

**National Policy Forum  
Consultation Documents, 2018**  
*Reviews from the Grassroots*

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## Table of Contents

1	Introduction: Social undemocratic policy formation.....	2
2	Early Years, Education and Skills: Towards a National Education Service.....	4
3	Economy, Business and Trade: The future of work.....	6
4	Environment, Energy and Culture: A greener Britain.....	8
5	Health and Social Care: Tackling health inequalities.....	10
6	International: Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.....	12
7	Justice and Home Affairs: Protecting our communities and turning lives around.....	14
8	Work, Pensions and Equality: Addressing in-work poverty and working-age inequalities.....	16
9	Housing, Local Government and Transport: Giving people the power to shape their local communities.....	18

# 1 Introduction: Social undemocratic policy formation

The Labour Party has, since its formation, been a “social democratic” institution. This is ironic, given the serious democratic shortcomings of the way in which it operates internally. One of the many areas where this can be seen is in the realm of policy formation. In 1997 under Tony Blair the National Policy Forum (NPF) which was set up in 1992, replaced Conference’s role in policy development (except for Contemporary Motions). Thereafter, Conference’s role was simply to accept or reject what the NPF proposed in its Annual Report to Conference. Ostensibly it provided a space for members to engage with other sections of the party in policy development, rather than rely on the awkward and often messy Conference process.

Although it appears from NEC reports that the outcome of Labour’s Democracy Review will be to recommend the NPF’s abolition and a return to something like the old system, we believe that in principle its creation was a good idea. Conference is not well suited for the complex discussions needed to evaluate and choose between conflicting policy options and a dedicated body with a rolling programme can provide a better environment to hold them in. Moreover, members elected to such a body are more likely to have an on-going commitment to following the details of policy development than many of delegates attending Conference.

Formally, each of the eight policy commissions considered submissions from experts and held discussions before issuing annual consultation documents, summarising the issues and requesting party members and affiliates to submit their thoughts. A report setting forward new policy would then be submitted to Conference for approval, with the understanding that it would form the basis of the party’s manifesto in the next general election.

Reality has proven rather different. From the outset, the Blair leadership sought to control the deliberations and outcomes of the NPF commissions. This continued, although under Corbyn the NPF ceased being pro-leadership. The consultation documents tend to be vague and do not adequately communicate the testimony heard by the policy commissions or the ideas considered in discussion. The questions asked are overly broad, giving members no idea where to start in replying. Nonetheless, plenty of members, CLPs, and affiliates *do* submit responses, mostly via the NPF website. These would appear to be largely ignored, except for the odd noncommittal comment by an NPF member and an occasional quote which makes its way into the annual reports. Despite containing little actual policy, Conference has tended to pass the reports as a matter of course. This gives the leadership considerable scope in writing the manifesto.

Nearly three years ago, Jeremy Corbyn was elected leader of the Labour Party with the promise to properly involve the membership in policy formation. Since then, the only change has been that it is now possible to vote on the policy sections of the NPF Annual Report. This resulted in several reports or parts of them being referred back at the 2017 Conference. This year’s consultation documents represent a new low, being devoid of any new policy proposals at all. They also fail to provide any background information about the problems they are meant to solve.

If democracy is to be meaningful, it requires informed participants. Otherwise members will not be able to properly evaluate the options before them, let alone feel comfortable submitting their own ideas. At most, a few people with existing knowledge will be able to put something forward, leaving the vast majority of members with their opinions unheard. With the sort of behaviour seen in recent years, the NPF has not been engaged in trying to democratise policy formation but, whether wilfully or not, manipulating it. However, scrapping the NPF and simply expecting conference delegates to vote on motions, as is now apparently recommended by the party’s Democracy Review, will make the situation even worse. A criss-crossing network of different bodies engaged in policy development, which it seems is to be proposed, is most likely to be even less understood by the majority of members than the current arrangements.

This document was written prior to this announcement and sought to provide assessments of each of the eight consultation documents produced by the NPF. We believed that these assessments justify the harsh statements made above. After evaluating the content of each report, a list was provided of the sort of work which *should* have been published in order to meaningfully advance policy discussion. The NPF claimed to have a different focus each year as part of its rolling programme, which could explain some of the omissions. However, the existing programme was nowhere to be found and no indication was given as to how this year’s focus fits into a broader plan for policy development. As such, it was felt useful to make suggestions beyond this year’s themes and covering the whole remit of the Commission in question.

We wrote all of this in order to demonstrate the poor state of Labour Party policy formation in the run-up to this year's Conference, in the hope that Conference would demand much higher standards of work from its policy forming body. We have now been overtaken by events. Despite our criticism, we are not in favour of the NPF's abolition, as we consider some sort of discussion forum to be necessary for policy development outside of Conference. Rather we believe the most effective way to develop policy democratically would be to substantially reform the NPF and to make its internal workings open for all members to see and follow. We hope the NEC and Conference will agree and choose to reform, rather than eliminate, it.

