

GREEN PARTY AUTUMN CONFERENCE 2017

A HOLISTIC REVIEW OF HOW THE GREEN PARTY ORGANISES AND OPERATES

WHY DO WE NEED THIS REVIEW?

Much of the Green Party's structure and processes date back to the mid 1970s. Many of the assumptions about how we should organise ourselves have been unquestioned for over 40 years.

But the world (and the party) has changed beyond recognition since then.

The terms of reference of the governance review set in 2013 were a missed opportunity to address this challenge. A lot of hard work by the governance review working group over 4 or 5 years has resulted in 35 pages of constitutional detail.

But we need to recognise that we have put the cart before the horse. Instead of further piecemeal changes to a 40 year-old framework, we need to step back and start with this question: **how can we build a more visionary organisational platform for a radical party fit for the 21st century?**

One simple thought experiment demonstrates the need for this type of holistic review: if we were setting up the Green Party today, with all the new digital opportunities of engaging with people and making decisions, would our organisational structure look anything like the revised constitution proposed by the Governance Review? We don't think so.

We are also painfully slow when it comes to organisational change. We need to become much more agile. Otherwise we will continue to fail to adapt to the speed at which the world is changing around us. That's why the motion is proposing to carry out the holistic review in a way which will act as a test-bed for new ways of delivering change. A commission of the best people we can find for the task will be asked to quickly develop high-level principles about how we should organise and operate, which members can then either approve or reject.



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WHO IS PROPOSING THIS MOTION?

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WHAT DOES THE MOTION SAY?

Conference instructs GPEX and GPRC to immediately:

1. Establish a Commission, chaired by a respected member of the party, to conduct a full and open review of the Party's structure and organisation, and produce a final report for approval, no later than the Party's autumn conference in 2018, and for the submission of proposals so approved to a referendum of the Party's full membership immediately thereafter.
2. Agree a terms of reference for the review that confirms that the review is bounded only by the twin pillars of the Party's philosophical basis and its belief that Party members should have ultimate democratic control and ownership over Party policy. The terms of reference should make it clear that all other questions regarding Party organisation and structure should be open to debate and discussion in a manner consistent with the Party's codes of conduct and democratic values.
3. Appoint a Chair to the Commission and agree the basis on which up to ten additional members may be appointed, selected for their skills and experience, and also agree that the Commission's work will be supported by a small secretariat provided by national party staff.
4. Instruct the Commission to agree a structure, including key questions for the review, and to engage with all members and common interest groups within the Party at the earliest possible opportunity.

Conference further agrees to

5. Suspend further consideration of proposals from the Governance Review Group (GRG) but integrate the work of, and current proposals from, the GRG to date into the review of the Commission.

WHO ELSE IS SUPPORTING IT?

A wide cross-section of members across the party, including

Adam McGibbon
Caroline Lucas
Jonathan Bartley
Natalie Bennett
Sian Berry

Judy Maciejowska
Elise Benjamin
Sandy Irvine
Oliver Dowding
Sam Riches

WHY YOU SHOULD SUPPORT THIS MOTION

WHAT IS THE CHALLENGE?

Organizational structures and processes are important. They are a big influence on how effective we can be as a party – because they influence how we work together and make decisions; how we behave and act. They help shape the culture and norms of the party.

Our challenge is that the Green Party's structure and processes were largely formed in the mid 70s. But both the party, and society, have changed significantly since then.

Back in those early days, there was little alternative to a conference as a democratic way of making decisions. We had only a tiny handful of councillors – and no MPs or

MEPs. We didn't have the money to pay anyone – so there was no executive group within the party. Our membership, and the number of local parties, was a fraction of what it is today.

In addition, the digital revolution makes it possible to completely rethink how people engage with a political party. The use of technology could be transformative in a number of ways which we can't foresee until we adopt a new perspective.

To be as effective as possible, we need a fundamental review of how we organise and operate.

WHAT ARE THE PROBLEMS WE'RE TRYING TO SOLVE?

