

# GUIDE

**for new & newly enthused  
Labour Party members**

**Published by Momentum Sheffield**

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The Labour Party rulebook is almost a hundred pages long and written in pure Bureaucratese. This is an attempt to explain the most important rules and structures in plain English. The main rules for members looking to get more involved in the party can be found on three manageable pages in the *Model procedural rules* (pages 56-58).



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# I) Local Labour Party organisation

## 1) Branch Labour Parties (BLPs)

The Labour Party is divided into branches, usually based on the ward boundaries for councillors (there are 28 electoral wards in Sheffield). Branches usually meet monthly and:

- discuss political issues and plan local campaigning activities;
- send motions to the CLP meetings;
- nominate candidates for election to the CLP Executive;
- elect delegates for the CLP;
- select local council candidates and
- participate in trigger ballots for sitting MPs.

Branches are run by an Executive elected by an Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the branch, which usually takes place in April or May.

If your branch does not organise political discussion or debate, try to suggest it at your next meeting. Guest speakers or discussion around a motion can make meetings more interesting.

## 2) Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs)

CLPs are based on the electoral district for the MP and there are six in Sheffield. CLP meetings take place monthly and:

- discuss political issues;
  - plan local campaigning activities;
  - send motions and delegates to Labour Party Conference;
  - elect officers to the Executive Committee, which oversees the day-to-day business of the CLP;
- organise hustings during candidate selections for the MP and MEPs.



There are two main models for CLP meetings:

- a) some CLP meetings are open to all members and are known as **All Member Meetings (AMM)** – this structure was introduced in the late 90s, when meetings were extremely small;
- b) more traditionally, CLPs operate on **General Committee (GC)** structure. Some GCs allow all members to attend but only elected delegates can vote, whilst some GCs are restricted to delegates only. Delegates are elected from Labour Party branches, affiliated trade union branches and affiliated socialist societies.

Details on the structures can be found on pages 80 and 81 of the *Labour Party Rulebook*. These structures (like anything else in the local standing orders/local constitution) can be changed only at an AGM or a special meeting called for this purpose - any changes need to have the support of 2/3 of members/delegates.

### 3) Branch and CLP officers

Detailed job descriptions can be [found here](#).

The **BLP Executive** is made up of:

- chair
- vice chair
- secretary
- treasurer

At least two of these four must be women. There can be up to four additional members.

The **CLP Executive** is made up of:

- chair and deputy chair
- vice chair (membership)
- secretary
- treasurer
- women's officer
- youth and student officer
- Organiser appointed by the Executive and Campaigns Committee

At least three of these officers must be women.

In addition, the BLP and CLP can elect 'coordinators' or 'officers' for specific areas of work, e.g. Political Education Officer; Trade Union Liaison Officer; Equality Officers for BAME, Disability, LGBT and Youth; Fundraising Officer etc. Coordinators will be non-voting members of the Executive, unless with the approval of the NEC, the CLP has made particular roles executive posts and amended the gender quota.



Some CLPs invite local Branch Secretaries or even the whole Branch Executive onto the CLP Executive. Check your local standing orders or talk to your secretary.

- **Chair:** This is the senior position in the branch/CLP. Chairing meetings is only part of the job; together with the secretary, the chair guides and oversees activities and campaigns, plans meetings, etc.
- **Vice-chair:** assists the chair with the above, chairs meetings when the chair is not present.
- **(Membership) secretary (post can be split in two):** Communicates with members, answers their questions etc; works with the chair to ensure meetings run smoothly and oversees activities and campaigns, plans meetings, etc.

## 4) CLP Campaign Committee

Every CLP runs a Campaign Committee that organises the public activity of the CLP and any election campaigns. Each branch sends at least one delegate to the CC, while the chair and treasurer of the CLP, the MP and/or the parliamentary candidate, and the parliamentary agent are ex-officio members. It votes for a Campaign Co-ordinator who is supposed to organise and cohere constituency-wide campaigns.

Meetings of the Campaign Committee are open to all members and can be a useful vehicle to try and make Labour Party events and campaigns more interesting, transparent and democratic.



