

Report from South-East Regional Board Meeting 15th June 2019

This report has been drafted by and represents the views of the 8 Momentum and CLPD backed candidates elected to the Regional Board from **the CLP section** (Lisa Fricker and Cal Corkery, representing Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, Gemma Bolton, representing East and West Sussex, Michaela Collord, representing Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire, Karen Constantine, representing Kent, Nada Al-Sanjari and Shelley Grainger, representing Berkshire and Surrey), **the Young Labour representative** (Sarah Cundy), and **three Unite representatives** (Gordon Lean, Sarah Hacker and Elaine Bolton).

Acronyms

BAME – Black Asian and Minority Ethnic, CAC – Conference Arrangements Committee, CLP – Constituency Labour Party, LGBT – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender, NCC – National Constitutional Committee, NEC – National Executive Committee, MEP – Member of the European Parliament, WG – Working Group convened to discuss Officer roles and definitions, LCF – Local Campaign Forum, ALC – Association of Labour Councillors.

Agenda item 1 Welcome, apologies.

Vice Chair **Elaine Bolton** opened the meeting.

Minutes of 16th March Meeting

- The minutes from the March meeting were too brief and we'll need a better record of the meeting next time.
- Request to list observers (non-voters) separately agreed.
- Proposed agenda to be distributed 3 weeks before and opportunity for REC members to put forward agenda items.
- Any written reports to be prepared, distributed and read in advance. Then discussion will consist of questions to these reports.

Apologies: **David Hide** (CLP Rep, East & West Sussex), **Lynda MacDermott** (Co-operative), **Anneliese Dodds MP**, **Dan Dobson** (NPF)

Agenda Item 9 Reports (brought forward at request of MPs)

MPs

Rosie Duffield:

- We did very well in the local elections in the South-East. Canterbury went from 4 to 10 Councillors, out of 39; Labour are stronger in the region than ever before.
- EU elections, on the other hand, did not go well. Our own members were saying they were voting Lib Dem and Green. We need to tackle it.

Peter Kyle:

- Local elections in Brighton & Hove; took two seats from Tories. Across Brighton; lost some to Greens. The new councillors some good work; installing electric vehicle charging points; getting on with a social house-building programme.
- But in EU elections, Labour was 4th in a 70% Remain city and Labour voters and members voting against us.
- Couple of successes, in parliament, MPs in SE working closely together – legislative changes to stop ‘sex for rent’ where unscrupulous landlords are exploiting tenants. Also changing DV laws so perpetrators can’t directly question victims in Family Courts. We ARE making a difference in opposition.

NPF

Carol Hayton and Joyce Still

Take up of NPF offer to run events has been slow, due to understandable pre-occupation with elections. The NPF is there to support CLPs to facilitate CLP events to discuss and shape policy.

Point raised by **Lisa Fricker** that the NPF deadline for policy consultation was far too short (policy documents were distributed to CLPs with a deadline of end of June for submissions). **Carol Hayton** agreed and said she had raised this.

Agenda item 2 Action points from last meeting

n/a

Agenda item 3 Election of Chair

Lisa Fricker: Nominated by Shelley Grainger, seconded by Gordon Lean

Vince Maple: Nominated by Ann Black, seconded by Martin Phillips.

Before the vote there was a discussion about whether the MPs present were allowed to vote under the REC Standing Orders, which clearly say that they need to be elected by the Regional group of the Parliamentary Labour Party and one of the two must be a woman. The Regional Director must be notified of who has been elected.

The last vote was taken by the PLP over 2 years ago, when **Peter Kyle** and **Fiona Mactaggart** were elected. Fiona Mactaggart stood down prior to the 2017 election so this position is, technically, empty.

It was argued that since **Anneliese Dodds** and **Rosie Duffield** are the only two women MPs in the South-East and Anneliese could not attend the meeting, it was right that Rosie should attend and be allowed to vote.

However, it was clear that no election or notification of the Regional Director had taken place, raising a serious question over Peter Kyle’s legitimacy to vote in particular.

Votes: Vince Maple: 13 Lisa Fricker: 11

Vince Maple duly elected Chair of the Regional Executive Committee.

Agenda item 4 Election of Youth & Co-operative Officers

Sarah Cundy – Youth Officer, unopposed.

