

Report from South-East Regional Executive Committee Meeting 26th January 2021

The meeting was held on Zoom

This report has been drafted by and represents the views of the Momentum and CLPD backed candidates elected to the Regional Executive Committee in November 2018 from **the CLP section** (Lisa Fricker, representing Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, David Hide, representing East and West Sussex, Karen Constantine, representing Kent, Shelley Grainger, representing Berkshire and Surrey), **the Young Labour representative** (Sarah Cundy), and **Unite representatives** (Gordon Lean, Elaine Bolton)

Acronyms

AGM - Annual General Meeting
ALC - Association of Labour Councillors
BAME - Black Asian and Minority Ethnic
CLP - Constituency Labour Party
GLU - Governance and Legal Unit
LGA - Local Government Association
LP - Labour Party
NEC - National Executive Committee
NPF - National Policy Forum
REC - Regional Executive Committee
SE - South-East
TULO - Trade Union Liaison Officer

Present at the meeting

Above listed members, Ellie Buck (Acting Regional Director), Vince Maple (Chair of REC & CLP Rep, Kent), Ann Black (CLP Rep, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire), Robert Evans (Councillor), Peter Kyle MP, Martin Phillips (Labour Movement for Europe), Lynda MacDermott (Co-operative Party), Arran Neathey (Co-operative Party), Joy Gough (NPF), Carol Hayton (NPF), Amanda Grimshaw (GMB), Mark Chiverton (Unison), Jean Butcher (Unison), Dianne Hill (CWU)

Agenda item 1 Welcome, apologies

- Apologies from:
 - Cal Corkery (CLP Rep, Hampshire & the Isle of Wight)
 - Michaela Collord (CLP Rep, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire)
 - Sarah Hacker (Unite Rep)
 - Gemma Bolton (CLP Rep, East & West Sussex)
 - Nada Al-Sanjari (CLP Rep, Berkshire & Surrey)
 - Naushabah Khan (Councillor Rep)
 - Rosie Duffield MP
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Agenda item 2 Correspondence with the General Secretary update

- Vince Maple (Chair) had a meeting with the GS where he raised many of the on-going concerns of REC members.
 - These included the backlog of complaints, the morale of party members following recent communications from the GS, and the under resourcing of the regional office which has, through no fault of the staff, sometimes led to response times being lengthened.
 - Vince finished by saying that he felt the meeting had been worthwhile and that the region would benefit from more regular meetings with the GS going forward.
 - It was noted that motions from CLPs should be sent to the following address: <gso@labour.org.uk>
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Brought forward:

MP's Report Peter Kyle

- While behaving in a non-tribal manner, the shadow front bench are bringing constant pressure to bear on the govt.
- What do people want to see? Labour MPs out there, talking to their communities.
- Brexit vote - Labour made the right decision to vote for the govt's deal, although a difficult decision after so many had worked so hard to stop the inevitable.
- Also continuing to use opposition-day debates effectively.
- Point made that the visibility of Labour MPs' activities quite low.
- Discussion about seeing new faces rather than a reprise of those we saw under Ed Miliband & how shadow cabinet could speak across a range of policy areas.

- This difficult due to demarked responsibilities of shadow ministers to their areas (eg Peter is shadow Justice Minister, should not speak across another shadow minister's brief).
 - Question about presenting a Labour vision for the post-pandemic future.
 - Discussion of use of language; 'radical' and 'industrial strategy' may be unwelcome or outdated.
 - Labour needs to discuss the future of our creative industries and hospitality post-COVID.
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Agenda item 3 Regional Conference 2021

- Consensus reached that Regional Conference should include motions, debates and votes, even if it is to go ahead digitally.
 - It was noted that the Co-operative Conference is a virtual event, scheduled for 10th/11th October.
 - Annual Conference will go ahead in some form in September and we can build on the expertise developed there.
 - Likely that large gatherings will still be precluded by COVID, even if many people have been vaccinated.
 - Opinion eventually coalesced around the 1st week in November as a realistic date, whether it is an in-person or digital event.
 - Acknowledged that some advantages in holding a digital event, inclusion-wise.
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Agenda item 4 Officer Reports

ALC: Vince Maple

- Written report circulated in advance of the meeting.
Summary of the main points:
 - o ALC continues to support Councillors and Labour Groups across the SE.
 - o Report written by Vince and Naushabah welcomed by Labour Councillors - hopeful that some of the recommendations will be adopted.
 - o Work supporting Mental Health of Councillors continues.
 - o Local Govt Conference a week-long online event running 1st - 6th February.
 - o LGA pushing for polling stations - some now being used as testing and/or vaccination centres - to be made COVID safe before May elections given go-ahead.

TULO: Gordon Lean

- Verbal report:
 - o Unions across the region continue to be very busy.
 - o Anxiety that smaller unions are not making use of TULO so efforts being made to get them on board. A lot of smaller unions are not affiliated and are missing out.
 - o Suggestion made that Gordon talk to Labour Unions about co-ordinating.

