

Report from South-East Regional Board Meeting 15th February 2020

This report has been drafted by and represents the views of the Momentum and CLPD backed candidates elected to the Regional Board from **the CLP section** (Cal Corkery, 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, Sarah Hacker and Elaine Bolton, Vice-Chair of REC).

Acronyms

BAME – Black Asian and Minority Ethnic, CAC – Conference Arrangements Committee, CLP – Constituency Labour Party, LGBT – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender, 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.

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), Diane Hill (CWU) Naushabah Khan (Cllr Rep), Rosie Duffield MP, Martin Phillips (Movement for Europe), Mark Chiverton (UNISON), Joyce Still (NPF), Jean Butcher (UNISON), Joy Gough (NPF - non-voting)

Agenda item 1 Welcome, apologies.

Apologies: **Lisa Fricker** (CLP Rep, Hampshire & the Isle of Wight), **Michaela Collord**, (CLP Rep, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire), **Karen Constantine**, (CLP Rep, Kent), **Lynda MacDermott** (Co-operative Party), **Arran Neathey** (Co-operative Party), **Peter Kyle MP**, **Dan Dobson** (NPF), **John Howarth** MEP

Agenda item 2 Action points from last meeting

1. **REC to write a letter to the NEC/Jennie requesting CLPs are able to select candidates and for a shortened process for non-target seats**
 - This was requested. In the event trigger ballots were prioritised and there was a shortened selection process run by Ellie, Vince and Elaine. Less than ideal but praise given to the panel for their hard work in achieving the selections.
2. **For December meeting – have an agenda item on the policy making process and how members and CLPs can feed into it**
 - Agenda item for the next meeting.
3. **Ellie to speak to GLU about collating a list of town and parish councillors – whether possible, GDPR implications etc.**
 - Still to be actioned.
4. **Email out to members about the role of Regional Board, who they are, what they do etc.**
 - Still to be actioned.
5. **Regional Board members to be send each other's email addresses.**

- Done

6. Ellie to work with Gordon to co-ordinate TULO meeting at Southside

- Meeting of reps from all unions across the region still to be arranged, as GE has interfered with ongoing actions. Ellie voiced her thanks to Unite and all the other unions who supported the SE campaigns with money and assistance.
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Agenda item 3 Officer Reports

TULO Officer

Gordon Lean

See above point.

CLP Officer

David Hide provided a written report. Summary:

- Still need a smoother way of communicating.
- There are a couple of internal CLP issues which he and Gemma dealing with. Collectively the REC and Regional Office often fall down on good responses (timely, transparent) in helping these CLPs.
- Greater authority for CLP Reps to deal with issues might help and a mechanism for ensuring this support provided.
- Regional Activity in our area should be resumed. Was common under Blair and meant local parties were involved in policy making. This point was strongly agreed by other CLP Reps and there were offers from REC members to help make this a reality.
- **Complaints** – discussed at length.
 - CLP Reps have a lot of CLPs ask us for help but we can usually only be a sympathetic ear/provide some emotional support. Could CLPs be empowered to deal with some complaints themselves? For CLPs to have power to deal with complaints under Ch 6, there would have to be a rule change at Conference.
 - Several people asked if the Regional Executive Committee members could help the regional office with this process.
 - Point made that if REC CLP Reps were helping a CLP deal with a problem, they would have to have some understanding of when professional help - such as a mediator – needs to be brought in.
 - Ellie Buck: It's proved impossible to break down complaints figures to regions.
 - The general view was that this needs to be reviewed and the system needs to work for members, not just the party itself.

Action points:

- Invite a member of Legal & Governance to come to the next REC.
 - List of questions to be prepared in advance by REC members.
- Nationally – need to establish a credible Social Media Policy.

- Future of S-E Regional events to be an agenda item next time.

