

Central Suffolk and North Ipswich Labour Party AGM 2021

Secretary's Report

2020-21: a year of uncertainty, confusion, misery and disillusionment - and that's just the Labour Party politics!

As Secretary, my focus has been on using online polling to make sure members views were relayed to the Leadership, the Parliamentary Party and the National Executive in a timely way.

More than that, I believe online polling is one of the best ways of making sure the factionalism that has undermined the Party for decades is kept at bay. Factions left or right can only dominate when members are marginalised and meetings poorly attended. That allows small, well-organised groups to secure positions of control, pass resolutions and approve actions without having to persuade a large number of members to support them.

In our constituency we have broken new ground with online polling:

- We have held polls to ensure you have a say who is nominated or selected for positions within the party (e.g. nominees for election to the National Executive; candidate for Suffolk Police and Crime Commissioner).
- We have consulted you in near 'real-time' so that our delegate to National Conference can get your views on key resolutions as they emerge day by day at conference.

Participation in our polls is typically between 100 and 145 members. That's more than 5 times the number of people who typically make it to an actual meeting (be it physical or via 'Zoom').

Here are some of the issues that featured in online polls:

- Should Labour call for income protection for those 'instructed to self-isolate'?
- Would you support a Universal Basic Income?
- How should Labour MPs vote on Johnson's Brexit Deal?
- Should Labour sanction the use of neonicotinoids in agriculture?
- Should Labour support Proportional Representation?

Asked about Labour's priorities for a 'post-covid' world you said: "*tackling and mitigating climate change, reducing inequality, and increasing national and global social justice must be the top priorities*" and that "*Labour should promote the transformational investment policies of its recent manifesto, and adopt the slogan 'No Going Back!'*"

I hope you continue to support and engage with polling as a way to improve participation and democracy in our Party, both locally and nationally.

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Local Campaigning

In 2020, elections were cancelled and carried over to this year (May 6th).

We struggled to get candidates to stand for election, even as ‘paper candidates’. In part that was due to covid and in part people felt anxious about defending on the doorstep aspects of the record of the Parliamentary Party in the last year. In the end, enough candidates were found, including from other CLPs.

Campaigning was constrained by law, and many did not feel comfortable being publically active without having been vaccinated. There was also some anxiety about whether people would welcome unsolicited leaflets put through their doors.

We should thank those who did stand, and in particular thank those who lost their places on councils.

It is difficult to analyse the results as post-Brexit voting patterns are still hard to disentangle. Overall, there was a swing to the Conservatives. In Suffolk there was a significant increase in support for the Green Party, which has displaced Labour as the largest opposition party on Suffolk County Council. The distribution of seats compared to share of the vote highlights the issues about a first-past-the-post electoral system. (Conservatives won 55 seats with 125,000 votes; Labour won 5 seats with 56,000 votes.) In our recent poll, members voted to support PR by a majority of 101. Maybe a CSNI CLP priority for the coming year should be working for Labour to support Proportional Representation?

Anthony Meehan
Secretary, CSNI CLP
May 2021