



**European Movement in Wandsworth & Merton
Chair's Report
For the AGM, January 20th 2025**

The objectives of this branch as stated in the Constitution are:

- to promote awareness of the European Union (EU)
- to disseminate a positive image of the European Union and Britain's role in Europe
- to raise awareness of European values and to campaign to build a closer relationship with the EU and to rebuild* public support for such a relationship.
- to further the aims and objectives of the European Movement (EM) by undertaking relevant activities as stated in the Constitution.

** The Secretary will propose at the AGM a change to the wording of this objective, from 'rebuild public support' to '**intensify** public support', recognising the strong evidence we already have of support locally for a closer relationship.*

The Committee

The AGM on 16th January 2024 elected the following committee:

Chairperson	Barbara Callender
Vice-chair	Sally Morgan
Secretary	Phil Carey
Treasurer	Arjan Geveke
Campaign Executive	Ben Austin
Membership Officer	Helen Rennie-Smith
Social Media	Maciej Psyk, James Ryder
YEM representative	Lucy Marsden

Summary

The branch members have had another highly busy year. Our general campaign strategy has been to ensure that we have a regular stream of activity underway, whether that be action days to meet the general public or other events – like talks, social meet ups, lobbying MPs or otherwise.

Where possible we seek to then publish and promote via social media, paid or organic, photos and conclusions from our events. It has been an extremely busy and diverse year of activities, both as a local group and in collaboration with EM HQ and other branches.

Activities in the community

- **London Regional Member social**
On **January 16th** our AGM was followed by a talk from Sir Vince Cable. Our hired room at Balham Bowls Club was packed out with EM members and supporters from across London keen to hear from one of our key patrons.
- **Rock up at Raynes Park street stall**

On **February 24th** we set up outside Raynes Park station, equipped with leaflets and our new Eurometer. Most of the passersby were of the same opinion as we are: the UK is much worse off outside the EU, and no one could discern any Brexit benefits.

- **Social evenings**

On **April 20th** we returned to our favourite pub in Earlsfield, the Leather Bottle, for another social event which was well attended by local members, and we also met up on a chilly June evening (4th) at the Charles Holden pub in Colliers Wood.

- **Battersea street stall**

On **July 13th** we took the Eurometer to Battersea High Street, where our questions focused on what passersby thought the new government should prioritise in their relations with the EU. Nearly all wanted to see closer relations with our near neighbours.

- **National Rejoin March 2024**

On **September 28th** our branch joined forces with Lambeth for Europe once again, distributing leaflets and stickers about EM to the people marching.

- **'The Colleagues we lost to Brexit'**

October 10th saw the result of several meetings and filming with **Rachel Wang**, the co-founder and director of **Chocolate Films**, a film production house in Battersea that brings disadvantaged young people into filmmaking and digital art. I had met her at an International Women's Day event hosted by Marsha de Cordova. With the help of the head of press and media at EM HQ, we produced a short film interview with Rachel that spells out how Brexit has negatively impacted her company. The film can be found on our website.

- **Wandsworth Town street stall**

On **November 2nd** we held our final street stall of the year outside Wandsworth Town station, with a visit from Spiderman as an added attraction. We managed to attract enough people to the Eurometer to get a good idea of what the locals there want: greater cooperation with the EU as many key areas as possible.

Members, supporters and e-mails

At the time of writing EM Merton has 111 members (compared to 90 in January last year) and Wandsworth has 235 (193); this is impressive growth during a year in which our politicians at least have tried to divert attention away from the opportunities of better relations with Europe. The database also includes so-called supporters, people who have signed up for our e-mails but are not yet paid-up members. The best way to monitor the number of supporters is to study the statistics of our e-mail messages. Between the last AGM in January 2024 and now we have sent out 15 e-mails to supporters. The year started with an e-mail sent to 1288 supporters, a number that has gradually declined to 1122.

European Twinning for Wandsworth and Merton

We have had a goal of building town twinning relationships for both boroughs for several years. Our initial approach had been to work with councillors in both boroughs, of all parties and we had some success engaging with senior leaders in both. Unfortunately, both councils decided not to action these proposals late in 2022 due to other more pressing financial commitments and we have been trying to work with them ever since to keep twinning on the agenda.

In 2024 we have surveyed members for suggestions about who to twin with as well as launching a twinning website, to act as a repository for the project. Post General Election we reviewed our strategy and have decided to focus first on launching twinning associations to help drive it forward. We hope to gather a wider membership of civil society and businesses to form a group devoted towards getting the councils to change their mind. We are going to start a new programme of communicating to these groups, with the intention of inviting them to a launch event. This approach proved successful when launching our local EM branch.