Equalities Officer

Nada Al-Sanjari

DISABILITY

- Disability access needs continue to be the most prominent issue raised – difficulty in participating. Rural constituencies in particular, suffer from smaller branches holding meetings in members houses.
- AMM structure seems more democratic for disabled people, as CLP's are duty bound to book accessible rooms.
- Poor/little use of technologies. Point was made that Labour International manage to have whole meetings on-line.
- Availability of grants was re-stated, if CLP's apply to the Labour Party, they can receive money to make their offices accessible.
- Need to consider creches or children's corners to enable parents to attend meetings.
- Alternative campaigning tasks for disabled people and those suffering long term health conditions.
- Political education in CLPs on subject of Equalities Act. A poor understanding seems to permeate the party.

TRANS RIGHTS

- Need a resolution to the issue – presently in the news as it's being discussed by Leadership candidates. Nada Al-Sanjari emphasised the need to support trans rights and to reject any discourses that undermine the idea that trans women are women, and trans men are men.

Action points:

- Suggested that a best practice document be prepared and sent out to CLPs. Reminder that needs of minorities must be front and centre in all we do.
- A systematic survey to all branches / CLPs about accessibility. Elaine and Nada to write to Disability Labour and prepare draft.
- Please could Nada prepare a written report for distribution in advance next time.
- Nada to update her accessibility report for Reading AGM and distribute – Sarah C asked for a copy.

Local Authority Officer

Naushabah Khan

- Both **LGA** and **ALC** have started to look at ways of supporting Councillors' mental health. The nature of the role leads to bullying online, loss of time for personal life. Mental Health First Aid was discussed at the ALC and the North-West region have started the training.
- How can we, as REC, better support Labour Groups on Councils?
- Noted that some Councils themselves offer Mental Health training to their councillors.

- We should also should acknowledge the stress that Parish / Town / District Councillors are under, they are often more isolated.

Action points:

- Action point carried over from previous meeting: a list of all Parish and Town Councillors.
- Nausabnah and Vince have drafted an email:
 - Survey for all Councillors
 - To offer to meet Labour Councillors at their Labour Group meetings to support them.

Agenda item 4 General Election Review and feedback

Ellie thanked Vince and Elaine for their incredible effort working on selections.

Action point:

- Vince and Elaine will write to the NEC and to all candidates to thank them for their commitment and effort.

Feedback on the General Election was given by all present, in turn.

Cal Corkery presented his written report about Hampshire & The Isle of Wight.

- *The area bucked the national trend on the whole and Stephen Morgan's campaign increased Labour's vote share in Portsmouth South.*
- *CLPs were unhappy about being unable to select their candidates early enough and we need the NEC to delegate this task in future.*
- *The presence of Community Organisers was invaluable to the campaigns, providing training and empowering activists. Their role will be vital to win back support in those former Labour voting areas – not just in the north but in our working class areas in the South-East.*

Gordon Lean

- *Selecting candidates: early selection helps as we can then build the campaign around the candidate*
- *There were many structural and resource issues – funding and staff.*

Elaine Bolton

- *Campaigned in 3 seats where there were hundreds of activists out, but the percentage drop in Labour's vote share was about the same as it was in Gemma's seat, Mid-Sussex.*
- *Reasons:*
 - *Brexit – evident in loss of 'red wall' seats.*
 - *Party Unity – 5 years of division, lack of support for JC / PLP and members pulling in different directions.*
 - *Mainstream media: we need to find a way to deal with it. To counter the messages or to find other ways to get our messages out.*

Sarah Cundy

- *Agree with previous speakers.*
- *In seats where we were lucky enough to have CLP Organisers these were imposed with little to no discussion with the CLPs as to who should be employed, Canterbury CLP EC in particular has raised with Sarah that they would like a say in future.*
- *Great that young candidates like Gemma stood.*
- *Would like to see the region encouraging more community organising now that we can't make such a difference in Parliament.*
- *Sarah is organising the South-East Young Labour Conference for Summer which will establish a SEYL committee to help build Young Labour groups and hold events throughout the Region in the future. This conference will also involve political education and various trade unions have come forward to help with costs.*

