



NEC Update – Spring 2021

Introduction

The NEC has had three meetings since the start of the year, all on-line. The first was to review the arrangements for Annual Conference and the AGM in the light of current and possible COVID restrictions. The second was to look in more detail at the process for reforms of our disciplinary procedures.

In March, the NEC met with a full agenda, including the report of the Auditor and the Board Report and Accounts 2020.

This update summarises the key issues discussed by the NEC in these meetings. This is an internal Party document i.e. for Co-operative Party members, societies, affiliates and officers, not for publication or external distribution.

Societies and Affiliates NEC Representatives

Following the death of Ian Miller, a by-election took place for his seat on the NEC. Eddie Thorn, nominated by Scotmid, has been elected to join Maria Lee representing the subscribing societies and affiliates.

You can read the Party's tribute to Ian Miller [here](#).

Annual Conference and AGM 2021

In early January, the NEC met to consider the viability of holding Annual Conference in Leeds in October as planned. Annual Conference is a huge financial commitment, both to the Party centrally and to our local parties in delegate fees, travel and accommodation. Unfortunately, January was the latest we were able to take a decision to go ahead without risking large losses if it became necessary to cancel at a later date. In the light of continued uncertainty on government restrictions and regard for the safety of our members and staff, the NEC decided to build on the success of our 2020 conference and remain on-line only for a further year. Local parties and societies have been notified.

The NEC also took the decision to postpone the Society AGM to October.

Board Report and Accounts 2020

The March meeting of the NEC received the audit findings from the Party's external auditor and approved the Board Report and Accounts 2020. This will be presented to the AGM in October.



Disciplinary Process

The NEC set aside a meeting in January to discuss plans to move to an independent disciplinary process, hearing from the Labour Party, members of the UK Parliament Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme and the Jewish Labour Movement on their perspectives on the paths to a successful scheme.

In March, the NEC received a report on progress, including work by the Rules Working Party to clarify the level at which complaints are processed; to codify the scale of disciplinary sanctions and to list stakeholders for consultation at each stage of the review.

The NEC also agreed to reopen nominations for vacancies on the Co-operative Party Disciplinary Committee so that in the period leading to implementation of a new process the CPDC can continue to function with a wide and diverse pool of members.

Parliamentary Report

Preet Kaur Gill MP gave a report to the NEC as Chair of the Co-operative Party Parliamentary Group.

Violence against retail workers

Our campaign on preventing violence, threats and abuse directed towards retail workers has continued in several ways.

Following the drafting of his legislation, Alex Norris wrote to the Prime Minister highlighting the concerns around retail workers safety, flagging the success in Scotland with Daniel Johnson MSPs Bill, and calling for the PM to follow through on his commitment made in response to Alex's PMQ to meet with retail workers.

The Home Affairs Select Committee is undertaking an inquiry into the issue, and around this time we ran content from Jim and Tracy Brabin flagging the issues in stores and asking people to follow safety guidelines, and Preet Kaur Gill helped in directing people with experience of the issue on the shop floor towards the HASC's call for evidence.

We have also done some work on the issue of vaccination priority for retail workers as the Government's vaccine rollout entered the latest stages, and Jim McMahon flagged the numbers of those who work in stores who have died and the increased likelihood over the general population, and called for proper consideration of them in the vaccination rollout priority list.

We further engaged our membership to help push the parliamentary petition for a debate on this issue over the 100,000-signature threshold, and there will now be a debate held in parliament.

Budget

In advance of March's budget, the Parliamentary Group was able to support Labour and Co-operative Shadow Chancellor Anneliese Dodds' comments, and further call for measures to be included that would directly benefit the co-operative movement.

We used Anneliese's comments on a number of issues including her work on the Co-operative Recovery, whilst echoing her calls for more to be done to safeguard access to cash – a call led by Preet in which nearly 2,000 people wrote to their MP through our landing page.



