

Report from South-East Regional Executive Committee¹ Meeting 16th March 2019

This report has been drafted by and represents the views of the 8 Momentum and CLPD backed candidates elected to the Regional Executive Committee from **the CLP section** (Lisa Fricker and Cal Corkery, representing Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, Gemma Bolton and David Hide, representing East and West Sussex, Michaela Collord, representing Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire, Karen Constantine, representing Kent, Nada Al-Sanjari and Shelley Grainger, representing Berkshire and Surrey), **the Young Labour representative** (Sarah Cundy), and **three Unite representatives** (Gordon Lean, Sarah Hacker and Elaine Bolton).

Acronyms

ALC – Association of Labour Councillors

BAME – Black Asian and Minority Ethnic

CAC – Conference Arrangements Committee

CLP – Constituency Labour Party

LGBT – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender

NCC – National Constitutional Committee

NEC – National Executive Committee

NPF - National Policy Forum

MEP – Member of the European Parliament

WG – Working Group convened to discuss Officer roles and definitions

LCF – Local Campaign Forum

REC - Regional Executive Committee

Before the meeting

Democracy is all about the numbers. It's also very much in the eye of the beholder. Two lessons being played out in Parliament right now; and lessons we took away from the 2nd meeting of the South East Regional Executive Committee.

Prior to the meeting a Working Group (WG) of 8 Regional Executive Committee members met in late January. The WG was balanced between Momentum/CLPD and the rest of the REC (with one apology from our group). Some proposals were agreed which were brought to this REC meeting for approval.

These were:

1. A recommendation that the Co-Chair positions of Vince Maple and Lisa Fricker be adopted by the REC & ratified at this meeting.

¹ Regional Executive Committee is the new term to describe Regional Boards.

2. That the following additional Officer roles be adopted: Vice-Chair, TULO, CLP, Equalities and Affiliates (drawn from Councillors, MPs, MEP, Co-op)

After a very constructive meeting a disagreement arose between members of the WG via email: This was over voting method: Two of our number wanted all REC members casting a vote for all positions but three established REC members felt strongly that Chair, Vice-Chair and Equalities should be elected by all, but the other roles should be elected by their 'constituents'. Their argument was that this reflects the selection procedure for NEC/CAC/NCC.

Ultimately it was decided to leave the decision on voting methods to the full REC (discussed below under Agenda item 6).

The Meeting

A minutes silence was held for the victims of the terror attack on the mosques in New Zealand.

Agenda item 1 Welcome, apologies.

Agenda item 2 Report from John Howarth MEP

John Howarth had sent out a written report about his work in the European Parliament. He stated that about 6 to 8 weeks ago the EU Commission began to think '*they just might be crazy enough to do it*' [leave without a deal] and the EU started to plan for such an eventuality.

The Commission are talking to The Labour Party with an eye on a possible future election.

The general attitude of the EU is that Britain will have to have another vote / that our parliament should have been seeking a consensus in Parliament all along. Theresa May's red lines and her tacking to the extreme right of her party has been a huge tactical mistake.

John was asked his opinion on coastal towns and Port Authorities, including the 33 million compensation which went to Eurotunnel. What is happening to Port authorities around the country; are they geared up; what is the intention of UK govt regarding customs?

John's view is that Grayling is either malevolent or incompetent. No real information on preparedness has come through from FOI requests. Roads contingency has seen a little work but the UK seems to have a real problem.

John's view on a 2nd Referendum: This is not a strategy which will help the Labour Party. Our voters are 70/30 Remain/Leave and views have hardened up since the vote in 2016.

David Hide led a vote of thanks to John for all his hard work for the region in the European Parliament, as this may be his last Regional Executive Committee meeting.

