

DEVELOPING DIGITAL DEMOCRACY

So how do we transform more than half a million members into an active movement of campaigners? And how do we persuade many more who are not yet Labour members to become involved?

The General Election of 2017 showed how social media can transform the political debate. The Labour Party has an increasingly impressive social media operation. It is no longer a bolt on to our campaigning work but incorporated from the beginning. How we use social media and technology to open-up politics has been raised repeatedly in the Democracy Review. Many of our members who can't make it along to get involved in a traditional meeting culture are enthusiastic to contribute through digital methods.

Carers, disabled members, shift workers, women and young members have argued it is the poor, disadvantaged and already under-represented who are least likely to have the time and resources to attend meetings. These points have been made particularly at the disability events we have had.

The Review looked how we can creatively use social media to build a mass movement and how we use digital technology as part of our internal lay member democracy to transform our Party.

Our new policy making process will use digital democracy to help develop our policy and our strengthened Annual Conference will use the latest technology.

Labour activists are asking for more training, support, materials and guidance from the Party nationally. Already many local Parties have a range of social media platforms. Others provide regular digital community newsletters. Many are asking for training in moderation for Facebook pages, video, live streaming, how we enable on line meetings, how best to run Facebook Live Question and Answer events, group administration and the opportunity to skill share and network.

Labour provides social media training events at our Annual and Regional Conferences. Demand always outstrips supply. Those already involved in social media say they would like more opportunities to network and skills share.

Every CLP should be supported to have a website.

A social media event should be arranged for "advanced" users. Some people we spoke to were tired of being asked to "share" and want to get more creatively involved. This represents an important cultural shift.

A range of requests have been made to the Democracy Review relating to the Labour Parties online engagement tools. The proposed social media event would enable a dialogue about what work needs undertaken.

Labour nationally needs to know who all the elected Social Media Officers are to provide them with more support and both formal and informal networks should be encouraged at regional level.

The experience of recent years is that allowing more members to participate in decisions empowers and builds the Party. The Labour Party should develop secure online voting systems to make it easy and cheap to hold online ballots. There should be rule book provision to allow local Parties to use them.

Organisations such as Momentum already use this technology for a range of democratic purposes and say that it is cheap and easy to use. Indeed, they argue that it will be less work for those organising votes to use the current technology that is available than the work undertaken by local CLP and branch Officers regularly to inform members of key events.

The proposals would not affect those who do not have access to the internet or would prefer not to use it as current methods of voting would always be available. It is recommended that this technology should be acquired by the Labour Party and available to CLPs, LGC's, branches and other Party units on membersnet. This type of democratic activity would not be instead of current structures but as a supplement to them. Guidance should be drafted as to how the technology should be used.

Many CLPs are asking that it should be a disciplinary offence if someone purports to represent a local Party online without authority as there is a widespread problem that social media and other websites who purport to represent local Labour Parties are not actually controlled by them. It is not acceptable for any member to purport to speak for the local Labour Party when they do not have the authority to do so. Many CLPs have Social Media Officers, in other CLPs this work is undertaken by the CLP Secretary or other Officer. Default procedures should be drafted for CLPs setting out the processes by which social media accounts should function.

Labour members run a range of both public facing and private digital platforms. Many local Parties have their own private digital platforms for members only where information is shared. The default procedure/guidance should cover both.

The Review had an extremely useful online Facebook Question and Answer event with the CLP Secretaries Forum. This is an online ongoing discussion forum where CLP Secretaries share information, experiences and provide support to each other. It is strictly not a forum for political debate but to give practical support to each other. We are aware of other online forum for other roles such as Women's Officers. These are informal unofficial forums which have been created by Labour Party members who have met each other or have told others about the initiatives. By their nature the most isolated CLP or branch officers who are most in need of this kind of support will not know of their existence. The Party at regional and national level must enable and facilitate these types of both formal and informal networks.

Social Media Officers or those who undertake that work in local Parties, must have a named digital lead in regional or national office to provide support, have access to training both at regional and national level and clear social media policies and procedures must be drafted and circulated to CLPs.