

National Executive Committee Meeting, 22 July 2025

The prime minister Keir Starmer, deputy prime minister Angela Rayner and justice secretary Shabana Mahmood all gave updates, thanking the NEC for their support and hard work and reminding us of how much the Labour government has already achieved in the face of unprecedented difficulties.

Angela Rayner said that while the Tories are wrong about 96% of everything but focus on the 4% they get right, Labour delivers 96% of its agenda but agonises over the remaining 4%. People will only vote for us if we give them reasons: trade deals helping the car industry, record pay rises especially for young people, extending free school meals, protecting renters, £39 billion invested in housing, devolving power from Westminster and massive expansion of employment rights. She stressed that Labour was not anti-business: good employers know that if they treat staff well, productivity will rise. The Conservatives and Reform opposed all these measures, and only Labour would deliver for working people.

Members thanked Angela for engaging with councillors and hoped the Lords would not be allowed to hold up critical legislation. With votes at 16 on the way they asked how to attract young people tempted by Reform or the Greens, and about the impact of automatic voter registration in areas of high mobility, including a possible timetable for new boundaries to reflect their true population. Though I do wonder if this can be completed before the next general election.

On the Middle East Angela said that the UK government was working with allies to save millions of people in Gaza as well as the Israeli hostages still in captivity, and considering further sanctions. Israel must respect international law, and the current situation was barbaric and disgusting. Yet it continues while we watch. Finally she recognised that announcements are not enough: people have to see real improvements in their lives, soon, and the next 12 months would decide whether Labour wins a second term.

General Secretary's Report

Hollie Ridley highlighted Labour's summer campaign and preparations for 2026, with elections in Wales, Scotland, London, Birmingham and other key councils. Funding was critical: generous donations this year supported effective challenges to Nigel Farage's plans for the NHS, and every effort was being made to maximise income and control costs. Members were at the forefront of party strategy, campaigning in target areas and supported by new interactive online resources. The average joiner stayed in membership for six-and-a-half years, and recruitment and retention were both essential. The NEC thanked everyone involved in delivering the Bernie Grant leadership programme for Black activists.

Hollie said that candidate selection in Scotland and Wales was devolved to their executives, but they were on track to meet their deadlines. *Hope Not Hate* were providing valuable analysis of Reform voters and the party was working closely with the unions. And with today's 13-year-olds able to vote at the next general election I believe that schools have a key role in educating future citizens about our democratic structures.

I asked how we could avoid months of speculation about the chancellor's plans for taxes and spending. Hollie promised briefing notes with the budget but it's a long time till the autumn. We need to control the narrative now, and not get boxed in by ruling out one option after another. Also searching the website should lead to current policies and progress on implementation: entering "housing", for instance, pulls up random references to old speeches. This is our shop window to the online world, and we should use it.

Prime Minister's Questions

Keir Starmer emphasised that Labour inherited a broken economy and broken public services. The first year was spent clearing up the mess, including a wildly popular spending review. The promised two million extra NHS appointments were achieved in five months, and the total now stands at 4.5 million. Expanding free school meals, childcare from nine months, breakfast clubs and family hubs would reduce inequalities, the national minimum wage was rising by £1,400, and real pay had gone up by more in ten months than in ten years under the Tories. Trade deals would save British jobs, including 44,000 at Jaguar Land Rover, and rail and road infrastructure projects were being rolled out along with 1.5 million extra homes.

Responding to questions Keir confirmed that he wanted to reduce child poverty by the end of this parliament, as had all previous Labour governments. (I am on the relevant policy commission, and every expert has told us that this cannot be done without ending the two-child limit and the benefit cap.) He was as committed to a Hillsborough Law as when he first met the families 15 years ago, and determined to get it right. He agreed that "conversion therapy" is abuse against LGBT+ people, and a ban would be seen through at pace.

Trade union representatives asked for effective communications to get the good news across, and for research on which messages cut through. Keir agreed that people had to feel genuinely better off, with costs kept down as well as wages rising, the NHS and other public services visibly improving, and everyone safe and secure within their neighbourhood and the country's borders. In Gaza the situation was intolerable and worsening daily, and plans to corral two million people into a tiny corner were indefensible. The urgent needs were for a ceasefire, getting aid in and freeing the remaining hostages, with Palestine recognised as part of moves towards a two-state solution. Yet the intolerable continues.

I passed on concerns about proscribing Palestine Action. Many members see their actions as comparable to the Greenham Common women who broke into RAF bases, criminal property damage but not on a par with Al-Qaeda. Or Patriotic Alternative who, according to *Hope not Hate*, support political violence and Holocaust denial, or the mobs attacking asylum-seekers, security guards and police. Keir said that all organisations are held to the same standard, and Palestine Action has a history of break-ins, sabotage and targeting Jewish-owned businesses. (The latter would indeed be disturbing but is not mentioned on the government website.) He assured us that the ban is not intended to stifle debate on Palestine. Though it is clogging up courts and police stations with pensioners for holding placards and Private Eye cartoons.

