

Report from South-East Regional Executive Committee Meeting

19th May 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 and Cal Corkery, representing Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, David Hide, representing East and West Sussex, Karen Constantine, representing Kent, Nada Al-Sanjari and Shelley Grainger, representing Berkshire and Surrey), the Young Labour representative (Sarah Cundy), and two Unite representatives (Gordon Lean and Sarah Hacker).

Acronyms

BAME – Black Asian and Minority Ethnic

CLP – Constituency Labour Party

NEC – National Executive Committee

CLPD – Campaign for Labour Party Democracy

ALC – Association of Labour Councillors

NPF – National Policy Forum

PLP – Parliamentary Labour Party

GC – General Committee

AMM – All Member Meeting

YLNC – Young Labour National Committee

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) Rosie Duffield MP, Peter Kyle MP, Martin Phillips (Labour Movement for Europe), Lynda MacDermott (Co-operative Party), Arran Neathey (Co-operative Party), Joyce Still (NPF), Dan Dobson (NPF), Carol Hayton (NPF), Amanda Grimshaw (GMB), Mark Chiverton (Unison), Jean Butcher (Unison), Dianne Hill (CWU)

Agenda item 1 Welcome, apologies.

Apologies from **Gemma Bolton** (CLP Rep, East and West Sussex), **Elaine Bolton** (Unite representative), **Michaela Collord** (CLP Rep, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire), **Dave Clements** (GMB)

Vince Maple, Chair, stated that there should be no discussion of two items at the forefront of our representatives' concerns:

- CLPs pressing to be able to restart business meetings
- The 'Labour Leaks' report

The party needs to get behind **Keir Starmer** as he pressures the govt for a roadmap out of lockdown.

Agenda item 2 Officer Reports.

CLP Officer: David Hide

- Request from our CLPs for a road map out of lockdown so that GCs and AMMs can function normally once more.
- In respect of the leaked report, the members need an opportunity to be included as part of the process. Shutting down the discussion will delay the healing of the party. This is needed so we can move forward in unity.
- In the eighteen months since the election of this Committee, we still do not know the extent of our remit as representatives. How can we support CLPs collectively and individually and help them with issues which arise?
- We need a clear idea of where our responsibilities lie and how these fit with those of regional staff and GLU.

Ann Black

- NEC due to write guidelines in a week or so on how CLPs can start to conduct business.
- Socialist Societies can meet and pass resolutions, which begs the question why can't CLPs be allowed to do the same.
- Regarding David's question on the remit of CLP representatives on the REC: what we can do is currently being reconstituted. Until this completed, we can rely on the 2020 Rulebook.

Joyce Still (NPF)

- The leaked report was widely disseminated and most in the Labour Party have read at least parts of it.
- The report made a heartrending read – that we were so close in 2017, yet scuppered by people in headquarters undermining the hard work of ordinary members countrywide.
- Many members have raised these issues – nobody who read the report could have failed to find it very upsetting.

(Joyce was then reminded by the Chair and Acting Regional Director that we should not discuss the report).

Carol Hayton (NPF)

- NPF reps have been asked to encourage CLPs to submit contributions to the latest policy consultation round, however the documents have not yet been circulated, which were due to be out in early May and it remains unclear as to when they might get circulated.
- Despite this, the deadline for submissions remains the end of June. This is symptomatic of the continued disregard for members. Despite this, CH encouraged members to look out for the documents and make submissions.

Shelley Grainger

- We should support decision-making by CLP's using technology. Some CLPs have reported that virtual meetings increase the ability of some members – especially disabled members and those with childcare responsibilities - to attend meetings.
- Party needs to be able to continue functioning in a lockdown. We must be prepared to continue democratic decision making during any National emergency
- Just need some guidelines on how to conduct meetings – can use various apps for voting.

- Future should allow a mix of online and physical meetings.

Karen Constantine

- NPF are opening the consultation process on 20th May.
- Larger role for NPF to play – what does the new normal look like? / dealing with an inevitably depressed economy.
- Regarding member engagement – agree that CLPs should use Zoom to have a discussion, but making decisions in a virtual meeting raises equalities issues – a cohort of members struggle with technology.

Ann Black

- Zoom meetings have attracted some attendees never seen before, so seems that those with childcare or disabilities may have been able to join. Exclusion cuts both ways.

