

# Becoming a Scottish Labour Councillor

## The what, why and how



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## Foreword

**Thank you for showing an interest in being a Labour councillor. It is a critical tier of our democracy – and local councillors can make a real difference to people’s daily life.**

Local government is important for people and for the Labour Party, being in the front-line of delivery of Labour’s quality public services and in the forefront of engagement with the community. It is one of the closest forms of public service to residents that elected representatives serve. It has a long history and a proud tradition, but it has been flexible enough to adapt to become more relevant and efficient for the twenty-first century.



The party needs people of vision, leadership, integrity, ambition and commitment to help deliver strong leadership and quality public services. Alongside the leadership team, as a Labour Party member representing your community, you will have an important and significant job in delivering local services that play a vital role in sustaining and enhancing the quality of all our lives, creating cleaner, greener and safer communities, raising standards in education, promoting social inclusion and supporting people. Your local Council regulates planning, licensing, and trading to safeguard people and communities. It works with partners to promote the social, economic and environmental well-being of our communities, and creates a vision for our local areas in which the community can share.

There is no doubt of the scale of the challenge ahead. But the power of politics to change people’s lives remains undiminished and it is therefore important that we work together in every election to return Labour representatives who can deliver real change.

This booklet sets out the opportunities for and expectations of Labour councillors. There is an outline of what being a councillor really means, useful tips on the selection process and thoughts from sitting councillors on why you should consider standing for Labour. We have also included a very in depth overview of the rules governing the selection process in the appendix, so you can understand the process in as much detail as you wish!

I look forward to working with you.

**Brian Roy**

Scottish General Secretary

## Why you should stand for Scottish Labour

**“Being a councillor is the greatest privilege. It’s a really practical way of being a champion for the Labour Party at a local level”.**

### **CLlr Frank McAveety**

Glasgow

Being a local councillor is a hard job but it is also one of the most rewarding roles that you can play in your local community.

You are not only tasked with making sure that every public pound does the maximum amount of public good, but you are also the link between the people you represent and the services many of them rely upon the most. As a Councillor you are the most visible and effective representative for your local community and the capacity to affect change is massive. The opportunity to help improve the lives of your neighbours is an immense privilege and even on the hardest of days is never something I regret choosing to do.

### **CLlr Shamin Akhtar**

East Lothian

It was the opportunity to contribute to improving schools in the county, shaping the economic climate to create jobs and training opportunities, and tackling child poverty which drew me into standing for selection. Getting ‘wins’ for constituents in whatever form that may be is immensely satisfying and far outweighs the hard yards getting the result. It is an immense privilege to be an elected Labour representative. I would really encourage people to put themselves forward to serve – I’ve never regretted it!



### **Cllr Martin McElroy**

**Glasgow**

You don't have to be a political know it all to represent your community. Many people told me I was too young when I first stood for the Labour Party at 23. But I saw it as a chance to improve the area I represented. Every time you get a result for a constituent or community group, it makes all the hard work worthwhile. Being a Labour councillor is more than a job but no matter your experience, gender or background, all you need is a passion to improve the lives of the people you represent.

### **Cllr Paul O'Kane**

**East Renfrewshire**

Standing for election was a little daunting at first, but I had a lot of support from people who believed that our councils should be more representative of our communities. I am proud of my home town and my council area, I stood for election to the council because I want to see it continue to improve and grow. Being involved in decisions and actions that affect our communities is an important task - one that we need strong, local, Labour voices for.

## The role of a councillor

**“To be an effective councillor you must be hard working, committed and passionate about improving the area you live in.”**

**Councillors are elected to the local council to represent the residents in the ward and their local community. Councillors are expected to be active in their local community and act as the voice of their constituents, raising any local concerns within the Council on a range of matters related to the work of the Council.**

To be an effective councillor you must be hard working, committed and passionate about improving the area you live in. Councillors must balance the needs and interests of residents, the political party they represent and values of the Labour Party, as well as the council.

Being a Labour councillor is an extremely rewarding experience but it does also demand your time. It is important that you are able to balance your council and party commitments with your personal life and professional work. Make sure you consult with family and friends before making the decision to stand as a councillor.

### **The skills to stand**

Below is a person specification which shows the skills you will need to be an effective Labour councillor. How do you measure up against the criteria?

#### **Community leadership**

Engages enthusiastically and empathetically with the community in order to learn, understand and act upon issues of local concern. Mediates fairly and constructively, encouraging trust by representing all sections of the community.

#### **Regulating and monitoring**

Understands and executes judicial role by following protocol, evaluating arguments and making decisions that balance public needs and local policy. Ensures progress by monitoring and intervening where necessary.

