

**the co-operative party**  
Ideas to change Britain



# being a **co-operative councillor**

**A guide for newly  
elected Labour  
& Co-operative  
Councillors**



## information and support

If you would like any more information about the topics covered in this guide, or would like support or advice in implementing the ideas contained in it, feel free to get in touch.

### **Emma Hoddinott**

Local Government Officer,  
Co-operative Party  
[e.hoddinott@party.coop](mailto:e.hoddinott@party.coop)  
07392 195170

### **Contact the party**

[mail@party.coop](mailto:mail@party.coop)  
020 7367 4150

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# Introduction

## Well done on being elected and joining hundreds of other Co-operative Councillors across the country!

This guide is intended to help you through your first steps in local government and in particular help you develop the co-operative aspect of being a Labour & Co-operative Councillor. Your local council will offer an induction and training to help you familiarise yourself with all the different aspects of the role – casework, committees, meetings, ward work. **But** there is something a bit extra about joining our network of Co-operative Councillors across the country who are putting our values into action on a daily basis.

This guide will help you get recognised as a Co-operative Councillor, explain how you can work with other co-operators, as well as giving you lots of practical examples of what Co-operative Councillors are doing already and campaigns and ideas you can take forward in your area.

There is also plenty of advice and support for Co-operative Councillors through our online hub, regular mailings and practical guides. We've even got some tips from existing Councillors to help you along the way.

Welcome to the network and enjoy making the co-operative difference as a Councillor.

# Being recognised

Now you've been elected, you need to ensure you are correctly listed by your local authority as 'Labour & Co-operative'.

## Make sure your council lists you correctly

The Co-op Party writes to every council to inform them of who should be recognised as a Labour & Co-operative Councillor. You may also want to check yourself that this has been done correctly. It will vary, but in most cases there will be a Head of Democratic Services / Member Services / Monitoring Officer who will be responsible for maintaining a record of the party affiliations of sitting councillors. So if your status as a 'Labour & Co-operative' councillor is not currently reflected in official council records or publications, they should be your first point of contact to ask that you are.

"Labour and Co-operative Party" is registered with the Electoral Commission by both parties, as a joint description used by candidates standing on behalf of both the Labour Party and the Co-operative Party. This is based on our long standing electoral agreement. You should be listed as a Labour & Co-operative Councillor but you still remain part of the Labour Group, and will not affect political balance on the council.

## Let your local media know

For any newly-elected or re-elected councillor, it's never a bad idea to introduce yourself to any local media contacts who may later be helpful in publicising your local initiatives or campaigns.

For Labour & Co-operative councillors, this can also be a great opportunity to mention that you have been elected as Labour & Co-operative, and to explain to them what that means, and why you chose to stand to represent both parties. If you have included any co-operative policies in your manifesto, this is your chance to mention that too.

## Continue using the logo and branding

During the campaign, you may have used Labour & Co-operative posters, stickers and other printed materials. Now that the campaign is over, feel free to continue using them as you go about regular canvassing and other party political activity. If you'd like more branded materials, you can order through the Co-op Party's online shop.

And as during the campaign, we encourage you to also continue using the joint 'Labour & Co-operative' emblem on leaflets, outcards and other printed campaigning materials. You can find the logos on Labour's Contact Creator software, as well as downloading them from the Co-op Party website.

As an elected councillor, there will be rules restricting how and where it is permitted or appropriate to use party political logos and designations. Be sure to familiarise yourself with these rules, and to bear them in mind!



# Organising as Labour & Co-operative

**If more than one Labour & Co-operative Councillor has been elected to your council, then you can meet and work together as a group.**

Some groups of Co-op Councillors appoint a convenor to co-ordinate this, by inviting speakers from the co-op movement to meet with Councillors, co-ordinating reports and presentations back to local Co-op branches and making Co-op Councillors aware of current Co-op Party campaigns.

## Bristol Co-operative Councillors

In Bristol 6 of the 36 Labour councillors are Labour & Co-operative, plus many of the other Labour councillors are Co-op Party members. The Co-operative Councillors elect a Convener who takes the lead on organising meetings and events, and serves as a point of contact for many Co-op-related aspects of council policy. Together the Co-operative Councillors, and Councillors who are Co-op Party members, are working together with the council's Labour administration to establish Bristol as a co-operative city.



Bristol councillors support the Co-operative Party Food Justice Campaign

You do have to work to Labour Group rules, so you are not allowed to determine how Co-op Councillors vote in group meetings, or make recommendations or slates of candidates for elected positions.