There was some speculation on whether John might be standing again in May, if a long delay results in the UK taking part in EU parliamentary elections. John remarked '*Show me someone who says they know what is going to happen and I'll show you a fool.*'

During the short Q&A that followed the MEPs report a discussion took place around the importance of electing Labour councillors. John described this as 'municipal socialism in action as compared to the work undertaken and achieved by an MEP which may take many years to change something for the

better.’ It was a timely reminder for us all ahead of the local elections that only by contesting all and winning as many as possible, both council seats and constituencies MPs will we achieve our common aim of electing a socialist government. Standing on the sidelines shouting for change delivers very little, winning elections is what matters.

(Agenda item 3 Action points from last meeting)

Agenda item 4 Ratification of the recommendation regarding Co-Chairs

Under s13.a of the REC’s Standing Orders, **Gemma Bolton** asked for a secret ballot to spare any members embarrassment and allow them to vote without fear of censure. This was agreed by consensus and the ratification was defeated by 11 votes to 9.

It was then suggested that a Chair be elected but objections were raised by established REC members and the Regional Director, who asserted that a Chair could not be elected as this item was not on the agenda. This seemed a spurious argument as it was clear that if the Co-Chair situation was not ratified, the REC would then, logically, need to move to elect a Chair. It was pointed out that this possibility had been clearly outlined at the WG meeting: that it was possible that the REC could reject the Co-Chair recommendation in preference for re-running the vote for Chair.

It was a technicality which should have been foreseen – there was no guarantee that the REC would accept any of the recommendations of the WG and provision for this eventuality should have been made on the agenda. Citrine’s ‘ABC of Chairmanship’ makes clear that agendas should always be prefaced with a caveat ‘*Agenda to include the following*’ to prevent this type of didactic argument prevailing. A lesson to remember for next time.

Discussion on this matter went on for some time and the argument was made that another candidate might wish to put themselves forward for Chair when receiving notice in the agenda. It was clear that no consensus was going to be reached and, in the end, business was moved and the meeting went on to item 5.

Agenda item 5 Election of Vice-Chair

Ann Black and **Elaine Bolton** stood for the position of Vice-Chair. Elaine was elected by 11 votes to 9.

Agenda item 6 Discussion of the wider proposals from the working group

Officer roles: the recommendations of the WG for the following roles were accepted

- TULO
- CLP Rep
- Affiliates /other (drawn from Councillors/MPs/MEP/affiliates)
- Equalities

The Co-op Party representatives argued persuasively that they be allowed an additional Officer role of their own, as representatives of our sister party and an increasingly important partner as more and more of our candidates are joint Labour and Co-op. This was carried, 17 for, 1 against, 2 abstentions.

Then the importance of representation for young members was put forward by **Gemma Bolton**. This was accepted by the REC and the vote in favour of a Youth Rep was carried unanimously.

Discussion of voting method

On the NEC, the Officer Group is comprised of the chairs of various sub-committees which do not exist on regional structures, so we could not adopt the same format as the NEC in the South East REC.

Many of us felt that the idea of voting in constituencies is invalidated by the fact we've all already been voted in by our 'constituencies' and that once on the REC we should make collective decisions.

Three proposals were put forward for voting:

1. Constituencies nominate from within their ranks and vote for their Officer role, except Chair Vice-Chair and Equalities.
2. Constituencies nominate from their ranks and all REC members can vote on all roles.
3. Anyone from the REC can nominate – the nominee must be from the Constituencies – then all REC members can vote.

Proposal 3 received 11 votes and was carried.

NEC guidance

It was mentioned that we could wait for NEC guidance as to the format for Regional Executive Committees – it was decided this could take some time, so we should continue and adopt any NEC recommendations at our next Regional Conference.

Question of Co-Chairs

There was a consensus that we should not revisit the idea of Co-Chairs if there was a tie in an election, as it had been rejected by the REC. If there is a tie again, we will take a second vote and if that is tied, lots will be drawn, as per 15.c of the Standing Orders.