#### **Scrutiny and challenge**

Acts as a critical friend by seeking opportunities for scrutiny and providing constructive feedback. Analyses information quickly and presents arguments in a concise, meaningful and easily accessible way.

**Communication skills**

Listen sensitively, uses appropriate language and checks for understanding.

Communicates regularly with individuals and groups in the community, speaks clearly and confidently in public, and makes sure that people are informed.

**Working in partnership**

Builds positive relationships by making others feel valued, trusted and included and by working collaboratively to achieve goals. Maintains calm and focus, recognises when to delegate or provide support and is able to take a long-term view in developing partnerships.

**Political understanding**

Acts ethically, consistently and with integrity when communicating values or representing group views in decisions and actions. Effectively works across group boundaries without compromising values or ethics.

## **Key objectives and responsibilities**

**The role of a councillor is a broad and varied one. We hope to give you a clear overview of the sorts of things you are likely to have to do as a councillor, as well as show you the impact you can have through this position.**

### **Standing up for local residents**

One of the most important aspects of any councillor's job is standing up for local residents. Councillors will be expected to host weekly surgeries to ensure that you are hearing concerns from your constituents and taking action on problems in the area.

Another key aspect of standing up for local residents will be dealing with casework and acting as an advocate for residents. These issues will range from those concerning housing benefits to anti-social behaviour in the area.

### **Developing better services**

In the council chamber, your work will focus on a number of different aspects, including ensuring quality public services are provided by the council, participating in community planning and seeking improvements for residents around a number of important areas.

These objectives can be achieved through your work on scrutiny panels, helping create council policy and providing leadership and engaging with the community.

### **Delivering local change**

Councillors will work with community groups and local residents to ensure that the Council delivers improvement and change in the local area.

Community groups are part of the fabric of the area and it is important that councillors maintain a good working relationship with them.

**“One of the most important aspects of any Councillor’s job is standing up for local residents.”**



Below is a summary of the key duties you will need to undertake in your role.

#### **Key duties on the council**

- to attend full council, the council executive and/or overview and scrutiny committee(s) and other committee meetings as necessary
- to monitor performance against targets in all areas of the council activity
- to engage with local residents to consult them, feedback on council activity, take up their concerns as appropriate and be their voice in the council
- to contribute effectively to the work of the Council, in line with Labour group policy as appropriate
- to help to decide service priorities and participate in agreeing and setting a budget, in line with Labour group policy

#### **Key duties within the community**

- to develop links with all parts of the community e.g. visiting schools, meeting local businesses, attending tenants' meetings, visiting local projects and community groups
- to conduct regular walkabouts in the ward to identify issues of concern and tackle nuisance e.g. fly-tipping, graffiti, abandoned cars
- to promote and represent the Council in the local community and on community bodies (e.g. school governing bodies, residents associations)
- to conduct regular surgeries to allow constituents to raise issues of importance or personal concern with their elected representatives
- to take action on issues raised by constituents and lobby for resources for the ward within the constraints of the group's overall priorities and financial strategy for the Council
- to attend local community events on a regular basis



## What is expected of a Scottish Labour councillor

**As well as representing your constituents as a councillor, it is important that you understand that you will be representing the Labour Party as an elected official.**

A Labour councillor should be in agreement with the aims and values of the Labour Party. You should seek to implement a Labour programme in your local authority. You should help ensure the council delivers high quality public services which represent value for money, and be committed to continuous improvement in the services the council provides.

**“A Labour councillor should be in agreement with the aims and values of the Labour Party.”**

A Labour councillor should also aim to represent their residents as effectively as they can, build and sustain relationships with local residents, and give strong community leadership. The Party expects Labour councillors to maintain the highest standards of conduct and to act as Labour’s ambassador in the community.

### **Key duties within the Labour group:**

- to participate actively in Labour group meetings and contribute to effective decision-making
- to assist in the formulation of the Labour group’s strategies and policies, within a framework of national Labour Party policy
- to be a part of the Labour team working to deliver Labour’s policies locally
- to support regular campaign and communications in the local community, raising the profile of Labour and its work for local residents
- to be an ambassador for the Labour Party

### **Key duties with the local branch Labour Party:**

- to attend branch meetings and report and consult on all council activity undertaken
- to campaign with branch members on local issues
- to support policy discussion e.g. as part of the Party’s policy making process
- to recruit new members and mobilise existing ones into action
- to build a healthy party locally

## Assessment, shortlisting and procedures

**We have developed a robust process to select the very best candidates to stand for Labour. The process exists to test your interest in and knowledge of local government, the level of your commitment to and track record in the Labour Party and your involvement in the local community. Over the course of the selection process, you will need to complete a detailed nomination form and attend an interview at an assessment centre.**

As you may have experienced before, we have a number of different bodies and structures at a local level that can be a little difficult to understand at first. To that end, we have produced a jargon buster that will better help you understand the process.