As you represent the Labour & Co-operative parties it is important that you feed back to both your Labour Party ward branch and local Co-operative Party branch to let them know the work you are doing. You may have just been elected but this will help you if you decide to stand for re-election in the future. How this is done varies from branch to branch with some Councillors providing regular verbal reports to their branch, or written reports. We recommend that you stay in close touch with your local Co-op Party branch, so they know the work you are doing representing the Co-op Party.



# Being co-operative on the council

The role of a Councillor is very varied and covers a whole range of activities that you will be balancing all at once. Depending on your background and skills, some areas will be easy to do, whereas others will take time and training.

Most Councillors will be doing a mix of the following in their work:

- Serving the Community
- Representing the community
- Representing the Labour & Co-operative Parties
- Working with others
- Making rules and regulations
- Communicating and Influencing
- Managing casework

**“Remember to get a balance – make sure you split your time between work in your ward, in your council and for the parties. You don’t want to spend all your time in the town hall!”**

# 1. Working in a co-operative way

The Co-operative Party believes in the principles of self-help, self-responsibility and solidarity; trusting local communities to find their own solutions and devolving power and resources for them to achieve them.

Some councils have already devolved power down to a neighbourhood level through devolved or ward budgets which you will be able to work with. If not, think about how you can involve your local community in having a say in what you do and services.

## Supporting Citizens' Assemblies

Building on the Party's longstanding commitment to action on climate change and our belief that we can achieve more for our environment when working co-operatively, than we can alone, Councillor Tom Hayes is convening a citizen's assembly to bring every viewpoint into decision-making and to build a majority for action.

The council is supporting the assembly, because for the city to become Zero Carbon while struggling under austerity and cuts, councillors will have to make hard choices. They want to ensure that a real range of viewpoints gets heard, not just the usual green viewpoint. By breaking environmentalism out of the bubble of the traditional green community, the assembly will position climate as a challenge in the fight against inequality and highlight what a majority of residents want to do.



Councillor Tom Hayes is organising Citizens' Assemblies on Climate Change in Oxford.

The assembly will involve a representative sample of citizens, randomly selected by an independent body, supported by experienced independent facilitators. The assembly will establish the facts and make recommendations.

## Developing local community budgets

The Local Community Budget scheme was launched by Stevenage Borough Council in 2011 to help community groups and organisations to develop an idea, support an existing initiative or deliver a local priority. Stevenage Borough Council Councillors each have a budget of £2,500 and the Youth Mayor a budget of £3,300: a total of £100,800 to be allocated to support initiatives across the Borough. There is also a Neighbourhood Engagement Fund of £4,500.

## 2. Supporting the local co-operative economy

The Co-op Party is a link to the wider movement of co-operatives, mutuals and social enterprises. A good first step is to find out about the co-operatives in your ward and introduce yourself as a local Councillor.

If you have a local credit union for example, look at the ways your council can support them through our [guide on working with credit unions](#). In your ward you can make sure you promote their activities, ask if they want to be on your local leaflet and signpost residents to them.

### 3. Supporting co-operative solutions

The Co-operative Party believes in public ownership first, that is democratically controlled - putting workers, users and other stakeholders at the heart of services. Co-operative models can also be used in the community whether that be community pubs or childcare, local councils are supporting co-operative solutions that put people before profit.

#### Interview with Cllr Laura Price - How a campaign became a Co-op

I'm Laura Price and I'm a County Councillor for Witney South and Central. It started in early 2016, when we started seeing proposals coming through from the Conservative run County Council. The county budget for bus subsidies was over £2million a year, so it was one of the areas they were looking at to make a reduction, when they were making those huge cuts.

Quite quickly, I knew the impact from one route that affected my ward would be significant, so I called a public meeting, alongside one of my district Councillors in the ward. We were just bowled over by the number of people, elderly people, many quite frail that made it out in the evening, to come and listen to what we had to say about the service. We started off looking at how we could oppose that cut, or how we could convince the county to preserve our bus service, even if they were looking at cutting other bus services. That was the position we were at for quite a long period.



By the point they made the decision, I think we could already see where it was going. We put quite a lot of time into seeing if we could do something. In the back of my mind, that ideas was growing that if at the end of it, if there was no bus service, there was such a serious need there for something that we couldn't really walk away from it. We would have to do something ourselves.

The more I spoke to different providers about the challenges for running that service it gave me an understanding of how you might be able to run the service, and how you might be able to make some adjustments that would make it viable. I then worked with lots of people, people in the community who were interested in public transport, people who had an interest and expertise in co-operatives. I started to think about how we could take on running the service as a not-for-profit operator and ensure that it was something the community knew they were also involved in.

