tories. We know that UKIP is seeking not only to take votes from the Tories but also to appeal to those disillusioned with politics. Our challenge will be to cut through all of that with clear policies that make clear this is a change election, messages that amplify our core strengths and exposing the record of opposition parties.

We discussed the key messages that would be the focus of the months leading up to the short campaign and I'm pleased ours will be a party arguing the benefits of being in the EU and speaking up for a better deal for those being shortchanged by the current government. We noted the specific workstreams that had been set up to support the General Election team – a workstream on UKIP headed up by Yvette Cooper, one on the Greens headed up by Sadiq Khan, another young voters headed up by Ivan Lewis, and another on BME voters.

I stressed that the SNP are also seeking to capitalize on disillusionment and fear through their 'Yes alliance' and are clearly attempting to appeal to Labour voters by trying to steal our party's clothes. I was pleased to hear that we are conducting our own polling to clarify the threat there and that our campaign resources will be reviewed accordingly.

[Post meeting note; anonymous briefings only detract from the collective efforts of our hard-working members, activists and candidates. Those doing this might reflect on the fact that they have zero support amongst the members who have contacted me, might wish to desist and instead focus their efforts on the doorstep!]

- The Executive Director for **Elections & Stakeholders** reported on the 3 trainee organising schemes that had been run so far, enabling us to get 70 trainees and 100 organisers on the ground in our battleground seats. He reported on the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) all key seats were working to, how successful they are in meeting them and the candidate contracts of key seat candidates. We heard of the millions of pounds that the Tories are already pouring into the marginals and we discussed our strategy of combating the effects of this. We noted that our candidates, members and activists had knocked on about 5million doors so far this year and that the average number of voter contacts being made per month per seat has more than doubled in the last year. This is a phenomenal effort – we know the Tories have money but we know that we have the best activists and it will be your help that will get us over the line. We discussed the twinning arrangements and the messages that are going out to non-target seats and I'm pleased that feedback will be taken on board and adjustments made to make it as easy as possible for activists to be on the doorstep. I asked for data on those CLPs with low contact rates and also that consideration be given again to giving Dover & Deal an Organiser.

- The **Policy & Rebuttal** team has been focused on work to build the [YourBritain](#) hub and our policy platform and supporting the National Policy Forum meeting in July, which formed the basis of the manifesto, subsequently agreed by conference. In the year ahead their focus will be on the Clause V meeting, which will finalise the manifesto, manifesto outreach (packs and guides for all our representatives and members) and correcting misinformation promulgated by our opponents. It was noted that we have a plethora of policy right now – more than almost any other opposition party at a similar point in the election cycle – and these are being uploaded [here](#) but more will be done to arm activists with simple user-friendly policy information they can use on the doorstep.
- On **Digital Strategy** the team is working on the journey supporters and members take to activity and how we can mobilise activism through better use of digital. It was noted that our digital campaigns to date have seen 149,000 people pledge to volunteer for Labour in the general election campaign and the team are working on growing our reach across a number of different platforms. We discussed the number of fundraising e-mails being sent to members and it was noted that work was being undertaken on the data we hold for people to better target fundraising efforts.
- The Executive Director for **Members & Supporters** reported that the party's membership had grown over the past year. We looked at the demographics of current members and I asked again for the demographic breakdown of our role holders. It was noted that 60% of new joiners were joining unprompted online and we had seen a number of new joiners in Scotland on the back of the referendum. A lot of work is going into personalising and targeting communications from the party to ensure members get information that's relevant and useful to them.

Leader & Deputy Leader's report

Ed Miliband started with a tribute to our dear friend Paul Cottingham who recently passed away and noted that our thoughts were with his partner, and our former NEC colleague, Lord Michael Cashman at this difficult time.

Ed spoke about the three things that, with 6 months to go before the General Election, will be important to the party during the campaign: fight & passion, showing our primary colours and collective responsibility. Ed then talked about the 5 issues that will define the campaign: living standards and the recovery; the NHS; the next generation; immigration and; having a stable economic foundation that would enable us to pursue a different agenda to that of the current government.

Harriet talked of the importance of women's voices and votes during the campaign.

I asked Ed to ensure that whoever was elected as the new Leader of the Scottish Labour Party that he worked with them to ensure that we kept our party together. I raised Unison's judicial review of employment tribunal fees and [the recent 'new' evidence presented to the court by the Department of Business Industry & Skills](#) which seems to contradict the breakdown of cases by fee-type that the Ministry of Injustice projected in May 2012, in its final regulatory impact assessment of the fees regime. I also asked that we take the government to task on the recent stats showing a dramatic increase in child poverty.

Association of Labour Councillors (ALC) Report

Jim McMahon reported on the work that Labour in Local Government were doing to try to find a pay settlement that addresses low pay in local government within the very difficult financial settlement they had been left with from the government. He also reported on the training programmes being run for new cabinet members, women and BAME councillors and the debate on further devolution of powers to local government

EPLP Report

Glenis Wilmott reported that our MEPs has recently rejected measures to increase the overall EU budget and instead had voted to re-focus spending on investment for growth and jobs. She reported that the Group had called on Junker's new commission to tackle climate change, unemployment and extremism, had demanded answers from the UK government about the granting of seven export licences for British companies to export £180,000 of tear gas and CS gas to Hong Kong and had welcomed the decision to commit more than 150million Euros in EU funding to the fight against Ebola. Congratulations we extended to Glenis for her recent award for Outstanding Leadership from the Belgian Association of Clinical Researchers for her extensive work on encouraging medical research and ensuring full transparency in clinical trial results.

