

NPF and policy-making review

Introduction – Angela Eagle, Chair of the National Policy Forum

Under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn and Tom Watson, the party is undertaking a review of how we organise ourselves so we are best equipped to earn once more the right to serve the British people in government. A vital part of this process is to look at how we make policy as a party. Developing a winning policy platform means reaching out to as many people as possible. It requires a policy making process which is inclusive, open and democratic. We need to reach out to as many people as possible to engage them in instigating, contributing to and leading the formulation of policy.

Jeremy Corbyn has asked me as Chair of Labour's National Policy Forum (NPF), to lead this work. My intention is to forge a new approach to policy making – one which empowers members and stakeholders, harnesses their skills and abilities and allows everyone to play a full role in deciding the direction we will take together. We need to do more to reach out to people and engage them on the big issues facing us as a country.

It is a fundamental principle of the Labour Party that our members and trade unionists are involved in our policy making. One of the strengths of Jeremy Corbyn's leadership campaign was his message that members should have a far stronger voice in policy making. We need to look at ways to strengthen the role of members and Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) in our policy making process and we will consult with both members and CLPs about how best to do that.

The review will look at what works well with the National Policy Forum and what needs to be improved. This means looking at all aspects of our policy making, from what people expect of policy debate and how we can get more people involved, through to the structure and working of existing policy making institutions. It also means harnessing new technology and new ways of hearing disparate and often seldom heard voices. We will be working hand in hand with the party's digital discovery team led by Tom Watson. This team are exploring how the Labour Party should adapt to the greater digital revolution happening in the UK and beyond. So that by the next general election we are using technology differently in our campaigns, in how we organise our communities, and in how we make policy.

As part of the review I want to look at best practice elsewhere to learn lessons from those who have combined new technology with social networking and community mobilisation to reach out and broaden the debate. I am, for example, particularly interested in exploring what we could learn from some highly innovative ways in which the NHS has managed to harness social media and community mobilisation via its NHS Change Day and NHS Citizen programmes. These have succeeded in finding new ways of tapping into Seldom Heard Groups and grassroots activists to mobilise

thousands of frontline NHS staff, patient groups and supporters to take action, pledge frontline improvements to care and open up new routes to allow the national NHS Board to hear new voices and perspectives. Over the course of 2 years, for example, NHS Change Day mobilised over three quarters of a million online pledges of individual acts of improvement and care – virtually entirely through social media and social networking. NHS Citizen has been highly innovative in mobilising new voices around learning disability, mental health and transgender issues – bringing their perspectives via Citizen Assemblies and its ‘Gather’ initiative to play a distinctive part at the heart of NHS England’s Annual General Meetings. In recent years we have seen how digital platforms and new underlying business processes – when creatively harnessed and carefully designed to integrate with existing policy making structures and processes -can engage the public and influence national policy and debate, bringing in new audiences and fresh voices. These platforms and designs can offer highly cost-effective and strikingly distinctive routes to securing wider and more impactful engagement, debate and networking. They can enrich our insight and deepen the real-world understanding that underpins our policy making. I want us to learn from these lessons.

Together I want to build on the good things we have done already. The establishment of Your Britain, www.yourbritain.org.uk – our dedicated online home for policy making -as well as the successful People’s Policy Forum meetings held during the last Parliament, which saw politicians directly engaging with members of the public on key issues were important innovations. This approach of looking outwards is one I am determined to build on. We must be prepared to be radical, optimistic, fresh and open to new ideas, new perspectives and new ways of engaging as we look to build the policy making process which will equip us for the future. I urge everyone to get involved. This document sets out some key questions for consideration. In the weeks ahead I will be consulting widely with all parts of the party. I hope you will join the conversation.

We have a unique opportunity – by capturing the new energy and new ideas of our thousands of new members we can revitalise the party; by reaching out to the British public, hearing their voices, understanding their perspectives and insights we can rebuild their trust in us and truly earn the right to govern for them and the country once again.