Sarah Hacker

- *Reading West is a mixed area, from urban to very rural and the Brexit position certainly hit the vote in the more rural parts of the Constituency.*
- *A point on the schedules of literature put out – damaging to put out too many leaflets as it's not environmentally friendly.*
- *Committee Room organisation on the day was difficult. Would like to see a streamlined app where data can be entered and updated live so targeting GOTV is easier. (It seems this is in development).*

Nada Al-Sanjari

- *Reading East was a joy to work. Increased Matt Rodda's majority.*
- *He's a unifier. All wings of the party, long standing members, Momentum activists etc came together and worked incredibly hard in support of his campaign.*
- *He showed true loyalty to the party, refused to be rent-a-quote in the very hostile media.*
- *Wokingham is an unwinnable seat and it was frustrating for the CLP not to be allowed to select candidate until very late. This sapped energy, but at least the members could go and help both Reading campaigns. Also Maidenhead and Newbury are seats that wanted to select early and were unable to.*
- *Blue leaflets – playing down the Labour brand in some parts of the SE, to dissociate from Labour / Corbyn. There was none of that in Reading East. Matt lead an honest campaign, Labour and proud.*

Shelley Grainger

- *Both Guildford and Woking were under attack from the Lib Dems. The People's Vote campaign and other Remain alliances advocated tactical voting to great effect. This meant Guildford's vote was slashed by 6,000 votes from 2017 and in Woking, Labour went from a strong second into third place.*
- *The Lib Dems were appallingly behaved and told lies about our policies in their election leaflets. Our candidate was continually harassed and told to stand down.*
- *The Lib Dems still didn't win, despite achieving highest vote ever in Guildford.*
- *The lesson from 2015 election was that you need to defend the party's record and reputation at all costs. In this election we were **still** hearing a perception that Labour bankrupted the country, ten years after the worldwide financial crash. It has become an accepted fact.*

- *We made the same mistake this time. Labour's failure to rebut the lies and propaganda in the media - some of our own MPs adding to the hysteria - put our activists at risk. Five incidents of abuse and threatening behaviour, just in Guildford.*
- *Rebuttal unit is needed. Every falsehood in the media and threat to our reputation must be challenged. Also a team dealing with attacks on social media.*
- *Challenge fake adverts funded by 'friends' of the Tories which stepped round electoral funding rules. These were spreading falsehoods about our policies.*

Jean Butcher

- *Was pleased to help in Canterbury where the campaign was well co-ordinated and Rosie Duffield increased her majority. Her clear Remain stance picked up votes.*
- *True that media was dreadful and crucified the Labour party.*

Mark Chiverton (UNISON)

- *Selecting candidates late was a mistake.*
- *Late freepost which landed when most postal votes had already been cast was a disaster.*
- *For survey, could ask CLPs to pick three things that had gone well and three that had gone badly?*
- *We did well in S-E as we didn't lose any MPs.*
- *Would say that this was an unusual election as Brexit skewed everything.*

David Hide

- *Early selection of a candidate enhances their reputation in a constituency.*
- *Was pleased to work with Michael Jones who was a brilliant candidate.*
- *The authorisation of the freepost took too long, which held things up.*
- *Not criticising Region, but the literature could have been organised better.*
- *As to the reasons we lost, the arrogance of some within our party dismissing those who voted Leave was astounding. How out of step we are with the people we seek to serve?*
- *Crawley did lots of Voter ID but Labour are no longer seen as champions in the community.*
- *Worried about those voters who jumped ship, that they might be lost to us.*