Arran Neathey – Co-op Officer, unopposed.

Agenda item 5 Officer reports

TULO Officer

Gordon Lean suggested a meeting of Union reps in the region to establish better links.

A note to go to CLP Secretaries to be passed to TULO Officers requesting their attendance at the meeting and for them to make suggestions for building links.

CLP Officer

Gemma Bolton read a report from **David Hide**, in his absence.

REC should ask CLPs for a short report of their election performance and how they plan to develop/work on improving.

There was discussion of hostility within the public sphere and how that puts off some candidates from putting themselves forward or campaigning. This is not helped by attacks from ‘own side’; those within the Labour Party. Could there be some training from Regional office for members in how to face this culture of hostility? In particular, it was noted that hostility is putting off Muslim women from participating.

All CLP Reps voiced concerns put to them by CLPs that communication with the Regional office is unsatisfactory. Often responses are very slow in coming or do not come at all. Could this be improved? It was stressed that this was not criticism of regional office staff but we are concerned about it as our members are telling us they are unhappy.

Staffing levels are currently low: **Billy Christie** is moving on, staff at Regional office are currently advocating to be able to recruit a replacement for the Deputy Regional Director’s job as **Ellie Buck** is standing in for **Amy Fode**.

It was decided that Vince will write a letter from the REC supporting an increase in staff numbers for the regional office.

Suggestion of a members’ pack to be revived: should be specific to the South-East, accessible info for members, explaining the structures and how to get active within the party.

Equalities Officer

Nada Al-Sanjari

Disability access needs to be addressed by the Party. We should look at using technology. For example using Skype so that disabled members don't have to be physically present at a meeting.

How can we get away from the idea that a person's value to the party is only measurable in their physical ability to go canvassing, leafletting etc, when we are selecting candidates. Incident reported to Nada where a disabled candidate was asked 'How will you cope?' connected to their disability.

Equalities knowledge poor across selection panels, we need to improve training on this. Can we, as REC CLP Reps, check CLPs are conforming to rules and conducting fair selections?

A number of people raised accessibility issues within CLPs, such as unsuitable offices and meeting venues. The meeting was reminded that NEC grants are available for improving accessibility for disabled candidates. These grants also available for improving Labour properties. CLPs might not be aware of the grant's availability and it was suggested that details about the grant, eligibility criteria and how to apply be emailed out to all CLP Secretaries.

Ellie Buck: There is work being done by Regional Office on a training plan for CLPs, but this has been pushed back. Also plans to hold an equalities conference-type event. Training LCFs should stop inappropriate questions being asked.

Selecting BAME candidates for winnable seats is a concern, many excellent candidates seem to be side-lined. As is rising abuse as mentioned earlier, as a far-right narrative becomes dominant in the public sphere, minority Labour candidates become targeted. Can there be a mechanism to ask for more support from the Labour Party when people are attacked?**Naushabah Khan:** Suggested that REC members visit groups across region, asking how we can better support them. Local Government Association has, through the Women's Taskforce, managed to get more women involved. Would like to propose that we get a package of best practice measures through the LGA which can be delivered at the grassroots. Would like to move forward with a long-term project of mentoring local CLPs to use these measures, mentoring them to get this set up over the next few months. Nada and Naushabah to work together to seek out best practices used across the region.

Suggestion that an Equalities Working Group be formed: this agreed by the REC. Volunteers to join **Nada Al-Sanjari: Naushabah Khan, Michaela Collord, Lisa Fricker, Gemma Bolton, Sarah Cundy.**

Agenda item 6 Feedback on Local Government & European Elections 2019

Local Elections

Ellie Buck: The South-East bucked the trend and we increased our local councillors, we now have 173 across the region. Joint Co-operative and Labour councillors have also increased across the region.

Sarah Cundy asked whether we have data on the number of under 27s standing in seats. No data to hand.

London Young Labour assisted in S-E, sending plenty of activists down for campaigning.

Value of working with University associations was stressed:

- Brighton University worked hard in tandem with the CLPs to get new councillors elected to Brighton Council; increasing their confidence and developing skills/proving themselves.