20 July 2018

### **Note on the "What Was Missing" Sections**

These notes are a response to the almost complete lack of substantial content in the draft policy statements. We do not mean to suggest that each item listed could have been fully dealt with. This would be appropriate for some points for others we would expect this issues to be acknowledged and/or references to be given to work done so far on these questions. It might also be said that what we have identified as missing are outside the chosen theme for this year. Our response is that given the pressing nature of those issues the chosen themes are too restrictive and leave the Party with no discussion of great swathes of the social and political changes taking place around us.

## 2 Early Years, Education and Skills: Towards a National Education Service

By David Pavett, Brentford & Isleworth CLP

### Labour's Vision

According to the [draft statement](#), the principle of a National Education Service (NES) was key to the 2017 Manifesto and to the Party's wider vision. The problem with this is that: (1) only the barest general objectives of the service have been announced—so far there are no details to indicate the nature of the service in terms of such things as decision structures; (2) we still have no policies on what to do with structures imposed on education in the last 18 years, e.g. Gove's “academy revolution”.

It is not general declarations of “values” that we now need but ideas about how a better education will be delivered. That cannot be separated from the structures for that delivery. The problem here is that the Party, through its Shadow Secretary of State for Education, is still saying that it is only concerned with “standards and not structures”. It is time this old debilitating mantra was dropped. We must show how Tory-imposed structures continue to fragment our education service. Without that the potentially positive idea of an NES will be reduced to empty rhetoric. Above all we need to hear about how schools will be re-integrated into the framework of local government. On this Labour is so far silent.

### Issues

This section is devoid of any analysis or argument about the issues to be addressed. It consists of vague allusions to problems without any analysis of the educational issues that they raise.

*As Britain prepares to leave the European Union, and undergoes wider economic changes as new industries emerge and the world of work changes, equipping people with new skills throughout their lives will be imperative; from young people passing through school needing to develop skills that will respond to the economy of the future, to those currently in work who will seek to retrain and advance in their current professions or move to new industries.*

The last part of this section repeats commitments from the 2017 Manifesto which have become Party policy by default. There is no discussion of the many political issues associated with implementing these policies successfully. For example, even though the abolition of HE tuition fees is a definite Party commitment its cost will be massive and this should be discussed in the context of overall educational spending plans. The value of such commitments will be progressively diminished if Labour does not turn them into increasingly detailed policies.

This section defines no issues for discussion and offers no arguments for any of its assertions.

### What Next?

In this section we are reminded of the 10-point charter for the NES that was published after the 2017 Manifesto. None of its points are discussed or fleshed out so we are left hanging at such a vague level that it seems that no progress has been made in turning the general commitments of the Manifesto into concrete policies. Instead we are left with general aspirations such as that Labour would (1) be guided by the principle that “education has intrinsic value in giving all people access to the common body of knowledge we share, and practical value in allowing all to participate fully in our society” and (2) “provide education that is free at the point of use, available universally and throughout life”. This sort of thing may have its place but it does nothing to turn Labour's aspirations for education into practical policies.

### Have Your Say

The slender offerings of the document commented on above lead onto 10 proposed questions for members to answer. The first question asks “What should a National Education Service be for and what values should it and the draft charter embody?” The remaining questions continue at the same level of inanity. It is time to get

beyond saying things like “Education must serve all children”, “Education should continue throughout life” and the like. There are more specific questions e.g. “What barriers currently exist to cooperation between education institutions, and what steps can be taken to remove them ...” but they are presented with no background or framing of any sort. There is no chance that a coherent picture can emerge from asking such unframed questions.

Previous draft education policies from the Commission have been weak but none have been as vacuous as this one. They have tended to be so vague that, whatever the responses to them, the real decisions are left to the politicians at some later stage. In other words, they have not given a steer to policy formation. As such they hindered rather than furthered policy development. There is no analysis of the state of education, no definition of its problems, no clear proposals, no consideration of alternative proposals and no references to the research relied on.

