

Labour

Penrith & The Border

Chair & Secretary's Report, June 2019

A Troublesome Year for Politics

The Penrith & The Border Constituency Labour Party (CLP) has continued to thrive despite the fact that this has been an absolutely terrible year in British politics and beyond. Theresa May redefined the art of 'negotiation' as stubborn intransigence, Chris Grayling extended the meaning of incompetence, Donald Trump limboed still lower under the bar of acceptable standards of honesty and morality, the Ukraine electorate made an entertaining satire a perverse reality by electing comedian Volodymyr Zelensky as their President, and the rise of the far right reminded us that complacency is not an option.

Conversely, Jeremy Corbyn remained dignified and unruffled despite enduring the most lavishly funded smear campaign in modern history, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez reminded us that not all US politicians are bigoted monsters whilst Jacinda Ardern got it exactly right in dealing with the aftermath of a painful and brutal atrocity. Perhaps the most influential political act in the world came from the inspirational school girl Greta Thunberg whose *skolstrejk för klimatet* (school strike for climate) sparked environment protests in over 700 countries. So it wasn't all bad!



Our Little Local Triumphs

Despite the widespread disillusionment in politics, the membership of the Penrith & The Border Labour Party has remained relatively stable. We have not seen this 'mass exodus' from the party that the press would have us believe.



We now have established branches in Eden & Penrith, Wigton, Brampton & Area, Alston Moor and Upper Eden: more than ever before.

In 2015, the Labour party had only 2 candidates contesting seats in the Eden District elections: this year we had 12 candidates. Congratulations to Lissie Sharp and Michael Hanley who both won seats in Alston. We also came closer than ever before in Penrith West where we lost by only 5 votes after a recount. All of the candidates worked really hard and deserve our thanks and appreciation — as do all of those dedicated members who turned out to leaflet and canvass.

In the Eden District part of the Penrith & The Border constituency, we have never had Labour Party Town or Parish Councillors.

However, we now have 5 Labour Councillors (Hilary Snell, Paul Donald, Nicola Hawkins, James Fallows, Dave Knaggs) who were elected to the Penrith Town Council for the first time since it was created.



What has the CLP been up to?

There have been a couple of Council by-elections in our area (we stood in one by-election but didn't win) as well as elections to all of our Town and Parish Councils and to the District Councils in Eden, Allerdale and Carlisle. We joined campaigns to oppose the post office closures and against the inept Penrith Strategic Masterplan. Members also supported the several national campaign days which have covered issues such as education, austerity and the railways.



There were a range of interesting speakers at the CLP meetings over the year:

- Colin Glover, the Leader of Carlisle City Council,
- Councillor Roger Liddle, amongst other things was a Special Adviser on European matters to the former Prime Minister Tony Blair, and to President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso.
- Ed Burrows, Secretary of the Fire Brigade Union for Cumbria,
- James Fallows on the Crisis in Housing & Homelessness,
- Peter Doyle retired full-time UNISON Organiser for Cumbria
- Karen Lockney a newly elected County Councillor in Carlisle
- Fiona Stanton, Regional Director of Labour North (Executive meeting)



We had several discussions and agreed the occasional motion:

- Brexit (on several occasions)
- IHRA Examples and Labour Party Code of Conduct on antisemitism
- Affiliation to the Jewish Voice for Labour (JVL)
- Penrith Masterplan
- A Cumbrian Labour Conference
- Housing and homelessness
- Democracy Review
- Motion on Equality Act 2010 (Disability & the Labour Party Handbook)
- Campaigning policy
- Participation of women in CLP meetings
- The Cumbria County Council Newsletter
- Education strategy and funding



National Conference in Liverpool

The CLP sent three delegates to the national conference in Liverpool in September 2018. The delegates were Hilary Snell (Women's Officer), Will Melling (Youth Officer) and Karen Lockney (Ordinary delegate). We would like to thank these delegates for their attendance at the conference and the many fringe events and for producing an [excellent conference report](#) which is informative, comprehensive and provides links to the main speeches via YouTube so that we are able to watch for ourselves.



It was a lively conference with many important policy announcements over a wide range of areas despite the media attempting to report it as though the whole conference was only about Brexit. The Penrith & The Border CLP agreed a conference motion as follows:

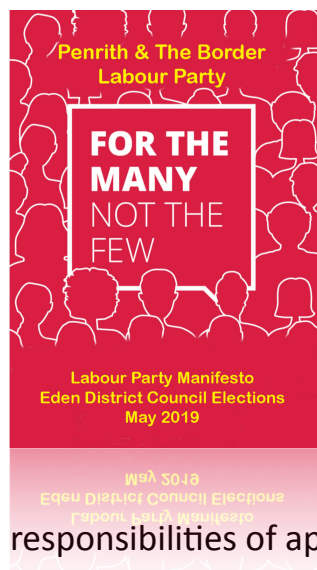
The Penrith & The Border CLP calls for a Labour Government to immediately devise a phased and time-scaled plan to terminate current arrangements for the support and development of Academies, Free Schools and Grammar Schools returning their organisation and resources to the comprehensive school approach serving pupils that live in the local community. Additionally, the charitable status of public schools should be brought to an end and a new Fair Funding formula reconsidered as part of a strategy to ensure a properly funded National Education Service.