Consultation process

We want to design a process that allows as many people as possible to be involved, including those people and groups who are seldom heard. In taking this work forward Angela Eagle will be leading a process of consultation with stakeholder groups and will be launching a regional tour to talk to members. As part of this, Angela will be looking at how physical get-togethers can be augmented and supported through online, mobile and social consultation, engagement, debate and discussion. She will also investigate how we can balance the desire to hear as wide a variety of voices as

possible with the challenge of channelling and focusing the energy and enthusiasm of such social engagement within a process of policy determination and development. We want to capture the new energy and new ideas in our party, to find the best way to revitalize the policy-making process.

To support the review, we intend to publish this consultation document setting out the background to the review, key questions for consultation and a call for submissions.

Terms of reference

Jeremy Corbyn and Tom Watson were elected on a promise to deliver an honest, straight-talking politics where we address the big issues for our country and the party, and engage people in a serious conversation about the challenges facing us. The striking increase in membership enjoyed by the Party since their joint election – particularly amongst the young and those not traditionally active in Labour Party – or indeed any political Party - activities and structures – shows the appetite and potential attractiveness of new modes of engagement and openness. The Labour Party has committed to opening up policy making to more people, to harness the skills and abilities of our members, and allow everyone to play a full role in deciding the direction we will take together.

This review is to look at how we make policy as a party. We want to hear from our members and supporters what they think works well at present, what doesn't work well, and how best we can reform our systems. This will include looking at how we harness technology, social networking and engagement, how we empower our members and what the best mechanisms are for tackling the big issues facing the country.

We would like to highlight four key areas for discussion:

1. The big picture

There are now over 380,000 members of the Labour Party. And across our membership we have a wealth of different experiences, opinions and ideas. In the run up to the 2020 General Election we must work together to find the best way to deliver a kinder, fairer, more equal and prosperous society. And to do this we need to ensure that we have a policy-making process in place that allows us to develop a strong and cohesive policy platform that we are proud of. We also need to be realistic. There will be necessary constraints on time and resources, as well as other competing priorities -such as the important series of elections this May. The goal of this review is a policy-making process that supports our newly invigorated party in developing an election manifesto that not only can enthuse Labour members and supporters, but also the wider electorate, enabling us to win in 2020 and deliver a desperately needed Labour Government.

Key questions:

- If you could change just one thing to improve the policy-making process – what would it be?
- With limited resources now and in the future a reality, what should be our priorities for the policy-making process?
- How can we build a policy programme that commands the support of the electorate and which will enable us to win in 2020?
- How can we balance everyone having a voice with constraints on time and resources?
- How can we reach out to and harness seldom heard voices and new perspectives?

2. Involving and engaging people more directly

Our members work tirelessly on the ground and know better than anyone what works best in their communities – we need them to take a full and active role. That means instigating, contributing to and leading the formulation of policy, not just being asked to comment. We need to look at how we make sure that all of our members, newly-joined, re-joined and long-standing, are able to play a bigger part in the debate. And we want to involve as broad a range of people as possible in these discussions as part of our commitment to open, inclusive debate.

In recent years, thanks to a series of party reform reviews we've made significant change, but there's always more to do. Our local structures need to be better supported to be part of a network of local groups and organisations discussing policy ideas including trade unions, co-ops, social enterprises and progressive voluntary organisations and businesses. And we need to look at what more can be done to allow what is being said on the ground in these conversations to be equally heard and discussed by the policy commissions and the national policy development process.

Key questions:

- In your experience, what works best to engage people in policy discussions that are constructive and informative?
- How do we best involve our members, supporters and local parties in policy-making?
- How do we ensure the issues raised by members of the public with Labour canvassers and policy discussions at local level are reflected in our policy making process?
- How can we best engage with external organisations, communities businesses and other groups on a local and national level?
- How can we reach out to and involve the wider public in our policy-making?
- How can we improve the interface between national leaders and spokespersons with the grassroots and those not traditionally engaged by party politics?