Agenda Item 7 Election of Officer group

It was made clear that the Officers should not make substantive decisions, which remain the responsibility of the whole REC, but they can make decisions *'in exceptional circumstances, where the final decision is needed within 1-3 working days and where it is impractical to contact the whole REC to get their views on a decision within the 1-3 day period.'*

After all the discussion above, there was no need for elections as the following nominees were unopposed:

- TULO: **Gordon Lean**
- CLP Rep: **David Hide**
- Affiliates: **Naushabah Khan** (Councillor)
- Equalities: **Nada Al-Sanjari**

The Co-op Rep and Youth Rep will be elected at our next meeting.

Agenda Item 8 Local government elections

Amy Fode, Regional Director, talked us through the spreadsheet of the region's local councillor candidate selections.

The Regional Director used to be able to approve candidates who did not have the requisite year's membership but now the NEC needs to approve, which is causing some delay.

If someone is not happy with the LCF or CLP approach to decisions on whether they can stand, the first complaint will be to the CLP, a second complaint would go to the Regional Director and at that point an appeal panel is set up by the Regional Office, which consists of 3 people. One Regional Executive Committee member would sit on this panel, representing the NEC.

Gemma Bolton raised an issue where a CLP had contacted her to say they felt the councillor selection process was not being run properly. After discussion Gemma decided to go back to them with guidance.

Our target, as ever, is for every constituent in South-East England to have the chance to vote for at least one Labour candidate in every ward.

One Councillor felt that the members were less enthusiastic than usual, despite the party having more members. Even some winnable wards were unpopulated by candidates.

Nomination papers are a barrier, requiring ten signatures, in Scotland only two are needed. This excludes some candidates in rural wards with sparse membership.

There are lots of reason that people can't, or don't feel able to stand. **David Hide**, as Chair of his CLP, has made positive changes. He proposed a plan of action for how we can improve the situation next time. An example: talking to members and arranging for members to sign nomination papers can be organised a long way in advance

Some rural constituencies can be hostile environments; standing for election can make a member a target for right-wing harassment and in some wards, candidates face hostility on the doorstep.

Several people expressed the view that our complaints process is not robust enough and the party does not do enough to protect our members. One of our CLP Reps has been on the receiving end of harassment and had to ask for their name to be removed from the REC website. Another has been subject to misogyny and this has affected her family life.

Nada Al-Sanjari and **Naushabah Khan** both outlined the barriers faced by women, particularly muslim women where candidates face entrenched Islamophobia. Nada is organising a vigil to the memory of those killed in New Zealand and several local muslim women have told her they are too scared to attend.

The hostility towards Labour Party members is putting people off from engaging in their CLPs as well as standing in local elections. The party needs to have a robust complaints process where the rules to protect us are implemented. BAME members in particular, have been targeted and we need the party to take us seriously as we feel isolated in battling against these attacks, including attacks from other party members. BAME people the group who feels most threatened with the rise of the far right and that has to be reflected in the way the party handles complaints, in order to acknowledge the many considerable institutional barriers we face, especially when we engage in politics/public life.

Naushabah agreed with this and said we need to be heard, sharing her own experiences as a Muslim woman in politics.

The board was very supportive of ensuring a comprehensive complaints process that protects members.

Michaela Collord suggested using our collective knowledge to assist CLPs with training by organising campaigning workshops and expressed a willingness to work on a plan to address this important issue. Naushabah made the point that it is a bit late to make an impact on women applicants this time but would like to share best practice on encouraging diverse applicants, and she advised planning now for the next local elections.

Agenda Item 9 Parliamentary Elections

Banbury, Basingstoke, Aldershot are all currently selecting. Women Only Shortlists have been used in Basingstoke and Aldershot. Other constituency selections were listed in Amy's report.

All the seats in the current tranche of 7 will be selected by August.

Amy said that she had had a succession of queries from REC members asking permission to select on behalf of CLPs but, unfortunately, she's not in a position to influence the order.

Some problems have arisen with poor behaviour during selections. The REC agreed it is never acceptable to talk about other members to the press. The point was made that sometimes lending a friendly ear to informal complaints can help and could REC members offer support to individuals? Unfortunately, it is not possible as we sometimes assist with appeals.