The section then takes you step by step from being an interested member, to being selected as a candidate for the Labour Party.

**“Make sure to speak to your Local Campaign Forum or Constituency Labour Party secretary to find out when the selection process will begin in your area”**



## Selection Jargon Buster

### Assessment Centre

The assessment centre is a meeting held by an interview panel of members from the LCF where applicants to be a council candidate are evaluated for their suitability to be a Labour representative.

### BAME

Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic, the acronym for Labour members who self-define as one of the above.

### Branch

A branch is a sub grouping of the constituency Labour Party, usually made up of membership from two or three ward areas. This grouping deals with party administration on a local level.

### Candidates

Candidates refers to all individual members of the panel of candidates.

### Code of conduct

A set of rules and expectations that all candidates must adhere to during the selection process.

### Constituency Labour Party (CLP)

These are the units of organisation that cover all members within parliamentary constituencies. The branch and the ward are subsections of this unit.

### Labour Group

The Labour Group is a collection of all Labour councillors in the local authority. If you become a councillor, you will become a member of the Labour Group.

### LGBT

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Trans, the acronym for Labour members who self-define as one of the above.

### Local Authority/Council

The Local Authority or Council is the administrative body in local government, to which you will be a member if you are elected as a councillor.

### Local Campaign Forum (LCF)

The Local Campaign Forum is a group elected from each branch, tasked with coordinating the selection process for council candidates, as well as campaign work across the local authority.

### Local Government Selection Pack

A detailed document that outlines all the rules and process of the selection process. These booklets are made available to the LCF to ensure the process is effectively administered.

### SEC

Scottish Executive Committee, this is the body that is in charge of the Labour Party's rules and is the Party's senior governing body.

### Selection meeting

A selection meeting will be held by the membership of a ward to decide who will be their candidate. A shortlist will be drawn up from the panel.

### The Panel

If you are deemed to be a good potential candidate by the assessment centre, you will be placed on the panel. The panel is a list of all members who have been approved by the LCF following the assessment centre.

### Ward

A ward is a local authority area represented by councillors. A number of wards make up a constituency and Local Authority. Generally a ward is represented by three or four councillors, although there are a number of occasions where a ward will have one or two councillors. The members of the ward will have the final say on who will be selected as their candidate.

## Assessment

### **Nomination form**

The nomination form covers personal information, your experience and knowledge of local government, your track record in the party and community, and the reasons you would like to be a Labour councillor. The Local Campaign Forum will consider your form and check whether you are eligible to stand and if so, will arrange for you to be interviewed. Forms are available by contacting your LCF secretary or CLP secretary. Alternatively forms can be requested by emailing [scotland@labour.org.uk](mailto:scotland@labour.org.uk) or phoning 0141 572 6900.

### **Recommendation**

The assessment team writes up the results of the interview and makes a recommendation to the Local Campaign Forum as to whether the nominee should be included on the panel of candidates to select from. Reasons must be given. This report is shared with the nominee, who has a right to appeal to the Scottish Executive Committee within fourteen days of receipt.

### **Local Campaign Forum**

The Local Campaign Forum receives the recommendations of the assessment centre and makes the final decision on the composition of the panel of candidates.

### **Information**

Successful members of the panel of candidates are invited to provide a summary for distribution to the branches prior to short-listing and selection. A code of conduct, (appendix, must be observed during all of the stages of the selection procedures.



## Shortlisting

**So now you have made it onto the 'panel' or list of candidates that a local ward can choose from, what next?**

### Getting short-listed

The ward party draws up the short list. Once approved for the panel of candidates, you will be asked to write a short biography, which will be circulated to all wards selecting candidates.

"The selection meeting, like a job interview, is an important opportunity for you to put your case as to why you should be selected, so it is important to make a good impression."

The branch may be faced with the names and details of a large number of people, and will only be able to include a few names on the short list. So you need to get noticed, get known and convince members why you should be their candidate!

You need to ensure that members in the branch know you are interested, otherwise nobody will nominate you. If you have named their ward specifically on your form, this may help. However, ask yourself, does anybody in the ward know you or know about you? If so, it is wise to make contact before the meeting and see if they will nominate you to the short list. If not, see what you can do to make contacts in the ward so somebody will nominate you. The guidance from the SEC explains the rules governing this, but all members of the panel are able to obtain a copy of the branch membership list for this purpose.

