

Becoming a Scottish Labour Councillor

The what, why and how



Contents

3

Foreword: Drew Smith

4

Why you should stand for Scottish Labour

6

The role of a councillor

11

What is expected of a Scottish Labour Councillor

12

Assessment, short listing and selection procedures

19

Support for your role

Foreword

Thank you for showing an interest in being a Labour councillor. Our Scottish Labour Councillors are the core of our elected members. Every day, our councillors fight for our communities and deliver crucial public services.

Local government is the forefront of engagement with the community. Our councils are responsible for delivering services to meet local needs; and strive to improve quality of life and community well-being.

Being a local councillor is the form of elected representation which is closest to local people and local communities. The role of a councillor has changed greatly over the years, developing to meet the needs of people in the 21st century. However, it is still intrinsically tied to serving and supporting everyone in our communities.

Our party needs people who are committed and driven to help deliver strong leadership and quality public services. We need councillors from a diverse range of backgrounds who have vision, innovation and ambition for their local areas. 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.

Labour Councils, and Labour Councillors have the power to transform lives. We are on a journey to rebuild our party and we know the importance of our councillors in that journey.

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.

Drew Smith
Acting 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 Joe Cullinane

Leader of North Ayrshire Council

Being a Labour Councillor isn't always glamorous, but it is always an honour. Labour Councillors are our communities' frontline of defence against the SNP and Tories – in opposition, campaigning to hold the SNP and Tories to account on cuts to jobs and local services; and in power delivering real change by building council houses, creating good, well paid jobs and implementing Labour policies like we did in North Ayrshire with our Period Poverty initiative in 2017. Next year we need as many Labour Councillors elected as possible across the country so we can improve the lives of people here and now whilst demonstrating the difference that having Labour in power makes to communities. I hope you will consider standing and make a difference to your local area.

Cllr Jill Brown

Glasgow

As a mum, I know I was concerned about balancing the needs of my family with the demands of being a councillor. However, I am so glad I put myself forward for the Partick East/Kelvindale by-election in March this year. I received fantastic support from both my CLP and sitting councillors as I navigated being a candidate. Now, as a councillor, I am so proud of the work Scottish Labour is doing to fight for our communities. We need more women, and more parents, to represent our local areas and the people who live in them. I hope you will consider putting yourself forward.

Cllr Shamin Akhtar

East Lothian

I stood to be a councillor in my local area because I care deeply about the community I live in and the people around me. Being able to represent the community I live in, be a voice for them and make a difference to their lives is hugely rewarding.

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 policies 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 Labour Party:

- to attend branch or CLP 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 Government Committee 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.

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.

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 Government Committee (LGC)

The Local Government Committee is a group formed from three sections: members elected from each branch, Labour Council Group members and Trade Union delegates. The Committee is 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.

The Panel

If you are deemed to be a good potential candidate by the assessment centre, you will be placed on the approved panel of candidates.

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.

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.

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 Government Committee 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 LGC secretary. Alternatively forms can be requested by emailing ScottishSelections@Labour.org.uk

Recommendation

The assessment team writes up the results of the interview and makes a recommendation to the Local Government Committee 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 seven days.

Shortlisting

So now you have made it onto the 'panel' or list of candidates. 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 membership list for wards they wish to stand in.

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. Due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, this meeting may take place online. The local party may decide to hold the shortlist and selection meeting at the same time.

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 (e.g. 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, LGC 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 have recently delivered a number of webinars, including on standing as a council candidate, which can be accessed at:

<https://labour.org.uk/members/activist-area/training/training-webinars/>

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

If you'd like to receive the Labour Party's training emails, email 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 <https://labour.org.uk/upcoming-webinars/> to sign up.

There are also a number of training models on Achieve - [Achieve.Labour.org.uk](https://labour.org.uk/achieve) - which is available to all members using their My Labour login. You can create a My Labour login at [My.Labour.org.uk](https://labour.org.uk/my-labour)

The Scottish Labour Party's Mobilise Training Academy modules can also be accessed at: <https://labour.org.uk/members/campaignresources/handbooks-guides/scottish-training-academy/>

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 <https://labour.org.uk/upcoming-webinars/>
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

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

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 <https://labour.org.uk/members/activist-area/training/>

Labour Connects

Labour Connects 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.

Labour Connects 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. All members can access Connects using their My Labour login at:

Connects@Labour.org.uk

Legal support

Through membership of the Association of Labour Councillors, our Councillors are able to access dedicated legal advice.

Party staff support

The Scottish Labour Party employs a full time Local Government Officer dedicated to supporting our councillors and Labour Groups as well as other party staff.

For SALC queries, campaign advice, print and planning

Contact scotland@labour.org.uk

0141 572 6900

Candidate application forms can be obtained by emailing

ScottishSelections@Labour.org.uk

Labour Party Campaign and Training support

Call 08450922299 and choose option 3

or by email via campaigntechnology@labour.org.uk

Thank you for considering seeking office as a Labour councillor.