Here are some of the problems that we think need to be fixed. The proposed review would consult across the party to quickly arrive at a definitive expression of these. But here's a starting point:

1. We're way behind other radical movements when it comes to **attracting and mobilising the energy of members and volunteers** in our campaigns and elections. How can we do this more effectively?
2. Only tiny numbers of members attend conference. **How can we engage far more members** to participate in party elections, and organisational and policy decision-making?
3. Our policies often appear inconsistent and outdated. The process of developing policy is unwieldy and far

too slow. How do we ensure that members retain their role in developing policy, whilst at the same time ensuring that we have **policies that are relevant, usable and credible?**

4. The party now has a staff of around 40 and a wide range of different governing bodies and committees. Responsibilities are often overlapping and sometimes unclear. How can we **streamline our internal organisation in order to become more effective** as a party at campaigning and winning elections?'
5. How can we attract more people with the right skills who want to help **lead the party at all levels?**

Because these issues are interconnected the review would consider them in an integrated way.

MOBILISING THE ENERGY OF MEMBERS AND VOLUNTEERS

What can we learn from movements like Podemos or the Bernie Sanders campaign about campaigning more effectively? Both have achieved massive online engagement outside of traditional campaign structures. They've managed to generate enthusiasm, but then turn that grassroots energy into disciplined volunteer teams

doing effective voter-contact work. Technology is part of the story – it can help absorb and deploy large numbers of volunteers. But it is new thinking about how we organise and campaign that is most important. We're doing some of this already in places – but often our traditional way of doing things is a barrier.

ENGAGING MANY MORE MEMBERS IN DECISION MAKING

The main forum for decision-making is conference, but typically only 4% of members attend. The relatively small number of attendees can make Conference subject to undue influence by very small but well-organised minorities. Many members feel that participating in the party is confusing and difficult. The arcane world of standing orders, motion prioritisation and the labyrinth that is the members' website ... all seem designed to prevent all but the initiated from getting involved in what's being discussed at conference.

Then we have a bewildering range of bodies, committees and sub-committees, with elections held in different ways.

Other committees are elected at Conference in a ballot that opens on a Saturday evening and closes early afternoon on Sunday. Not only is it a small proportion of members who attend Conference, but an even smaller proportion who are there for the hours that the ballot is open.

We're already experimenting with alternative approaches. For example some regions have held successful regional conferences with high attendances and members saying they found these more inspiring and useful.

But we could surely do much more to make participation in the party easier and more meaningful for all party members?

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ENSURING WE HAVE POLICIES THAT RELEVANT, USABLE AND CREDIBLE

The Policies for a Sustainable Society (PSS) is an unwieldy set of documents, hundreds of pages long, set out in a series of sections under different policy headings. Each subject chapter contains the policies agreed and amended at successive Green Party conferences.

The nature of each of the policies varies wildly – some contain a long background section, others contain only policies. Others are clearly unbalanced by a large number of random amendments from members who have wanted to reflect their own views on what may be a minor element of a larger policy.

During the 2015 General Election campaign particularly, the policies in the PSS were subjected to unprecedented scrutiny by both the media and public. This led to embarrassment for party spokespeople who were suddenly faced with questions about obscure policies, sometimes injudiciously worded and out-of-date, some of which were counter to current thinking or less progressive than current government policy.

At the same time, some members are also deeply wedded to the minutiae of specific wording in policies and will complain to HQ or Westminster if a different phraseology is

used from that contained in the PSS.

Policy Development Committee (PDC) has made some changes to try and streamline the policy development process by, for example, introducing accredited policy motions – which, when first presented to conference, elicited an almost audible sigh of relief and acceptance from members, who clearly didn't feel that they were required to inspect it forensically.

Some policy groups have moved to 2-page policies, backed up by longer background documents. Only the 2-page policies require change by conference vote, whereas the background documents can be changed as required.

And day-long 'policyfests' have been trialled twice in the last year to allow members to participate in longer policy discussions than are allowed at Conference.

But we should take a step back and have a radical rethink of our policy making process:

How can we find a way of ensuring that members retain their role in developing policy whilst at the same time ensuring that our policy publications and statements are relevant, usable and credible?

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STREAMLINING THE PARTY TO BECOME MORE EFFECTIVE

The Westminster office, and the party head office at The Biscuit Factory, need to work well together and need clarity about their separate and complementary roles of running the parliamentary office and the party. Should there be a separation between political and administrative functions and how would that work? The party has a lord, two London Assembly members, MEPs and around 170 local councillors. Until recently, these latter have barely figured in party news stories and policy implementation successes.