3. How can we reform our systems?

We want everybody to be able to engage in debate and influence our Party's policy and we should look at how making reforms to our current systems could deliver significant improvements. We need to explore what is the best way for Annual Conference, as the sovereign decision making body of the Party, to debate policy; ensuring debates remain topical and relevant. And what areas should we be focussing on so that the National Policy Forum can continue to be a powerhouse for ideas and policies, meet the policy challenges of the future, and reflect our affiliated organisations' and members' and supporters' concerns. In the last electoral cycle we opened up membership of the Policy Commissions so that each and every NPF member had a place on a policy commission and could bring forward views more directly, what further action could we take here? And are there ways the Joint Policy Committee could be empowered to carry out its role of strategic oversight of policy development more effectively? This is an exciting opportunity to take a detailed look at what works, and what frankly, does not, in our current policy-making structures and processes, to empower everyone to play a more full and active role.

Key questions:

- What constitutes a successful policy-making system for our party and what do we expect from our policy-making process?
- How should Annual Conference, as the sovereign body of the Party, discuss policy and involve stakeholders?
- How can we reform the NPF so that in the coming years it empowers everyone to play a full and active role?
- How do the policy commissions work best, and what can we do to improve them?
- How do we deal with devolution issues? What should the NPF's relationship be with Scottish and Welsh Policy Forums?
- Does the Joint Policy Committee work effectively? What should its role be?
- How can we improve our feedback mechanisms, so that every individual who makes a positive contribution can see how their voice influenced the eventual policy outcome?

4. Harnessing new technology

The development of our party should be a continual process. We always need to be pressing for further, faster modernisation of the party's way of working to continue developing policy.

In the last electoral cycle we developed new innovations such as the Your Britain website where people could make submissions directly to their NPF members and engage in conversations about what other members and supporters had submitted

too. It was a better way to talk about the big issues facing the country and more people were involved in the last policy making cycle than ever before. 340,000 people took part in our policy development process by interacting with 'Your Britain.' sharing their views and helping to shape Labour's policy programme.

Key questions:

- How can we best harness the new opportunities technology brings us to allow people a much greater say?
- How can we use technology to reach out to more people and include those who have newly joined the debate?
- What were your experiences of the Your Britain website, both positive and negative?
- How could technology be better used to support people to discuss policy in their local area?
- What innovations would you like to see?
- In particular, how can we best harness social media, social networking and seldom heard groups through digital, mobile and social channels
- How can we ensure that our social outreach efforts encompass all – young and not so young?

Conclusion

These questions are just the start of the conversation. They have been provided to help in the discussions you have in your area, and you can answer as many or as few as you wish. In the coming months we will come forward with proposals for reform to make our policy-making more inclusive, open, and democratic, based on what you tell us in the submissions made to the review in the coming months. Together we will deliver on a commitment to a new direction: honest, straight talking politics.

Timeline

We aim to publish a paper at the end of June incorporating what has been learned through the consultation process and containing proposals to be taken forward for further consultation. This paper will be discussed at a meeting of the JPC, prior to further dedicated discussions at a full meeting of the NPF this summer, date to be decided.

Outline of consultation process	
September 2015	Review announced at Annual Conference in Brighton
November 2015	NEC agreed to establish a party reform working group with different work strands led by NEC members, including the NPF and policy-making process strand led by Angela Eagle

February 2016	Outline document on parameters for the review published and publicised and consultation period opens
March 2016	First meeting of the new JPC following the JPC elections
February - April 2016	Stakeholder meetings across the country to discuss the review
June/July 2016	JPC meeting to discuss progress of consultation and agree dedicated discussion sessions for NPF reps at Summer NPF meeting
Summer 2016	NPF meeting
Summer 2016	JPC meeting