Alex Sobel called for the Chancellor to extend the Social Investment Tax Relief scheme, which has raised millions of pounds since its introduction for social enterprises and co-operatives looking to improve people's lives, but faced being scrapped in the budget. The scheme was extended, and we were pleased to show our support it

On the provision of the Community Ownership Fund, it's important that the Government is aware that funding alone is not sufficient. This fund should come with the proper legislative and regulatory framework that will allow communities to genuinely take control over the decisions and assets in their areas. We'll be pushing for this, such as a real 'right to buy' for communities, rather than the existing 'right to bid' in the Localism Act.

In response to the budget in the House of Commons, Seema Malhotra and Geraint Davies spoke about the need to invest in the co-operative sector, whilst Florence Eshalomi spoke about lack of ambition shown by the Chancellor in failing to give the co-operative sector more support and allowing it to lead in our economic recovery.

Childcare

Another really important campaign the Group has been engaged with is that of childcare and the issues around staff safety and financial security

Florence Eshalomi spoke directly to the Health Secretary and wrote a letter to the Vaccines Minister, setting out the concerns of the sector and directly calling for greater vaccination priority for early years settings. This was followed by Alex Sobel reiterating these concerns in Parliament, where he asked the Minister present for early years staff to be given vaccination priority.

Funeral Services

The Parliamentary Group has supported funeral service workers where concerns about staff safety exist. Preet Kaur Gill wrote to the Minister for Vaccine Deployment, flagging the need to ensure funeral staff like in co-operative funeral services who are often in contact with those who have died of COVID are given appropriate consideration in the vaccine priority list to limit transmission

With help from Christina Rees we've also been active identifying where funeral services workers fall within the vaccine priority list, and calling for them to be considered appropriately towards the top of this.

Similarly Barry Sheerman has submitted questions on guidance for funeral directors more generally, something the Co-operative Group has been keen for clarity on.

Co-operative Governance

In the aftermath of the initial lockdown in March, the Government made amendments to legal requirements for organisational governance, related to such issues as the holding of in-person AGMs which were no longer appropriate.

These changes were made through the Corporate Governance and Insolvency Act, and it was the efforts of Co-operative Party MP and Chair Jim McMahon and others that helped ensure this legislation took co-operatives into consideration, and any changes applied equally to this business form

In light of the subsequent lockdown, Jim has continually raised with the relevant Government Minister the importance of these amendments being extended beyond the current deadline.



Although the Government have not yet been forthcoming in helping out with these requests, the Party and Jim have been active in ensuring co-operatives are considered in any possible changes and have their interests represented where decisions are being made

Environment

Some fantastic work has been done relating to the environment which we've been able to support effectively in a number of ways

Luke Pollard and the frontbench team, and Geraint Davies put down amendments to the Environment Bill around legally enforceable air quality targets, and along with a Co-operation Live! members call on this topic we set up a facility for our members and others to write to their MPs outlining their support for these amendments. In the end around 2000 people took this up and sent emails to the best part of 500 MPs.

Likewise following his amendment to the Environment Bill on bee-killing pesticides we have been really pleased with the take up of people co-signing Luke's letter to the PM calling on him to rethink his lifting of the ban, which over 22,000 people signed. This helped ensure the Government eventually U-turned on overturning the ban, and the pesticides will not be used this year.

Further on the environment, we were able to lay an amendment to the Government's Fisheries Bill that would have required the Government to provide financial support and assistance help new and existing co-operatives in the fishing industry.

Jonny Reynolds also put forward an amendment to the Pension Schemes Bill that would mean all pension schemes have to have a plan to make sure their investments are made in accordance with our commitments and obligations under the Paris Climate Agreement, which would have made a huge contribution to a green recovery

'Cancel the Cuts' to Universal Credit

We were really pleased to be able to support Jonny Reynold's work on 'cancelling the cuts' to Universal Credit. This was an important piece which we were able to tie in some ways into our food justice work and note the impact of cuts to UC on food security for many people.

Financial Services Bill

Stella Creasy tabled an amendment to the Financial Services Bill which would remove impractical and unnecessary legislation from the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act that restricts co-operative and mutual banking.

Although it is largely a historical technicality, Section 67 of the current legislation actually severely restricts this form of banking, and harms competition and choice in the sector.

