

National Executive Committee Meeting, 2 December 2025

This was the first meeting after conference and, as usual, the opportunity to plan for the year ahead. Vice-chair Peter Wheeler welcomed members, and the NEC observed a moment's silence in memory of former MP Mark Fisher and of Roy Darke, long-serving and much-missed Oxford councillor and activist.

Newly-elected deputy leader Lucy Powell thanked general secretary Hollie Ridley and the staff for running the contest with integrity and professionalism. She suggested a brief review of the procedures before next time, perhaps making candidates' access to affiliated voters consistent with their access to party members.

(For those who ask, neither the NEC nor the candidates know the breakdown of the results. Out of a total of 970,642 ballots issued 160,943 were cast, 87,407 for Lucy Powell, 73,536 for Bridget Phillipson. This gives a turnout of 16.6%, but rates in the affiliate section are always very low. My friend and super-nerd Charlie Mansell calculates that using the same metrics Ed Miliband was elected in 2010 on a turnout of 14% of members plus trade union levy-payers and Tony Blair in 1994 on 22% of members plus levy-payers. His analysis, which assumes that about half of eligible members voted, is at <https://sites.google.com/view/labourdashboard/>.)

Be that as it may, Lucy is embracing her new role of political leadership, supporting members and elected representatives. More than 1,800 signed up for her first Lucy Listens webinar, and she has already been contacted by 43 local parties. She is working with Keir Starmer, Hollie Ridley, party chair Anna Turley and organisations from Labour Together to Hope Not Hate. She praised Rachel Reeves for delivering a true Labour budget and urged members to argue for it, as no-one else would.

NEC representatives asked how we could protect councillors and candidates, especially women, from abuse online, on the doorstep and in public, a widespread and growing problem. Unfortunately no-one has the answer, but this new and unpleasant world deters people from standing for election, including as MPs.

Party Management

Hollie and party treasurer Mike Payne stressed the importance of financial stability, controlling costs and generating income, building towards 2026 and the next general election and giving activists the tools they need. I said that constituencies would be affected by local government reorganisation, as councillors contribute significantly to party funds and some proposals will reduce their numbers. I expect to be involved in a review of the NEC funds which hold a share of subscription income formerly dispensed to CLPs.

The membership of NEC committees was agreed. Ellie Reeves replaces me as an NEC officer in her role as national policy forum chair, but I continue on the business board as a former chair of the NEC. The terms of reference, also agreed, lay out clear lines of accountability:

"The NEC officers will meet on a monthly basis ... The NEC will be advised of any decisions made under delegated powers by the general secretary, the NEC officers or the chair of the NEC before those decisions are made public ... The NEC will be notified in advance of proposed vacancies of all senior staff positions, before posts are advertised The general secretary shall maintain a log of key actions and outcomes which shall be presented to each meeting of the NEC ... Key decisions of the NEC will be communicated to party stakeholders as soon as possible by email or timetabled for the nearest mailing date ..."

so I should still be kept informed.

The remit of the equalities committee was extended to promote a representative workforce, but in my view it also needs to reconnect with the organisation committee. Both committees used to meet on the same day and discuss the same papers on monitoring statistics and selections, including decisions on all-women shortlists. They are now separated. In addition its agenda now overlaps with that of the national women's committee, with ministers for women and equalities giving largely the same reports to both meetings.

Technology Update

The NEC then received a presentation on campaigning. Labour continues to be at the forefront of technological development, and more sophisticated data collection will help us to identify and get out our vote. Training packages are being rolled out to activists and published on the website. Being in government is different: instead of just saying that the Tories are bad, our campaigns must be rooted in local communities and show the difference that Labour in power makes to people's lives. Labour can appeal to voters across the country, whether through tackling child poverty or through reducing immigration, and must continue warning that Reform threatens to privatise the NHS. Volunteers are essential to get messages across, and their time is our most precious resource.

Members stressed the importance of engaging on social media, including TikTok. I raised the need to explain government decisions: how could activists justify removing winter fuel payments from every pensioner with an income over £11,500 and then, a year later, restoring it with a cut-off of £35,000? However I welcomed the revamped website, which puts achievements upfront - see <https://labour.org.uk/> - and just needs work on the Search function to make it perfect.

Ballots and Deadlines

The NEC agreed timelines for a bumper crop of internal elections in 2026. The national committee of Labour Students (officers, regional and other representatives) and the Young Labour National Committee (officers, trade union, socialist society and regional representatives) will be elected in spring 2026, so that committees are in place before university freshers' fairs. Nominations for these positions open on 8 December 2025 and close on 29 January 2026, with ballots between 16 February and 2 March 2026.