### Preparing for a selection meeting

If you are shortlisted, you will then be called to a selection meeting in the ward and asked to make a speech and answer questions. You should be told in advance how much time is allowed for your speech and how much time there will be for you to take questions. Ensure that you prepare properly. Find out as much as you can about the ward and its local members. Think about the key issues in the ward. Speak to any existing Labour councillors for the ward, if appropriate, and to local members, if you haven't done so already.

The selection meeting, like a job interview, is an important opportunity for you to put your case as to why you should be selected, so it is important to make a good impression. Look smart, appear confident and be committed and enthusiastic. It is vital that you arrive on time for the meeting – if you are late you may be disqualified.

## Preparation

### Your speech

Prepare your speech carefully as it is your main opportunity to get your message across.

- Spend time thinking about what you want to put in the speech. You will want to demonstrate an understanding of key issues on the council and in the ward and that you will work hard, in partnership with council colleagues and the Party.
- Structure the speech carefully. You should think particularly hard about your opening and closing line. A good opening line will help capture the audience's attention and a strong closing line is likely to be remembered.
- Ensure you use the time available wisely. Practice timing the speech and ensure it fits in the time given, without having to rush.
- Practice making the speech to others – to family or friends, or ideally a group of Labour colleagues and ask for feedback.
- At the meeting itself it is best not to read the speech. If you have practised it you should be familiar with the words. Either have a copy with you as a reminder or use 'prompt' cards or brief notes to remind you of the main points. (Numbering the cards will avoid getting them in the wrong order!).
- Some people like to stand to give the speech. Your voice will carry better if you do. However, if the meeting is small and informal or if you feel more relaxed that way, you may prefer to sit. The Chair may prompt you either way.
- Most importantly, try to relax and appear comfortable. Remember you are among friends so don't forget to smile!





### **Answering questions**

Members of the meeting will then have the opportunity to ask the candidates some questions.

Preparing yourself for questions is slightly more difficult. If you have done your homework on local issues and the work of the council, this will help a lot. It is worth spending time beforehand thinking about what you are likely to be asked, and planning your replies, especially on controversial issues or any points on which you may be weaker.

### **Likely questions are:**

- Why do you want to be a Labour councillor?
- What in particular do you have to offer our ward?
- What issues are you most interested in?
- What do you think are the key issues for the council?
- What do you think are the key issues for the ward?
- What experience do you have of campaigning?
- What experience do you have of other community or voluntary work?
- How would you work with members of the ward during the campaign and after you are elected?
- How would you build and sustain relationships with local residents?
- To whom would you feel accountable as a councillor (eg local ward members and/or the local community)?
- How would you handle a difference of opinion between the Labour group and the branch?
- How would you fit the work of being a councillor around your other time commitments?

## Selection

**Once all candidates have gone through the selection meeting assessment process, you will be asked to wait in a side room while a discussion will be had between the members present at the meeting. The members will discuss all the candidates and vote on who they would like to be the candidate.**

### **If you are selected**

If you win the selection, you may be asked to say a few words. Apart from thanking the ward for selecting you and commiserating with those who have not been selected, you may want to give a positive start to your election campaign by saying a few words about looking forward to the campaign and working hard for the ward.

### **If you are not selected**

If you are not selected by your first choice ward, you may still have a chance at another ward. If you are on the short list for other wards, try to talk to members in the first ward to find out why they did not select you. There may be lessons you can learn to develop your speech and improve your presentation skills and questions to think about that you had not prepared for initially or may have answered differently.

If you are not successful in this round of selections, make sure you ask for feedback from the Interview and Assessment team, LCF officers and the wards so that you can prepare for the next round. Take up training opportunities and participate in campaigning and community events. Don't give up!

**“If you are not selected by your first choice ward, you may still have a chance at another ward”**

## Support for your role

### **If you are elected**

The Scottish Association of Labour Councillors is a Labour Party affiliated organisation (which you become a member of automatically when elected as a councillor) with the aim of enabling Labour in local government to speak with one unified voice and to effectively lobby and input into the national Labour Party structure. Each region has a representative that can provide you support and assistance as a Councillor.

### **Training support**

Training is crucial to ensure that our Labour Councillors and Labour groups are up-to-date with the latest campaign resources and developments.