The amendment would have levelled the playing field for mutual banks but sadly the amendment was voted down by the Government.

Fairtrade and International Development

A commitment to international development and Fairtrade is a key co-operative value

Along with Gareth Thomas, we called for Fairtrade principles to be at the very heart of any new trade deals that are struck, to ensure that small-scale farmers in co-operatives in developing nations are financially supported when it comes to negotiating deals with countries such as Ghana.

As part of our commitment to international development, with Preet Kaur Gill the Parliamentary Group was vocal in on our opposition to the merging of the Department for



International Development into the FCO. On a similar note, along with committee member Kate Osamor we voiced our opposition to the abolition of the International Trade Select Committee – something that was eventually protected.

Alongside Preet Kaur Gill, the Parliamentary Group has also reaffirmed the Party's support of and commitment to the 0.7% foreign aid spending target, and opposition to the cut. Preet raised this in the Commons, and explained how cutting aid and turning our back on the world's most vulnerable during a global crisis is against our co-operative values.

Grief and Bereavement

Grief and bereavement have been the sad and often hidden reality for so many people during this difficult year, and both the Party and wider co-operative movement are keen to do more to support those experiencing it.

Earlier in the year we published our call for a 'roadmap to dignity in bereavement' that would give those experiencing grief greater support, and called for the widening of eligibility for financial support such as the Funeral Expenses Payment to ensure fewer people are forced into financial insecurity to afford an unexpected funeral.

We marked National Grief Awareness Week in December, and it's vital we do more to address this hidden epidemic that people are currently going through in incredibly difficult and unusual circumstances.

Outside of the Parliamentary Group, we have worked with Rosena Allin-Khan, the Shadow Secretary for Mental Health, and Carolyn Harris to draw more attention to this issue and look at more we can do.

Food Justice

As a value at the very core of the co-operative movement, the Party has been active in tackling the issue of hunger, particularly around the provision of free school meals.

In Westminster, Co-op parliamentarians have been vocal in drawing attention to this issue, and called for continued provision of free school meals over the October and half term and over Christmas.

Ahead of the Government climbdown on this, Gareth Thomas questioned the Prime Minister directly during PMQs and pushed him to ensure free school meals were provided over the Christmas holidays.

We've also launched our Food Justice Finder online tool, which gives people the opportunity to encourage their local authority to address hunger, and was launched by Steve Reed, the Shadow Secretary for Communities and Local Government.

General Secretary's Report

The Party's strategy is set by the NEC and the General Secretary every three years, with the current Strategic Plan running from 2019-21. This will be reviewed by the NEC in July, and a new plan put in place from 2022.

Within the Strategic Plan, the General Secretary sets and manages the Party's programme for the year ahead. This is presented to the NEC each year, together with the budget.

The General Secretary reports to each meeting of the NEC on the work of the Party towards our strategic objectives. These are the some of the key items from the report to the March meeting.



Strategic Objective: Enable the Delivery of Co-operative Solutions Locally, Regionally and Nationally

I have been really pleased to see the 'Co-operative Recovery Partnership' with Anneliese Dodds make such a positive start to its work. Co-operative growth content was also included in the Labour Party's pre and post budget work. We have worked hard to get real influence into manifestos across the country ahead of 2021 and generated new shorter campaigning pieces in around co-operative movement issues such as financial inclusion and LV's demutualisation.

'Co-operative Recovery Partnership' – three private roundtable events with the co-operative movement and the Shadow Chancellor on the background work happening towards a publication of a report post local elections.

We have updated the '12 ideas for Local Government' for use in local groups manifestos. This work has included resource packs, events and briefings - see here for details: [12 Ideas for Local Government Manifestos – Co-operative Party](#)

We launched an online campaign tool www.foodjusticefinder.com, which has been used thousands of times to find out what measures local authorities have taken to support food justice. One call in our campaign is for Councils to appoint a local food champion. I'm pleased to say that since the tool's launch we have doubled the number of food justice champions around the country. This work was backed by commissioned polling attracted national coverage such as in the Mirror <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/councils-urged-appoint-food-champions-22951771>

After supporting the campaigning for a couple of years the Party was part of a good win in the Westminster budget 2021 in the continuation of SITR, an important tax relief for social investing. Through Alex Sobel MP we have supported the work of the All-Party Group on Social Enterprise in this campaign.