We are focusing on Wandsworth initially as we obtained a grant of £500 specifically for that purpose. If we can successfully launch the association, we will then consider doing the same in Merton. Much of what we plan will be easily transferable to Merton but to replicate the Wandsworth approach in full we will need to find further funds. This may be obtainable from EM HQ, which supports eligible projects organised by the local branches.

Young European Movement (YEM)

The last year has been a busy year for the Young European Movement with their increased number of media appearances and focus on networking alongside their efforts to increase the turnout of young voters during the general election. They ran a petition to demonstrate support for the UK to rejoin Erasmus which was handed into No. 10 Downing Street with over 30,000 signatures.

Although the current government is yet to signify an intention to rejoin the scheme YEM continue to campaign for this goal alongside the proposed Youth Mobility Scheme which would allow those under thirty to live and work in the UK and EU respectively. Their various efforts and activities were recognized at the Empower EU Awards where they won the Youth Champions Award. They rounded up the end of the year with a roundtable event to discuss their milestones and achievements over the past year and their proposals and plans for the year going forward.

Settled Status

Our branch can pride itself on advocating changes to the European Union Settlement Scheme (EUSS), the Government's major post-Brexit scheme for Europeans from continental Europe (not including Irish nationals) that replaced freedom of movement. While the scheme itself has been included in the Withdrawal Agreement, the details of its operation – allocated human resources, means and procedures to make decisions and appeals, issuance of certificates, transition from the pre-settled status to settled status, integration of the scheme with the Border Force personnel and equipment – rest squarely with the United Kingdom, particularly the Home Secretary. Regrettably, the scheme has been plagued by shortcomings and dysfunctions, which have placed extra burdens on the applicants, with insufficient focus on making the necessary improvements to the scheme.

Building on our previous work in 2023, the Committee had endeavoured to identify areas requiring priority changes:

- to clear or at least reduce the current backlog below 100.000 cases nationally,
- to prioritize cases unacceptably pending for over 24 months,
- to grant temporary but effective rights to applicants waiting for the decision,

- to create special procedures for particularly vulnerable classes of people unlikely or simply unable to submit an appeal on their own (elderly, digitally excluded, with a mediocre command of English, victims of domestic abuse etc).

Upon completing that stage, we had meetings in surgery with MP for Battersea **Marsha de Cordova** and MP for Putney **Fleur Anderson**, highlighting how their constituents are being affected. Both politicians listened to us carefully and undertook a number of actions to highlight the need for change. We shall contact our local members via the usual channels with any new information once we receive them.

It may be worth noting that our identified priority areas show a high degree of convergence with the "six urgent proposals on the EU Settlement Scheme" independently developed by **The3million** and presented in late December 2024. We hope to continue to work with them, MPs and others to bring about that change in 2025.

EM Board and National Council

As a member of both the Board and the Council, I have continued to work with EM management and activists around the country developing strategies to expand our membership and influence.

In February I was invited to represent EM UK at the regular meetings of one of the Political Committees of European Movement International and attended these throughout the year.

On August 20th I was one of a small group of EM officials who handed in a petition to No. 10 Downing Street, which highlights the impact of Brexit on musicians through the Save the Music campaign.

At the national AGM on November 16th I was nominated as the new Chair of the Diversity Committee of EM, one of the four statutory standing committees.

MP contacts

Whilst four out of the five MPs representing Wandsworth and Merton seats were returned to Parliament after the July General Election, the campaign period and aftermath as the new Government settled in has dominated the political year locally as well as nationally. But in the last few months we have been able to rebuild our engagement with the four Labour MPs who were re-elected:

- We have an excellent relationship with *Marsha de Cordova, Battersea*, who has recently accepted the invitation to become a Vice-President of EM. She has shown particular interest in the challenges faced by her constituents seeking EU Settled Status (see above), and she has just been appointed Leader and Co-Chair of the formal UK Delegation to the UK-EU Parliamentary Partnership Assembly; her office value the advice we have been able to provide on European matters.
- We similarly maintain a close and effective dialogue with *Fleur Anderson, Putney*, and have talked through with her too the problems of EU Settled Status. Despite being a member of the government and spending 2 days a week as Parliamentary Under-Secretary (Northern Ireland Office), Ms Anderson continues to support our work. She takes all our concerns most seriously and is keen to be invited to forthcoming events.
- We are only now getting to the same level of contact with *Rosena Allin-Khan, Tooting*, in part because our Committee currently lacks constituents of hers. But, as she is now

Co-Chair of the new All-Party Parliamentary Group on Europe, her commitment to the cause is clear, and we now have a unique opportunity to further our goals through actively supporting Ms Allin-Khan in her work – especially if members of ours living in Tooting can come on board.