The disabled members' representative spoke passionately, sounding close to despair. She had worked to embed co-production by disabled people in measures which affect their lives through the national policy forum in 2023, the manifesto meeting in 2024 and the NEC in March 2025, all in vain. The last two months triggered horrendous levels of insecurity and the health-related elements of universal credit were still being cut. Keir admitted that the bill was not handled well, and expected Stephen Timms' review to do better.

Justice Delayed ...

Justice secretary Shabana Mahmood faced immediate crises on entering government, with fewer than 100 prison places available in August 2024, and down to five during the summer riots. The Tories only added 500 during 14 years in office, compared with 28,000 by the previous Labour government, and there were now plans for a further 14,000 by 2030/2031. We didn't explore why England and Wales lock up more people than any other European country, and hopefully David Gauke's review of sentencing will address this, but Shabana had to deal with the situation as she found it. Inevitably this meant taking fewer offenders in and/or letting more people out, earlier in their sentences. Community punishment had to be seen as credible and tagging could be used more extensively, as could bans on, for instance, attending football matches. On violence against women and girls Shabana was keen to restrict the movements of the perpetrators rather than the victims, and she hoped that intensive supervision could tackle prolific offenders, including addicts and shoplifters. Her next decisions would be on the Leveson review, which is recommending that more cases are heard by magistrates or judges instead of juries. Currently the crown courts have a backlog of 77,000 cases with some not scheduled until 2029. Doing nothing is not an option.

Responding to questions Shabana committed Labour to staying in the European Convention on Human Rights, which underpins the Good Friday agreement and has sometimes supported British citizens, including the Hillsborough families, against the state. Some countries believe that the convention needs modernising, and Labour has asked to be involved in those discussions. She hoped that careleavers, who are over-represented in the prison population, could be diverted away from crime earlier in their lives, and aimed to reduce the number of women in custody as they are more likely than men to be imprisoned for less serious crimes. She shared concerns about protecting prison officers, and there might be arguments for segregating dangerous extremists and providing body armour for staff. In addition drones posed new challenges, flying in drugs and also potentially weapons or explosives.

Party Chair's Report

Ellie Reeves reflected on the first year in government, with a summary of achievements sent to every member. She highlighted the youth congress which brought 300 young members to Cardiff in June, the Plan for Change roadshows, and the Volunteer Voice initiative to feed back views from the doorstep. Every Labour MP had a campaign pack for the summer, to build their profile as incumbents.

As chair of the national policy forum she was planning a newsletter so that all NPF members were aware of the work of all the policy commissions, and the commissions would hold policy seminars at conference. (I would highly recommend these as an opportunity to explore issues with ministers in depth.) The first year, Fixing the Foundations, had included dozens of online and in-person events, feeding into the annual report which was endorsed by the joint policy committee on 16 July 2025 and would now go to conference.

I sensed that the days of in-person NPF gatherings, where all members contributed to every document and we could talk across divides, are over, and there is little support for reopening the website to members, even on a read-only basis. I am in favour of technology, especially for commission meetings, but less sure about an entirely virtual forum which meets once every four years. The only suggestion which may get taken forward is enabling local parties to contact their elected representatives and vice versa, to build communication between grassroots and leadership and try to avoid unnecessary errors.

Members asked for campaign materials tailored to local circumstances: for instance in London the Greens and the LibDems may pose a greater challenge than Reform. Others welcomed the focus on recruitment and retention, but asked how the NEC could monitor progress without access to membership data. A good question. Totals are given in the annual report, but they include those in arrears and are nine months out of date. I have no idea if we are typical, but my CLP is 20% down over the last twelve months, with further resignations as the Gaza crisis deepens. As always, local information welcome.

Conference Preview

Formal proceedings will start at 11 a.m. on Sunday 28 September and close by 1 p.m. on Wednesday 1 October 2025. There will be regional briefings earlier on Sunday and some events on Saturday in place of the cancelled women's conference, so most delegates will need to travel on the Saturday. The standing orders were approved, including the right to refer back parts of the NPF report.

The NEC also took a first look at rule changes. Only four constitutional amendments from CLPs met the conference arrangements committee (CAC) criteria. Three were born of frustration at the delays and disempowerment in selecting general election candidates. Bracknell would require all national or regional committee members or party employees to resign their role before standing for any public office, which would exclude committee members who are already councillors, prevent staff filling in as paper candidates, and leave them jobless if not selected. Lewes would entitle CLPs where Labour polled below 20% to initiate their own selection at any time. North Herefordshire would install parliamentary candidates no later than three years after the preceding election though they could then be replaced if circumstances changed, a situation which could create insecurity. There was sympathy for the underlying motivation and though the NEC opposed them, members said that CLPs should be more involved next time. I do hope this is carried through, and 2029 will not see a fourth round of late impositions.

The last, from Leyton & Wanstead, called for online balloting in party meetings to be as rigorous and transparent as in-person voting. I trust Anonymvoter but asked again for renewed guidance on hybrid meetings, preferably including provision for mixed-mode secret ballots. Some CLPs have developed their own solutions, some regional / national offices allow remote votes to be cast to promote inclusion, and the NEC itself conducts open ballots in hybrid meetings, but it would only take one complaint to lead to trouble. The NEC agreed without a vote to oppose all four CLP amendments.