The Party has worked to support the All-Party Group on Mutuals in their inquiry on the demutualisation of LV. This has included gathering evidence from members of the Party who are members of LV to support the evidence base for the inquiry as it develops.

We have published the Scottish and Welsh Co-operative Parties' manifestos ahead of elections and had positive engagement with both Labour Parties ahead of their manifestos. We have also supported the development and delivery of the London' Co-op Party's manifesto ahead of the Mayoral and GLA elections.

Co-operative Parliamentarians from all three Parliamentary Groups have championed a wide range of issues through debate and legislation including, but not limited to, new co-operative banks (Westminster), new mutual transport services (Wales), community energy (Scotland).

Preet Gill MP, alongside Anneliese Dodds MP, have worked to raise the profile of the need for many financially excluded people to have access to cash.

Strategic Objective: Have an engaged, diverse and growing individual and organisational membership that values the Party and its work

This is an area of real growth and strength for the Party in recent times. We finished 2020 with the largest individual membership yearly increase in our history and started 2021 at a similar pace.

We have also developed our work to attract new co-operatives to membership. We have platformed over 100 different co-operatives through our recent events and have started dedicated non-member co-operative engagement sessions.



I have been particularly pleased with the focus and efforts in supporting our member-led networks. It was great to run a successful follow up election for networks' committee members and to support the activity that has started to happen within them.

The Party was part of a great win for the campaigning of the co-operative movement as Daniel Johnson's Private Members Bill on protection for retail workers passed through the Scottish Parliament and became law. Our Parliamentarians have continued the campaign for a similar law in Westminster, most recently writing the Prime Minister calling for him to honour an earlier won promise to meet with victims of retail violence.

The Westminster Parliamentary Group held a meeting with representatives of all member retail societies – the first time this meeting has been held.

Jim McMahon MP led work to call for the prioritisation of retail and funeral works in relation to the vaccine roll out.

With member retail societies having a focus on mental health, the Party has supplemented this with national zoom events with Dr Rosena Allin-Khan MP and a range of other organisations.

We produced and delivered the latest copy of the Pioneer Magazine.

Following internal Party elections all member-led networks have full steering committees, apart from one place on Youth Committee. This will mean we are able to start to convene the Equalities Advisory Committee.

Whilst our retention levels of new members remain good, I was pleased that through this reporting period the Party also recognised members of long standing. Members who have been a member of the Party for 25+ years have received written thanks and commemorative badges.

In addition to the non-member co-op session which has taken place we have plans for two further sessions just after Easter looking at specific aspects of the co-operative sector.

The Party has also launched the 2021 member led policy process, looking specifically at Social Care and High Streets. More detail can be found here: [Policy Process 2021 – Co-operative Party](#).

Strategic Objective: Inspire and educate our audiences about the achievements and potential of the co-operative movement.

Our events and conferences agenda has been busier than ever. Since the start of the year we have delivered six regional conference (with additional numbers of break out events). These events have attracted good numbers of members and supporters and have profiled well over 150 speakers and organisations (58% women and 15% BAME). In that period we have delivered over fifteen national zoom events with good attendance numbers and great speakers and topics.

1,300 people viewed our online 'Local Action, Local Leadership' Local Government Conference. It was a strong programme, with contributions from the Shadow Chancellor, Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, Chair of the LGA Labour Group, Greater Manchester Metro Mayor and the Shadow Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government. The conference garnered a range of media hits with BBC, LBC, The Telegraph, the I, independent, MSN/mail, guardian.

Over 15,000 new people have recently joined our supporter list – the largest single contributing factor to this was the work with Luke Pollard MP on bee killing pesticides.



22,000 people joined our call with Luke to write to the Prime Minister to call for a reversal of plans to use Bee killing pesticides. This was a great win as the Department withdraw these plans.