- We have kept in touch with *Siobhain McDonagh, Mitcham and Morden*, and most recently invited her to join a social meet-up with members; we hope to be able to say more about that early in the new year.
- The *Wimbledon* seat was won by *Paul Kohler* for the LibDems. It's clear from discussions to date that he is a strong supporter of closer ties with Europe, and we are delighted he has agreed to be our guest at a Fundraising Dinner for the Branch, on 6 March; more details to follow.

Communication

- **Website**

We have revamped our website at www.wandsworth.eu to include links to all our recent activities.

- **Social Media**

Facebook

Our branch continues to maintain a Facebook page at:

<https://www.facebook.com/europeanmovementinwandsworth/>

Throughout 2024 the number of followers has risen by 20 and currently stands at 887. They continue to be predominantly members of the branch, members of the European Movement from other branches, other committed Europeans and a small number of branches or organisations themselves. If Facebook itself is to be believed, 768 of them live in the United Kingdom and 119 abroad. Majority of them are over 50, which corresponds with the HQ's statistics.

836 people like our website, a slight rise from 817 a year ago. We currently follow 14 organisations – mostly European Movement UK and fellow branches. Also, some friendly organisations like The New European and Young EM London. Direct communication with the administrator (and vice versa) is possible although practice shows that to be rare.

The page has not had Community Standards violations or restrictions. It is run by six administrators with two access levels. It is authorised to run social issue, electoral or political ads. It is able to earn money, but currently does not.

We are routinely engaged with other similar pages, eg. Leeds for Europe, “liking” their content or commenting. Our website is public, meaning that any Facebook user can follow us and comment. The cost of this openness is that paid promotion of a post may attract some aggressive, vulgar or “trolling” people, or even fake accounts, known to be around 5%. The only defence against them is to block that account from engaging, which in 2024 has been deployed as the last resort.

Facebook adverts in 2024:

Completed	First words	Reach	Post engagements	Duration (days)	Amount spent	Cost per link click
11 February	On February 24th we will be doing another street stall with our Eurometer	3339	444	13	£20.00 out of £20.00	5p
3 April	We would like to invite all our members and supporters to a social lunch on 20th	3040	343	16	£20.00 out of £20.00	6p
27 May	As the Spring is in full swing and the "most dishonest general election in	1951	222	8	£20.00 out of £20.00	9p
2 July	The General Election campaign is barely referencing the damage done to the UK	3401	868	11	£20.00 out of £20.00	2p

Twitter/X/Bluesky/Threads/Instagram

To ensure we cover all the bases, we have expanded our presence beyond Facebook and X/Twitter to also include Instagram, Threads and Bluesky.

The latter part of 2024 saw many individuals and organisations from the pro-EU sphere choosing to abandon X/Twitter and turn to Bluesky as a replacement - as a result our Bluesky account now boasts approximately 4,800 followers whilst our X/Twitter follower count has declined to just 1,260.

Our ventures onto Instagram and Threads have been less successful thus far, with just 74 and 40 followers respectively. We continue to post information about local campaigning activities, events and links to articles and reports of note on all of these platforms, as well as cross-promoting the activities of other pro-EU groups. Links to all of our accounts can be found on the revamped front page of our website mentioned above.

A clear observation from the events of 2024 is that social networks and, more broadly, online influence have never been more relevant as a campaigning tool. However, groups such as Reform UK and the US Trump campaign now appear to be leading the way in engagement, particularly through the format of short video clips and podcasts. The question now is what steps we can take to develop such content to promote views, information and discussion points related to UK and Europe beyond our 'bubble' of committed supporters - all ideas are welcome!

- **Traditional Media**

I have had several letters published in the South London Press. These can be found on our website: https://www.wandsworth.eu/in_the_press

Looking ahead

We are hosting an event following our AGM on **January 20th** at The Omnibus Theatre in Clapham with **Dominic Grieve KC, Co-President** of the **European Movement** as guest speaker.

On **January 25th** we will be joining in the national EM Action Day for the Erasmus+ campaign with a street stall in Wimbledon.

On **March 6th** we will be hosting a fundraising dinner with **Paul Kohler**, new Lib Dem MP for Wimbledon.

We welcome suggestions and input from our members and are always looking for more volunteers and committee members.

Acknowledgements

Once again I would like to thank a highly proactive and efficient committee and all the volunteers who have worked with us on our campaigns this year. I am grateful to Ben Austin, Phil Carey, Arjan Geveke, Lucy Marsden, Sally Morgan, Maciej Psyk, Helen Rennie-Smith and James Ryder for their input to this report and accounts. I also wish to thank Robin Phelps, our auditor.

Battersea, January 2025

Barbara Callender

Chair

European Movement in Wandsworth & Merton

<https://wandsworth.eu/>