

## NEC Update, January 2023

The full NEC meets on Tuesday 24 January. Before then, here is a report on last week's subcommittees.

### Organisation Committee, 17 January 2023

The committee received a provisional schedule for reorganising CLPs along new boundaries, and further information will be posted on the web page <https://labour.org.uk/activist-hub/governance-and-legal-hub/clp-hub/clp-reorganising-faq/>. Dates are:

|                                             |                                                                                                                                       |
|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| May 2023, after local elections             | Formal letters to CLPs with details of the process                                                                                    |
| From July 2023                              | Technical transition work on membership systems<br>Interim officers appointed to oversee establishment of new branches and committees |
| 1 September 2023                            | Relevant date for transfer of membership, and assessing net assets and liabilities at CLP level                                       |
| 11 October 2023<br>(at close of conference) | Current CLPs abolished                                                                                                                |
| 12 October 2023                             | New CLPs established and reorganisation complete.                                                                                     |
| By December 2023                            | Inaugural AGMs elect new officers<br>Letters to treasurers with details of financial adjustments                                      |

Interim officers would usually be existing officers, where they are willing and live in the new constituency. There is no desire to impose new officers across the country, and regions will concentrate on assisting with any contentious issues around equipment, property and other resources.

### **More Questions Than Answers**

There will be many individual queries, but general points raised so far include:

- if a CLP is completely unchanged, must it still hold an extra AGM at the end of 2023?
- if an AGM is normally held in summer, must CLPs hold two AGMs within a few months, or can they defer?
- the need for guidance on affiliations by trade unions and socialist societies
- what happens if a CLP which has all-member meetings combines with one which has delegate-based general committees? (The committee view was that the initial AGM should be delegate-based. This could mean that a CLP with few or no branches has to invent them and hold branch AGMs first.)

Secretaries and treasurers will have many questions, but details have to wait till May while the party focuses on local elections. There are also external uncertainties, and a general election on current boundaries cannot be ruled out. And the entire project depends on functioning membership systems.

There are specific issues in Wales where the Senedd is also reviewing boundaries. Currently the plan is for these to align with Westminster boundaries, but the Welsh executive is keen to be involved in consultation. Scotland is unaffected because Scottish CLPs are based on Holyrood constituencies.

A separate paper outlined procedures for selecting parliamentary candidates for the new constituencies. Because the total number remains at 650 most MPs who have been reselected will find a natural home in the new structure, after which recently-selected candidates will be similarly allocated. This process is expected to conclude in May. In October 2023 remaining selections for vacant seats will begin.

Of new candidates, so far 43% are women, exactly mirroring the proportion of women who are party members, though a majority of reselected MPs are women. The committee was keen to be proactive in increasing BAME (Black, Asian and minority ethnic), disabled and LGBT+ representation.

The committee also noted updates on CLPs in special measures and on campaign improvement boards, working to support Labour groups and generally said to be making progress. Procedures for selecting combined authority mayors were agreed.

## Complaints and Disciplinary Sub-Committee (formerly the Disputes Panel), 17 January 2023

The committee received the latest figures for complaints, membership appeals, investigations, exclusions, terminations, suspensions and hearings by the national constitutional committee (NCC) and the independent complaints board (ICB). Summaries of disciplinary outcomes can be found on the party website, at the foot of the page <https://labour.org.uk/complaints/>

Antisemitism continued to account for a majority of complaints related to protected characteristics. Members were still concerned that racism, ableism and Islamophobia were significantly under-reported, given the Labour Muslim Network survey which found that 29% of respondents had experienced Islamophobic behaviour. Victims were again urged to come forward and use the party's processes.

Nearly 80 people were waiting for their appeal against rejection of membership to be heard, with regional offices responsible for organising these. The number of members suspended was gradually declining, and I welcomed the commitment to resolving the situation of those who have waited more than 18 months.

### **Against the Odds**

Of 475 cases considered by NEC disciplinary panels in 2022, 30% were expelled, given a punitive suspension or referred to the NCC or the ICB. The other 70% were able to continue normal party activities, though half received a formal warning or reminder of conduct for breaches of rule. I've served on a number of these panels, with a legal adviser to encourage consistency and proportionality, and I understand them.

This contrasts with alleged support for proscribed organisations. Of 331 members referred to exclusion panels in 2022, 91% were expelled and only 9% retained membership. I was told that this is a different process, where legal guidance and proportionality are not relevant. Panels can exercise discretion and impose a punitive suspension or reinstate the member, but these powers were used just three times in 2022, fewer than 1% of cases. Expelled members can appeal to the NCC, but the NCC only concluded eight cases of any kind during 2022, so many may still be waiting. The independent complaints board does not move much faster, and has only considered six cases since it began operating in July 2022. Lengthy delays punish the person whether or not their appeal eventually succeeds.

