



**Lead for
Women**

www.lead4women.org.uk

Refounding Labour:

Lead for Women's Submission

About Lead for Women

Lead for Women is a grassroots network of women Labour Party members, who want to ensure women are equally and meaningfully represented at every level of the Labour Party - from branch meetings to the Shadow Cabinet Table. We were set up last Summer, during the leadership election, by a group of women Party activists who were frustrated by the low profile of senior Labour women during the General Election campaign, and who wanted to ensure that the next Leader of the Labour Party would 'lead for women' and would help create a Party in which women lead. We continue to campaign and organise to tear down the barriers that stop women getting and staying involved in Labour politics.

Organising for equality - better Party organisation and a stronger women's organisation

We believe that the Party needs to change the way it organises to make sure that all members get to play their part and put their particular skills into practice. We must also ensure that the Party's commitment to equality is put into practice in a strong, effective and well-resourced women's organisation.

■ **Supporting new members**

A 'buddying' system should be implemented for new members, so that they are pro-actively contacted and encouraged to get involved soon after joining, by another local member. Factors such as age, gender, ethnicity etc should be considered when allocating 'buddies' / mentors.

■ **Valuing members' skills**

Too many people have excellent skills from work, family life or other voluntary or community action that are wasted when they are seen merely as foot soldiers. Local Parties should be putting our values into practice in their local communities. Mechanisms should be set up to ask members what transferable skills they have and what areas of campaigning / community involvement they would like to be involved in, and members encouraged to develop their skills in areas outside leafleting / election organisation.

■ **Making CLP meetings accessible**

Every CLP should be asked to audit how, where and when they hold meetings. Different styles of meetings will work for different CLPs, and we should not dictate changes from the centre, but neither should GCs continue to meet on Thursday evenings in the upstairs of a pub because that's how it has always been. Examples of local parties holding meetings in a different way, e.g. hosting morning family-friendly, all-member meetings in a local café (where they can engage with the local community) should be shared with all CLPs when they are conducting their audit.

■ **Investing in supporting and developing our membership**

Every region and nation should employ a staff member responsible for membership development. Their role would be to run events for new members and to ensure new members are able to get involved, to facilitate local and regional networks for women, BAME members, young members, LGBT members, disabled members etc, and to pilot ways of organising locally that might involve more members (for example, each regional membership development officer could work with 3 or 4 CLPs to pilot new ways of auditing the skills base of the membership and deploying those skills in the community).

■ **Showcasing best practice**

The session at annual conference where awards are given to CLPs and members should be broader, more substantial and given a higher profile. If the Labour Party is to grow and develop we need to learn from the best of what local parties are doing around the country, and we should celebrate good practice in involving members and community campaigning as much as we do contact rates. Local parties could be asked to submit examples of their excellent work in submissions for awards (for example, a local Party that has overhauled its meeting practices and has more members involved as a result

could submit, or a local Party that has developed a new and active women's network, or a local Party that has launched a successful new community project). Videos could be made showcasing the best examples, which could be edited with highlights shown at conference. This would also increase transparency around who is put forward for awards, which would make them more meaningful and encourage healthy competition.

- **Supporting our CLPs on equality and diversity**

Labour as a Party that believes in the importance of equality and diversity; but putting these values into practice consistently is not always easy, especially as we are a volunteer-led movement. Lead for Women proposes that the Party develops a training module on the importance of equality and diversity, and mechanisms for promoting those values in the way we operate and organise locally. The training would cover the arguments for why we as a Party believe in positive action to guarantee equal representation, and, in particular, ideas and best practice for organising locally in ways that reach out to all members and tear down some of the 'invisible barriers' that prevent women getting involved and running for office. This training should be run through the regions, and all CLP officers should be encouraged to attend. Participation in such training should be compulsory for either the CLP Chair or the CLP Secretary on a yearly basis.

- **An open and transparent complaints procedure**

In a voluntary organisation with thousands of members, it is to be expected that sometimes things will go wrong in the way our Party works and is organised. Given the close-knit nature of local Parties, some people may be put off from coming forward with complaints because they 'don't want to be seen to make a fuss'. When things do go wrong, it's important that members know where they can go to seek redress, and that they are confident that complaints will be dealt with according to transparent and agreed procedures. We suggest that an NEC working group is set up, chaired by a woman trade union member of the NEC, to look at renewing the Party's complaints and equal opportunities policies, and ensuring that complaints procedures are open, transparent and widely advertised.