- Surrey: Royal Holloway helped in the east of region, making up a third of the activist base in Runnymede, although some dislocation was caused by the Labour Society deciding to disaffiliate from Labour Students.
- Labour Society at Surrey University assisted (and two students stood as candidates) in Guildford.
- Southampton University was involved, attended freshers week, reminded students they could vote both at home and at university in a voter registration drive. Increased majority by 10.

Importance of University Clubs' affiliation and involvement in local CLPs cannot be understated. It was suggested that involvement of university clubs and affiliation to CLPs might be approached in a more systematic way.

Kent: In Thanet, the incumbents were re-elected, 5 at Thanet District Council, the only UKIP controlled council in the country; Thanet Council went from 15 to 20 Labour councillors. Tories are in overall control with a few independents called Thanet Independents (who are UKIP in disguise).

Oxford: University Club also disaffiliated from Labour Students. No elections in Oxford itself so campaigning in outlying areas. Disappointing results in Abingdon/Kidlington, seats went to Lib Dems and Greens.

Vince Maple summarised: As Association of Labour Councillors Rep, everyone in the region worked very hard. There were challenging moments on the doorstep. Lost 20 Councillors in places like Medway but elsewhere did well. Thanks to all candidates, activists and especially to the unsung heroes; election agents.

EU Elections

There were 5 days in which to conduct selections. Thanks to **Gemma Bolton** and **Lynda MacDermott** for rising to the occasion.

Arran Neathey (third on Labour list): Thanks to everyone for support during campaign. Election literature was not satisfactory, it was about local matters, not about the EU. We could have talked about the positive things the EU working on, such as tax reform. The campaign was under-organised and over-centralised. It is not a criticism but the infrastructure for leading the campaign wasn't there.

Ann Black: Labour policy of constructive ambiguity convinced at GE 2017 but is now losing support from both sides of the debate. The majority of our members are still Remain. 40% of Labour members voted for a different party in the Euro elections.

Gemma Bolton: We had good candidates and all of them were out campaigning hard. Concerned that some applications went missing as people she had been told had applied but their applications didn't then appear.

In Gemma's view, the Labour party position is simple, not ambiguous at all: To get a soft Brexit with a customs union and if that is not possible, a referendum with remain on the ballot. A lot of Labour voices repeatedly saying they did not know what the position was really didn't help us.

Ellie Buck: There was one email address for all applications across the country, this was a mistake as some applications were then sent to the wrong region. Only 1 person was doing the sorting.

Shelley Grainger: As a reminder of the difficulty of the Labour Party position; according to political analyst and statistician John Curtice, it would be very foolish to take the results from the EU elections to try and predict the result of a 2nd Ref: neither Remain nor Leave can paint the results as a victory.

Many REC members were confident of Labour's ability to win voters back in a GE. Many policy areas which the Labour Party are currently developing, e.g. cutting edge green policies will persuade people when we start campaigning.

CLP reps expressed the displeasure of many of our members when they received John Howarth's angry email on the day of the count. As a whole, we as CLP reps thought it divisive and unprofessional. While understanding his anger and upset, it serves as reminder, as **Cal Corkery** put it, *"Not to tweet when angry, not to post on facebook when angry and especially not to email every Labour party member in the South-East!"*

John's email had caused issues on the evening of count with the press keen to quiz him about it. Ellie thanked Arran for standing in and giving interviews to the press.

Vince Maple, summarising: Recognition of candidates and all their hard work. Thanks to all of them. Congratulation to John Howarth on his re-election. Welcomed his report to the REC, supplied in advance.

This REC is unanimous that his email to members was unhelpful, in its timing as well as its content.

Agenda Item 7 Update on Parliamentary Selections 2019

Ellie Buck: Banbury, Aldershot and Basingstoke have selected. Selection in Gravesham (All women Shortlist) and Chatham and Aylesford are proceeding to be followed by Rochester and Strood (All Women Shortlist) and Gillingham and Rainham. Then tranche 2 will be over. Selections will continue again from September.

A note has gone out to Labour MPs, asking them to indicate whether they would like to stand in the next General Election. All CLPs with a sitting MP will have the chance to vote in a trigger ballot to decide if they want an open selection or to automatically reselect their MP.