Equalities: Nada Al-Sanjari

- *Unfortunately Nada was unable to attend at the last minute due to unforeseen circumstances. She provided a written report to the meeting, circulated at the start.*
- Summary of the main points (**not discussed by the meeting**):
 - o Concerns that BAME candidates not selected for winnable seats, after working hard to cultivate those wards.
 - o More support needed for BAME candidates to combat hostility experienced during campaigning.
 - o Disabled members - little visibility of disabled people in the party, neither are their issues currently being championed.
 - o Need a drive - as with AWS - to select disabled people as candidates.
 - o Reports from members that Labour-run councils are demonising GRT people.
 - o LGBT+ Although few contacts in this period about LGBT concerns, but Trans rights remain a contentious issue. Training from the party and clarity on Labour's position would be very welcome.
- Issues with complaints continue:
 - o Number of complaints about racism broken down by region would be useful for a full picture.
 - o Perception that racism against BAME people is not taken seriously.
 - o Acute attention on antisemitism has led to perception that issues experienced by other minority groups are being marginalised.
 - o At the same time, some antisemitism reported is still being poorly dealt with or ignored.
 - o Islamophobia remains a little-acknowledged problem in the party and no education or guidance on the issue has been forthcoming.

CLP: David Hide

- Verbal report
 - o Thanked Vince for feedback from General Secretary.
 - o Effect of the suspensions has been de-motivating.

- o Would like to see these suspensions quickly resolved – unfair to leave people suspended week after week.
 - o Nothing has improved since November’s meeting.
 - o Politics does not stop over the Christmas holidays – potential disciplinary issue arose and could not get hold of anyone at HQ. Need an emergency number during holidays.
 - o Selection process issue arose, where there were queries over a selection process not being followed correctly at one CLP. (Ellie reported that this issue had been resolved.)
 - o Suggestion was made that we have an on-call staff member available at all times to discuss urgent party matters.
 - Discussion of party unity – present position was summarised:
 - o **Councillor resignations:** 2 Councillors have resigned from LP in Spelthorne, halving the Labour group. They cited the threat of disciplinary action if showing solidarity with Corbyn, plus concerns over the policy direction of LP.
 - o **Strikes:**
 - Labour In Exile Network
 - Labour Black Socialists
 - o **3 legal actions:**
 - Corbyn fighting for reinstatement of the Whip.
 - JVL – reinstatement of two CLP officers, one Jewish, one non-Jewish. A legal letter was sent from Bindmans (leading human rights lawyers) to David Evans.
 - Labour Activists for Justice – 7 Labour Activists taking court action as they are being pursued under the self-same disciplinary process condemned by the EHRC.
 - o **61 CLP Officers remain suspended, 5 from our region.**
(This was correct at the time of the meeting)
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Reports

NEC: Reports by Ann Black and Gemma Bolton provided in advance of the meeting.

- Ann Black voiced her frustration, too, with the ongoing CLP Officers’ suspensions. These should have been dealt with and suspensions had lasted an unacceptably long period of time. If this was an employment situation, the LP would not accept it and we should not be treating volunteers this way.
- While the EHRC report had legal force and this determined the LPs response on antisemitism, the new system will also apply to sexual harassment and misogyny cases, some of which have also been outstanding for a considerable time.

- Agreement that capacity problems have been an issue for a long time and there needs to be enough resources to resolve complaints.
- Additional resources will also be needed to conduct additional vetting of candidates now expected from Regional Offices.
- It was clarified that a suspended Councillor can still represent their ward in Council chambers but cannot be part of the Labour Group. Neither can they vote against the Labour Group.

NPF: Carol Hayton

- Written report circulated in advance of the meeting.
 - o Reiterated deadline for submitting motions to the NPF portal for this year's policy-making process is 1st March 2021
 - o Ellie to send reminder to CLPs they can invite NPF Reps to their meetings.
 - o If we want Labour's policy to reflect **Labour values** and the issues that are most important to us collectively, we need to engage with the process. So please do get involved. www.policyforum.labour.org.uk/2020-interim-reports.

Co-operative Party: Lynda MacDermott

- Written report circulated in advance of the meeting.
 - o Noted that all 4 of our Police and Crime Commissioner candidates are joint Labour/Co-operative candidates.
 - o Co-op Conference had just been held. Successful use of online resources and had used break out rooms to split out the three regions for their own discussions.

Acting Regional Director's Report: Ellie Buck

- Written report circulated in advance of the meeting.
 - Update on May 2021 elections and campaigning.**
 - o Dialogue training – CLPs requested to push this over the next month. Despite lack of ability to campaign on the ground due to COVID, trials of Dialogue have so far worked well.
 - o Discussion around phone banking – are the public ready to discuss politics? Ellie had been part of trial and people seem to want to talk.
 - o Some incidents of activists from other parties being stopped by police. Leaflet delivery is out, but paid delivery services can continue.
 - o Discussion of logistics around May elections, including fact that Agents would need to be out in March gathering signatures at doors and the LP's duty of care to members.

Agenda item 6 AOB

Oxford LGC structure

- Ann Black had prepared an explanatory paper, shared in advance. Discussion hinged on ensuring gender balance.
 - Conclusion was that while 50% in each of the three sections was desirable - and point was made that NEC should abide by this - 50% across all three sections was acceptable.
 - Ann to adjust proposal accordingly and REC agreed to the plan's adoption.
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Next meeting date: early April, TBC