Report by Paul Leake

* Annual Report - SHA Council Delegate

I have been one of the North East branch's Central Council delegates since March 2018.

Central Council over this period has been frustrating on not in a position to advance the aims of the SHA - promoting a social view of public health and protecting health and social care services from threats like privatisation.  This has been for two reasons:

a) SHA has been involved in a contentious employment dispute and this has taken up a lot of central council's time and energy.  It is (with hindsight) clear that the employment procedures in place were not adequate both in terms of day to day management support of staff members and in particular a lack of detail on dealing with disputes.  SHA officers in several cases has to use their discretion in judging how to go forward where procedures were quiet or ambiguous.  Central Council is supposed to be the principal decision making body of the SHA and there is an understandable tension between the need of Council to be in control of a fair process and hold officers accountable, and with the unsuitability of sharing confidential employment information across a body with large membership and without prejudicing the SHA's interests were an employment matter to go to tribunal or arbitration.  Members (and officers) have struggled to reconcile these tensions which have, on occasion, spilled over into counter-productive and uncomradely behaviour from some members.

b) SHA was unable to access its funds for part of the year

It is clear that SHA's governance is not fit for purpose.  SHA AGM discussed changes a few years ago that would have resolved this but did not agree by the necessary majority. The officers are convening a working group on governance to bring new proposals and I have asked to be a member of this.  It is difficult to overstate how important this is to securing the SHAs long term future and I would urge all members to engage with this.

Despite that there has been positive work with the Labour Health Team and MPs, including around the NHS Reinstatement Bill.  There is continued close working between the SHA and campaigners against cuts and privatisation in the NHS.  While the SHA's motion to Labour Conference on Social Care was not taken SHA is helping build a consensus around the necessity of democratically accountable, well-funded social care service.  New policy working groups are being set up.

As a member of central council i have sought to contribute in a number of ways

a) Representing the branch and reporting back

b) Working with delegates from other branches to ensure that the needs of branches are not overlooked and their autonomy developed

c) Holding officers to account

d) Seeking to influence policy, particularly recognising the social determinants of health in the North East, disability and the importance of health in the workplace.

e) Putting forward ideas around better linking of campaigns with Labour councils and councillors.

This has been a difficult year for the SHA and attending central council has not always been fun.  However I am optimistic that SHA will move forward over the next 12 months getting back on a firm footing and making sure Labour have health and social care policies that will improve the lives of the many and using health campaigns (in conjunction with the Shadow Health Team) to get a Labour Government elected.

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