We have actually grown so we initially took on that service. Essentially the day that we started, we had one 16-seat bus, and one driver who was alternating between two services across Witney, whereas now we have four buses and we run four routes and we have a pool of drivers.

I feel that being a Labour & Co-op councillor gives me the tools to be able to put into action some of the values I naturally have as a Labour Councillor. That's what happened there, most Labour Councillors up and down the country have been fighting against the reduction in bus provision, and will campaign on those things. I think that my understanding of the value of co-operatives and a little bit of an understanding about different models and the support network that is out there, gave me the opportunity when I could see there was room for a new bus provider.

## Building a solidarity economy network

In Kirklees, local Councillors have looked at how they think about new ideas to solve some of the challenges facing the area. They are also looking at how they take a step further and actually try and carry them out; part of an aspiration to be more than just an election fighting machine and more of a social movement that mobilises communities. Elected Councillors are key members of the Kirklees Solidarity Economy Network which includes community and party activists. The network identified social care as a key area of concern, and in particular the way it currently operated as a task and time contract culture – determining the sort of care our elderly receive that commodifies human interactions.

The network is now looking to set up a multi-stakeholder co-operative

that seeks to balance and involve the different interests of the various players in the care system such as people using the service, their families, staff and members of the community willing to act as volunteers or as part of existing voluntary and community groups.

They held public events and engaged with seventy people who were interested in the idea. A project steering group has been set up and they have been successful in securing grant funding support from Kirklees Council to set up the co-operative. They will spend the next year testing out a successful social care operation and the longer term goal is to replicate the business model, developing a network of small, locally owned and controlled care co-operatives.

## Using scrutiny effectively

Ealing Council carried out a cross-party scrutiny review in 2015/16 to look at the potential of co-operative enterprises, in particular credit unions, housing co-operatives, care co-operatives and worker cooperatives. The review took evidence from co-ops and the final report aimed to stimulate the Council to develop and implement positive strategies for the development of co-operative enterprises as an integral part of local business and economic development.

# Co-operative campaigning

The Co-operative Party runs national campaigns, so you'll find plenty of campaign materials available online adaptable to campaigning in your community.

Most recently we have been running successful campaigns on the issues of modern slavery and food justice. .

## Modern Slavery

Modern Slavery is where traffickers and slave masters use whatever means they have at their disposal to coerce, deceive and force individuals into a life of abuse, servitude and inhumane treatment. It is one of the great evils of our time and it's estimated that tens of thousands of people in the UK could be victims.

Much modern slavery occurs in industries that may well be commissioned by councils - from cleaning to construction, and from car washes to factories. Many firms that supply councils will use contractors and suppliers of their own too, that may also be affected. Supply chains are a complex business, but Labour councils are working hard to ensure that their resources aren't being used to support



exploitation. Collectively, local authorities in England spend more than £40bn per year procuring goods and services on behalf of their citizens, and councils do business with thousands of different suppliers – both large and small.

Co-operative Councillors have been leading the way in ensuring that this cruel exploitation has no place in council supply chains. Our 'Charter Against Modern Slavery' goes further than existing law and guidance, committing councils to proactively vetting their own supply chain to ensure no instances of modern slavery are taking place. Councils are committed to train its corporate procurement team to understand modern slavery, challenge abnormally low-cost tenders to ensure they do not rely upon modern slavery, and highlight to all suppliers that workers are free to join a trade union. Councils must also report publicly on the implementation of the Charter annually.

Over 80 councils have already signed up to support and implement the Charter, many by Co-operative Councillors where Labour does not have a majority on the council. Find out more at <https://party.coop/local/councillors/modern-slavery-charter>.

## Fairtrade Fortnight

Tackling poverty isn't just about giving aid; it is about increasing trade opportunities and ensuring that producers are paid a fair price for their work. Fairtrade is about changing the way trade works through better prices, decent working conditions and a fair deal for farmers and workers in developing countries. The Co-operative Party has been a long supporter of Fairtrade and Fairtrade Fortnight reminds us all that by a few simple changes to the way we shop and the



**“Holding an annual Fairtrade Fortnight coffee morning is a great way to promote my co-operative values while also being accessible and available to my residents”.**

Cllr Stephen Stammers

products we buy, we can make a real difference to producers in the developing world.