## What Was Missing

- There are no details on the form of a National Education Service. There is an obvious analogy with the NHS but is a similar structure being proposed in terms of central and local government? It is time to give at least the broad outlines.
- There is nothing on academies and academy chains. How can such a massive feature of our current school system pass without comment in Labour's education documents?
- Nothing is said on the role of the Regional Commissioners for Schools. Labour would presumably abolish the post but we need to be told.
- Most educationalists supporting Labour want to see schools returned to a local government framework. This is almost certainly true of the majority of Labour members. This would be a big task after so much of local authority educational work has been dismantled and expertise lost. This all needs much discussion.
- There is nothing on the economics of education and how Labour sees this developing.
- It is unclear just what issues the Policy Commission saw itself as addressing this year. There is supposed to be a rolling programme of issues. We should be reminded of the overall plan – if there is one.
- There is a lot more to HE than the issue of tuition fees. That is all that gets mentioned. Does Labour have any ideas to tackle HE elitism? Does it wish to bring about any changes in the balance of different subject areas studied? Does it want to restore university-based teacher training?
- The document says that there is to be a wide-ranging consultation “on the principles that are outlined in the draft charter”. That sounds like a really bad idea. We can all agree about vague aspirations very quickly. We need information about Labour's ideas on the detailed shape of a National Education Service so that we can get into the difficult business of turning general ideas into practical policies.
- The report gives no indication of meetings held, specialists consulted and materials used for discussion. This makes the Policy Commission look like a shadowy body that pops up once a year to dash off a few general words for the NPF.
- There are no proposals for improving the educational work of the LP. The party has a large number of educationalists and people keen on educational issues. At the moment it does nothing to tap into this pool of expertise. Many knowledgeable members are willing to help develop Labour's educational policies but there seems to be a reluctance to accept that help. Thus the Party's only educational affiliate the Socialist Educational Association has been asking for years to participate in meetings of the Policy Commission but has not yet been invited to do so on a permanent basis (it was invited to participate in one meeting recently).

## 3 Economy, Business and Trade: The future of work

*By Chris MacMackin, Oxford & District CLP*

This [draft policy](#) statement devotes less than 450 words to the core issue of economic policy. Needless to say, this is insufficient space even to examine thoroughly the issues we face, let alone propose any solutions.

### Vision

The commission has only a vague vision for the future. A number of problems around working conditions are referenced and a few manifesto policies are mentioned which may help address them. Why this is being discussed by the Economy, Business & Trade commission rather than the Work, Pensions and Equality commission is unclear. Labour plans on “using public investment to upgrade our economy and create high-quality jobs”, but no work has been done to identify exactly what sort of investments should be made. The effect of technology on work is acknowledged and the commission claims to “recognise that more work is needed to develop the public policy proposals” on this, but they present no plan to do so.

### The Context

When laying out the context of the report, it is noted that “workers are being forced into self-employment by unscrupulous employers to avoid costs and their duties to workers”. It is further noted that “this is only one of the many recent changes to employment”, although no effort has been made to describe any others. Once again, the risks posed by technological change are mentioned. However, no suggestions are made to solve any of these problems.

### The Future

Labour will “set up a dedicated commission to modernise the law around employment status and to ensure a policy which utilises our comparative advantage in sectors where productivity is high”. It would have been useful, however, to know the terms of reference this commission will be given.

### The Mechanisms

The commission says absolutely nothing about the mechanisms which can be used to implement economic policy, simply noting that the government “has refused to support our industries, businesses and workers” and that “the economy has shifted towards low-paid, insecure jobs”.

### The Bigger Picture

Looking at the bigger picture, we are told that “More democratic ownership would help our economy deliver for the many and lead to a fairer distribution of wealth”. There is no indication of what “democratic ownership” means in practice or which sectors it will apply to.

A [number of documents](#) on possible approaches to economic policy were published in conjunction with the 2017 Manifesto. None of this work is picked up and developed in this document. This gives the impression of a disconnect between the Commission and other sections of the party working on the same issues. It also gives the impression that the Party has put no thought at all into these matters; reading this report, one wonders on what basis Jeremy Corbyn promises a government more transformative than Attlee’s.

