

# Women's Equality Party Leicester Branch

## Branch Leaders' Report Annual General Meeting 2017

### Formation and Aim of the Women's Equality Party

The Women's Equality Party was formed by Catherine Mayer & Sandi Toksvig after their attendance at the Women of the World festival in March 2015. Their shared idea quickly gained speed, policies were set, a leader was unanimously appointed and the party was launched officially in October 2015. The main aim of the Women's Equality Party is driven by the need for women's equality and to achieve that there needs to be whole systems structural change, finally disposing of patriarchy, to replace it with equality in all areas of life.

During that initial period of time in 2015, as people signed up their membership to this new party, Branches started to form across the UK.

### Leicester Branch



WEP Leicester AGM September 2017

In Leicester, our former Branch Leader, Sue Horner started setting this up in June 2015 and by early September 2015 the first Branch meeting was held. From that, individuals took on Branch Officer roles and meetings were set to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday of the month from 13.00 to 15.00. Although we are called the Leicester Branch we do cover the whole of Leicestershire. During the last 2 years our membership, activity and visibility has continued to grow. In the first year of meeting we identified the need to form smaller working groups to work on specific aspects of the WEP policies and focus on how issues manifest themselves locally. These groups have a small core membership of 3 or 4 people but are open to other members joining on single activities or more long term.

The working groups formed are:

- Education
- Election
- Ethos
- Violence Against Women and Girls

As part of this AGM each group will report back on its aims and activities to-date.

### Activities

Locally & nationally within WEP we have a wealth of energy knowledge & drive. Nationally we had massive successes in our campaigning pre the General Election of 2017, especially for such a young party. We received political acknowledgement and gratitude from the Labour Party, as well as the Greens in several locations where they stepped down to allow WEP through; which is pretty amazing for a party so young. During the hive of activity pre-election WEP nationally undertook 500 hours of campaigning. In Shipley alone WEP knocked on 31,000 doors and members of the Leicester Branch are proud to have been a part of that, as well as campaigning in other parts of the country.

WEP also broke down barriers of how to do politics. In the run up to GE17 WEP hand delivered copies of our manifesto to all the main parties, inviting them to steal the contents and make them their own. WEP is not about taking over leadership of the country, it is about changing the structures and putting equality at the forefront of everything we do as a society.

Locally we have raised our profile by attending and participating in various events, including being visible and engaging with small community groups as well as individuals. On a bigger picture we hosted the Police and Crime Commissioner hustings, enabling a firmer continued discussion with all candidates who were in the running, which has proven beneficial for our relationship with Willy Bach, the current Police and Crime Commissioner. We were one of a handful of Branches to host a public event with Sophie Walker, the WEP national party leader, as the inspirational guest speaker. Two of our members have been appointed into national WEP roles. Collectively we campaigned tirelessly in other locations as we were not in the position to put a candidate forward during the last elections here in Leicester. Locally we engaged women to at least register to vote; additionally we supported separate campaigns of women who were in the running. Leicester is one of the 1<sup>st</sup> Branches to hold an AGM.

### The next 12 months

We are delighted to now have Sujata Barot on board. Sujata stood as an Independent candidate in the recent election and has agreed to stand as a Women's Equality Party candidate in the next round of elections.

The success we have in the next elections will be based on, and reinforced by, the activity we do between now and then. Our membership is now 302 on the last count. We know there are many others across Leicester &

Leicestershire who would wish to join us, but they do not yet know we are here; we intend to address that, along with increasing the diversity of our membership to reflect the Leicestershire population.

As you will hear in our other reports today, we will continue to raise awareness of ourselves as a group as well as our messages. We will continue to welcome new members to our Branch meetings, we will knock doors, we will host events, we will increase our social media presence, we will continue to pressure local government and local authority officials to keep our messages current and progress change. With our increased membership we are better positioned to do that – but there is always room for more. We will continue to increase our funds through local fundraising, all of which will put us in a good place to support Sujata as a WEP candidate in the next elections and we have the time to prepare to get us there.

