

Annual review 2017-18

1. Foreword

This year we have had some significant achievements and steps forward, but it is crucial that we build greater campaigning traction coming into the year ahead. We would like to begin by thanking the outgoing members of the management committee who are not restanding; in particular our co-chair Bev Craig, our former secretary Rose Grayston, Paul Thompson our Scottish rep, Welsh rep David Hamblin who is no longer based in Wales(!), and of course our Treasurer, Alex Sobel who was elected as Labour MP for Leeds Northwest last June

We are proud to be a grassroots organisation, but with this comes big organising challenges which have been significant this year, and which we have had to tackle without significant funding or a staff presence.

Despite this we have campaigned around the country for a number of our members standing in local elections, successfully backed several other Open Labour members to become parliamentary candidates, supported Ann Black's NEC campaign, run packed out party conference fringe and The World Transformed events, built a new website and permanent membership system from scratch, and made proposals to the Labour Party, setting out views about how we can make Labour a more democratic, pluralistic and open party.

2. New MP intake update

Alongside party members across the country, Open Labour worked hard campaigning in the 2017 General Election. Open Labour members and supporters were very well represented amongst our Parliamentary Candidates.

Four Open Labour Members at the time of the election were elected – Open Labour Treasurer Alex Sobel in Leeds North West; Emma Hardy in Hull West and Hessle; Rosie Duffield with a spectacular win in Canterbury and Marsha De Cordova in Battersea.

Many of the new intake have spoken or attended Open Labour events or been interviewed on the website or have approached Open Labour about being involved in the future. These include Jo Platt, Anna McMorris, Lloyd Russell-Moyle, Matt Rodda, Paul Williams, Anneliese Dodds, Preet Gill, Tonia Antoniazzi and half the Scottish PLP with Martin Whitfield, Paul Sweeney and Ged Killen.

This is in addition to a number of existing MPs who have worked with Open Labour, most recently Catherine West, who has co-authored Open Labour's first policy publication. There is reasonable overlap between our supportive MPs and those who are members of the Tribune group in Parliament, and also some who are also members of Momentum. We have a close working relationship with Tribune Group MPs and we will continue to work with them in the future

3. PPC selections

Open Labour committee decided to work with Labour Party members who shared our values and ethos and were seeking selection to Parliament in the seats the party had identified as marginal and were undertaking early selection.

The following people were selected for key seats with Open Labour's endorsement and support:

- Plymouth Moor View – Charlotte Holloway
- Gloucester – Fran Boait
- Calder Valley – Joshua Fenton-Glynn
- North East Derbyshire – Chris Peace
- Milton Keynes North - Charlynn Pullen

Open Labour also endorsed the following candidates but were unfortunately not selected:

- Norwich North – Jo Rust
- Cities of London and Westminster – Chris Clark

There are still a small number of key seat selections and Open Labour is open to further approaches for support in these selections.

4. Local campaigning

Open Labour ran seven campaign days this year, in support of some of our members standing for election to council. Campaign days were held in Southampton, London, Birmingham and Greater Manchester – all in marginal wards.

In London, we supported Sam Pallis in Hackney and James McAsh in Southwark, both of who were running in longtime Lib-Dem wards, and won! In Greater Manchester, we ran campaign days for Laura Wright in Manchester, David Meller in Stockport and Stephane Savery in Trafford. Although Labour did very well in Greater Manchester overall, only David won his seat this time. In Birmingham, we helped Alex Aitken win his ultra-marginal Kings Norton North ward, a ward many didn't expect Labour to win. Finally, we supported Lisa Mitchell in Southampton, where she too won a marginal ward from the Lib-Dems.

Our local campaigning focus for the coming year will be to run regular campaign sessions to support our fantastic Open Labour PPCs and MPs up and down the country.

5. Anti-Semitism

Open Labour has played an important role this year in combatting anti-Semitism. We supported the JLM rule change at Party Conference, and have members involved in delivering JLM training.

Alex Sobel has joined the All Party Parliamentary Group against anti-Semitism and delivered a moving speech on Holocaust Memorial Day, and dealt with the sadly inevitable barrage of anti-Semitic abuse that followed on social media.

Open Labour also publicly stated that Ken Livingstone should be expelled and we welcome his departure from the Party.

We are also involved in discussions with Hope not Hate and Momentum to coordinate a left wing response to the anti-Semitism problem in the Party.

6. Conferences and events

Our party conference event was well attended and featured Owen Jones, General Secretary of the GMB Tim Roache, MPs Dawn Butler, Jo Platt and Emma Hardie, and Tom Copley AM. We also had a thoughtful fringe event hosted at The World Transformed where we were joined by Florence Sutcliffe-Brathwaite from our friends at Renewal, Lloyd Russell Moyle, young trade unionist Jawad Khan and Dr Matthew Sowemimo of Compass.

We also ran a curry night fundraiser with Clive Lewis speaking, and a big event in Manchester earlier in the year featuring a barnstorming speech from Angela Rayner. This year we have plans for a roadshow about the left and Europe (with thanks to those who have generously donated), but we also need to hear from members who would like to run events in their area – we will do whatever we can to make it happen.

As a final point, we are also proposing a policy at National Conference to help you build local groups – if you have had an event in your area, let's turn it into something long standing.

7. Media and editorial

i) New website

The launch of a new web-platform was a significant project that pulled together the digital infrastructure needed to support Open Labour's political objectives including secure payments processing, a membership and renewals system, custom webforms and integration with an email marketing service.

The new web-platform is also more secure, faster to load and more flexible than before. We moved our servers to a cloud hosting service, installed an SSL certificate and purchased additional firewall protection to shield against attacks, spam comments and suspicious login attempts.