The following national positions are also up for election:

On the national executive committee:

- treasurer
- nine CLP representatives
- two local government representatives
- three backbench MPs
- Welsh, youth, Black, Asian and minority ethnic and disabled members' representative

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On the national constitutional committee:

- four CLP representatives
- four trade union representatives
- one socialist societies representative

On the national policy forum:

- five CLP representatives, including one youth representative, from each of the eleven nations and regions.

Two auditors

On the national women's committee:

- six CLP representatives
- six trade union representatives
- representatives from local government, socialist societies and the parliamentary party

Nominations for these close on Friday 26 June 2026, with some elected at annual conference / women's conference and ballot timetables for the NEC elections to follow later in the year.

For annual conference 26 June 2026 is also the closing date for delegate applications and for constitutional amendments. The deadline for contemporary motions is under discussion, and I supported the trade unions' request to set this at a time which allows them to finalise motions at their annual congress. The deadline for emergency motions will be 12 noon on Friday 25 September 2026, and there will be separate arrangements for women's conference. All details will be sent to secretaries in January.

Challenges Ahead

The NEC agreed the party's aims and objectives for the coming year: successful performance in May's local, Welsh and Scottish elections on the way towards the next general election. Key elements are a shared understanding and purpose with a more inclusive and diverse culture; building campaign capacity for elected representatives; communicating delivery by the Labour government; driving innovation; holding opponents to account; and all underpinned by financial stability and organisational strength.

A report on regional activities referred to a by-election in Birmingham, and trade union representatives expressed concern about messaging on the nine-month-old bin strike. The NEC agreed that Labour should work to resolve rather than escalate the situation, defending the workers and keeping the wider movement united. Lucy Powell undertook to raise these issues urgently with ministers.

The next presentation reviewed the prospects for elections in 2026 against a background where Reform hold a significant poll lead, and natural Labour voters could be tempted by the Greens and the LibDems from one side and by Reform and the Conservatives from the other. The Welsh Senedd will be elected through a new system similar to the closed lists used in past European elections.

Party chair Anna Turley highlighted three key themes: health, the cost of living for families, and pride in place. The NHS was getting back on its feet, with five million extra appointments already delivered. Families were benefiting from falling mortgage rates, breakfast clubs and ending the two-child limit. Reform was not on the side of working people: they backed tax cuts for the rich, opposed employment rights and stoked grievance and division, and far from being patriotic they leaned towards Putin. The Tories held extreme views on climate change and would leave the European convention on human rights. Looking beyond 2026 Operation Second Term was already gearing up, with summer schools for staff training and a review of constituency readiness. I suggested that local parties would be more motivated if they could choose their own parliamentary candidates this time.

The NEC discussed how to take on different political opponents, and how to campaign where national messages did not resonate locally. The Caerphilly by-election suggested that Plaid Cymru won through mobilising the anti-Reform majority, and Labour had to campaign as the party best placed to defeat Reform. Without Scottish and Welsh MPs Labour could not win a Westminster majority in 2029.

Prime Minister's Questions

The NEC then relocated to Number 10 Downing Street for sandwiches and the leader's report. Keir Starmer was pleased by the reception for his conference speech, framing Labour as progressive patriots against Reform as the party of division. He celebrated the budget which protected public services, controlled borrowing and bore down on living costs, still the top issue for many people. Everyone would see their energy bills cut by £150, with an extra £150 off for six million low-income households. Rail fares and prescription charges were frozen. Breakfast clubs and free school meals were protected, and government-funded childcare was a game-changer. Ending the two-child benefit cap was the proudest moment of his political life: it had dragged hundreds of thousands of children into poverty, damaging their health and stunting their futures. Now we had to take the messages out and win the arguments.

I was delighted that the two-child limit has gone. Children do not choose to be born, and should not be punished for the decisions of their parents. I am trying to find out how many larger families will now run up against the overall household benefit cap, but one step at a time. Instead I expressed concern about plans to curtail trial by jury. Keir responded that currently 90% of cases are dealt with by magistrates. Of the rest 7% of defendants plead guilty, so only 3% go to trial. Labour's changes would reduce this to 2.5%, with the most serious still keeping their existing rights. He put the moral argument that delays in the system keep rape victims waiting up to four years for justice, and many simply give up. However such a small reduction in jury trials is unlikely, on its own, to eliminate the entire backlog, and some will still be uneasy on principle. I also asked that the Lords should not be allowed to filibuster the assisted dying bill.