The Rules of the Game

The last section covered amendments to be put forward by the NEC. Some were non-contentious including

- raising membership subscriptions by inflation each year rounded up to the nearest number of pence divisible by 12, so that monthly direct debit payments are all for the same amount;
- treating a caution for committing a serious offence as a prohibited act, as with a conviction;
- allowing councillors to attend regional conferences with ex officio status, with payment;
- requiring CLPs to hold at least six ordinary meetings each year, down from eight, and without specifying two policy meetings;
- electing the chair and vice-chairs of regional executive committees at their first meeting after regional conference, instead of at conference. I suggested that a short business meeting at the close of conference could do this, in the same way that the NEC elects its chair and vice-chair;
- new Young Labour branches to be registered with regional directors / general secretaries before going to the Young Labour national committee;
- simplifying the collection of levies from councillors;
- removing the ability to pilot direct election of Labour group leaders by local parties (we believe this has only been done once);
- not allowing CLPs to rescind a motion for the following three meetings, rather than the following three months. This does not prevent different motions on the same subject being discussed earlier;
- replacing Association of Labour Councillors (ALC) with Labour in Local and Regional Government (LLRG) to include mayors etc throughout the rulebook.

Requiring CLP chairs, vice-chairs campaigns and membership, secretaries and treasurers to be at least 18 years old was opposed by some as unfairly excluding young members but was carried by 26 votes to 5. Some posts have significant legal responsibilities and I voted in favour, but maybe I'm just getting old.

Moving on, the conference arrangements committee (CAC) currently has five general places (in practice held by the unions), two elected by CLP delegates and a disabled members' representative elected 50/50 by affiliates and CLPs. There was an interesting proposal to add a third CLP member and a representative of the PLP (parliamentary Labour party). Currently most MPs can stand in the CLP places, and this could give them up to four seats. In preliminary discussions I was minded to support the change if MPs were excluded from the CLP places, as they are on the NEC. However a decision was deferred until September.

The Slow Death of OMOV

I remain committed to electing constituency NPF representatives by one-member-one-vote, partly because it took me ten years to achieve. The NEC was now asked to revert to election by conference delegates, with the youth places elected only by CLP youth delegates within their region. I foresaw this when CAC elections were returned to conference in 2022, writing that *"the next move could be against OMOV for the NPF constituency representatives"*. The cited reasons – expense and low participation – should be addressed by better connecting members with the NPF, not by further reducing their rights. Three years from now the same arguments could stop members electing their NEC representatives as well.

I disagreed with those who argue that conference elections are "more democratic". Around 20% of CLPs do not send any delegates, and I imagine that far fewer can afford extra youth delegates. I did not mention the elephant in the room, but CAC elections were moved out of conference in 2014 to address complaints of improper influence, so members could vote freely in their own homes. I had more support than usual, and with members raising other points about NPF composition these proposals will return in September.

Councillors' Corner

We then had a long discussion about candidate contracts. The proposal specified that the NEC shall rather than may introduce candidate contracts, which I thought was OK. It is the contents of the contract which matter. However the word "may" occurred several further times in this rule, and some members suggested changing some of them to "shall" as well. We ended up voting, with 17 for and 10, including me, against, to say that candidates' failure to achieve their objectives shall lead to their right to stand being reassessed, but that this may be taken into account when an elected representative is up for reselection.

Finally the NEC decided to abolish all Labour group observers, currently expected to provide a bridge between the group and the corresponding local government committee. The supporting argument was that Labour groups deal with confidential business and need a safe space for frank discussion. I was initially unsure about how to vote, but local feedback was that the role provides invaluable insights for members who may then consider standing themselves: *"the most rewarding thing I've done, infinitely more interesting, taught me way more about local government and kept me far more involved than any training programme which would last a few weeks with a certificate at the end"*.

There are also significant differences between metropolitan councils with large Labour majorities and rural areas dominated by other parties. Councillors are rightly accountable to their local ward or division, but many branches, and indeed whole CLPs, have no Labour councillors at all and observers to a county Labour group may provide the only links. So I voted against, but the proposal was carried by 20 votes to 8. However I believe there is a willingness to address genuine problems, and perhaps councillors could work through their representatives on the LLRG to establish alternative channels of communication.

In addition I have been promised a further NEC rule change so that a vacancy for the NEC socialist societies representative can be filled immediately rather than having to wait until the next conference, in the same way that trade union vacancies are filled, and that will come to the NEC in September.

Goodbye and Thanks

Finally members expressed appreciation to Gavin Sibthorpe, who leaves the NEC as he takes on a new role in the GMB union, for his contributions, including as co-convenor of the joint policy committee. I shall miss his insight, advice and fair-mindedness and wish him success and fulfilment in his future career.

Please feel free to circulate / post online, and contact me at annblack50@btinternet.com / 07956-637958. Previous reports are at www.annblack.co.uk