For a local Branch which is only 2 years old, I think that what we have achieved to date is pretty amazing and just demonstrates our potential trajectory for the next 12 months.

If you have not already joined us, or you have any questions, then please do take this opportunity to ask any questions of any of us, or come along to our next Branch meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> October to find out more, or, just dive in & sign up today – we would love to see you.



Clare Walker and Alison Large (Co-Leaders)

## **Education Sub-group 2016-17**

Members: Charlotte Knight, Helen Everett, Denis Walsh, Alison Large  
(withdrew due to other commitments)

Meetings:

Monday 6<sup>th</sup> February, 2017

Monday 25<sup>th</sup> April, 2017

Monday 17<sup>th</sup> July 2017

Discussions:

We considered the main themes in WEP policy document on 'Equality in Education':

- beyond pink and blue: the earliest conceptions of gender
- equal opportunities in teaching and school leadership
- supporting all young people into adulthood
- sex and relationships education

Decided to focus on sex and relationships education and 3 actions came from that:

1. contact Rita Hindocha, Head of Rushey Mead School that has a programme on this and ask her to attend our monthly branch meeting
  2. contact WEP Educational spokesperson to come and speak at our Branch meeting
  3. to seek out a gender audit tool for schools
- Subsequently Frances Sussex (the national WEP Educational spokesperson) attended the August Branch meeting and gave an overview of progress so far on this policy area. Rita was not able to attend.
  - Frances suggested we work with Faith schools in Leicester and focus on diversity issues.
  - Denis has found a number of gender audit tools online but not specific to UK Schools though they could be adapted

Action:

1. The Educational Sub-Committee will meet in the autumn to devise a plan for the coming year with particular reference to Frances's suggestion
2. We would like to expand membership of the group in the coming year
3. We will do further work on a gender audit tool for schools

## **Election Sub-group 2017**

The sub-group was formed in February 2017, to discuss actions and strategy in advance of the scheduled County Council elections in Leicestershire in May 2017 with a view to meeting monthly when possible.

The sub-group's current members are Jennette Battisby, Clare Bottle, Heather Brunskell-Evans, Helen Everett and Alison Large. Anyone wishing to join the group on either a regular or ad hoc basis would be very welcome – there is a sign-up sheet for anyone interested on our display.

Members of the group take turns chairing and arranging meetings. Dates for the next three meetings are as follows:

30 <sup>th</sup> September	Bishop Street Café, Leicester – 2-3pm
25 <sup>th</sup> November	Via videoconference – 10-11am
9 <sup>th</sup> December	Before December branch meeting in Leicester, 11:30am-12: 30pm

During its first six months in operation, the group have reviewed guidance from Central Office in respect of running candidates and the following initiatives have been put forward to the branch meetings:

- Funding proposals – 30% of all funds raised to be set aside for election campaigning.
- Collaboration with Sarah Hill, Liberal Democrat Councillor in Market Harborough – Sarah was re-elected in May 2017 following on the ground campaign support from sub-group members. The sub-group met with Sarah in June 2017 to discuss ways in which she and WEP can work together to raise the profile and Sarah has also undertaken to look into the basis for the current Liberal Democrat policy on prostitution to see whether there is scope for bringing policy in line with WEP.
- Involved in design, printing and distribution of 1500 leaflets encouraging voter registration during the General Election campaign.

The calling of the snap general election for 8 June meant a refocusing of our efforts using a Whats App group to co-ordinate branch members' involvement. During the election, the sub-group members worked alongside the main branch membership on actively supporting the local campaign initiative of registering voters in areas of the city where it was felt women may not normally be registering to vote. The branch was also in the top 10 of branches that canvassed actively, with members canvassing in both Shipley and Lambeth.

Anyone interested in volunteering or learning more about canvassing can also let us know via the sign up sheet on our display.