## What Was Missing

- A detailed analysis of the specific problems the British economy currently faces, and proposals for how to solve them.
- Identification of sectors which should be developed as part of an industrial policy. This would likely have required coordination with other policy commissions, particularly on Environment, Energy, and Culture.
- Considerations of how to achieve full employment in the current era. In particular, this should have looked at whether full employment remains possible in the context of globalisation, whether capital controls would be required, etc.
- Comparisons of different macroeconomic frameworks (e.g. Keynesianism, modern monetary theory, etc.), with particular attention to the plausibility of each and their implications for levels of public borrowing.
- A critical examination of the Bank of England's independence, in order to understand whether this is compatible with policies to achieve full employment.
- Analysis of the failure of past attempts to develop an industrial policy in this country (e.g. under Harold Wilson) in order to understand what must be done differently.
- Comparative analysis of industrial strategies which have been used in other countries, such as the current German model and the old French system of dirigisme. Their applicability to the present UK context should be examined.
- Suggestions of what "democratic ownership" could look like in practice. This could have built upon the content of the [Alternative Models of Ownership](#) report. Particular attention should have been paid to how to apply democracy to those industries which necessarily require centralised national ownership.
- A consideration of the role of the financial sector in the British economy and policies (such as regulation, breaking up banks, and public ownership) which could make it better meet social goals.
- Analysis of whether proposed renationalisations are likely to provoke an investment strike, as the CBI has threatened. If so, proposals should be made for how such a strike could be defeated.
- Detailed costings of proposals made by other policy commissions, with suggestions of how to raise the necessary revenue.
- Ideas for how to make the tax system more progressive. This could include reducing VAT, changes to income tax bands, the introduction of a land value tax, a financial transaction tax, specific measures to combat tax avoidance, etc.
- A comparison of different options for future trading relations with the EU (membership of the single market, a customs union, a bespoke free trade deal, etc.). In addition to considering how these would affect the UK's economy, this should examine the implications for the UK's ability to negotiate other trade agreements, exposure to liberalisation directives, limitations on state aid, the ability to impose capital controls, etc. It should also consider the likelihood of the EU agreeing to these different options.
- Consideration of the place of free trade agreements in a left economic policy. Do the opportunities they bring for mutually-beneficial trade outweigh the lost capacity to use tariffs as a tool in economic policy? Would it be possible to negotiate free trade deals without corporate-friendly provisions such as "investor-state dispute settlement" clauses?



## 4 Environment, Energy and Culture: A greener Britain

*By Chris MacMackin, Oxford & District CLP*

The Policy Commission seems to believe that a plan for a more environmentally friendly country (culture has been largely ignored) can be laid out in [only 580 words](#). The reason for the brevity quickly becomes apparent: the Commission has no knowledge of the issue on which policy could be built. Bizarrely, even less information is provided on these topics than in last year's consultation.

### Vision

The Commission's vision section spends much of its time concentrating on the past. We are told that "a Labour Government ... [placed] in law a duty to reduce carbon emissions", but not that these reductions were inadequate to meet international goals. Apparently "ensuring 60 per cent of the UK's energy comes from zero-carbon or renewable sources by 2030" was "at the heart of its General Election industrial strategy". How can this be when only electricity, making up just 20% of Britain's energy, received significant attention? The only detail given on environmental protection is that it "should be founded on sound scientific principles". This isn't very useful unless we are told what those principles are and their implications!

### The Natural Environment

We are reminded that regulations regarding the natural environment will no longer apply with Brexit. Issues considered important when replacing these include "flooding, animal welfare and food standards, biodiversity, the future of our blue and green belts and the promotion of a reduced plastic circular economy". What existing EU regulations say on these matters is not laid out, nor is any indication given of where we may want to make changes. Discussions on the need to develop "new funding regimes for farming and fishing" similarly give no useful background information. The closest the report comes to discussing culture is mentioning the importance of green spaces, but all we are told is that "the benefits of, and increasing access to, green spaces should be considered".

### Clean Energy

While the Commission clearly believes a clean energy supply to be important, they offer little in terms of policy on it. They think that "renewables...should form the backbone of a clean energy system", but haven't bothered to address concerns raised over the feasibility of such an approach. They embrace "the potential for further decentralisation of energy" without bothering to compare its merits against those of a more centralised model. Issues such as "energy security, keeping bills low" and "where jobs are to be created" are mentioned but no solutions are offered.

### Air Pollution

The final section on air pollution gives some indication of the extent of the problem, but the only gesture towards a solution is saying that "a comprehensive strategy to bring air quality to acceptable levels is urgently needed". Apparently the commission has not bothered to devise such a plan. We are not even given details on the sources of air pollution, without which it is difficult to know how to reduce it.

With no details provided on the challenges faced, this report provides no basis for policy discussions within the party. If this is the best the Commission could produce then it is vital that its members be replaced as soon as possible so serious work can begin on these urgent issues.