Ann Black

- *Mistake of NEC to prioritise trigger ballots over selections in early autumn.*
- *Oxford East was lucky that Anneliese Dodds does everything asked of her.*
- *Many members in Oxford West may have voted Lib Dem.*
- *Backdrop to election – yes Labour failed to rebut the idea that we crashed the economy*
- *2019 manifesto: too much, different focus every day. Free Broadband should have been worked into policy. WASPI compensation added to impression.*
- *Needed simple clear message to compete with Tories' message. Needed someone like Alistair Campbell working on communications strategy.*
- *In 2017 we had sympathy from both sides in the Brexit debate, in 2019 we lost votes from both sides. Plumping for a Leave policy would not have helped, would have lost different votes.*

Martin Phillips

- *Wanted to talk about the next five years rather than dwelling on defeat.*

- *Campaigned in many seats and when out in Southampton Test, it was noticeable that in two particular wards, knocking on doors of over 120 council estate households, **none** said they would be voting Labour.*
- *Over next five years we need to work on connecting with voters in these kinds of areas.*
- *Labour Councils need to spend the money in these areas, tackling litter/drug dealing, investing in road repairs, as these were the issues residents wanted to talk about on the doorstep.*
- *Learn from Tories, they always spend money in their wards.*
- *Better targeting will hopefully bring back lost Council wards to Labour and counter 500-600 vote drop we were seeing in the Council elections last year.*
- *SE region should decide own targets.*

Rosie Duffield MP

- *The rest of the country should learn from us in the SE, where we kept all our MPs.*
- *Jeremy was a problem on the doorstep. When knocking on doors, had to continually defend Jeremy, or divert attention away from him. Not even getting on to policies.*
- *Should have had 2 or 3 key policies to discuss.*
- *Need to deal with media better.*
- *Community Organisers were not necessary engaging with MPs – due to having them, staffers at HQ reduced.*
- *Special thanks to Unions who helped enormously in Canterbury: Frank from GMB, Dave Prentis of Unison, USDAW and CWU.*
- *99.9% of CLP were great during campaign.*
- *Lessons:*
 - *Playing down the Labour brand helped win. Rosie's personal vote held up.*
 - *It's time we had an effective leadership.*
 - *Need a manifesto less like a sweetie shop, not lists of policy, need to get real.*

Naushabah Khan

- *Devastating result, never seen it before.*
- *Different versions of manifestos.*
- *Need clear messaging.*
- *Need to learn the lessons of the defeat.*

Diane Hill, CWU

- *Campaigned in Crawley, Hastings & the 8 seats we already had.*
- *Lots of Brexit / Corbyn / antisemitism on the doorstep.*
- *Also Lib Dems made in-roads in SE.*

Joyce Still (Parliamentary Candidate in Stafford)

- *Brexit position lost us the Midlands/North-East, without a doubt.*
- *Should have kept to our original policy.*
- *Lots of animosity on the doorstep, directed at Corbyn*
- *Press were worse than usual. People on the doorstep were directly quoting the papers back at you.*
- *Due to the propaganda about Corbyn supporting terrorism, accused of having terrorist sympathies, received threatening emails and text messages. Was given police advice not to let anyone know where she lived.*

- *Depressing to have conversation with voters who were suffering under the Tories and then turned round and said they were 'voting for Boris, he's a laugh'.*
- *Social media was very good in Stafford.*
- *Disagrees that the manifesto was a 'sweetie shop'. It was costed, on the whole. It was a solid left-wing manifesto and we are a socialist party. We should not go backwards.*

Gemma Bolton (Parliamentary Candidate in Mid-Sussex)

- *Previous campaigns there would be 7 or 8 people out. This time there were almost too many activists, demonstrating how much the party has grown.*
- *So much so, Mid-Sussex had many more people at their stall than the Tories did at next stall, when launching their campaign.*
- *20 helpers from the University of Sussex.*
- *A great community feeling and response from voters during the campaign.*
- *Video went viral on social media.*
- *Lib Dems had been selected a year ago and was therefore known, this hurt the vote. Seemed to have endless money and their FB promotions worked really well.*
- *Labour systems a struggle to work with FB ads.*
- *Was threatened and abused when campaigning. Frightened at one point and others had to help. This not helped by some in the party whipping up hate. Had to call the police.*
- *The only real change from our 2017 position to our 2019 one was the Brexit position.*
- *The manifesto was not a sweetie-shop or an unrealistic wish-list, it comprised policies necessary for our country.*
- *One real positive was seeing lots of young people getting involved and lots of young people voting.*