## 5) District Labour Party (DLP)

DLPs don't exist everywhere. But in Sheffield, each branch sends two delegates to the DLP, which meets monthly. It can discuss motions that have been agreed by CLPs, hears reports from LP councillors and can make recommendations to them. This used to be an important forum (when it was still called the Local Government Committee) – for example, it used to write the manifesto for local

elections. Today, this is done by the council's Labour group itself. Still, the DLP can be a useful forum to hold councillors to account.

DLP meetings in Sheffield usually take place on the second Tuesday of every month at the Trades and Labour Club. All Labour Party members are allowed to attend.

The DLP has an Executive Committee made up of officers elected by the DLP, the Leader and Secretary of the Labour Group on Sheffield City Council, plus one member from each CLP. It sets the agenda for the DLP and deals with urgent business. It controls councillor selection meetings. Meetings take place on the first Tuesday of each month but are only open to executive members.

## II) How to get involved in your local Labour Party

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### 1) Contact your CLP and branch secretary

Once you have joined the party, you should receive your membership card, which shows the contact details of the secretary of your Constituency Labour Party (CLP).

Ask your CLP secretary to:

- add you to the local mailing list (this should happen automatically, but can take a long time)
- ask for the dates of future CLP meetings and the AGM
- ask which structures the CLP uses (see below)
- ask for the contact details of your local branch secretary
- ask for the CLP's standing orders (some branches also have standing orders – ask your branch secretary). These should contain information on the local quorum, structures, who is allowed to attend meetings of the local steering committee. Standing orders are based on the *Model procedural rules* of the LP's rulebook (see below)



## 2) Get involved in Momentum

This is the best place to find 'allies' on the left of the Labour Party. Momentum Sheffield currently meets at least monthly, organises political education and other events.

Momentum does not organise on the level of branches or constituencies, but in Sheffield we have elected representatives for the six Sheffield CLPs who help with our intervention in the Labour Party.



Join Momentum [here](#) and get involved locally by emailing [momentumsheffield@gmail.com](mailto:momentumsheffield@gmail.com)

## 3) Become a CLP delegate or officer in your branch/CLP

If your CLP operates with a General Committee (GC) (see above), you need to become a delegate from your branch in order to vote. Delegates are elected at the branch's AGM, but empty places can be filled at any branch meeting. Just tell the secretary you are interested in the position and they will have to bring it up at the next meeting.

In order to become an officer and join your BLP and CLP executive, you can nominate yourself at the AGM. If there are unfilled positions, any regular meeting can vote to fill those positions.

## 4) Write and move a motion

Please be aware that not everybody welcomes motions at Labour Party meetings. But they can be a very useful tool to put pressure on your MP, the CLP executive, Labour councillors or just help to lead to political clarity on a particular political issue.

- Ideally, a motion should be short, to the point and ask somebody to do something (the branch, the MP, the CLP etc). Check that any factual points are accurate - motions that have inaccuracies are less likely to be selected. You should also not rely on a single source, especially if it is a newspaper article or a campaign.
- The policy recommendations are the most important part of the motion and what you should give most thought to. A common problems is that

they contain a lot of criticisms and a detailed description of the problem but are thin, unclear or entirely negative in their conclusions.

- it is better to stick to a few substantial points which make for a coherent plan, rather than a long list of small changes.

**The best motions are structured as follows:**

- a) Description of the issue or problem which the motion seeks to address
- b) The Labour Party principle(s) which underlie the solution
- c) Highlighting existing Labour Party policies which will contribute to the solution
- d) The further policy proposals which normally conclude the motion and are its most important element

A motion needs to be submitted by a 'mover' in writing and somebody needs to 'second' it at the meeting itself. See below for an example.

For a motion to be heard by a CLP meeting, it needs to have been voted through by a branch. Please note that notifications for branch and CLP meetings are sent out with (a minimum of) *one week's notice*, but motions need to be submitted to the secretary *two weeks in advance* of that meeting. Which means you need to know when your branch meetings take place or submit your motion 'blind'. It also means that it takes a full month for a motion to go through the branch and then the CLP – you should consider that with any time-sensitive issues.

The exception is an **emergency motion**, which must be submitted in writing to the secretary as soon as the emergency allows it. However, it is up to the chair of a meeting to decide if the motion deals with a real emergency (see below on how to challenge a decision by the chair).