- **Annual Women's Conference**

There should be an Annual Labour Party Women's Conference. A representative from the NEC Equalities Committee should speak at Labour Party Annual Conference to report back on behalf of the women's organisation. It should be considered whether this conference could in some way feed in to the policy making process.

- **Women's Officers on Regional Boards**

Each Regional Board should elect a women's officer, whose role would be to work with the National Women's Officer and CLP Women's Officers in the region.

- **Local Women's Fora**

Women's Fora play a vital part in recruiting and developing female activists. Women who have been deterred or frustrated by stale branch or CLP meetings have found a warm welcome into increased party involvement via their local Women's Forum. Lead for Women believes all constituencies should be encouraged to develop an active Women's Forum, ideally with support from a regional women's officer. We also believe that the constitutional position of Women's Fora in the Party should be clarified and strengthened. At present all Women's Fora can send delegates to CLP meetings but

only Women's Fora in Shire Counties, not those in unitary authorities, can send delegates to their Local Government Committees. This anomaly prevents some women from shaping our message at a local level and should be corrected without delay.

- **Equality packs for new members**

The Party should produce a booklet / pack to be sent to all new members, explaining why we fight for equality and how they can support it. It should include details of why we have Women's, LGBT, BAME and Disabled Members' organisations, and how new members can get involved with the sections appropriate to them.

Selecting candidates - talent, diversity, equality

The Labour Party has led the way in getting women elected to Parliament. We must continue to support positive action for selections, and also ensure that other aspects of our selection processes are as fair and accessible as possible.

■ **All Women Shortlists - transparency and consistency**

We welcome the progress that we have made towards achieving our Party's aim of 50:50 gender parity in the PLP. It is clear that All Women Shortlists have been instrumental in the progress we have made, and we believe that it is only through their continued use that we can ever achieve our goal. We share concern that the way in which All Women Shortlists are applied can sometimes lack transparency, and we want to see an open and clear, published set of criteria and targets that would re-state our Party's commitment to achieving gender parity and help local parties to understand why some seats are allocated AWS while others aren't. We genuinely believe that part of local parties reluctance to volunteer or accept AWS is because they perceive that the process is not always enforced, while the belief that ordinary processes are sidelined to allow 'favoured sons' to go for seats still permeates across the party. We note that the allocation of AWS across the regions has been far from equal, Scotland in particular lagging behind in terms of the number of AWS that were enforced. We think that a renewal of our party's commitment to the use of AWS, with clear allocations for regions rather than targets, along with a published set of criteria would help to open up the process and reinstate faith in their application and use.

■ **Parliamentary Panel and shortlisting**

We are very concerned that the suggested abolition of the parliamentary panel, and other changes being trialled in the seats currently being selected, will lead to a situation in which local Parties only shortlist local candidates, thus missing out on the true breadth of candidates that the party has to offer and reducing diversity. Watching local parties switch to primarily selecting local candidates will have a devastating impact on the number of women getting selected in labour held and target seats and we believe the Party should reconsider these changes in the light of our commitment to equality and diversity.

■ **Skills and competencies for Parliamentary candidates**

We also feel that the party should be more rigorous in its selection of candidates, and we should look to develop a system where the standard required to be a Labour Party Parliamentary Candidate is tested through a series of skills based assessments, rather than primarily through the submission of a CV. This would recognise skills gained from work, family life, volunteering and community campaigning, and would help stop the disproportionate value sometimes attached to number of years spent in Labour Party committees. The Party should consider holding a series of panel assessment centres throughout the year, whereby potential candidates would go through a series of training and then skills-based assessments prior to interview. These training sessions could look at the skills that candidates need to develop in order to be effective, for example leadership, handling the media, public speaking and conflict resolution. After the training and completion of tests, successful candidates would be placed on the panel, while unsuccessful candidates given feedback on how they can improve and could try again at a later date. While we appreciate that the administration of such a system might be burdensome, we strongly feel that the investment of staff time would

be well spent if it meant that the calibre of candidates we were able to field was dramatically improved. Local parties would select from a panel which had genuinely been tried and tested. We think this would increase the diversity of candidates as well as the calibre, because it would be a chance for members from non-traditional backgrounds to demonstrate their skills more fully than a CV can ever allow.

■ **Questions at selection meetings**

It is considered good practice to ask all candidates the same standard questions at job interviews, and this should be the case at selection meetings. It is not acceptable that candidates for the same selection can be asked different questions - for example, at a recent selection where the only candidate to be asked about their views on abortion was also the only female candidate. We recommend that the Party ensures that all candidates for any particular selection are asked the same questions (these could be submitted by local Party members at the beginning of the meeting).