## What Was Missing

- A review of existing EU environmental legislation and its shortcomings. Proposals should be made for how it can be implemented, enforced and improved upon Brexit.
- A review of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy. It should be compared with agricultural policies from other parts of the world, with the view of designing a replacement for the post-Brexit context. Particular attention should be paid to how agricultural policy can support climate change goals.
- A review of climate science and how much more greenhouse gas Britain can emit if global warming is to be limited to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels..
- An assessment of different clean energy sources, their advantages and disadvantages, and their potential for use in Britain. The combination of technologies most suitable for completely eliminating the combustion of fossil fuels in this country should be identified, along with a timetable for this.
- A review of the technologies which can replace petrol and gas in transport and heating. This should also include a timetable for their roll-out and specific government policies needed to achieve this. This would likely tie in to the work of the Housing, Local Government, and Transport Commission.
- A review of the historical organisation of the electricity sector in the UK, the current structure, and models used in other countries. This should inform recommendations on how to go about returning the sector to public ownership.
- Estimates of the costs of decarbonising the energy sector, the effect this would have on households and industry, and measures which can be taken to support those in energy poverty.
- Identification of key sectors (such as steel, agriculture, and aviation) for which it will be particularly difficult to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. How these should fit into overall decarbonisation plans and avenues for long-term research should be indicated.
- An overview of sources of air pollution and consideration of how they can be eliminated or reduced. The potential of new technologies should be noted. A legislative framework should be sketched which can deliver short-term reductions in pollution within the context of a longer-term strategy.
- Policies and technologies which can reduce and, eventually, eliminate the amount of waste entering landfills.
- How the BBC and Channel 4 can be governed to ensure the production of high quality, popular content reflecting the diversity of interests and views in Britain.
- How cultural and educational policy can work together to ensure all children have access to arts, music, drama, sports, etc.
- A way to address concentration of ownership in media, ensuring it is not used to propagate the views of a few rich individuals. Alternative ownership models, such as cooperatives, should be considered.
- Ways to protect and expand news and entertainment production in the era of the Internet, with particular attention paid to local news.

## 5 Health and Social Care: Tackling health inequalities

*By Chris MacMackin, Oxford & District CLP*

The Policy Commission devotes an entire 1220 words to health and social care, making this one of their [longer reports](#). However, it is almost entirely dedicated to describing challenges we face and summarising policy from the 2017 manifesto, doing nothing to further develop policy.

### Vision

The vision section mostly outlines existing problems. Vague statements such as “the NHS has been vital in ensuring that everybody is provided with healthcare from cradle to grave” indicate a continued desire to for Labour to wrap itself in the flag of this institution, without actually making any proposals. There is a welcome promise that “Labour will take action to reverse damaging privatisation in the NHS”, but the only indication of how this is to be done is “by repealing the Health and Social Care Act, and reinstating the powers of the Secretary of State for Health to have overall responsibility for the NHS”. Such steps are certainly necessary, but hardly sufficient. Furthermore, nothing is said of what will replace the Health and Social Care Act.

### Addressing the Impact of Health Inequalities in all Parts of Society

While the theme of this year’s report is addressing the impact of health inequalities in all parts of society, this is not clearly defined. It appears to refer to how “health outcomes and inequality are inextricably linked” and acknowledging “that certain groups within our society” tend to have poorer outcomes. Though “as a party we need to be aware ... [of] the specific challenges facing particular parts of our society”, we are not told what specifically those challenges are or how to overcome them. “Poor-quality housing, insecure employment and lower incomes” are noted to “have a detrimental impact on people’s health and wellbeing”, but no effort has been made to coordinate with the relevant policy commissions in order to address these issues.

### Public Health Funding

The commission somehow manages to talk about public health funding with almost no budgetary details. We are told “Labour supports the promotion of prevention and early intervention to help reduce health inequalities”, with some specific examples given, but not how much actually needs to be spent. The only firm numbers are taken from the manifesto, with no consideration of whether they are adequate to meet the country’s needs. Though it is acknowledged that “Labour’s task now is to build upon pledges made in the manifesto”, the Commission has not done any such work itself.

### Workforce

It is noted that “Under the Conservatives, and as a result of damaging policies they have pursued, we are seeing workforce shortages in many areas in the English NHS”. However, the only response to this is to quote old policies from the manifesto. Though they believe the “hardworking staff that work in our health and social care sectors ... should be supported with the right policies and planning”, nothing is done to actually develop any policies or plans.

The Commission has failed to put forward any new policies or give a detailed examination of the problems we are faced with in health and social care, so members should be worried if this is the basis on which Labour's will try to rescue the NHS from its current crisis.

## What Was Missing

- Any review of the challenges currently faced in health and social care policy.
- Consideration of how best to organise the NHS in order to ensure efficiency, accountability, and democratic control. This should include investigations of the experiences of other countries.
- Detailed plans for returning NHS operations to the public sector. Particular attention would need to be paid to how “Accountable Care Organisations” would be handled, if the Tories introduce them.
- Examination of the most cost-effective measures which can be taken to promote health, particularly around preventative care.
- Consideration of the role of fees in NHS services such as dentistry, prescriptions, and optometry. The NHS is not truly “free at the point of use” if such fees persist.
- Thoughts on how the private nature of GPs’ and dentists’ surgeries relates to plans to return the NHS to public ownership.
- An analysis of how much it will cost to restore the NHS budget to adequate levels and a consideration of where this revenue would come from.
- An explanation of how social care can be successfully integrated with the NHS, given that the former is fragmented, funded by local government, means tested, and usually privately delivered.
- Any mention of problems around pharmaceutical companies, particularly relating to procuring generic drugs and developing new classes of antibiotics. This should include considerations of how public research funding and the patent system can be reformed to better serve public interest and of the possibility of the NHS producing some drugs in-house.
- Detailed consideration of how health policy relates to other areas such as educational, housing, and environmental policy. This should include communication with the relevant policy commissions.
- Consideration of the need to pay for the training of an adequate number of medical professionals in the UK, rather than poach those which other countries have paid to train.