**Amendments** and deletions can be moved and seconded from the floor of a meeting, but shall be handed to the secretary in writing. If an amendment or deletion is carried with a simple majority, the amended motion becomes a motion to which further amendments may be moved.

Motions are carried with a simple majority. In the event of there being an equality of votes, the chair may give a casting vote provided that s/he has not used an ordinary vote. If the chair does not wish to give a casting vote, the motion is not carried.





## Sample motion

This CLP notes:

- (a) the statement by the Red Cross' Chief Executive that it is having to respond to a "humanitarian crisis in our hospital and ambulance services";
- (b) spending on the NHS as a proportion of GDP (national wealth) has fallen from 8.8% in 2009/10 to 7.3% in 2014/15. (Ref: The Kings Fund).

The CLP instructs the Campaign Committee to plan and organise a significant and varied programme of campaigning events across the constituency for the Labour Party's forthcoming NHS Day of Action, including:

- (a) arranging at least one street stall in every branch of the constituency at a prominent location;
- (b) spending £50 on ordering 2000 copies of the Labour Party's NHS leaflet (Code: NHS Fund) to hand out to voters;
- (c) creating an attractive and eye catching display outside the Town Hall, highlighting the Conservatives' mismanagement of the NHS.

Furthermore, this CLP calls on the National Policy Forum to make it party policy for the next Labour Government to introduce legislation making it the law that NHS spending as a proportion of GDP must at least match the average health spending of countries in the OECD. (Currently 9.1%).

## 5) Challenge the chair

It can seem quite daunting to challenge the chair of a meeting. After all, they've been in the position forever, they know the rules much better than you and they seem so confident! However, it is important to know that *any* ruling by the chair of *any* Labour Party meeting can be challenged.

- a) A member needs to get up and raise a "point of order" and explain why the decision is wrong, in their view.
- b) Be clear about what exactly it is you are challenging:
  - For example, has the chair ruled that an emergency motion does not deal with "a real emergency"? Then you should briefly explain why it is a real emergency indeed and should therefore be discussed and/or voted on.
  - For example, has the chair ruled that a controversial issue should not be discussed any further and wants to move on to the next item? Your challenge should concretely call for the "discussion to be extended by xy minutes" or that "the four speakers who raised their hand should be heard".
- c) The point of order must be supported by at least four members eligible to vote. Don't be intimidated by the fact that the secretary might ask for your name to be taken down. This will have no negative consequences for you.

d) The chair will have to ask for a vote on his disputed decision. If 2/3 of members at the meeting agree with the challenge, the chair must adhere to it and, for example, allow an emergency motion to be discussed.

“Any breach of or question to the rules or standing orders may be raised by a member rising to a point of order. The chair’s ruling on any point arising from the rules or standing orders is final unless challenged by not less than four members; such a challenge shall be put to the meeting without discussion and shall only be carried with the support of two thirds of the members present.” (Chapter 15, point N, page 58).

### III) Electing representatives

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‘Representing Labour is a privilege, is now remunerated at all levels, and it surely cannot be acceptable to behave as if there are few if any obligations to the party at all levels. ‘ (p21 ‘Re-Founding Labour’ 2010)

#### 1) How are council candidates selected?

Interested candidates can nominate themselves to the Local Campaign Forum, who will interview new candidates. All those ‘endorsed’ by the LCF are included on a ‘panel of approved candidates’, which is sent to the relevant branches who organise shortlisting and selection meetings. Branch members vote in a ballot to determine who goes forward to be a candidate. As in all selections the NEC has overall authority in approving candidates and procedures.

Nominees who are not endorsed by the LCF can appeal to the Regional Board to try and get on the ballot.



#### 2) How are parliamentary candidates selected?

##### Step 1

If the sitting MP wants to stand again, the ‘trigger ballot’ process begins. All the constituency’s branches and its affiliates (trade unions, socialist societies, cooperative organisations) have one vote each and can choose ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to retaining the sitting MP as the only candidate. Each branch and affiliate is counted equally, irrespective of the number of members

- Branches meet in person to vote.
- Affiliates decide their own process for deciding this matter (it is argued that this gives trade unions a disproportionately large influence, as one union official can decide)

## Step 2

- If a simple majority of branches/affiliates vote 'yes', the sitting MP automatically becomes the official candidate. The selection process is over.
- If a majority of branches/affiliates vote 'no', then a full selection procedure takes place. It does not mean that the candidate is deselected.

