

South East Regional Executive Committee, 25 November 2020

The meeting opened with a presentation from the party's national Head of Safeguarding. The unit was responsible for protecting children, and also vulnerable adults. There were now up to 10,000 children (aged under 18) in membership. Incidents could occur where there was a potential victim, a perpetrator, and an environment where abuse could take place, either at meetings or online. A safeguarding code of conduct, and explaining the standards required of members, should help to protect those at risk. He hoped to see safeguarding champions in every CLP, but all members should be able to recognise possible harm, offer reassurance, report incidents to the regional office or appropriate authorities, and record their concerns. The national email address is safeguarding@labour.org.uk

Committee members commented on the wide age range for Young Labour, from 14 to 27, and asked if it would be better sub-divided. Others said they had reported serious complaints and received no response from the party. I asked if the party would guarantee support not only to victims and alleged perpetrators but also to witnesses who might be asked to give evidence in disciplinary cases.

Regional Conference and After

The regional director reported that more than 850 members attended the online sessions in November. Sixty per cent of panellists were women, and 20% from a BAME background. There were some technical glitches, and the chat had to be closed because of offensive comments, but most feedback was positive. Though the experience was not as satisfying as meeting in person, more people had been able to take part, and there was a general desire for a "blended" approach to events when (if?) normal life resumes.

National policy forum representative Carol Hayton regretted that there were no policy discussions, and the regional director promised to arrange sessions after the May elections. Carol circulated a summary of the timetable for policy development, and I agree with her that members should continue to be able to submit views on anything they care about, rather than be restricted to a few, sometimes "niche", topics chosen by the joint policy committee.

Interim reports from the policy commissions are posted on the NPF website at

<https://www.policyforum.labour.org.uk/2020-interim-reports>,

and amendments can be submitted up to 1 March 2021. Commission workplans and meeting dates are at

<https://www.policyforum.labour.org.uk/policy-commission-work-plans>

with continuing consultation leading up to a full meeting of the NPF in July, the first since February 2018, and documents covering two years' work going to conference 2021.

Alongside this, the policy-making process itself is being reviewed for the fifth time, with the aim of ensuring that it is more transparent, accountable, democratic, inclusive and effective. Thoughts can be mailed to pdreview@labour.org.uk by 3 February 2021.

Full information on all the above has been sent to CLP policy officers, and as chair of the NPF I have asked for these mailings also to go to CLP secretaries and chairs, as well as summaries for individual members.

I also reported on the first full NEC meeting since I was elected, and answered questions about the election of the NEC chair and vice-chair, and how the NEC deals with motions from CLPs.

Reports

The last "normal" party meeting that I attended was the Buckinghamshire County Forum on 7 March, and I was back there virtually in November. They have found candidates for more than half the 147 seats on the new unitary authority, a huge achievement in a mostly blue area, and are looking for advice on manifesto presentation, campaign technology and targeting candidates and resources. I thanked Naushabah Khan and Alexa Collins who have continued to chair panel interviews for Oxfordshire county and Oxford city candidates. We are now close to a full slate. The committee agreed a reduced quorum for Chesham & Amersham CLP in advance of their AGM, and also for New Forest East and Tunbridge Wells. Many discontented messages around national issues were received from members in Sussex.

Councillors Vince Maple and Naushabah Khan presented their south-east local government report for 2020 / 2021, based on a virtual “tour” of the region. This covered responses to Covid-19; councillors and mental health; the anticipated government white paper on council reorganisation; and improving diversity within Labour in local government. On the white paper, they reported strong support for a single collective position for Labour in the south-east and across England, though consensus on what that position should be may be more difficult, with mixed views on two-tier versus single-tier local government.

On diversity, support for candidates with additional requirements, working with specific under-represented groups, and barriers for those with caring responsibilities, were raised, and also the need for all-women shortlists to maintain, as well as to achieve, 50% women. Currently Oxfordshire has 14 Labour county councillors of whom ten are women, but with men replacing women who are standing down, and more men in target seats, the proportion could fall below 50% after May. We were told that we couldn't use AWS, though I believe the NEC has received conflicting legal advice and I will look into this in the New Year.

Mystery Solved

Finally Lynda MacDermott's Co-operative Party report explained their role on the new local government committees (LGCs) which replace local campaign forums (LCFs). The rule change agreed at conference 2019 defined a tripartite structure for LGCs, with CLPs, trade unions and councillors having equal numbers of delegates and equal shares of the vote, but did not carry forward the Co-op entitlement to a delegate. This inadvertent omission will be remedied at the next conference, but until then CLPs are being advised that the Co-op place must be retained. Hopefully we will also be advised on how to compute the votes.

The meeting closed with good wishes for the festive season, and better fortune in the New Year.

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