Agenda Item 10 Police & Crime Commissioner Selections

Applications are currently being accepted for Police and Crime Commissioners to be elected in May 2020. These are difficult to recruit to as members are not often engaged on the issue. In addition the party offers no resources to campaign on this.

Gordon Lean stated that there is union funding for PCCs to assist with Campaign costs in the same way that some funding is available for other elections. Applications go to Union Political officers.

Volunteers to help the NEC with PCC selections: **Lisa Fricker, Gemma Bolton, Lynda McDermott and Gordon Lean.**

Agenda Item 11 Reports

NPF

Carol Hayton: The consultation process has started and CLP Secretaries have received their packs. We must do all we can to engage our members in policy making. The deadline for policy submissions unfortunately always falls fairly swiftly after the local elections, so there is limited time to discuss papers – members are all out there campaigning. **Carol Hayton** and **Joyce Still** stated they are very happy to act as facilitators / assist with events to discuss policy with CLPs. The NPF relies on Constituency parties to support them in their work.

Carol asked that members be encouraged to raise any other policy suggestions that they wish, even if the ideas seem outside the scope of the policy papers, which can seem a little restrictive.

John Healey has produced an excellent campaign pack on Housing and we are on notice that more campaign days will be organised. Amy is to circulate the campaign pack.

Joyce Still: attended the Health and Care Commission 14th Jan and 11th Feb. There was general discussion about social care and the establishment of Labour's National Care Service. Jonathan Ashworth outlined a 10 year strategic plan for the NHS. The NPF worked on the development of Labour policy on NHS, particularly on how it is going to fit within the National Care Service. They discussed how to actually make the NHS and the National Care Service joined up, rather than just a new name for joint working. They also discussed the Brexit-caused shortages of epipens, drugs and nurses, plus health inequalities and the increased failure of outsourced services.

Joyce's paper will be circulated to all REC members, who were very interested.

Karen Constantine: NPF work on Economy, Business and Trade – Wide-ranging discussion took place of Labour plans for the renationalisation of some industries, democratic ownership of industries and reinvestment in public services.

ALC

Vince Maple gave a brief outline of the ALC Conference. For the first time, the majority of the speakers from local govt were women. This was the best Local Govt conference Vince had attended for a long time. There is an event planned for June offering guidance for small Labour groups and how they can work within councils, which will be of interest to many councillors in the South-East. More info will be circulated about this nearer the time.

CLPs

Ann Black outlined her report on behalf of Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire CLPs, which had been circulated in advance.

NEC

Gemma Bolton reminded us that the NEC is still conducting its year-long consultation on standardising regional structures (now named Regional Executive Committees), which are currently all run differently. There may well be implications, not just for us as a REC but also changes to our Regional Conference. These might need to be on the agenda for discussion next time.

MPs

None were present, most sending apologies. **Tan Dhesi MP** had sent a written report, which was welcomed.

Agenda item 12 AOB and dates for future meetings

A question was raised about Labour's position on Unitary Authorities – for a long time it has been thought that Unitary Authorities are better than the confusing system, dominant across the South-East, with overlapping authorities having different responsibilities. But Tories are now pushing for Unitary Authorities in various parts of the region, in order to make savings.

The Labour Party would not force Labour Councils to re-form into Unitary authorities as each area has its unique features, but often they work better.

Provisional dates for next meetings:

- Sat 15th June
- Sat 7th September

Summary / Looking forwards

Once we had got through the first part of the meeting, we seemed to agree on a large amount with the rest of the REC. Generally, most members on the REC share the same aims: for the REC to become more active, to improve member participation and communication across the Region.

Between meetings our Vice-Chair, **Elaine Bolton**, will take the role of Chair and agree the agenda for June's meeting with the interim Regional Director. Elaine will also try and convene a meeting of the Officers selected so far and work with them to flesh out some ideas on Equalities and Rural constituency work we would like to pursue.

If you have any questions or matters to raise with the REC, please contact your CLP Reps via your CLP Secretary (or look for our contact details on the Regional Executive Committee website). As noted above though, the order of parliamentary selections has already been decided.