On these expulsions I am assured that no action is taken against members who argue that they now have nothing to do with the organisation, and who send a strong response which politically distances them from previous errors. If only 9% are repentant, then fair enough. I also know that people give selective accounts on social media, as they did in the 2016 leadership election (contrary to myth, no-one was excluded for "liking the f\*\*king Foo Fighters"). I don't have a complete picture, but I am troubled by some of what I have seen, and fear that the party risks repeating past errors. NEC members always act in good faith, but in 2016 that good faith led different NEC members to wildly varying decisions, and fuelled the internal tensions which persist to this day. Consistency, transparency and perceived fairness matter.

## National Women's Committee, 19 January 2023

Members expressed frustration at difficulties in carrying out strategic oversight of women's organisation and involvement. Formerly women's activities sat within the equalities committee, but that connection has been lost. The NEC agreed in principle in November that the chair of the women's committee should attend equalities committee meetings, and that will take effect from March.

The two committees meet on the same day, and Anneliese Dodds, party chair and shadow secretary for women and equalities, reports to both. She stressed the impact of the cost of living crisis, particularly on lone-parent families and disabled and BAME women, and health inequalities, where gynaecological waiting lists were longer than ever. Women in their 50s were the fastest-growing group in the workforce, with many caring for children and for elderly parents. Anneliese was working with deputy leader Angela Rayner and the unions, and with shadow education secretary Bridget Phillipson on childcare and breakfast clubs for all.

Following a successful webinar on tackling violence against women and girls, members supported an event on the cost of living, including equal pay and hardship among single women existing on the state pension. This would be planned for March, close to International Women's Day.

Members asked for a list of established women's branches, and faster progress on rolling out branches in other CLPs. In particular the forthcoming boundary reorganisation should make sure that existing women's branches were not lost. CLP secretaries are now able to grant access to Organise, the party's mailing software, to women's officers, so they can write to women members.

## National Women's Conference 2023

There was particular unhappiness at simply being told that this year's women's conference had been reduced to the Saturday before annual conference, and any event on Friday evening would have to be held off-site because the conference venue is only available from Saturday. The provisional timetable is:

12 noon, Friday 23 June 2023 – deadline for delegates to register (same as annual conference)

12 noon, Wednesday 13 September 2023 – deadline for motions and constitutional amendments

Wednesday 20 September 2023 – online ballot opens to decide priorities for debate

12 noon, Tuesday 26 September 2023 – online ballot closes

12 noon, Friday 29 September 2023 – deadline for emergency motions

Thursday 28 September to Tuesday 3 October 2023 – compositing online

Friday 6 October 2023 – welcome reception

Saturday 7 October 2023 – women's conference

I asked for information about delegate entitlement, fees and pooled fares for delegates and visitors, and start and end times. All these are essential for CLPs in deciding how many delegates they can afford to send in addition to their annual conference delegation.

The next meeting will discuss a rule change allowing casual vacancies on the committee to be filled between elections at women's conference. This is urgently needed because four of the six constituency representatives elected in 2021 have left for various reasons, and cannot be replaced. I am proposing that the runner-up from the previous election should join the committee, as with NEC vacancies.

Finally the women's committee agreed to make submissions to the six national policy forum consultation documents to be published on 30 January. It was suggested that members on the different policy commissions could circulate lists of key points, followed by informal Zoom gatherings.

### Equalities committee, 19 January 2023

In the first meeting of the new cycle Angela Eagle was elected as chair, succeeding James Asser. I was re-elected as vice-chair for women, job-sharing with Jayne Taylor of Unite, and the other vice-chairs are Abdi Duale (LGBT+), Elsie Greenwood (youth), Carol Sewell (BAME) and Ellen Morrison (disabled members). Members agreed to continue meeting remotely rather than hybrid or in-person, which means that the women's committee will also have to meet remotely.

Anneliese Dodds reported on Labour's plans, including Doreen Lawrence's taskforce on a new race equality act, mandatory disability pay gap reporting for companies employing more than 250 people, and commitments to childcare and flexible working. She welcomed the Tories' latest U-turn which would now include trans people in a ban on conversion therapy and stressed the entitlement of all LGBT+ people to dignity and respect. As chair of the national policy forum she would work to ensure that equalities were hardwired into every policy area.

Members raised the urgent need for a definition of transphobia and codes for addressing it, Scottish and UK Labour positions on gender recognition reform and the equality act, fundamental flaws with universal credit, and difficulties faced by disabled members at local level, some of which verged on unlawful behaviour. As at the complaints and disciplinary subcommittee they were urged to use the new procedures so that offenders could be dealt with. The NEC working group on the Forde report had met the day before, and I hope it will come forward with concrete proposals for improving local party culture.

On parliamentary selections members echoed concerns raised at the organisation committee: where representation of women, BAME, LGBT+ and disabled people is falling behind, the NEC must act before it is too late. A presentation on the 2021 census highlighted demographic changes since 2011 as a backdrop to the forthcoming general election. And the NEC would return to democratic structures for BAME and disabled members after the election, currently the over-riding priority for everything we do.

*As usual please feel free to circulate and/or post online, and contact me at [annblack50@btinternet.com](mailto:annblack50@btinternet.com) / 07956-637958. Previous reports are at [www.annblack.co.uk](http://www.annblack.co.uk)*