## Step 3

The sitting MP is guaranteed a space on the shortlist. Other potential candidates need to submit their CV to the CLP shortlisting committee, who shall "*draw up a shortlist of interested candidates to present to all members of the CLP who are eligible to vote*". The NEC selection panel can produce a pool of "*nationally recommended candidates*" and/or interview additional candidates to select who is allowed onto the shortlist.

## Step 4

All eligible, individual Labour Party members in the constituency, with six or more months continuous membership, will be invited to a candidate selection meeting. Generally, the format of these meetings is that each candidate makes a speech and then all candidates answer questions submitted by the membership. Members then vote in a secret ballot, with the least popular candidate eliminated and their votes redistributed, until someone secures over 50% of the vote. Subject to approval by the NEC, the winner becomes the Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for the constituency.

## Step 5

The successful contender needs to be approved by the NEC. "*Where successful candidates are not members of the national recommended panel ... there should, however, be an endorsement interview in each case before a recommendation is made to the NEC*" (Labour Party rulebook 2016, p22). The NEC has indeed exercised its power to block a CLP's initial choice of candidate, though this does not happen often.

## 3) Selection of MEP candidates

A shortlist is drawn up by a regional selection board made up of representatives from CLPs in the area, along with affiliated organisations. A sitting MEP needs to get the support of at least 50% of the CLPs and affiliated organisations in their

region to get onto the shortlist for re-selection, alongside other nominees. The final candidate is chosen by a postal ballot, held across the region.

## 4) Scottish and Welsh Assembly candidates

Essentially the same as for MEPs only limited to the respective countries.

## 5) Holding your MP/representative to account

The trigger ballot process outlined above is only activated in the weeks after the announcement of a general election or by-election (or boundary change).

As a constituent, there are of course the familiar channels of communication with an MP or councillor (post, email, telephoning the local or Westminster office) and also constituency surgeries where you can meet them in person. Also, MPs and local representatives often attend CLP and branch meetings, which can therefore be a useful forum to hold them to account or question their decisions.

- The contact details of your MP can be found [here](#)
- All Sheffield councillors are listed [here](#) with contact details
- This [website](#) contains detailed overview of every sitting MP's voting record in parliament, organised into categories for easier reference

# IV) National Labour Organisation

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## 1) The National Labour Party

### The National Executive Committee

The NEC provides the strategic direction for the Party by overseeing the policy-making process, the party's administration, upholding the party's rules and ensuring it meet its legal obligations. It meets bi-monthly and has a number of sub-committees dealing with specific areas such as discipline (alleged breaches of party rules), equality (encouraging the participation of women, young people and other groups) and organisation (overseeing the arrangements for the selection of candidates for election).

The Party's Leader, Deputy Leader, Treasurer and Leader of the European Parliamentary Labour Party are automatically members of the NEC. The other members are elected by different sections of the party:

- 3 Ministers/Shadow Ministers nominated by the Cabinet/Shadow Cabinet
- 3 backbench MPs or Members of the European Parliament elected by the PLP and European PLP
- 1 elected at the National Young Labour Conference
- 1 elected by the Black and Minority Ethnic Labour Conference
- 1 representative of the Scottish Labour Party
- 1 representative of the Welsh Labour Party
- 12 elected by trade union delegates at the Party Conference
- 1 elected by delegates from socialist, cooperative and other affiliated organisations at Party Conference
- 6 elected by a biennial national postal ballot of party members
- 2 elected by a biennial national postal ballot of councillors, directly elected mayors or police commissioners

All party members may vote in the postal ballot to elect the 6 CLP representatives on the NEC.

### **Party Conference**

The Labour Party Conference directs and controls the work of the party. It is the supreme decision making body and decides the Labour Party's policy framework and rules. However, the Party Conference Agenda is rigidly controlled. Years ago, the Conference mostly debated motions submitted by trade unions and constituency parties. Today, it mainly considers NEC reports and policy documents, so there is very limited scope for constituencies or trade unions to influence what is debated. (See the section on the agenda below). Furthermore, some decisions taken by the Conference are ignored and not implemented.