## 6 International: Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals

*By Peter Rowlands, Swansea West CLP*

### Global Issues and Multilateralism

[This submission](#) is concerned only with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agreed in 2015 which looked to ending acute poverty by 2030. It describes how Labour set up the DFID in 1998, and how Tory governments since, while they have kept to Labour's commitment to contributing 0.7% of GDP to international development, have not brought forward plans as many other countries have.

The comment is brief, and surprisingly does not specifically mention the policy paper produced earlier in the year by Kate Osamor, Shadow Minister for International Development, entitled [A World for the Many, not the Few](#). This, despite being somewhat jargon ridden, is detailed and well argued. Its central feature is the drive to tackle inequality as well as poverty, and it sets out plans for a rejuvenated ministry, while criticising the Tories' "charity" approach.

The wider question of foreign policy generally is arguably the most important of all at the present time, in the sense that the increasing odds of catastrophe, either through climate change or nuclear conflict, both of which could make the world uninhabitable, must be reversed if there is to be a viable future. But a key problem is achieving recognition of this by the electorate, many of whom still think that foreign policy is only about securing and promoting the interests of the UK, even if that is at the expense of other countries.

The current situation means that this can no longer be a realistic outlook, although it was always unjustifiable. Increasing numbers of Labour voters know this, and are looking for answers. However, US policy has since Trump's election gone down this road to the general detriment of tackling the world's problems.

Labour's main policy thrust is a commitment to participation in multilateral efforts to solve problems rather than defend interests, as outlined in the 2017 manifesto. That must at some stage mean a discussion about NATO and the retention of nuclear weapons, although it is generally accepted that these issues are not on the agenda for this year. Where the all-consuming issue of Brexit takes us in terms of these objectives remains to be seen.

## What was Missing

- The progress and possibilities of multilateral or unilateral disarmament on a nuclear and non-nuclear basis. While nuclear conflict is the key danger the sheer size of armed forces and the weapons available to them in many countries increases the risks of war.
- The main military alliances and in particular the UK's membership of NATO. What are its aims and rationale since the end of the Cold War, what are the prospects for rapprochement with Russia, is a new military alliance needed?
- How can the arms trade be reduced and controlled? Who are the main suppliers and recipients? What are the profits generated from arms sales?
- An assessment of military intervention (and non intervention) in the recent period. Has it been successful? How can bloody civil wars as in Syria be avoided?
- How can the refugee crisis be successfully tackled? What role should the UK play? Should it do more?
- How can poverty be reduced in the poorest countries? Who are the main givers and receivers of aid? How is aid linked or tied?
- What progress has there been towards extending democracy and human rights in the world?
- How can international co-operation be improved? How can the UN be made stronger?
- What progress has been made, and has there been enough, in combating climate change? What role can the UK play to ensure the development of poorer countries does not exacerbate this issue?
- How can long term aspirations by many minorities for greater autonomy and viability be supported?

## 7 Justice and Home Affairs: Protecting our communities and turning lives around

*By David Pavett, Brentford & Isleworth CLP*

The 2018 [Justice and Home Affairs draft](#) purports to make policy proposals for justice and home affairs that it believes will improve protection for communities and turn lives around. It seeks to do so in 570 words. This suggests that the Commission did not have a lot to say and that not much work has been done since the previous drafts were issued a year ago.

### Vision

The opening vision statement offers a few platitudes and refers to Tory Cuts and failed reforms (no specifics for either). We then read that it is imperative “that Labour develops new strategies for effective prison and probation reform, for better community sentencing, and for ensuring fair treatment for BAME communities within the criminal justice system”. Isn’t that what the Policy Commission is supposed to do? The same goes for “we must address the evolving threat from extremism and terrorism by renewing the counter-extremism strategy”. It seems that the Commission thinks that its job is done when it points to areas where policy needs to be developed without actually developing anything.

### Prisons, Probation and Sentencing

The paragraph on prisons, probation and sentencing starts with a platitude. After that we get “We therefore must examine what reforms must be introduced ...” and “Labour’s task is to devise a new approach to prisons, probation and sentencing ...”. It continues “This will mean addressing the role of the private sector in our criminal justice system” and “... consideration of new strategies to deal with the violence and overcrowding that blights much of the prison estate ...”. There is no effort in this document to do any of these things. All we have is a statement that we ought to do them.

