

# Report from South-East Regional Executive Committee Meeting

## 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2020

*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 and Gemma Bolton, representing East and West Sussex, Nada Al-Sanjari and Shelley Grainger, representing Berkshire and Surrey), **the Young Labour representative** (Sarah Cundy), and **three Unite representatives** (Gordon Lean, Elaine Bolton and Sarah Hacker).

### **Acronyms**

*AGM – Annual General Meeting*

*ALC – Association of Labour Councillors*

*BAME – Black Asian and Minority Ethnic*

*CLP – Constituency Labour Party*

*CLPD – Campaign for Labour Party Democracy*

*GLU – Governance and Legal Unit*

*GS – General Secretary*

*JLM – Jewish Labour Movement*

*LA – Local Authority*

*LGA – Local Government Association*

*LGBT – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender*

*LP – Labour Party*

*NEC – National Executive Committee*

*NCC – National Constitutional Committee*

*NPF – National Policy Forum*

*PLP – Parliamentary Labour Party*

*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), Naushabah Khan (Councillor Rep), 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)*

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## **Agenda item 1 Welcome, apologies**

- Apologies from:
    - Cal Corkery (CLP Rep, Hampshire & the Isle of Wight)
    - Michaela Collord (CLP Rep, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire)
    - Karen Constantine (CLP Rep, Kent)
    - Rosie Duffield MP
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## **Agenda item 2 Regional Conference**

- SE Regional Virtual Conference is to go ahead, starting in the week beginning 9th November 2020.
- The REC discussed what we would like to see offered at the Conference. Ideas suggested are listed below:
  - A mixture of training, speeches and discussions with policy representatives.
  - Panel discussions – Equalities was suggested as a vital topic.
  - Could we invite members of the Shadow Cabinet? Anneliese Dodds, Shadow Chancellor is a likely attendee.
  - Must sort out accessibility from the Equalities aspect. Some difficulties occurred at the last Regional Conference and different problems will arise with an online event. Need signers for each event and speech to text.
  - In view of our area's needs, REC members would like to see a focus on rural issues – eg rural transport and services. Delivering housing in rural areas is difficult. There are many marginalised employees in rural areas. Agriculture is important, especially with Brexit coming.
  - In view of Kent and the South Coast, it was agreed there should also be a strong focus on the needs of coastal communities.
  - An online event is a good opportunity to invite people who can't easily travel down to the South eg consider northern MPs, Councillors, ministers and metro mayors.
  - The elections next year should feature – increasing diversity of Councillors in the Chamber is an important aim. A session for those standing (or interested in standing in the future). Ask Nick Forbes, Chair of LGA to attend.

- It would be good to see key Council representatives from all areas of our region.
- The full breadth of the Labour movement should be at the event.
- TU rights an important aspect, TUs are seeing a range of issues at the moment, eg health and safety, Brexit and COVID; all will make relevant discussion areas.
- It would be good to have senior Trade Unionists input about changes to employment law and, for example, the furlough scheme. A session from Trade Unionists about employment law could be organised. **Ellie** suggested a GMB lawyer who could be asked to sit on an Employment Law panel.
- Rights of the self-employed, struggling with the self-employment grants, do not usually have unions.
- Virtual stalls.
- We need to bring political education into the event. We should provide spaces for activists to interact, for example a round table event where activists can share their own experiences and good practice.
- Suggestion from LP that Regional Conferences should feature events organised for voters too, where non-Labour people can attend drop-in sessions.
- Educational issues.
- Losing jobs and homes leads to severe mental health problems and even suicide. Could we run a session featuring survival in these harsh times?
- Boundary changes and the local govt white paper would make an interesting discussion area. An update linking in with LGA / ALC could be organised.
- **Ellie made a request for volunteers to chair sessions and panels – REC members should email Ellie.**
- **REC members also asked to suggest people to invite or who might be prepared to run sessions if invited.**

## Agenda items 3 & 4 Reports

### TULO Officer: Gordon Lean

- Unfortunately, South-East TULO has not met during lockdown. TUs working hard on members issues during the emergency.
- Meeting agreed that it is worrying TULO has not been active. **Gordon Lean** and **Mark Chiverton** agreed that more should be happening – the next meeting is projected to be on 23<sup>rd</sup> September. Trade Unionists will chase up.