Martin Phillips

- Zoom not very secure so we need to be wary.
- A good format for NPF discussions.
- Agrees that accessibility is a challenge for online meetings; this makes decision making difficult.

Cal Corkery:

- Have had all-virtual meetings Teams for Portsmouth Council.
- Local Authorities are putting in processes for decision-making. Can see scope for the Labour Party to do this too.

Equalities Officer: Nada Al-Sanjari

- Many, many BAME members feel betrayed about the racism exposed in the party. The structural racism laid bare has shocked a lot of people, including allies. There continues to be no official acknowledgement from the party regarding the deep hurt and betrayal this continues to cause or any condemnation of racism and bigotry to reassure concerned members that this will not be tolerated. Members are looking to the leadership to set an anti-racist agenda with an open-door policy to reporting concerns.
- A lot of articles have been published that talk about a “BAME exodus”. We cannot be OK with this. As has been said, “We (BAME) are the Labour heartlands, too”. We must not take this for granted.
- Kashmir – the Muslim Council of Britain has written to the Labour leader, seeking clarification on his comments that it was a ‘bilateral issue’. A number of representatives from over 100 mosques wrote of their disappointment in the apparent change in Labour’s policy on Kashmir following these comments, reiterating that the plight of the people of Kashmir is a violation of human rights. The leader responded to say there has been no change in policy. The letter cautions against taking these voters for granted. We must work to engage with the diverse communities in the country and among our membership.
- Under-representation of Black people, particularly Black men in politics remains an issue. We need to look at the way Black MPs have been treated and consider the message this gives out. Arguably, a symptom of this culture is typified in the make-up of the All Parliamentary Equalities Committee, with just one Black (Labour) MP on it; Kim Johnson. What has the party

done to address this issue? How supported do BAME Labour MPs feel in speaking out against racism, misogyny and other forms of bigotry? Even the most experienced, resilient and accomplished MPs have faced further victimisation when they raise concerns of racism.

- The Immigration Bill continues to be a racist policy. Members have been shocked that there is not unanimous consensus in the party to reject it. What are the consequences for those who either abstain on voting or support this Bill after being whipped to vote against? It is BAME members (of the party and the public) who will suffer the worst consequences of this Bill.
- Disability- Use of Zoom has demonstrated that it is possible for the party to accommodate disabled members and carers. While there are barriers to the use of technology, it is long overdue that we offer this as an option across CLPs and Branches. We need to consult Disability Labour as well as Disability Officers in order to meet the needs of our members as much as possible.

Rosie Duffield MP

- Said (in the chat) that the members of select committee were volunteers.
- These BAME women MPs have fought against the odds to achieve what they have. They are strong women and there is nothing to stop them from volunteering to join these committees.
- It remains the case that PLP are often really stretched to find volunteers to fill committee places.
- Agreed that there was a still a long way to go before things were perfect.

Nada Al-Sanjari

- Asked what was being done to address the culture of the select committees and the way they are run in order to encourage BAME members to volunteer.

Local Authority Officer – Naushabah Khan

- A lot of current work is being conducted by Local Authorities on how they will have to change post-COVID as there will be financial challenges.
- ALC trying to co-ordinate responses across the region to deal with the long-term impact.
- National Party is communicating with Local Councillors.

Sarah Hacker

- As a Councillor, I am concerned there will be many more people in need of Adult Social Care across the South East. To give them the support they will continue to need after COVID will be a huge expense.
- This added need has coincided with a large drop in income for most Councils e.g. from Council venue hire and business rates. Some Councils are already threatened with bankruptcy.

Arran Neathey (Labour and Co-op Councillor)

- Next local govt White Paper is due in September. Likely that the Tories will semi-force two-tier govt through. This will be easier if local govt is failing.

Robert Evans (Surrey County Council Councillor)

- For Surrey, there is likely to be a reorganisation into one unitary authority. County Council elections (due 2021) will then probably be postponed. This, coupled with outstanding local elections, will leave a democratic deficit.

- Agrees with Sarah's point – far more vulnerable people needing help than ever before.
- Concern about deaths in Care Homes; no inquests and very little testing.

Peter Kyle (MP)

- White paper – this is likely to be used to force through boundary changes too.
- Care Home deaths seem to be at least double that which is recorded. Coroner does not have the oversight of deaths in care homes as classed as normal circumstances. Only if care/health worker in a care home dies will there be an inquest.
- As member of shadow Justice team - tabled motion to have real reason of death put on death certificate. Need to pressure govt to do this.