■ **Impact of the Boundary Review**

We are very aware that the Government's decision to review constituency boundaries and reduce the number of parliamentary constituencies by 50 will have a negative impact on the number of women MPs and will damage our commitment to achieve 50:50 parity in the PLP. We want the party to take urgent action to address this, and think the following action would help to mitigate against the consequences of the Boundary Review:

- Appoint a commission to look specifically on the impact that proposed changes will have on gender parity.
- Consider the application of AWS for contested selections where seats have been merged. We appreciate that these selections have normally been based on territorial claim, but we think that in these circumstances gender should be considered a more important factor, given that we are in genuine danger of reversing the progress we have made.
- Consider making significantly more than 50% of winnable seats AWS as a means of mitigating some of the consequences of the boundary changes - particularly in 'safer' seats where MPs are standing down.

50:50 gender balance - from local branches to the Shadow Cabinet

One of the founding principles of the Labour Party is Equality. We must continue to enshrine that in all our structures, and apply that principle consistently.

- **50:50 representation at all levels - proud of our commitment**

We are proud of the Labour Party long history of positive action, from quotas for GC delegations to all women shortlists for parliament. There are two issues with the implementation of our positive action mechanisms. One is our shyness about celebrating them. Quotas and AWS are only a mechanism - they are one part of achieving cultural change that we are committed to. The other is strong leadership and a party leadership in the broadest sense which is proud that Labour leads for women. The Labour Party should never apologise for having structures that ensure equal representation.

- **50:50 representation - consistent application**

Rules on equal representation of women should be standardised across the Party, with 50:50 representation the benchmark. At the moment, a CLP executive has to have gender balance, but a council's Labour Group executive only has to seek to represent the make up of the group as a whole. A branch Labour Party has to leave positions open if there are not women to take up the places, but when we were in government we never had equal representation in the Cabinet. It is time that all Labour Party bodies were subject to comparable gender parity rules: the quota for women's representation should be extended to 50% as standard across Party structures. Furthermore, it should be extended to all Labour Party committees, including the Shadow Cabinet, Regional Boards and Local Authorities and should include ministerial and shadow spokesperson bodies in Scotland and Wales and the GLA. Lists of Labour Candidates for the European Parliament, where our female representation recently regressed, should be zipped woman, man, woman, man, without exception. Only when rules are applied consistently will members accept their fairness and cultural change be achieved. It is not acceptable that there are Labour-held councils without a single female councillor, and others without a single woman in the local government cabinet. Officer time in regional parties must be made available to audit gender balance in local parties & ensure the rules are followed, but also provide support for local parties in recruiting, retaining and developing women members.

- **50:50 representation - a gender balanced leadership team**

Our commitment to 50:50 representation for women should be represented in the top team too, and we believe that there should be a guaranteed place for a woman in Labour's Leadership team. Of the 39 people who have served as leader or deputy of our Party - only two - Margaret Beckett and Harriet Harman - have been women. Without a change in the rules, we may in future be left with an all male leadership team which we believe would be unacceptable for a party that takes gender equality seriously. There are a number of ways that this rule change could be implemented so we would suggest a working party be established in order to report back on how this can best be achieved.

Policy processes that let all members have their say

Our policy-making processes must be open and transparent, and be designed to let all members have their say.

- **Transparency**

We support moves to make the policy-making process more open and transparent. Party bodies that make policy submissions should have them acknowledged and it should be possible to track them as they make their way through the process. If a policy submission does not proceed through the process, the body who submitted it should be informed - policy submissions should never 'disappear' into a process.

- **Making contemporary policy**

The greatest problem with the NPF system is that it is intended to formulate a policy over the long-term, to form a future manifesto, not to give members a chance to have an input into current policy making, which is almost entirely in the hands of elected politicians. Contemporary issues at conference have enabled trade unions to get issues debated, but the way the priority ballot is held makes it hard for CLPs to get a hearing too. Ensuring that both unions and CLPs get to debate contemporary issues at Conference (enforcing the '4+4' rule) would help, but we also believe that the NPF process needs to be opened up more widely to increase participation.

- **Women's voices in policy-making**

Whatever shape a new policy making process takes, Lead for Women believes there must be space for a distinct women's voice within it, both through a revived party women's organisation as set out above, and through working with organisations such as ourselves and the Labour Women's Network.