Agenda Item 8 Police & Crime Commissioners Selections update

Ellie Buck: Applications will re-open in September. Only the application for Thames Valley has been able to proceed so far with two candidates, one man and one woman, both with police experience. The winning candidate will be announced at the end of July.

Ann Black: has asked the NEC for a simplified procedure, as the procedure adopted by the NEC added 2 weeks to the process and was a harder one for CLP Secretaries to organise, plus the expense for the process was shifted from the national to the local party.

Agenda Item 9 Reports

ALC

Vince Maple: Yesterday (14th June) the ALC had a conference on 'effective opposition' 100 councillors there, 50-60 attended from S-E and S-W regions. The conversation continued at a local level. Pilot launched on Councillors and Mental Health in the North-West region.

Councillors allowance – how many hours does a Councillor work? Some Councillors in receipt of Universal Credit. Need widest breadth of Councillors, being elected should not put people in a worse financial position.

MPs

Tan Dhesi (now present) told us he takes his duties to visit CLPs seriously and has visited many CLPs, including Medway, Surrey Heath, High Wycombe, Bracknell, Reading and Peterborough.

Local: In Slough, Labour gained 2 more Councillors, we now have 37 out of 42 Councillors, the opposition reduced to only 5, 1 of whom is a Tory who has gone independent. Membership of Slough CLP has actually increased. In the EU election, Slough was the only place in the S-E where Labour was top, (Brexit Party 2nd and Lib Dems 3rd), although admittedly the turn-out was low. Tan felt that they did well in the elections as Labour in Slough knows the community well and what messages will resonate.

National: PLP meetings full of very passionate MPs. A small fraction is against Jeremy Corbyn, contrary to reports, others will support him come what may. The meeting after the EU elections was... intense. It was disappointing that the parliamentary vote to stop no deal failed, this is a real set-back.

Tan is also leading on 'Imprisonment for public protection', the Housing committee and Campaign against local government cuts.

Agenda Item 10 A.O.B & Dates for Future Meetings

Staff Pay and Benefits

We also asked about the media reports about party staff's pay deal and the delay in negotiating it. As the Labour Party we should be a 'best in class' employer offering a broad range of benefits to all our staff and a decent salary. We asked the Chair and Vice-chair to write to the NEC hoping for a speedy outcome as any more delay is not helping our staff and certainly any eventual deal will not benefit staff who have already left as they won't be eligible for any back pay.

Quorum Changes

Southampton Itchen have asked for a reduction in their minimum quorum of 5% for its all-member meetings, which would require 36-37 members. Over the past 6 months they haven't been quorate and therefore unable to agree any business matters. They asked and were granted permission to have a quorum of 25 members. If other CLPs are struggling to be quorate then please write to the Regional Director and ask for it to be taken to the Regional Executive Committee.

Ann Black also asked that the rulebook guideline of 5% should apply to wards in Oxford city as they select candidates for council elections in 2020. Lisa Fricker responded that it was a Local Campaign Forum decision and not REC, Ellie confirmed this as correct.

Labour Students: A couple of queries arose during the meeting, regarding University Labour societies disaffiliating from Labour Students. It was clarified that many clubs were disaffiliating in protest at the ongoing lack of democracy in Labour Students especially following this last conference and set of elections where the leadership made obvious that they had no intention of democratising. Conference was a shambles, run in a remote location, gerrymandering going on. OMOV was not delivered as

promised. The disaffiliating societies want the Labour Party to look at Labour Students and to review how it functions.

Vince/Sarah C to write letter to NEC asking them to review Labour Students.

Shelley Grainger requested the two documents which were meant to be circulated after the March meeting;

- The campaign pack on Housing produced by **John Healey**
- **Joyce Still's** report on the proposed National Care Service.
- Also asked about complaints, which (number and whether dealt with, not confidential details) were meant to be reported back to REC.

At the next meeting there will be a timed agenda and all those with reports will send a written report for distribution.

Vote of thanks to **Billy Christie**, who is leaving the South-East Regional Office.

Also, **Elaine Bolton** led a vote of thanks to **Ellie Buck**, who has hit the ground running as Acting Regional Director.

Next Meetings

- Saturday 7th September
- Saturday 7th December

If you have any questions or matters to raise with the Board, please contact your CLP Reps via your CLP Secretary (or look for our contact details on the Regional Board website)