### CLP Officer: David Hide

- A written CLP Report was provided in advance of the meeting.

- CLPs would like to know the remit of the REC and they would like improved communication with Regional staff and speedier outcomes when issues are raised.
- Two meetings ago, in February, it had been agreed that a GLU rep would come to the next meeting. As CLP Reps, we need to know what we can do to support the membership.
- Members and CLP Reps would like to make it clear that the GS's email of 12<sup>th</sup> August demotivated and upset a lot of people. This is not about the subject matter or the validity of the GS's email, but consequences of the peremptory and dismissive tone of the communication.  
Suggestion made that this be raised with the NEC.

#### **Ann Black**

- If this to be raised in a letter to the NEC, requests that it offers constructive criticism and raises other matters too. CLPs in Oxfordshire wish to raise the following:
  - Request for further guidance on online meetings.
  - Election of officers / remote access / selection of candidates.
  - Complaints to be dealt with quickly.
  - Campaign technology including Organise.

#### **Ellie Buck**

- GLU attending the meeting purely down to difficulty with diaries. Suggest a separate meeting arranged with no other agenda items except governance. All members of REC to be invited to submit questions.

#### **Carol Hayton**

- asked who can be contacted by REC about complaints – a serious one made to her and no idea where to pass it to.
- Suggests a directory of people who will pick up the phone. Voters, not just members, find we just pass people around.
- Demotivated membership not helped by the patronising message from GS.
- Resourcing levels low as resigned officers cannot be replaced without AGMs.
- Volunteers make huge efforts on behalf of party and should be treated with respect.

#### **Shelley Grainger**

- As well as dissatisfaction with the GS's email, there is concern about legal liabilities raised by CLP Secretaries in their FB forum. This is a question which should go to GLU, especially considering the libel pay-out made by a CLP, mentioned by another REC member.

#### **Vince Maple**

- The REC will raise points in a letter to the NEC.
- This to also include Ann's points and questions outstanding about CLP resources.

## **Equalities Officer: Nada Al-Sanjari**

- A couple of members have been in contact with concerns. Membership engagement is low. We can't have physical meetings which does impact on minority groups most, although video calls have their place as ease of accessibility increases for some individuals.
- Do we have the ability through Organise to contact equalities officers in each CLP and members who identify as BAME/LGBT/Disabled in order to reach out to them?
- BLM – a lot of members have been inspired by the protests and a stronger stance could have been taken by the LP in support of the movement.
- Trans rights – Confusion about the LP position upset a lot of people. Should not take vague positions on human rights. Human rights are not a factional issue.
- Disappointing that more REC members did not add their names to our (CLP Reps) statement on Trans rights. As an REC we should be promoting equalities and justice for all minorities unequivocally.
- The LP should have been more vocal on the refugee 'crisis'. There is a fear that we will pander to anti-immigration feeling to appeal to the attitudes of anti-Labour voters by not challenging far-right attitudes/rhetoric. A muted response, where in fact, the LP should not follow perceived public feeling but be courageous in leading it, in accordance with our values of equality and justice.
- Complaints – a radically improved communication from complaints is needed if we are to seriously tackle discrimination.
- GS's email was disengaging; members don't want to be told what they can and can't discuss. The LP meeting is a place for solidarity and where comrades can be heard, especially regarding issues of institutional racism where members specifically join the party to campaign on these issues. This becomes yet another institution that shuts down these important debates where our progress is carefully contained and managed without our say.
- Disabled members – disappointed by party for not raising the struggles of disabled people. This results in further marginalisation of disabled people, especially after a decade of austerity and now with the pandemic. Some accessibility issues have been mitigated by Zoom and we need to consider this moving forward to improve and increase participation and engagement for our disabled members.

## **Vince Maple**

- Thanks to Nada for dealing with individual equalities strands – as a party, we must deal with them all.
- has also made a public statement of his support for Trans rights.

## **Ann Black**

- Answered question on Trans rights on Twitter after our statement. Also engaged with Socialists of Colour.

- Regarding the access to self-identification data on Organise, there are some data protection issues around this, it is used to determine rights to vote in certain internal elections but we have not got to the point where the LP can make targeted communications.

#### **Lisa Fricker**

- Often have to email every single member with the messages for particular groups.
- Lisa has successfully reached out to BLM in Southampton and her CLP is involved with the launch of an initiative to set up a race advice centre – in tandem with Unite, who's premises the group will use (subject to COVID restrictions ending.)