### Community Relations

On community relations all we get is “Labour must now build on the work of the Lammy Review and the commitment in our manifesto to ensure that the justice system is more representative of modern society ...”. We are given no idea what this means beyond platitudinous phrases about treating everyone fairly and with respect.

### Counter-Extremism

The paragraph dealing with counter-extremism tells us that extremism is a serious and growing threat. There is a complete lack of analysis and the word extremism is used as it is in the media. What exactly are “extreme” views? Labour has too easily slipped into using this vocabulary. It should remember that any form of radical politics is regarded as “extreme” by those who identify their interests with present power structures. By way of alluding to possible policy all we are told is that we should (1) build on our manifesto commitments, (2) explore ways to ensure that counter-extremism strategies have the support of all communities.

This draft has no substantial content and therefore can only be discussed in terms of what it doesn't say rather than in terms of what it proposes.

## What Was Missing

The questions which follow each section simply hand the problems over to members with no background information and no indication of possible approaches or even alternative approaches. This is a travesty of consultation. It is the technique normally used by organisations which feel obliged to go through the motions of consultation but have no intention of developing policy on the basis of its results. Thus, members are asked “What key issues will the public sector have to address as it takes back control of the criminal justice system?” with absolutely no indication of what needs to be taken into account in producing a response. This sort of consultation is the opposite of empowerment. It invites those who already have a stance to air their views but discourages those who have concerns but feel the need to understand the issues better. A consultation should have an educational aspect. This one has none.

- In a year in which the reduction in police numbers have been continuously in the news and have been raised repeatedly by Labour in Parliament it is extraordinary that not even the hint of a policy change is provided in this draft.
- The draft says that it is “Labour’s task is to devise a new approach to prisons, probation and sentencing in which the public can place their confidence.” Isn’t that precisely what the Policy Commission should have been doing over the last year. This point can be repeated over and over again in response to the questions for members. The Commission seems instead to be satisfied to list the things that it should have been doing without actually doing them. Similarly we are told that Labour should consider the “role of the private sector in our criminal justice system”. Yes, indeed it should, and the Policy Commission should have been doing it.
- Given the focus on immigration issues over recent years and their role in the Brexit referendum and beyond it is extraordinary that the draft has nothing to say on the question. Just what is Labour's position? That seems to depend on which spokesperson one is listening to on which day of the week. Labour has accepted that after Brexit immigration will need to be managed. We have very little information on what this would mean in practical terms. Is this not something that the Commission should have discussed with a view to developing detailed policies?
- London police are struggling against the odds. Their numbers have been reduced dramatically and violent crime is on the increase in the capital along with some forms of non-violent crime. It would surely have been reasonable to expect that the Policy Commission would have something to say about this.
- The London police (and probably other forces) complain that a high percentage of the people they arrest and hold for trial would be better dealt with by social services e.g. there is a high incidence of mental illness among those caught up in the criminal justice system. Should Labour as a party that cares about the fallout from our increasingly unequal society not have this problem on its agenda?
- The section on counter-extremism, like the other sections, is full of declarations about what Labour should be doing without giving any indication of work done so far. Thus we read “we must also explore ways to ensure that counter-extremism strategy commands the support of all communities”. “We must explore ways ...”. Indeed we must, and the Policy Commission is charged to do just that.



## 8 Work, Pensions and Equality: Addressing in-work poverty and working-age inequalities

By Peter Rowlands, Swansea West CLP

The short 2018 [draft policy statement](#) on Work, Pensions, and Equality does very little beyond referring to the fall in real incomes and benefits since 2010, the rise since then of child poverty and pensioner poverty, the reduction in working age benefits and the advent of Universal Credit which will make things worse.

All of this is well known, and is documented in considerable detail in an array of books and articles, but none of this is referred to.

We are only told that this is a 'challenge' for Labour, and reminded of the commitment to tackle it. Unfortunately this is the one area where Labour's costed 2017 Manifesto did not specify how those disadvantaged would be compensated, so this is an area which cannot, we hope, be fudged.

The Commission's overall remit includes pensions and social security but it does not mention either.

### What Was Missing

#### Equality

(Note that Women, BAME and LGBT issues were not covered this year.)

- A survey of equality trends since the 1940s, with particular reference to the growth of inequality in the 1980s and its persistence since, but including the decline in child and pensioner poverty under Labour from 1997 and its recent rise, as well as the effect of the real reduction in benefits and the benefits cap.
- How Labour will restore and maintain income levels for these groups. This is urgent for those on benefits. While there is a manifesto commitment to do so nothing is yet costed.
- A comparison of equality trends with other countries in the last 50 years, including why the UK has declined in the rankings.