The Co-operative Group has supported the Fairtrade movement for over 20 years and became the first UK retailer to sell and use only Fairtrade cocoa in all of its products. In addition to the meaningful trade links and guaranteed Fairtrade prices, the Group and its member owners have raised £30million in Fairtrade Premiums which is estimated to have benefited 250,000 people.

Fairtrade Fortnight is held every year around February and it is a great

opportunity to promote it in your ward. The Fairtrade Foundation often provide a campaign pack and it can be as simple as holding a coffee morning in your ward.

## Food Justice

The Co-op Party has a campaign for food justice, which Councillors can get involved in to deliver food justice and raise the profile of food poverty.

The causes of food poverty are rooted in our dysfunctional economy which no longer provides a fair days pay for a fair days work, the broken housing market, Universal Credit, the bedroom tax, the benefits cap and freeze and of course austerity.

There are practical steps at a local level which can make a difference, such as appointing a lead for food poverty, developing a local food plan and keeping the issue in the new locally.

You can find out more about the campaign here : <https://party.coop/campaign/food-justice>.

# Ideas

## The Co-op Party has a broad range of policy ideas for local government.

Ideas to work co-operatively in local areas are becoming more and more relevant to the challenges we see in our communities. Through the work in Preston to introduce community wealth building, to taking on the private rented sector. All our latest ideas can be found here <https://party.coop/local/toolkit>.

## Fair Tax

The Co-operative Party believes that the economy should work for the benefit of us all, rather than private profit alone. That includes recognising companies who pay their fair share of tax. The FairTax Mark was set up to identify those businesses that pay their fair share from those who do not. It's the 'new Fairtrade' as the latest standard for ethically-minded consumers.

The Co-operative Party was the first political party to achieve the Fairtax Mark in April 2016 and Labour & Co-operative Councillors won a change in government procurement guidance for councils, so that a company's tax record must be considered.

However more can be done, use of tax havens, and tax avoidance means that the very wealthy can often pay less tax than working people. Councils can play their part by ensuring all suppliers are transparent about their tax arrangements and you can sign your area up to the FairTax Mark.

## Standing up for Private Renters

By the end of 2021 it is predicted that almost one in four households will be renting privately. These renters too often experience poor quality homes, insecure tenancies, punitive lettings fees and growing rents. By coming together renters can support each other on issues to do with renting, provide constructive input to new council policy and collectively campaign for better conditions.



Our publication *Standing up for private renters: a guide for councillors* provides practical examples and ideas about what you can do locally. From forming a private tenants' group to give private renters a voice and the ability to collectively organise for better conditions in your ward to the council supporting landlords' co-operative so that landlords can avoid the high charges from private lettings agencies and tenants can get a fairer deal.

# Resources

**As a Labour & Co-operative Councillor you get access to the Co-operative Party Councillors Network, with help, support and resources to help you fulfil your role.**

## Local Government Conference

There is our annual local government conference. This is a great opportunity to hear about the latest issues from a co-operative angle, and to network with other Councillors. Look out for this being advertised through our social media and emails.

## Online Councillor Hub

Our online pages include all the latest blogs about what other Councillors are doing, as well as access to our regular guides and briefings. To get you started there are

guides on private rented sector, credit unions, community wealth and tackling modern slavery. You can access the hub here : <https://party.coop/local/councillors>.

## Co-operative Councils Innovation Network (CCIN)

This is a non-party-political hub for co-operative policy development, innovation and advocacy which is a Special Interest Group within the Local Government Association. Membership is open to all UK Councils. <https://www.councils.coop>.

# Top tips

## Existing Councillors give words of advice :

- Go to all the training sessions - get key contacts for case work in each department via the induction, if not given, ask for them - bins/ parking/ housing
- Ask where the physical notice boards are in your ward and how to access them to put your details up.
- Find a mentor to help you through the Council bureaucracy. (If you can't find one ask the Co-operative Councillors Network for a contact).
- Plan the campaigns/ motions you want to carry out over the next year. Talk to your colleagues about this.
- Don't post daft things on social media – think, would you like to see it on the front page of the local newspaper?
- Know your community and identify its strengths. Don't just look for the gaps, look where there are organisations already doing good things.
- Co-operate! Don't work in isolation and think that you are the one fix to everything. As a Co-operative Councillor you have access to a network of people who have brave ideas on how to tackle problems.



**co-operative  
party  
local**

📍 **65 St John Street, London EC1M 4AN**

📞 **020 7367 4150**

✉️ **mail@party.coop**

🔗 **party.coop**

🐦 **@CoopParty**

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