#### **Sarah Hacker**

- As one of the Trustees and organisers of Reading Pride, the recent failure to articulate the LP position on Trans rights was ill-received by the LGBT community. Vocal support is needed from the leadership.
- Disability complaints – a discrimination complaint which nearly a year later has not been dealt with. LP needs to lead on this issue.

#### **Martin Phillips**

- Equalities issues around protected characteristics very complex.
- On a positive note, JLM are very pleased at progress on complaints which are now being actioned. Our thanks goes to volunteer NEC members sitting on panels for long sessions to get through the backlog.

#### **Gordon Lean**

- Nada is not talking about the personal position of REC members but the public one. The LP – and the REC – needs to take a collective position and all minority groups must be made to feel welcome.
- Noted that new disability issues are coming up with COVID – for example those with epilepsy cannot use Zoom.

#### **Ellie Buck**

- Self-identification policy means the messages to particular minorities will have to be sent to all members. This was one of the consequences of the Chakrabati report.
- Issues about complaints – only the person suspended and the CLP Secretary are told of that suspension. The complainant is not told if the person who they complained about has been suspended, which can lead to frustration as they feel as if nothing is happening.

#### **Local Authority Officer: Naushabah Khan**

- Written report sent in advance of the meeting.

- LAs are rising to the challenge of COVID, often having to use reserves.
- Anxiety that Labour present a joined-up agreed response to govt white paper on local government reform.
- Vince and Naushabah conducting a series of meeting with Councillors across the region, representing ALC and LGA. Useful exchanges.
- Naushabah drafting a report on conclusions from these meetings, will be completed at the end of September.
- Successfully completed Kent selections via pilot of virtual panelling, with invaluable help from Alex Mitchell of SE Regional Office.
- Vince mentioned his continuing work on the subject of Councillors' mental health.

### **NPF Representative: Carol Hayton**

- Carol provided a comprehensive written report in advance of the meeting, laying out the current state of policy making in the LP.
- Shadow ministers have not made clear what the status of the 2019 Manifesto is or what is going to happen to the submissions made to the NPF in the current policy making process, which concluded in July. Over 4000 submissions were made but the normal process of writing a NPF report to be confirmed (or not) at Conference clearly cannot go ahead without Conference itself.
- Recent policy discussions with shadow teams have centred on devolution but there is strong evidence that LP members want a strong national agenda embedding Labour values across the country and these will remain appropriate – if not become more so - when rising to the new challenges dealt by COVID.
- The Party Policy Development team need to review the outcome of this policy making round and build the party's policy on this. *(The NEC was due to decide what is to happen about the NPF Report on 8<sup>th</sup> September.)*
- Reform of policy making was proposed by the Democracy Review which took place under the last leadership, however how this change to be realised and the form it should take has not (yet) been laid out.
- Carol's view (and this is a personal view, not that of the NPF as a whole) is that change *is* needed.

### **MP's report: Peter Kyle**

- Peter expressed the view that on their return to parliament, Labour MPs had hit the ground running.
- Parliament remains in a hybrid state, with social distancing and some online meetings. The Tories continue to intentionally undermine the great institutions of our state – humiliating MPs, undermining their status and running them ragged.

- Peter provided a comprehensive report of the PLP's perspective on the new LP leadership and outlined some of the debates initiated by Labour in the House. These have taken place on Education and International Aid.
- The meeting was pleased to hear of debate in the first session of parliament on the rights of refugees, the shadow Home Secretary, Nick Thomas-Symonds, made an unequivocal statement regarding Britain's duty to uphold the dignity of life and our human rights commitments. 30 Labour MPs spoke in the debate afterwards.
- Peter spoke in both the debate on Education and that on International Aid, regarding the abolition of DfID. As a former International Aid worker, with a PhD on the subject, he was surprised to be heckled by a Tory during his speech, calling him a 'moron'. This is a feature of this new Tory administration – MPs are whipped to heckle and barack all Labour members when they speak.
- MPs, under Keir Starmer's leadership, are being careful not to be drawn into the 'culture wars', pitting urban population v traditional working class. This would play into the Populist narrative Johnson wants to encourage. This does not diminish the passion that MPs feel in speaking for those who are voiceless.
- Opposition's job at the moment to hold the govt to account, constructively. LP has exposed what has been happening in Care Homes, failures on track & tracing and allocation of PPE. The LP must acknowledge politics is difficult at the moment, we do not want to be seen to be exploiting the challenges brought by COVID for political gain.
- The PLP is united and energetic.
- Although the shadow front bench are mostly new to the job, they are learning their briefs rapidly.
- Peter's report was received positively. Views expressed including the need to highlight what the PLP is doing on our social media platforms and to keep Labour in the public eye, to which Peter replied that although it is difficult for the opposition to always get noticed the aim is to have a Labour spokesperson on every single news item.
- One member of the REC wondered if anything could be done about Johnson smearing Keir Starmer by claiming he supported the IRA, but Pete explained that the Speaker cannot rule on a truth or not.
- Focus groups have shown that people are currently very concerned with education, safety and jobs.