#### Pensions

- A survey of likely future pressures on pensions, both state and occupational, in the context of an aging population and the likely additional resources required.
- A survey of how the state pension has fared under different governments since the 1980s.
- A survey of the little understood changes to the state pension and their effects recently.
- A survey of pension provision and its principles in other similar countries.
- A framework for a pension strategy , to include occupational pensions and the increase in this provision recently.
- A strategy for the protection of pension provision in the private sector.

#### Social Security

- A survey of the development of the UK system since the 1940s.
- An analysis of the system of Universal Credit and its effects.
- A strategy for social security to include in work as well as out of work benefits.
- An analysis of current disability benefits and their effects.
- A strategy for disability benefits.
- An analysis of Universal Basic Income and its likely effects.



## 9 Housing, Local Government and Transport: Giving people the power to shape their local communities

By David Pavett, Brentford & Isleworth CLP

Housing, local government and Transport get short shrift. The theme selected for this year is “Giving people the power to shape their local communities” so we must assume that the Commission felt that Housing and Transport policy have been sufficiently covered since they are not mentioned. No information is given about this. As for giving people power, the Commission apparently felt that [700 words](#) would suffice to deal with the continuing dismemberment of local government, the dramatic reduction in funding along with how local government should be restructured to make it more democratic.

### Vision

If this report is anything to go by then Labour's “vision” for housing, local government and transport consists entirely of vacuous statements with no practical implications. For example we read

*The challenge for Labour now is to build on the policies outlined in the 2017 Labour manifesto in a way which supports the debate about where power will sit in the future and how key services will be run and funded in a post-Brexit economy.*

Yes, that is the challenge. The question is what has the Policy Commission done to respond to that challenge. Apparently nothing. Similar comments can be made about everything else in this “vision” section.

### Learning From Current Devolution Deals

In this section we are told that Labour’s manifesto was clear that we would be guided by public opinion when deciding the nature of devolution deals and whether to include directly-elected mayors in them. This consultation sets out Labour’s clear intention to hear from a wide variety of voices to learn from the current settlements when discussing options for future deals.

And that's it. A problem is noted and Labour's bold move is a “clear intention to hear from a wide variety of voices”! And this is supposed to be the considered opinion of a panel dedicated to the issues after a year of deliberation!

Having explained nothing, given no background information and discussed no potential policies, the commission then asks questions such as “What should devolution aim to achieve and how do we measure this?”. In any reasonable form of policy, this sort of question from a committee charged with policy development would be laughed out of the room. The other questions are all of the same low quality.

### Allowing People to Play a Greater Role in Society

The few lines offered in this section are lacking in any value whatsoever. Nothing is explained and nothing is proposed. Members are nevertheless invited to respond to a series of questions for which no background information or possible policy proposals have been provided. A typical example is “How can the different tiers of government support local people in creating a sense of community and empower local people to feel they can play a greater role in society?”.

This document thus makes no policy proposal in any shape or form. It says nothing specific about local government and nothing at all about housing and transport. It is an insult to members to send them documents like this as a basis for policy discussion.

## What Was Missing

The short answer is “everything”. This section makes no proposals and provides no information; as a policy document it has no value whatsoever. Housing and Transport are not mentioned so we are left to conclude that this year’s part of the “rolling programme” of policy issues is local government.

- The 2016 Housing and Planning act removes powers from local authorities and places them with the Secretary of State. This gives the advantage to developers and dis-empowers local communities. Why is there no mention of this?
- Similarly, the 2017 Bus Services act prohibits local authorities from establishing new municipally owned bus operators and granted bus franchising abilities (as currently exist in London) only to authorities with directly elected mayors. These impositions on local democracy also go unmentioned.
- The 2017 Manifesto said that Labour would ensure that local authorities would once again be able to set up new schools. The problem with this is that if everything else remains as it is then local authorities will find themselves in the situation of just one provider competing with others. In other words the participation of local authorities would help to establish the idea that public authorities are just another provider competing in a market place alongside other providers. We need a settlement that returns the creation of publicly funded schools to public bodies.
- There no discussion in the document of when devolution is desirable (e.g. for the management of local/regional resources) and when it is not (e.g. for the management of national resources). Words like “central government” then tend to take on negative connotations while devolved government appears to be always a good thing. This is hopeless confusion which will not allow a sensible debate to take place.
- A practical example of these difficult issues would be the case of transit. There is currently a problem that the regions people commute to and from often do not line up well with local authority boundaries. The jurisdictional mess this creates inhibits the building of a usable transit network. However, if these powers lie with higher levels of government then transit authorities may be unresponsive to local conditions. What degree of devolution or amalgamation of powers is best placed to address this?
- If people are to play a greater role in society then they need the education, information and access to alternative ideas that will enable them to make informed judgments. This document is a model of how not to go about this. It is a model used by central and local government when they run sham consultations which have no other purpose than to give a democratic gloss to decisions which have been made independently of the consultation.