We are expanding our training programme and in conjunction with the Scottish Association of Labour Councillors LGA Labour Group we will have a more extensive and comprehensive training programme open to councillors than ever before. Training will be delivered by experienced councillors as well as party staff. To make it accessible, more will be delivered locally, regionally and online.

We have recently delivered a number of webinars which can be accessed at:

[members.labour.org.uk/webinar-library](https://members.labour.org.uk/webinar-library)

Labour groups will have different circumstances, skill sets and strengths and we want to be able to offer a programme which focuses on core training, but with the flexibility to be applicable to all groups.

If there is any specific training you would like to see us deliver, or if there's something we've missed, just email us at [scotland@labour.org.uk](mailto:scotland@labour.org.uk)

If you'd like to receive the Labour Party's training emails, email [training@labour.org.uk](mailto:training@labour.org.uk) with SUBSCRIBE as the subject and we'll sign you up.

### **Training Online**

Sign up to our easy to use Campaign Technology sessions, or to get involved in our mini-series of campaign sessions about engaging your membership and getting active, just go to [members.labour.org.uk/training-listings](https://members.labour.org.uk/training-listings) to sign up.

- Webinars are usually on a Wednesday evening and are free to join and take part in
- Campaign training webinars usually last 30-45 minutes
- Campaign technology webinars usually last one hour
- All you need to access a webinar is a computer with an internet connection, and speakers or headphones on your computer

### **Signing up for a webinar is easy:**

1. Click on the link in the Training Email for a webinar you are interested in, or access a full list of upcoming sessions at [members.labour.org.uk/training-listings](https://members.labour.org.uk/training-listings)
2. On the specific webinar page, click the 'signup now' button
3. We will send you an email with a link to the event on the day of the session by 5pm

### **Campaign toolkits and online resources**

We have a campaigns team who help to develop templates, campaign packs and online tools. You will soon begin to see more templates specifically designed with councillors in mind - if you have any specific ideas on how our technology can be developed to suit councillors' needs, please email us.

In addition to this, councillors have a website with useful resources, best practice materials and policy briefs to help you in your day-to-day work. If you'd like to submit an idea as to how we develop this website, please email [councillors@labour.org.uk](mailto:councillors@labour.org.uk)

### **Contact Creator**

Contact Creator is the Labour Party's electoral database which local parties use for canvassing, survey and targeting work. It's a highly powerful and effective tool that could help you in your ward campaigns.

For more information on Contact Creator, including training, please go to [members.labour.org.uk/campaigntechnology](https://members.labour.org.uk/campaigntechnology)

### **Campaign Creator**

Campaign Creator is the Labour Party's new website that allows you to produce high quality print, email and SMS communications from a single integrated system. The new platform is compatible with all major browsers and allows you to import information direct from Contact Creator, to speed up personalised communications with your constituents.

Campaign Creator offers over 100 templates to support all-year round campaigning and campaigning at election time. A full monthly print offer, which allows you to order any printed Campaign Creator product by a set date every month, is now available.

Why not try creating leaflets and direct mails to support a campaign that you are running in your local area.

### **Legal support**

Our local government lawyer, Frances Randle, has helped hundreds of councillors in every part of the country on legal issues, from standards board queries to defamation and other issues. Frances is also able to provide support to Labour groups, for example advising on legal technicalities of planning proposals. Frances worked on over 50 cases last year which required additional representation and actions to be taken on top of the regular advice she gives to councillors on a day-to-day basis.

All of our Labour Councillors have access to legal insurance, support and representation on standards and legal matters when they need it. You are able to access support from Frances by calling 0870 890 3778 between 9am – 12pm, Monday – Wednesday or email; [frances.randle@steelandshamash.co.uk](mailto:frances.randle@steelandshamash.co.uk).

### **Partystaffsupport**

The Scottish Labour Party employs two full time Local Government Officers dedicated to supporting our councillors and Labour Groups.

For SALC queries, campaign advice, print and planning

Contact [scotland@labour.org.uk](mailto:scotland@labour.org.uk)

0141 572 6900

Candidate application forms can be obtained by emailing [scotland@labour.org.uk](mailto:scotland@labour.org.uk) or phoning 0141 572 6900

Labour Party Campaign and Training support

Call 0845 0922 299 and choose option 3

or by email via [campaigntechnology@labour.org.uk](mailto:campaigntechnology@labour.org.uk)

Local Government Constitutional and Compliance issues

Compliance Unit

020 77831498

[councillors@labour.org.uk](mailto:councillors@labour.org.uk)

**Thank you for considering seeking office as a Labour councillor.**

**Scottish****Labour**  
[scottishlabour.org.uk](http://scottishlabour.org.uk)