Trade Union Affiliations

A couple of years ago we had no branches of Trade Unions affiliated to the Penrith & The Border CLP. We actually have over 200 affiliated supporters who affiliate via their trade union. We started meeting and writing to Trade Unions that affiliate to the party nationally and, so far, we now have affiliations from the Cooperative Party, seven branches of UNISON, the Communication Workers Union and USDAW.

Local Campaign Forum

Part of the area covered by Allerdale (Wigton Branch) and Carlisle Council (Brampton & Area Branch) are within the Penrith & The Border constituency and our members have been working with their Campaign Forums. Members in these areas also supported their election campaigns during May.



The whole of the area covered by the Eden District Council lies within the Penrith & The Border constituency and we have been responsible for establishing and running the Eden District Local Campaign Forum which has involved members from branches in Eden & Penrith, Upper Eden and Alston Moor.

The membership of the LCF was organised so that there was a wide geographical spread to ensure that all areas were properly represented as shown in the [LCF Standing Orders](#).

The group worked well together in undertaking their main responsibilities of approving a panel of candidates, deciding on the election strategy, agreeing policy, producing a [manifesto](#) and supporting the election campaign.

CLP Social Event / Show

Though there have previously been social events organised at Branch level for members, there have been no recent events organised at CLP level... until this year. It is always difficult organising anything in a region that covers such a large geographical area. However, we tried and we will make every effort to build upon this. We should also consider holding **CLP events** in different parts of the Constituency.

The first 'event' was simply a get-together over a drink at the Fell Bar in Penrith. It was a very successful evening with member's filling the upstairs room. The second was a more ambitious fundraiser when we booked Jess Green (BBC Slam Champion) who agreed to add Penrith to her national tour of the show that played to sell-out audiences at the Edinburgh festival. However, several weeks after the venue of the Old Fire Station was booked, despite having full information at the time the booking was made, Eden Arts decided that this event was about promoting the Labour Party and, for some inexplicable reason, took the decision to cancel our booking even

though tickets had been on sale for weeks. Curiously, Eden Arts did hire their space for a public meeting with Jon Lansman (Chief Executive of Momentum ad NEC member) - see 'public meeting' below.

Social events were also organised at branch level plus two women's group socials and a disability group get-together held just before Christmas and in the spring.

Social Media and Website

This year we have attempted to keep the website a little more current. Our website is the public face of the Penrith & The Border Constituency Labour Party; we have tried to provide a flavour of the issues and policies that are of concern to us. We have also attempted to make it informative and interesting for members. However, to keep this going we need to get more people involved in preparing short articles to publish as well as help on the technical aspects of keeping the site going. If you are willing to help with any of this please let us know by emailing



clpsecretary@penrithborderlabour.org.uk If you haven't previously visited the site it can be found at <https://www.penrithborderlabour.org.uk/>

In addition to the website we also have a Facebook page aimed at the general public at <https://www.facebook.com/PBCLP/> and a closed Facebook group which is for members only at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/112508569145538/>

Some of the branches also have Facebook groups and, during the course of this year the Women's Officer started a

Facebook Group for women members which can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/679686412398464/> and

the Disability Officers started a Disability group at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/263604557494967/>. The Disability facebook group goes from strength to strength with new members joining from Carlisle as they don't have a disability group there.



If you haven't visited any of these sites, we'd recommend that you give them a try. They can only ever be as interesting as the members make them.

Public Meeting

In March this year a public meeting was held in Penrith at the Old Fire Station featuring John Lansman, Momentum founder and Labour Party National Executive Committee member, as the speaker. His input was entitled '*The Future of The Left in Britain*'. Over 80 people attended. He covered a whole range of issues including, education reform, social mobility, a transformational socialist programme, anti-semitism and Momentum's response, the operation of Momentum, electoral strategy, the Independent Group, Brexit and the party's Democracy Review. Following his input there was a lively debate. Though the meeting was located in Penrith, it was organised by members from Carlisle and Penrith & The Border. John Lansman is one of the most senior Labour Party figure to visit Penrith.



Rebecca Long Bailey

When Rebecca Long Bailey, Shadow Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, came to Cumbria to meet with business leaders on Thursday 30 May, it was very gratifying that she made a point of taking time out of her busy schedule to drop in on local Labour Party members in Penrith in acknowledgement of our continued hard work and recent successes.