We have worked with Co-operative Societies to bring greater awareness and support around the country for the use of healthy start vouchers and lead a call to every council leader in the UK.

We have delivered a number of shorter campaigns focussed pieces of work which engaged a large number of members, supporters and elected representatives this work has included on air pollution where we have had over 1,500 separate letters of support for particular amendment to the Environment Bill were sent from members and supporters to elected representatives.

Fairtrade Fortnight was well covered by the Party with content from both the Scottish and Welsh Parliaments. This was supplemented with blogs and videos from officers and elected representatives. We also hosted a national zoom event with the Fairtrade Foundation and Greenpeace.

The Party has continued our food justice work (outside the food justice finder) and we have had supportive content from Rt Hon Gordon Brown for our work in promoting a 'new right to food'. Again this work was covered in the Mirror here: [Right to Food should be enshrined in law to stop families going hungry - poll - Mirror Online](#)

Strategic Objective: Ensure the Party is organisationally and financially sustainable

Through the period of that this report covers the Party has worked hard to maintain and develop positive working relationships with our member societies – the feedback both informal and formal has been very positive. We have held very positive subscribing society meetings and a recent joint subscribing society/Westminster Parliamentary Group meeting really underscored the joint agenda we are currently working to. We have been able to point to real wins in campaign areas of importance to the movement such the support we have given to Daniel Johnson MSP in his new law for the protection of retail workers. We have continued to increase our membership income through the period of time and worked hard to support the activity and AGMs of local Parties and Party Councils.

We have increased the Party's income through the strongest member recruitment year the Party has ever enjoyed. This has taken over 12,000 individual members for the first time.

The new regional organisers have already played a fantastic role in developing capacity and local activity right across the country. They have worked to deliver a new activist development materials and sessions.

Planned work developed to create positive change for Party activity following the lifting of lockdown restrictions. This will involve member surveys, targeted events at member who have attended national online events, officers and member led networks in particular.

Strategic Objective: Support the election of co-operators at all levels of government

The Party reached a breakthrough achievement in 2021, with upwards of 80% of the population with a co-operative candidate to vote in May. The work which has gone into the training, campaigning and digital tools and support has been great and, in many cases, new. Co-operative candidates will contest a wide range of different elections in May including



parish, town, local authority, metro mayor, Police and Crime Commissioners, Greater London Authority, Scottish and Welsh Parliaments.

The Party in Scotland conducted a members' ballot for our nomination for the new Scottish Labour Leader. The two candidates are both standing as Labour and Co-operative at the next election and provided statements on their co-operative policy priorities. Following the result of the ballot which Anas Sarwar won we have been supporting his team ahead of the coming elections.

The Party has developed 5 local election themes - Food Justice; Local economy (high streets, town centres, etc.); Community ownership; Fair tax and Fighting injustice (retail violence, modern slavery, etc). These themes will form the basis of our election communications and feature on the new Lab/Co-op election materials.

The new Candidate development programme has been completed. The programme has featured external and internally provided training on a wide range of skills including on digital training, candidate selections and campaigning with postal votes. We have moved through over 200 people through the training since its inception.

The Party has delivered specific training on with our equality networks to support their members to stand for election in the future. This training has included each network apart from the LGBTQ+ network, with 170 attendees.

We have maintained regular 'Coffee mornings for candidates' to give them more informal support and networking through to the short campaign.

We also have candidate hubs for each set of candidates and a range of digital campaign assets, and have posted candidate packs with joint Lab/Co-op materials and certificates and a range of campaign materials covering fair tax, votes 16, food justice and postal voting.

We also agreed with the Labour Party joint standard text postal vote forms and direct mails. These materials feature information about the Co-operative Party and our campaigns. Thus far several thousand of these materials have been bought through the Labour Party and we hope for more in the coming weeks.

Equalities

Training

We understand that members of our diversity networks may face additional barriers to seeking selection and we therefore we have held training events with four networks (with the final one planned) to ensure that members feel informed and supported should they wish to seek selection. Each session has been well attended and all of the feedback has been positive. For these events 9 of the 11 speakers were women, and 8 were BAME.