Developing the new web platform was also an opportunity to create a more coherent visual identity for Open Labour's digital communications. The styling and layout for the blog and events section has been greatly improved and optimised for viewing on mobile and tablet devices.

There remain several features built into the web-platform that have yet to be used such as the ability to run petitions, conduct surveys, and publish podcasts.

ii) Editorial

Despite some period where we were unable to provide much content while we updated the website, Open Labour has had a busy year editorially.

We have run pieces by a number of committee members including Alex Sobel MP, Tom Miller and Emma Burnell. We have also run pieces by others on a range of topics including Carillion, Universal Basic Income, Industrial Strategy, Wind Power and more.

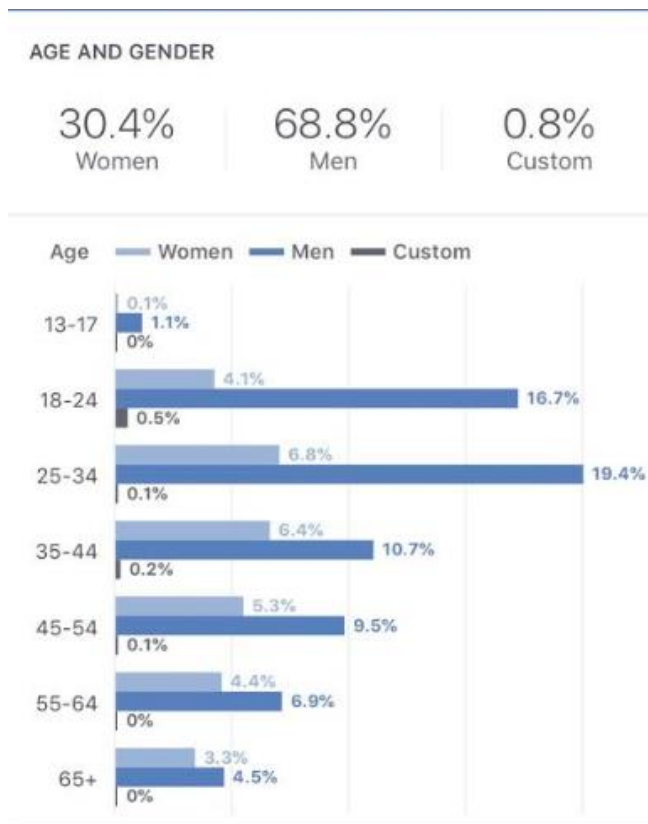
We also ran a series of interviews with newly elected MPs who are members of or sympathetic to the values of Open Labour including Jo Platt, Rosie Duffield, Dr Paul Williams and Martin Whitfield.

iii) Social media

Open Labour’s social media presence complements the website and offers opportunities for members and supports to engage with our editorials and articles, and discuss current affairs in an open and comradely atmosphere.

As at the end of May 2018, there were 1884 members of the Open Labour Facebook group – of whom approximately 1400 are active in the group.

Figure 1: Age and gender of Open Labour Facebook Group members



On average there are 80-100 posts per month in the group, with 800-900 comments and 1600-1700 interactions (such as ‘likes’)

As at the end of May 2018, 5198 follow the Open Labour Twitter account, where we are able to keep members up to date in a timely fashion by posting articles, news on endorsements, election results and policy, events and issues.

This year, we introduced a ‘three strikes’ rule on the Facebook forum – those who are warned three times by an admin are removed from the group. Fortunately, this is rarely something that occurs as the vast majority of contributors interact in a courteous and respectful manner.

8. Democracy review

Open Labour made submissions to part one and part two of the Labour Party Democracy Review. The part one response was prepared by the Management Committee, with the part two response prepared following extensive consultation with the Open Labour membership. We have planned a members' consultation in advance of our submission to part 3 later in the summer, so please keep an eye on your emails.

You can find our submissions at:

<https://openlabour.org/labour-party-democracy-review-open-labour-submission/>

<https://openlabour.org/labour-party-democracy-review-open-labour-submission-part-2/>

9. Looking ahead

Over the summer Ann Black will face the challenge of succeeding against two established factional machines as a left independent candidate for the NEC. She will need the help of our members to get the message out and make her case, as will NPF candidates. In addition we have published a procedure which makes clear how we will decide how to support candidates in internal elections. We would be happy to back NEC candidates who want our support and are broadly in line with us, and in addition we are keen to make a push into organising in the NPF.

The challenges of left anti-Semitism and misogyny in particular have been just one symptom of where the party has fallen short in protecting and empowering its members. We have supported a tough stance on these issues in contrast to other parts of the left, so the need for our perspective is clear.

Likewise, as the challenge of Brexit looms large, there is a huge gap for a left politics based around building industrial exports and human freedom rather than the 'Keynes in one country' model of left economics. The same gap in Labour's politics is representing itself in our internal democracy, where debating the key issue in the country democratically via party conference has fallen behind the stifling priority of loyalty politics, replicating some of the worst aspects of the Blair years.

Instead of the politics of lead and follow, we argue for a left which is diverse and actively encourages democratic debate – so whatever you think about Europe as a policy issue, the need for us when it comes to the Labour Party is clearer than ever. Now that we have defined our politics and set up our basic infrastructure, the challenge over the year ahead will be to shift much more towards building our profile, organising and recruiting. If we don't, these things won't actually matter.

In Solidarity,

Open Labour National Committee 17-18

Tom Miller and Bev Craig (co-chairs), Laura Pascal (secretary), Tom Williams (membership) Rachael Ward, Phil Freeman, Lynn Morris (campaigns and social media), Jade Azim and Emma Burnell (editorial), Paul Thompson (Scotland), David Hamblin (Wales), Alex Sobel (treasurer).