Scottish Independence Referendum

We were joined by Margaret Curran and Anas Sarwar who led a discussion about Scotland. The NEC placed on record their thanks to Johann Lamont for leading our party in such a challenging time throughout the referendum campaign. We also thanked Margaret, Anas, Gordon Brown and Alistair Darling for the roles they played in the referendum. Acknowledging his recent announcement to stand down as Deputy Leader, Anas was thanked for the contribution he had made as Deputy and will make in the weeks during the leadership election.

Both Margaret and Anas thanked colleagues across the party, on behalf of the Scottish Labour family, who helped in the referendum.

We discussed the referendum campaign, the vicious campaign environment and the result. We discussed the reasons why so many people voted yes and how we can best respond to the vote. If you want to know my views on this and what we need to do about it watch the short speech I made to party conference [here](#).

It was acknowledged that politics is extremely febrile at the moment with more people disillusioned with the main parties and also the rise of nationalism (with both the SNP and UKIP seeking to capitalise of that in different ways). We noted that people in Scotland did accept an argument about working in solidarity; our challenge is ensure that solidarity is seen as something that extends beyond the border and that the SNP are exposed for what they are. They may talk social justice but a party that votes against [a proposal to extend the living wage to workers on public contracts](#) – to deliver a pay rise to low paid staff – is no party of social justice.

Out challenge in short is to turn the politics of grievance into the politics of hope – having policies to address the issues affecting Scots most and ensuring that they know about them.

There is no doubt about our party's commitment to honouring [the vow](#). In the coming weeks Anas will be focussing on the work of the Smith Commission to ensure this is the case. He will also be making sure that Nicola Sturgeon, as new First Minister, is not let off the hook and that the SNP are held to account for the decisions they are making in Holyrood.

I asked that the NEC and the SEC have a closer working relationship – we should not deny our strength as a UK party – and this was agreed. There does need to be greater understanding across the UK party of the unique challenges faced in Scotland – they could have a significant impact on the general election. But we should use our strength to our advantage rather than creating distance between us. As I said in [this article for Labourlist](#) only by working together will we be able to defeat nationalism.

Other issues;

- We agreed the recommendation from the Organisation Sub-committee that the Holborn & St Pancras and Merthyr Tydfil PPC selections should be Open. We agreed the recommendation that the NEC run a 'late retirements' selection panel. I was pleased to be asked to sit on that panel. We also agreed the timetable for the Mayoral primary (CLPs will get communication on this direct from London Region but should be aware that the timetable is very tight and you will need have your meetings scheduled in prior to the general election if this isn't going to catch out as you focus your attention on campaigning) and the levy that supporters will pay to be able to participate in the primary (£3).
- We noted the results of the recent Heywood & Middleton and Clacton by-elections and the South Yorkshire PCC election.
- We received a report on conference and agreed that in future all bodies seeking to hold fringe meetings at our conference should be asked to ensure that they have representation from both genders on their panels. We asked that we look into reasons why CLP attendance had dropped slightly and how we get a better balance of people coming forward to speak.
- NEC's Aims and Objectives and Terms of Reference for the year ahead.
- We agreed the new membership of our NEC Sub-committees and I was pleased to retain my seat on the Organisation Sub-Committee (the committee that deals with selections and elections) and Disputes Panel. Some colleagues called for the membership of the Organisation Sub-committee to include all members of the NEC. I think that changes the role of the committee – it becomes no longer a sub-committee but another meeting of the NEC – and didn't vote for the proposal on that basis. However the size of the committee has grown in recent years so there is a case to review its membership. It was agreed that all members would attend prior to the general election and the membership of the committee would be reviewed after that point.
- We agreed the new NEC membership of the Party's Policy Commissions and I was pleased to keep my position as Co-convenor of the Better Politics Policy Commission.

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 spent a lot of time on the doorstep with members across the country. It was good to join members campaigning in **Hampstead & Kildburn** before heading home to campaign in the referendum with members in **Inverclyde, North Ayrshire, Carrick, Cumnock & Doon Valley, Kilmarnock, Edinburgh** and **Glasgow**. After the referendum it was straight to conference but I've been back on the road since then in **Battersea, Rochester & Kent, Ilford North** and **Bermondsey & Old Southwark**.

I've also spoken at the **Fabian Women Mentee's dinner** and to the **Kent Labour Forum**. I joined thousands of fellow trade unionists in the **STUC's 'A Just Scotland' march on the 18th October** and have been pleased to attend **Tooting CLP's fundraising dinner** and the recent **Scottish Labour Gala dinner**. If you'd like me to visit your CLP to give an NEC report, facilitate a policy discussion or join you on the #LabourDoorstep please don't hesitate to get in touch.