#### **David Hide**

- Appreciate the enthusiasm of the PLP and understand the need to pitch tone right during COVID.
- The Shadow cabinet need to make the argument to keep homeless housed and see they are not returned to the streets. Could we see Labour Councils committing to this aim?

## **Amanda Grimshaw**

- Made the point that while a media and social media strategy is extremely important, Labour need to be out there re-establishing a presence in the community, taking residents on a journey.

## **Co-operative Party: Arran Neathey**

- Co-op Party to have their digital Annual Conference 'Owning the Future' from 10<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> October.
- Co-operative Party policies will be important in the COVID recovery.
- South East Co-operative Party is being reorganised. As part of future development, Co-op would like branches to get engaged with Labour CLPs.
- The Co-op Party is developing a policy tool kit for Local Government.
- Member Pioneers are the Co-op's community organisers. At the moment, they are quite separate from Co-op activities. That barrier is to be thawed and their efforts should be co-ordinated on, for example, a particular campaign issue.
- Essentially the plan is to up the politics of the Co-op Party.

## **Acting Regional Director's Report: Ellie Buck**

- Ellie ran through her written report.
- Having been asking for an increased level of staffing for the last 10 years, the Regional office is currently down a Deputy Regional Director and a Press Officer.
- National Conference – sign up details have been sent out to members.
- Keir Starmer and other shadow ministers have done a number of public facing appearances in our region.
- Nick Thomas -Symonds, Shadow Home Secretary, visited the memorial in Reading to pay Labour's respects to the victims of the terrorist attack.
- Summer Training Programme has been completed by Regional Office.
- Update given on Police and Crime Commissioner Selections – all PCC candidates selected except Kent (*tba 11<sup>th</sup> September*) and Sussex.
- Summary of Local Elections given – huge number next year with elections delayed from May this year also taking place.
- County Council candidate selections continuing across the region after successful virtual panelling pilot completed by Kent LCF.
- White Paper on changes to local government. The LP is working on a toolkit for our campaign, led by Steve Reed, the Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

## **Ann Black**

- Owing to the time-lag from the elections postponed from 2020, some candidate selections are likely to be challenged but Ellie confirmed that this cannot happen. Once candidates are selected, they remain in place until the next electoral cycle has taken place.
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## **Agenda item 5 Proposed changes to the REC**

- This will be a full agenda item at the next REC.
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## **Agenda item 6 AOB**

- It was noted that the NEC now have powers that only the NCC used to have – to suspend and expel members.
  - Andy White is the new head of GLU.
  - Quorum request of 15 people agreed for Buckingham CLP.
  - **Sarah Hacker** reminded Ellie of the questions she'd asked last time about complaints:
    - How many receiving per year?
    - What was the average time they were taking to resolve?
    - How long to close cases?
  - Ellie Suggested Sarah H re-submit her questions once we know when the meeting with the GLU member is to take place.
  - **Ann Black** – CLPs are increasingly pressing for the ability to run AGMs online as many officers have stood down and election of new officers are needed.
  - Ellie replied to this last point that another voting tool was being trialled by Labour HQ and this will take a while to decide. It's the NEC's decision which company's software to use for online voting.
  - It was reiterated that **Vince Maple** will write a letter to the GS outlining the matters discussed under items 3&4 - CLP's Officer report. **Elaine Bolton** will then proof and it will be sent on behalf of the REC.
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**Next meeting date: TBC**