### **Party Conference - Delegates**

The Labour Party Conference meets annually in September/October, although the NEC can call a special conference at any time, as it did in March 2014 to approve changes to the Party's rules for electing the Leader and Deputy Leader. Trade Unions and other affiliated organisations like socialist societies can send a specific number of delegates based on the number of affiliated members and CLPs are entitled to a number of delegates based on their membership.

Specifically, CLPs can send

- 1 delegate for the first 749 individual members; and
- 1 additional delegate for every additional 250 members.

At least every second delegate must be a woman and if the CLP is only entitled to one delegate, this must be a woman every other year. Plus:

- 1 women delegate if there are more than 100 female members
- 1 youth delegate if there are more than 30 members under 27

At least 50% of delegates must be women. If there are more than 100 women in the CLP, an additional woman delegate may be appointed. If there are more than 30 young members (under the age of 27), another young delegate may be appointed.

Anyone who will have been a member of the Labour Party for a year on the date set for the receipt of delegates' names may stand for election as a delegate. Branches vote on who to nominate as delegates, usually at their Annual General Meeting. The CLP subsequently votes to elect the required number of delegates from the nominated candidates.



### **Party Conference - Voting**

Voting at Party conference is usually by a show of hands of all delegates present, but sometimes a card vote is called. In a card vote, trade union and affiliate organisation delegates have 50% of the votes and CLPs the other 50%. Each CLP is allocated a portion of that 50% according to its number of members and that vote is then divided between the CLP's delegates. eg If a CLP is entitled to 0.1% of the total vote and has two delegates at Conference, they each cast 0.05% of the card vote.

### **Party Conference - Agenda**

The Conference Arrangements Committee (CAC) is elected by a conference card vote. It takes office at the end of that conference for a year. Therefore, the annual party Conference is run by the CAC elected at the previous conference. The CAC is responsible for deciding the order of debates and plays a



significant role in determining which motions submitted to the Conference get discussed.

Each trade union, affiliated organisation and CLP may submit one contemporary motion. There are strict rules about what counts as a contemporary motion; it must not be on a subject addressed in a report to the Conference and must be on a contemporary issue (ie one that has arisen recently). The CAC decides which motions meet the criteria and conducts a ballot of delegates to determine their priorities. At least the 4 motions voted as highest priority by CLP delegates are placed on the agenda, as are the 4 voted top by trade union and affiliated organisation delegates.

Alternatively, a CLP may propose an amendment to the Party's Constitution.

### **General Secretary**

The Party Conference elects the General Secretary on the recommendation of the NEC. He or she remains in office for as long as they retain the support of the NEC or Conference. He or she is responsible for the day to day administration of the Party and is a powerful figure. The duties include managing the party's employees, running media and campaign strategies, organising the Party Conference and implementing the party's rules.

## **2) Regional Structures**

The Party's regional structure mirrors its national one. Scotland, Wales and each English Region has a Labour Party Office, overseen by elected Regional Boards (Executives in Scotland and Wales). Executives/Regional Boards have a role in policy development and organise local conferences. In addition, they act as appeals bodies for candidates who have been excluded from the approved list of local government candidates and councillors who have had the whip withdrawn.

## **3) How the Labour Party makes policy**

### **The National Policy Forum**

The National Policy Forum (NPF) is the body responsible for overseeing the development of Party Policy. It is made up of around 200 people, representing a wide range of different sections and groups in the Party: CLPs, regional policy forums, Ministers/Shadow Ministers, MPs and MEPs, peers, councillors, affiliated trade unions, socialist societies, black and minority ethnic, LGBT, young, student and disabled members. There are 55 CLP representatives, 5 from each of 9 English regions, 5 from Scotland and 5 from Wales, elected via a regional postal ballot of party members.



## **Policy Commissions**

The Labour Party sets up policy commissions whose membership is drawn from the Cabinet/Shadow Cabinet, the NPF and NEC. Each covers a specific policy area and is responsible for developing detailed policy through consultation, talking to experts and considering submissions from CLPs and individual Labour Party members.

The eight current policy commissions are detailed on Labour's Policy Forum at: <http://www.policyforum.labour.org.uk/>

Any Labour member may log on to this policy forum and suggest policy ideas or comment on others' suggestions. CLPs can also record motions on this system.