We have also been working to procure and devise appropriate training for staff, representatives, officers and members. We have now sourced four online training sessions that will strength the work we do, including Unconscious Bias, Equality and Diversity, Sexual Harassment and GDPR. Others will follow. Separately, we are procuring Antisemitism training that will be on-line and interactive.

Events

We have planned two party wide events in conjunction with members of our network committees. In February we celebrated LGBTQ History Month with an event that covered LGBTQ+ housing needs and the co-operative model, and in March we are celebrated International Women's Day and International Transgender Day of Visibility with online



events. We have plans to mark other occasions with our networks such as Pride and Black History Month.

Our weekly Zoom events for members have been closed captioned, recorded for those who cannot watch live and – in line with our practice of several years - without any all-male panels.

Membership and Processes

Equalities data is now asked as a standard for all joining and renewing members. The equalities survey has also been sent to members on a number of occasions and we are seeing an increase in our equalities data, which enables us to target our equalities work. We have been able to capture more data than ever before, and this has highlighted changes in our membership demographics.

In the past three months, of our new members: 42.1% have been women, 19.2% have identified as disabled, 13.6% are young members, 10.9% are BAME and 7.6% identified as LGBTQ+. A further breakdown on our membership equalities data can be found the recruitment and membership section.

We produce briefing notes for staff and party officers to ensure they are up to date with any equalities changes, for example in March I produced a briefing note to outline our commitment to gender balanced events. This briefing also clarified the policy around gender balanced roles and can be found [here](#).

The Equalities Officer has attended all of the national and regional conferences to discuss her role and the wider equalities work we are doing as a party, as well as meeting with local Branches, Party Councils and Labour Party colleagues.

She is undertaking an audit into our current structures, practices and policies surrounding equalities. This covers staffing, political representation, member activity, policy and campaigns. The purpose of this to get a sense of where we currently are as a Party, any changes we need to make in the short term, and to develop a strategy for longer term development and improvement. Areas of analysis include, but are not limited to: Race, Disability, Maternity & Caring Responsibilities, Sexual Orientation, Age and Gender. This is a means to support and underpin all of our equalities work and is intended to be an ongoing live document that can drive change, and be refreshed as the work develops.

Networks

The Party currently has five active equalities networks. Each network has regular meetings, and the Equalities Officer has met with each committee to discuss their plans for the coming year. As of March 2021 all networks have a full committee, apart from the youth network, and all are gender balanced.

Each network will have the opportunity to hold events with their members as part of the policy process, alongside Anna Birley our Policy Officer. We want to ensure that each network is informed, able to provide feedback and can engage within the process in an accessible way.

Now that we have concluded the network elections, we will convene the Equalities Advisory Committee Representatives from each network to discuss next steps.



Recruitment and Retention

Total membership after arrears at 28 February was 11,743 (2020: 10,721). This reflects strong recruitment, low arrears and resignations, and better retention. Most members who lapse will do so in Q1, which results in a temporary drop in overall membership in this period.

Total recruitment in January and February was 397 (2020: 240). Our recruitment strategy has delivered strong growth, setting a new record in February with more new members than all of January-March 2020. This has continued into March.

Our supporter list has increased by almost 40% over the past year. Converting supporters to members is our main recruitment source – this growth has been driven by strong campaign and policy output, and social media advertising.

Recruitment has been well spread across the UK in 2021, and has been particularly strong in a number of regions, with the North West, North East, East and East Midlands all seeing recruitment above the national average.

Questions on how members identify are now part of our renewal, join and candidates' registration forms. This is giving us accurate equalities data on new members, and helping build the data on existing members. 42% of new members are female, while 14% are aged 30 or under – both up significantly compared to 2020. We also know that 11% of new members identify as BAME, 19% have a disability and 8% identify as LGBTQ+ - each of these are much higher than the profile of our current membership.

Contacting the NEC

[See here for details of the NEC](#). You can contact the [NEC](#) at nec@party.coop or by emailing Karen Wilkie, Board Secretary at k.wilkie@party.coop.