Shelley Grainger

- What will Labour Council's across the region do to continue the housing of homeless people in hotels? This has seen a decrease in drug use among the street homeless population and been a successful policy locally.

Some discussion about the merits of unitary authorities over the more fragmented and costly system present in some of our constituencies. Some Councils would prefer to be unitary – such as Oxford - but Tories have previously given up on imposing Unitary authorities due to opposition from their own Councillors. Many Councillors will have several hats (and several streams of income) – County, Borough and Parish.

TULO: Gordon Lean

- Very little to report. TULO meeting for reps in the SE was in the process of being organised before lockdown. Will re-initiate discussions with union reps.

Agenda item 3 How do we campaign during lockdown/social distancing?

Some traditional campaigning methods are obviously not possible at the moment.

It was clarified by **Ellie Buck** (Acting Regional Director) that candidates for local elections already selected would remain so.

Carol Hayton (NPF)

- Concern regarding some of our members working in the community as some people they are dealing with are quite vulnerable – this can give rise to safeguarding issues.
- Also, members may lack of skill in dealing with vulnerable people. While some can do so safely and successfully, some need training / guidance.

Sarah Cundy (Youth)

- This period has been a good opportunity to recruit to and set up Young Labour groups in the region. Has been working with Charlie from the YLNC to do this, using Youth Officer contacts in CLPs, but asks if they can have access to Youth Officer and Secretary data as some other region's Young Labour reps have been.
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Agenda item 4 Update on selections from Acting Regional Director

Police and Crime Commissioner:

- 2 out of 5 candidates selected in our region: Thames Valley & Surrey.
- Kent and Hampshire left to select.

2021 elections

- County Council elections in 6 Local Authorities
- All-out in 4 authorities
- Half and third out in many of our key councils across the region
- 7 by-elections

Regional Office are pushing for selections to continue. NEC to finalise procedure.

Virtual selection has taken place for candidates for Kent. This has gone really well and regional office were able to follow the normal process very closely.

Agenda item 5 Reports

MPs' Report

Peter Kyle had left due to another important meeting. **Rosie Duffield** gave her report.

- All 8 MPs in our region are now on the front bench: the most successful region.
- PLP are very pleased with Keir Starmer's performance so far, at PMQs he has been successfully holding the govt to account.
- MPs have as much casework and constituency work as ever.
- The PLP are conducting virtual meetings.

Acting Regional Director's Report

- The Regional office staff are working from home. Party staff are not back in the office for at least another month or two.
- **Amy Fode** returns from maternity leave on Tuesday (26th May).
- Regional Conference would normally be taking place in November 2020 and a decision had been made to hold it in Oxford.
- However, a decision will be taken by Regional Directors next week on whether to postpone and hold this in early 2021 or to replace the Conference with a Virtual Conference – with a series of webinars, virtual panels and Q&As open to both delegates and visitors. The decision will be taken on all Regional Conferences at the same time.
- During lockdown, the party has been working on some virtual training / webinars and these will be going out from next week. Including the replacement of 'Promote' with 'Reach'.
- GLU has been re-organised. The process of dealing with complaints has changed and now the complaint is investigated, and a bundle prepared which goes to the NEC. The complaint remains the responsibility of, and is dealt with, by **one person** in the GLU.

- A member of GLU was going to be invited to this meeting. However, the employee in the post is new, so this session of questions with GLU has been postponed.

Ann Black

- New structure of the RECs means a move from 10 CLP Reps, as now, to 18 CLP reps for our region. We need to decide how these are to be divided.
- If an online conference is to go ahead in November, we will need to work out procedures. Will there be delegates to the conference? Those wishing to stand to be Reps will need to secure nominations in time.
- We need sight of the new constitution and how we are going to adapt it to the SE.

Nada Al-Sanjari

- As a member-led party, how will policy be decided? Concerned that policy changes will go ahead without members voting on these.

Ellie Buck

- Labour is a conference-sovereign party so that is where policy is decided, by the members. Members can feed into the NPF consultation.

Martin Phillips

- Policy making post-election is a grey area. In theory, the 2019 manifesto remains policy until Conference changes this.
- If we are to have a Regional Conference in February, we would need to elect delegates in late autumn.

AOB

During the meeting, news came through from the NEC Meeting (going on at the same time) that Conference 2020 is cancelled.

Next meeting date: TBC