Suggested initiatives for the next 12 months:

- Supporting our key note speaker, Sujata Barot, to stand as a candidate for WEP in Leicester City Council elections in 2019 and/or as a General Election candidate when next election called
- Identifying, selecting and training a candidate for the Leicester Mayoral election in 2019
- Identifying, selecting & training other candidates for the Leicester City Council elections
- Identifying, selecting & training election agents

- Suggestions for areas to be covered in local campaigning to raise profile of the party – provision of 30 free hours of childcare – survey of members & follow up

## **Ethos Sub-group**

Members: Julie Fish, Charlotte Knight, Dionne Royston.

The Ethos Sub-group was created after a branch meeting in March 2016, in which it was agreed we needed a value statement that outlined the inclusive nature of Leicester WEP. This led to a number of ideas and suggestions about how the ethos of the branch could be defined and how this would encourage more people to attend and participate in meetings.

The following were consequently discussed and adopted at branch meetings:

### **Local Issues**

It was agreed that local issues and activities needed to be incorporated as far as possible into Leicester WEP objectives. This would be done by local contacts and being alert to local campaigns.

The 7 WEP objectives would have a local feel to them and WE Leicester would concentrate on two/ three that reflected the skills/ knowledge and interest of the Branch. This has been actioned.

The ethos group did suggest that a standard process for how the groups review and prioritise action be put in place; however it was agreed that this may be too cumbersome and was not taken further.

### **Branch Meetings**

To enable meetings to be as inclusive as possible it was agreed that small group discussions, members encouraged to contribute to the agenda, and the possibility of a future AGM to elect key roles should be put in place.

It was important that the diverse mix of viewpoints and experience was valued as well as listened to within the group, as opposed to one viewpoint dominating another. We needed to address the fact that group members would have differing political views, varying or no experience of activism, differing opinions, may identifying or not as a feminist and that the group is open to men. This became the 'Ethos of Leicester WEP' document which now sits on our Face book page for members new and old to view. It was planned that a 'Mission Statement' might be created from this but the current statement seems to suffice. However, it was agreed that the 'Ethos of Leicester WEP' would be reviewed at each AGM and re- adopted.

Small themed group discussions now take place at each meeting and have proved very successful, especially in encouraging all attendees to contribute as well as planning any local action, such as support for candidates in the 2017 General Election.

### **Survey of members**

It was agreed that a survey of current members would be undertaken to get feedback on meetings, skills and knowledge, skills people could contribute if they were unable to attend meetings and barriers to attending meetings. This was undertaken in 2016 using Survey Monkey and although the response was small it confirmed our current ways of managing Branch Activity were along the right track.

### **AGM**

The ethos group is responsible for the planning and delivering of the yearly AGM, of which this, in 2017 is the first.

### **Future work**

The aim of the Ethos Subgroup has been met and may now only have a role in ensuring that the beliefs and values set out are underpinned in all WEP Leicester does.

We propose that future planning for the 2018 AGM rests with the Chair and elected volunteers.

Charlotte/ Julie/ Dionne August 2017

## **Violence Against Women and Girls Sub-Group**

This group first met on the 28<sup>th</sup> April 2016. Current members are Clare Walker, Heather Brunskel-Evans, Zinthiya Ganshpanchan, Gill Taylor and Liz Eglington.

### Our Key Strategy Aims:

- Publicise the impacts of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), issue locally
- Engage through awareness raising
- Lobby locally and nationally

### Activities:

To date, we have continued to work within that guidance and in summary; this is what have done so far.

1. We have made contact with every MP city and County wide to invite them to listen to our cause and ask them what they have/plan to do in regards to the impacts of VAWG issues on their constituents.
2. We lead the What Women Want Campaign locally, capturing the voices of what would tangibly improve women's lives, an initiative first completed 20 years ago.
3. We have attended and participated in various events especially around International Women's Day 2016 & 2017.