## **Making Policy**

The NPF meets from time to time to considers the output from policy commissions and produce reports on policy for the Party Conference. Until the 2016 conference, policy documents could only be accepted or rejected. However, the 2016 conference voted to allow parts of a policy document to be rejected, so in future the Conference will be able to delete one part of a policy without rejecting the whole thing.

# **4) Government**

## **Forming a Government**

If the Prime Minister (PM) resigns, either after a losing an election as Gordon Brown did, or for other reasons, the Queen decides the successor. She invites the person she thinks most likely to obtain a majority in Parliament to become PM. In practice, this is usually the Leader of the largest party in the House of Commons.

The Prime Minister then forms a Government by inviting about 20 MPs and peers (Members of the House of Lords) to join the Cabinet. Most are offered jobs running Government Departments such as the Treasury (the Chancellor), Health or Transport. The PM also appoints about 100 MPs and peers to become "junior" ministers. They are again mostly assigned to Government Departments, although some become "whips". Cabinet Ministers and their juniors are responsible to Parliament for the actions of their departments.

The Cabinet decides the policies the Government will follow. If this means changing the law, the appropriate Cabinet Minister will present a bill to Parliament. This has to go through several stages in both the House of Commons and Lords. Most of these involve a vote of MPs or peers. Each whip takes responsibility for a group of MPs or peers and tells them which votes are important and tries to ensure they follow party policy.



## **The Opposition**

The leader of the second largest party in Parliament becomes the Leader of the Opposition. That leader creates a *shadow* Government, inviting MPs to join a Shadow Cabinet, be Shadow Ministers and whips. Ministers/Shadow Ministers must vote as instructed by the whips. If they do not, they are expected to resign from their position. MPs who are not ministers or shadow ministers are called backbench MPs. They are supposed to follow the whips' instructions, but sometimes do vote against the party policy. This is called defying the whip. MPs who repeatedly vote against their party can be sanctioned by withdrawal of the whip, which effectively means they no longer represent that party.



## **Select Committees**

Each government department is scrutinised by a House of Commons Select Committee, which consists of at least 11 backbench MPs drawn from the Conservative, Labour and smaller parties in Parliament, so they are representative of House of Commons. The Chairs of Select Committees are elected by their fellow MPs. For example, Yvette Cooper was elected as Chair of the Home Affairs Committee.

Select Committees sometimes conduct investigations or consultations and anyone can send them their views. For example, the Home Affairs Select Committee has launched a consultation on immigration and asked for people's views on the subject. Further information about Select Committees and their activities can be found at: <http://www.parliament.uk/about/how/committees/select/>

## **The Parliamentary Labour Party**

All the Labour MPs elected to the House of Commons form the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP). The PLP holds regular meetings behind closed doors to question the Leader and discuss its concerns. Labour MPs elect one of their number to be Chair of the PLP and he or she chairs those meetings.

## V) Useful resources

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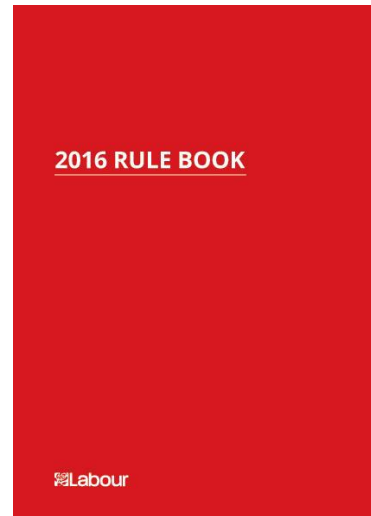
[The Labour Party rulebook](#) The main rules for members looking to get more involved in the party can be found in the *Model procedural rules* (pages 56-58).

[Membersnet](#) for LP members

[Detailed job descriptions](#) of officer posts in the Labour Party

[Jeremy Corbyn's ten pledges](#)

[Guide on councilor selection](#) produced by Momentum



[Grassroots Now!](#) produced by Momentum

[Jargon Buster](#) from Unite the union

[Guide to the Labour Party](#) from Unite the union

[The ABC of Chairmanship: Handbook on meeting procedure](#)