



Sunday 23rd September, 11.20 to 12.45 & 14.15 to 17.25
'Party Democracy & Campaigning': @LGA_Labour brief

PARTY DEMOCRACY AND CAMPAIGNING

LOCAL GOVERNMENT CAMPAIGNING

History shows that Labour's route back to Government lies through winning elections in town halls across the UK, and that victories are achieved when activists and councillors work together. There may be three sets of local elections before the next General Election – and Labour and its supporters should put just as much energy into each of them as it will at the next General Election. Local elections must be given the highest priority, with proper resources and a real say on campaigning for councillors at a national level.

Across the country Labour councillors and councils are improving people's lives every day. The work we do is municipal socialism in action. We are pioneers of radically progressive policies, campaigners for positive change in communities and problem solvers in our wards and divisions. Labour in local government led the way on introducing the Living Wage, demonstrated the positive impact of introducing free school meals for all primary school pupils before it was even being debated in Whitehall and Westminster and are helping resolve often complex issues for residents every day – we are the frontline defence against unrelenting Tory austerity and must be front and centre of Labour's local and general election campaigns.

There is more the Party can do unleash the potential of our almost seven thousand Labour councillors. This year Labour councillors have played a key role in the strategic planning of the national campaign for the local elections – the Party should ensure this happens every time there is a set of local elections. Labour councillors are now one of the biggest collective contributors to the Party's funds – we must be given a real say on how this funding is spent to help win elections

CAMPAIGNING AGAINST AUSTERITY

Since 2010 Labour councillors have had hellish choices presented to them, but they have never shirked the need to take decisions, however unpalatable they have been. They have listened to and worked with our communities to understand their priorities. They have examined every budget line and stretched every pound left available to them. But austerity has had a devastating effect on key public services that provide protection to the most vulnerable members of our society – children at risk, disabled adults and older people who require support, and the many families who are barely getting by despite being in work. Labour groups have mobilised local campaigns to expose the impact of government cuts, and opposed damaging cuts to other public services.

- **Our councils are in crisis**, with Tory-run Northamptonshire effectively bankrupt and other councils staring into the financial abyss after the Tories have failed to give them the funding they need.
- By 2020, local authorities will have faced **cuts to core funding of nearly £16 billion** over the preceding decade. That means that councils will have lost 60p out of every £1 the Government had provided to spend on local services in the last eight years
- These cuts have been **strikingly uneven** in their distribution. The poorest local authorities (which tend to be Labour-run) have had their spending cut by £228 per person since 2010. But richest councils have had their spending cut only £44.

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- LGA Labour's publication '**On Day One**', our radical manifesto for local government, set out the case for significant re-investment in local government by the next Labour government, through complete reform of the local government funding system, with a shift to a needs-based funding methodology, replacement of council tax, the end of ring-fencing, and more freedoms to borrow to build housing and infrastructure.
- **LGA Labour Group** organised a letter to the Chancellor in December 2017 that was signed by over 100 Labour council leaders demanding that he fully fund a decent pay rise for local government workers. LGA Labour councillor representatives on the Local Government Joint Negotiating Committee forced through a public sector pay cap-busting 2% pay increase for local government workers in 2018 and 2019, despite Tory councils opposing it

Some Labour councillors have felt under attack from their own side, as blame for the cuts has been wrongly attributed to them, rather than to the Government. This is because some people, understandably, do not understand the legal frameworks within which councillors have to operate. For instance, the provisions of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 and the Local Government Act 1992, mean that if councillors fail to produce a balanced budget then the statutory officers of the council are required by law to step in, and take over budget setting powers. This was recognised by our party leader Jeremy Corbyn who wrote to all Labour Groups in 2016 calling on them to resist calls for illegal or 'no cuts' budgets, and warning that a failure to set balanced budgets would see 'a Tory minister deciding council spending priorities', and that 'their priorities would certainly not meet the needs of the communities that elected us'. A subsequent party rule change made it clear that councillors cannot act illegally, stating that 'Members of the Labour Group shall not support any proposal to set an illegal budget' and that 'any councillor who votes against or abstains on a Labour group policy decision in this matter may face disciplinary action'.

DEMOCRACY REVIEW & LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The consideration of issues related to local government in Labour's Democracy Review has now been remitted to a wider review of local government by the NEC, which the LGA welcomes and looks forward to playing a key role in supporting.

Labour in local government is delighted by the recent surge in membership of the Labour Party, and the opportunities that this brings. In responding to the Democracy Review we considered how our party's rules and processes can be improved to assist councillors and Labour Groups to be effective in delivering for their communities, to be as open and accountable as possible, and to ensure that the role and importance of local government is properly understood and recognised. Our full submission is available online, but this is a short summary of our response:

- Local councils are **responsible for spending £1 in every £4 of public expenditure in the UK**, and Labour councils run services that support tens of millions of people. Labour councils and councillors are the beating heart of our communities, and are in an influential position to deliver Labour values. But the importance of local government is severely undervalued within the Labour Party – the time has come for the contribution of Labour councillors to be recognised with a strong voice at every level of the Labour Party, including the NEC, Regional Boards, and the National Policy Forum.
- Labour councillors are the **most accountable elected politicians** in the country. As we welcome hundreds of thousands of new members to our party, and give them the opportunity to shape local policy development and hold their elected councillors to account,

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the Labour Party should do much more to help them understand the roles, responsibilities, and restrictions which Labour councillors have to grapple with. Most Labour Groups work hard to keep members informed through regular communication, but in some areas members feel their Labour Group is not sufficiently transparent. We suggest that existing rules could be amended to increase clarity for members and Groups about the regularity and type of reporting.

- We proposed a **reformed and renamed ‘Joint Local Government Committee’**, reflecting its primary responsibility for overseeing all issues related to local government, including member engagement with policy and manifesto development, and underlining the fact that membership is drawn from local members, trade unionists, and the Labour Group. There should be no restriction on councillors standing for election as either CLP or trade union delegates to their LCF. The new Joint Local Government Committee should be given overall responsibility for organising opportunities for party members and the local community to enter into dialogue on current local government policy issues and ideas for the Party’s future programme and manifesto with the Labour Group, with the final decision on the content of the manifesto remaining with the Labour Group.
- Key accountabilities and legal requirements extend to ensuring that individual Labour councillors and **Labour Groups retain the right to elect their leaders**, and to have the final say on manifestos. There are also a host of practical and organisational reasons which make the concept of ‘directly-elected’ leaders unworkable, and the existing rules that set out how Labour Groups elect their leadership should be retained.
- It is important that Labour continues to **select and elect more women, BAME, disabled, LGBT and working class councillors**. We would encourage the Labour Party to be more pro-active in collecting and sharing data related to selection of candidates, and to use all-women shortlists (AWS) and other ways of positively influencing selection outcomes. Labour Groups should also be required to adopt a parental leave policy, and the party should implement all recommendations of the LGA Women’s Taskforce.

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