Other members raised former Welsh Reform leader Nathan Gill's conviction for accepting pro-Russian bribes, the stabbings on the Doncaster-London train and increases in assaults on public-facing staff, and the need for speedy progress on employment rights. Keir said that by the spring workers would be eligible for sick pay from Day 1. Other good news included contracts with Norway for frigates and Turkey for Typhoons, and small modular nuclear reactors planned for Anglesey, all creating thousands of good British jobs. He had met again with the parents of Zane Gbangbola who believed that hydrogen cyanide from a landfill site had caused his death, and said that in government, as with Hillsborough, Labour actually had power to help ordinary people fight the system and, if necessary, change the law.

Keir was asked if having to wait 20 years for British citizenship would drive overseas workers out of their jobs in the NHS, but said he expected most applications to be accepted before then. Britain would remain a compassionate home for refugees fleeing persecution, but the world had changed and people no longer sought sanctuary in the nearest safe country. I was disappointed that, like Shabana Mahmood and home office minister Alex Norris, he referred to an asylum-seeker allegedly receiving £800 a month from his family and driving an Audi while subsidised by the state, as if he was typical. It feeds the myth that they are all scroungers, just as Reform claims that they are all violent criminals based on a few isolated cases.

Keir said that an effective strategy to reduce violence against women and girls had to involve prevention, tackling the misogyny and hate peddled by online influencers. Many perpetrators are under 16 years old. On the Greens, he pointed out that supporting Ukraine while withdrawing from NATO was not a coherent approach. He also opposed their policy of legalising all drugs, and did not want heroin sold outside school playgrounds. The NEC then returned to party headquarters for the remainder of the meeting.

Reports Various

National policy forum chair Ellie Reeves was continuing to facilitate dialogue between party and government. The policy seminars at conference were successful and she was arranging ministerial briefings for NPF members after key announcements, including the budget and new immigration policies. I have found these very useful. Keiran O'Neill was elected as joint policy committee co-convenor, and the JPC would agree a workplan in January for the next round of consultation. The NEC asked for sufficient time for local parties to engage outside the election period.

Claire Reynolds, executive director for stakeholder relations, gave an update on her work. The eighth cohort of the Jo Cox leadership programme would start soon, with the next tranche of the Bernie Grant programme planned for summer 2026, and a new national youth and student officer was being recruited. She also covered work with MPs on anti-Black racism and Afriphobia, and with Disability Labour, Faith in Communities and grassroots community groups. Links with socialist societies were being strengthened through annual reviews of their needs and responsibilities, and the support which the party could provide. I asked again about the application from the Labour Campaign for Electoral Reform, and was promised that the socialist societies panel would decide on outstanding requests before Christmas. Anu Prashar and Sonja Davis were added to the BAME working group.

None of the Above ...

Finally the NEC considered the possibilities for a 2026 national women's conference. Until last year eligibility to participate was based on self-definition as a woman. However in April the UK supreme court ruled that sex, as a protected characteristic under the Equality Act of 2010, meant biological sex at birth, and the party could be challenged in the courts if it continued to operate on the previous basis. Amid confusion and dismay the 2025 women's conference was cancelled.

The equality and human rights commission has issued draft guidance to apply across all institutions and every aspect of society, and its implications are under consideration by the government. In the meantime the party has to deal with the law as it is, not as we would like it to be. The NEC was presented with a detailed analysis of the current legal position and offered the following legally compliant options for 2026:

- 1) hold a national women's conference on the Saturday before annual conference, with formal business restricted to women as defined by the supreme court, but with networking, panel debates, policy discussions, exhibitions and social events, all themed around women's policy priorities and women's equality within the party, open to all members irrespective of sex;
- 2) hold a national women's conference on the Saturday but limit all informal and formal business to women as defined by the supreme court. No other delegates or members would be able to attend at all;
- 3) do not hold a 2026 national women's conference.

Some members drew attention to party rules, which state "*There shall be an Annual Labour Party Women's Conference which shall wherever practicable be held in the spring*" and to previous requests for another standalone women's conference, but at the moment its existence and not just its timing are at stake.

No-one was happy with the limitations, but in the end I was among the 18 who voted for the first option as the least bad within the law. Eleven members abstained, and many trade unions have not yet decided whether they can send delegations to a conference organised on this basis. That in turn would leave their places on the national women's committee vacant, so I hope that a way forward can be found which again includes and welcomes all our members.

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