4. Two of our VAWG Working Group members were voted in to national roles, at the WEP National Conference last year :
- Heather Brunskell-Evans WEP Spokesperson. Her work in this role has been focused more specifically on the Nordic Model element of WEP's VAWG Policy. This is the most controversial of all WEP's policies, as some women defend 'sex work' as an example of women's choice and some see prostitution as emerging from an overall system of sexual subordination. The issue for WEP is how to convey the rationale for Nordic Model. Heather has had several meetings at central with the Policy Lead and together they met with Bristol University where the plan was to set up a relationship between the Dept of Social Policy and WEP.
- Zinthyia Ganeshpanchan WEP Movement Builder. Her work in this role has been more varied. She has supported Tabitha in the Mayoral elections Liverpool and built connections with a number of national organisations to introduce them to WEP and increase support in elections. She has had meetings with WEP central providing the specific situation to Leicester regarding VAWG. Zinthyia submitted a paper on cultural violence against women, also lead on the background paper; key questions that might arise about VAWG during elections. With support of other members Zinthyia has also continued to lobby the Police Crime Commissioner (Leicester) and Chief Constable, to setup a fully funded unit to combat FGM including prosecution of perpetrators.

Agreed work for the next 12 months:

- Heather and Zinthyia to continue in their roles as Spokesperson and Movement Builder.
- To continue to engage individuals and organisations regarding our key aims re VAWG and WEP itself.
- We hope to host an International Women's Day 2018 event open to all in Leicester and Leicestershire.
- A new area of focus for the year ahead is addressing polygamy and the need to eradicate its practice as well as that of Sharia Law. Again another controversial topic for us to work on, but VAWG related issues always are.

CW/010917

## Minutes: WEP AGM Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> of September (Secular Hall)

Present: Alison Large, Clare Walker, Charlotte Knight, Chris Morley, Helen Everett, Pete Stone, Denis Walsh, Ellen Grierson, Clare Bottle, Jenette Battsby, Dionne Royston, Sujata Barot, Mrs Barot, Bushra Jalil, Suad Abdulkadir, Julie Fish, Helena West, Zinthiya Ganeshpanchan, Sue Skyrme, Freya Large, Rae Webster, Annette Willcox, Ian Fox, Peter Barratt  
Apologies: Sue king, Gill Taylor, Sue Horner, Heather Brunskell-Evans, Sarah Hill

1. Welcome from Alison
2. Previous minutes – none to consider as this is the first AGM
3. Co-Chairs Annual Report by Clare
4. Sub-Groups report: Education (Denis), Election (Jeanette, Clare, Helen), Ethos (Dionne), VAWG (Clare)
5. Treasurer's Report by Alison standing in for Gill

### All copies of reports available from Charlotte or Ellen – to be published online

6. Election of Officers
  - a. Dionne is replacing Alison as Co-Chair of Branch with Clare
  - b. Jenette: Social Media and Coms
  - c. Ellen & Charlotte: Data Managers
  - d. Gill: Treasurer

Marketing role not able to be filled.

7. Keynote Speaker Sujata Barot. Sujata reviewed her experience of being a candidate in the recent General Election and has agreed to stand as WEP candidate if new election. Sujata gave an impassioned plea for involvement in WEP locally. She concluded with an optimistic vision of what we can achieve.



8. Peter Barratt, great grandson of Alice Hawkins, spoke about Alice who was a prominent Suffragette from Leicester. She was very active nationally and will have a statue erected to her in the Market Square, Leicester on the 6<sup>th</sup> of February next year.



9. We broke into discussion in small groups to come up with ideas for the coming year. Post-it notes were shared. These ideas to be considered at the next Branch meeting.



- Small device to be developed for women who experience violence in public or private, that will notify surrounding women
- Carry out a survey around the needs of women regarding the 30hrs free childcare being introduced this year
- Participate in Alice Hawkins march on 6<sup>th</sup> of February, next year
- Leave WEP leaflets in public loos whenever we use them
- Play about Alice Hawkins coming at Curve end of October. Tickers available for Dress Rehearsal
- Develop local campaign about equal pay in public organisations like universities, councils etc.
- Develop local campaign about gender stereotyping in Retail
- Challenge male dominance in public service bodies

10. Raffle raised £65

11. Close of Meeting

**Next Meeting: Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> of October, 1 – 3pm. Meet at Bishops Street Café at 12.00**