Vince Maple (Parliamentary Candidate in Chatham & Aylesford)

- *Need to learn in future from late selections – next time get on with it.*
- *2019 the manifesto was more chaotic. Dawn Butler described it as a 'Toby Carvery'. The 2017 manifesto was better, much more straightforward.*
- *South-East manifesto – didn't even know about it –confusing for candidates. Ellie argued against it.*
- *A change in Brexit policy might have had a positive effect in Chatham. But then we could have lost Lloyd and Rosie.*
- *As a party should have seen this coming. Although performed well in 2017 GE, the last lot of local elections proved a point.*

Conclusions from our discussion will be sent in a letter to General Secretary, New Leader, New Deputy Leader and the NEC, as follows:

1. SE MPs kept their seats. Thanks to all those who worked so hard to make that happen.
2. Manifestos – 2017 was better communicated.
3. Labour vote slipping over time – in the SE maybe less than elsewhere but this is a real issue.
4. Selections were flawed.
5. Positive contribution from our Trade Unions
6. Staffing levels in HQ and the Regional Office were detrimental.
7. Resources – online resources need to be better/easier/quicker/more reliable.
8. Apps need to be updated.

9. Rebuttal unit needed – both online and analogue.

Any responses from recipients will be circulated to REC members.

Agenda item 5 Reports

ALC

- Conference has sold out.
- See earlier comments about tackling mental health education for Councillors.

MP

Rosie Duffield MP

- Gave election analysis during discussion.
- We have 26 new MPs in parliament and 20 of them are women. Although parliament is a very different place, our MPs will keep opposing.

MEP

John Howarth

- Provided last written report to the REC. Highlighted his work influencing the EU budget, including a fund dedicated to a 'just transition' for fossil-fuel dependent regions to move to low carbon economies.
- John worked to highlight various causes, including Kashmir.
- Reflections: To hold the Tory govt to account, the Labour party will need to have prepared a coherent set of policies regarding engagement and association with the EU on matters of mutual interest and benefit.
- John put in his report some interesting comments on the future organisation of the Labour Party – particularly the CLP level use of Voter ID, which doesn't really work, at the expense of political activity and community campaigns.
- Thanked his staff.
- It has been John's greatest privilege to serve the Labour Party and the UK in the greatest peacetime project the world has ever seen.

Acting Regional Director

Ellie Buck

- Written report distributed prior to the meeting.
- Reiterate: we were the only region to keep ALL of our existing Labour MPs.
- Reading East, Portsmouth South and Canterbury increased their majorities.
- Police and Crime Commissioner selections taking place after this meeting. Only one selected so far – Letisia Carter for Thames Valley.
- SE MPs and regional office staff have fed back their thoughts about the GE already.
- Ellie will give all candidates in the SE the opportunity to do so.
- Now regional office is undertaking the design of a long term strategic plan.
- Part of this will be to set up programmes to train, mentor and support members and those who want to stand for election.

- A draft of this training and events plan will be brought to the next REC meeting.
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Agenda item 6 AOB & dates for future meetings

- Annual Conference is to take place from 19th-23rd September.
 - Sarah Hacker has written a report of and will send to Ellie and Vince.
 - Draft rules for REC will have to be voted on at next Regional Conference. NEC's current draft is for a largely extended body and these may well need adapting for our region.
 - Regional Conference may be held in either November or February. We will have an agenda item to select a Conference Arrangements Committee at the next REC meeting.
 - **Next REC meeting is on 23rd May 2020**
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