Since the 'green surge' of 2015 the party has been able to employ more staff both in the Westminster office, at HQ, and in the regions where some are contributing to the cost of their Regional Coordinators alongside HQ,

But we haven't thought through the implications of having employed staff in different entities, for what each is accountable and to whom. There is an uncomfortable

transition period for GPEX in terms of changes to the roles of 'volunteer' co-ordinators doing an unpaid job to roles more akin to non-executive directors.

GPRC and GPEX have often clashed rather than worked together to promote effective organisation. Responsibility has only recently been clarified for key functions such as the development of political strategy, which should be the driver of all other strategies.

We need to **streamline our internal organisation** and provide clarity on the roles of staff and of our governing bodies, at both national and regional level, **so that**

(a) different groups work together effectively, and that we are able to respond quickly to often fast-moving situations

(b) there is robust oversight of how things are working.

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GETTING MORE LEADERS THROUGHOUT THE PARTY

Few members put themselves forward for internal elections – there is often no competition for positions.

And a significant number of coordinators on GPEX have resigned, for a variety of reasons, and not been replaced for lack of people putting themselves forward for co-option.

So clearly the party is not attracting a large number of talented people to want to take leadership roles within the party.

Because so few members vote in most internal elections, the process affords little legitimacy to those who are

elected. At the same time, we don't specify the skills and experience required for a role, or have any scrutiny that people putting themselves forward have the necessary skills and experience.

And at a grass roots level, outside of election campaigns, how do we best utilise the energy and enthusiasm of members? How can we better encourage and celebrate people who lead creative campaigning actions?

How can we increase the number of people who want to help lead the party at all levels?

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HOW WILL WE TACKLE THIS CHALLENGE?

Organisational change is difficult. The good news for us is that the party's core values and objectives haven't changed. Often, organisations need to make a radical change of some kind because their purpose is no longer clear or relevant.

But in our case, we just need to change the way we operate to take account of today's world – both in terms of new technology, but also in terms of how members (and the general public) want to interact with a political party.

One of the biggest challenges in leading organizational change is stepping outside the box of 'how things are done around here'. People who have been deeply embedded in an organisation

for many years – particularly if they have positions of power and influence – are rarely able to see the full spectrum of possibilities.

At the same time, 'change agents' who don't have a deep understanding of, and empathy with, the purpose, values and objectives of the organisation, are unlikely to be able to bring the organisation along with them on the journey.

Because organisational change is so difficult, we will maximise our chances of success if we ask a small group of the best people we can find, to act as catalysts. We wouldn't let a surgeon operate on us if they didn't have a lot of experience and expertise; equally, we shouldn't let inexperienced people try to operate on our organisation...

WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE ARE WE LOOKING FOR ON THE COMMISSION?

Seven to nine people is the ideal balance between effectiveness and maximising diversity of thinking. We should look for people who can demonstrate:

- longstanding and deep commitment to the ideals and insights of the green movement
- experience of leading complex change in organisations with many stakeholder groups

Next we should filter by looking for in-depth expertise in one or more of the following areas:

- systems thinking
- action research
- organisation design and development
- behavioural science
- legal structures of groups
- digital engagement
- group facilitation and moderation

The key traits we should look for in the final selection of members of this team:

- evidence of an open mind
- critical thinking and analysis
- collaborative
- outgoing and persuasive communicator

WHO SHOULD SELECT APPLICANTS?

The smallest possible panel that adequately represents different groups within the party... probably

- Leadership: Caroline Lucas or Jonathan Bartley
- HQ: Nick Martin
- Elected Greens: one of the Association of Green Councillors/London Assembly/MEPs
- Membership: one/two people from Green Party Regional Council
- The chairperson of the Commission

AN OUTLINE ACTION PLAN

- *October 2017*: Conference initiates the Review
- Applications invited by *end of October 2017*
- Commission selected: *end of November 2017*
- *December/January/February 2018*: Immersion and informal consultation stage – leading to draft principles/choices that can be taken on the road for consultation with members.
- *March/April/May 2018*: 1st consultation period:
- *June 2108*: distil and revise
- *July 2018*: 2nd consultation period
- *October 2018*: Present back to conference

**WE CAN UNLEASH THE ENERGY AND CREATIVITY OF FAR MORE OF OUR MEMBERS.
WE CAN WORK TOGETHER MORE EFFECTIVELY.
LET'S START AN EXCITING JOURNEY.**

**PLEASE VOTE FOR THIS MOTION
AT CONFERENCE**