Rule Book & Standing Orders

There is sometimes confusion about Labour Party rules. For the most part, the party runs very well without ever having to reference them. However, there may be times when it is useful to check a rule if you are unsure about what is acceptable within the rules and what isn't, or how particular processes are managed. The Labour Party [Rule Book for 2019](#) and the



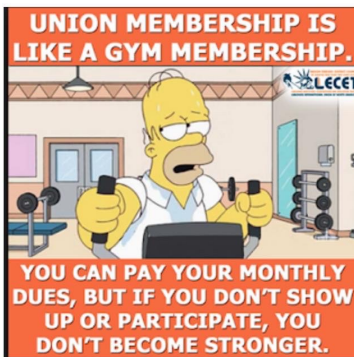
Penrith & The Border [Standing Orders \(June 2018\)](#) can both be downloaded by clicking on the links. Rules can be changed by proposing a *constitutional amendment* to the annual conference: this is generally believed to be more effective way of changing the rules than shooting the messenger whose role is to uphold the Rule Book.

The Various Shades of Membership

After having talked to numerous members, it is clear that there are a whole range of reasons why people join the party. Some people join to work for an end to neoliberal capitalism and the installation of a radical democratic socialist government focused on overhauling the current system with

transformational change. Phew! Not

**YOUR
MEMBERSHIP
MATTERS**



everyone harbours such ambitious or radical tendencies!

For some members the emphasis may be with particular issues that they believe would be better addressed with a Labour Government. In recent times, examples of these issues have been about fighting the cuts to NHS provision, addressing the housing crisis, increasing awareness of climate change and environmental issues, opposing cuts to schools and the education budget, making the rich and powerful corporations pay their taxes, campaigning against the devastating and unnecessary effects of the Government's austerity agenda, and so on.

The majority of members prefer to show their support for the Labour Party by paying a membership fee and, rather than attending meetings or becoming party *activists*, make their contribution to the cause by having *significant conversations* with family, friends and work colleagues. Whether people's motivations are ideological, issue focused or passive sponsorship, all are welcome. For this who wish to become more active as we move towards a General Election [HERE](#) is a good place to start.

Locally, the 'activist' rates are roughly the same as most other Constituency Labour Parties (CLP's), which is a remarkable achievement considering the huge geographical spread of our CLP and the distance travelled to get to meetings. Many urban CLPs are so densely populated and compact that it is easily possible for members to walk to their meetings!



We would like to thank all those activists, whose personal resilience and hopeful hearts have kept them going through these turbulent times. Members have acted in many capacities — taking on roles, standing as candidates, running coffee mornings, door to door canvassing, leafleting, gathering names for petitions, organising social events, helping with the campaign days and contributing to social media sites and discussions.

A big thank you is also due to all those members who have offered kind words of thanks and appreciation to party colleagues — active members can be re-energised and encouraged by simple words of acknowledgment when spirits are low.

Electors

Involvement in politics in an area like ours can be littered with hurdles, setbacks and disappointments. Feedback from canvassing conversations suggests that the electors take actions commensurate with their level of hope and optimism. That is, those people who have lost hope, don't vote. Unfortunately it would seem that many people in our area are worn down by the daily grind of surviving on low-wage, part-time jobs or zero hours contracts that offer little or no security that makes it impossible to plan a future. Where hope and optimism have been seriously diminished, there is also distrust in the promises of politicians. Voting in an election feels like a futile gesture. It would also seem that the toxicity of Brexit has disfigured politics for generations.



However, it is beyond doubt that the policies offered by Labour can restore hope and provide people with the motivation to vote. It can be very difficult to get our messages across in the face of intense media bias and hostility — which is why it is hugely important that, locally, we do all in our power to effectively and comprehensively communicate our policies.



Though to most of us it seems inconceivable that voters can come to the conclusion that we will be better off with the likes of Rory Stewart or Kevin Beaty, many voters appear to be inflicted with a working class deference that is reinforced by the rich and powerful using every social and economic lever in their armoury, with the help of newspapers and media whose inaccuracies and lies have

become as common and normal as pigeons in Trafalgar Square! How on earth did we end up with a Prime Minister who not only tells blatant lie after lie, but turns out to be an inept failure on biblical proportions. The only reason she that she didn't get ousted sooner is that many of her party know that the far right wing extremism of Johnson and Rees-Mogg will be even more painful and destructive.

Our Labour-led County Council has a crucial role in demonstrating to local voters that there is a clear democratic socialist alternative to the disasters of [Neo-liberal capitalism](#).

CLP Role Holders 2018-2019

More people have been actively involved in CLP activities than during previous years. We have had more members taking on 'officer' roles than ever before: this year we managed to fill 19 positions with three of these roles involving 2 people sharing the work. We also continue to increase the number of Councillors within our CLP.

We know that the whole CLP will join us in offering our gratitude and continued support to everyone who has volunteered their time to take on posts and activities in order to secure a positive future with positive outcomes for the CLP and the Party. If members did not take on roles, there would be no Constituency Labour Party.

As Chair and Secretary, the time has come to step aside

to make way for others to take on these crucial roles and to further build upon the achievements of the local party.

The local party is strong, well-organised and more ready than ever before to win more Council seats and to fight a fierce General Election campaign.



We'd like to thank those of you who have provided encouragement and support through thick and thin. We are happy to offer all the support necessary to help new role holders, and we are also prepared to take on other roles. Thank you.

Hilary Barker, Chair
Dave Knaggs, Secretary