

# **Establishing Women's Branches – A Guide**

## **Background**

As part of implementing recommendations from the Democracy Review, the democratic functions of Women's Forums were being strengthened. With that in mind, from the end of last year, all existing Women's Forums were invited to transition to become Women's Branches.

## **Update on establishing Women's Branches**

Up until now, any women's groups that weren't ratified Women's Forums weren't able to hold AGMs to become Women's Branches. This was due to the limited capacity of staff, with the focus on the May elections.

Now the elections have taken place and CLPs are meeting again, Women's Officers are invited to set up Women's Branches for their local areas.

This guide outlines what Women's Branches are, why they're important and how they can be established.

## **What are Women's Branches and why are they replacing Women's Forums?**

As part of implementing the recommendations from the Democracy Review, the democratic functions of Women's Forums are being strengthened, with increased democratic rights.

Alongside bolstered democratic functions, Women's Branches will be able to elect a committee to oversee and drive women members' engagement within and beyond the Labour Party. The officers that should be elected include: Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary and Treasurer.

The change in term from 'Forum' to 'Branch' is important too, as this will reflect the equality of all Branches in decision-making and the aim to empower members to play a more active role in the democracy of the Labour Party.

## **What's the purpose of Women's Branches?**

With the support of a wider committee, Women's Officers and women members will have more support to have an external focus – engaging in activities with the women electorate in their areas and relevant women's organisations and groups. This community engagement could be vital for electoral outcomes, particularly if a Women's Branch builds powerful relationships with a wide range of local stakeholders.

The Branch will also serve to support the development of women members and encourage women to stand for positions, such as councillor. This can help to broaden the range of women standing for election, as there will be a much bigger, more effective hub to engage with women members.

Lastly, by building a strong, internal community of Labour women, the Branch will help more women members to engage externally.

### **What activities could Women's Branches engage in?**

The activities Women's Branches could engage in, includes:

- Community mapping a local area to build relationships with women community and business leaders, as well as affiliated trade unions and women's organisations and groups
- Building and winning local campaigns that benefit the women electorate
- Running canvassing sessions with a focus on issues that affect women
- Engaging in campaigning activities in areas where women are likely to be – for example, school gate campaigning
- Running events that build our base and are open to the public, with a focus on engaging local women
- Encouraging women in the Branch to stand for positions of leadership, within and outside of the Labour Party
- Being a hub for training for women members, with the training focused on how to empower members to engage with the public in powerful and meaningful ways

### **Will Women's Branches operate differently to Women's Forums?**

Alongside bolstered democratic functions, Women's Branches will be able to elect a committee to oversee and drive women members' engagement within and beyond the Labour Party.

The CLP Women's Officer isn't the chair of the Women's Branch by default - there needs to be an election of an Executive Committee, including a Chair of the Branch. These positions should be elected at the Annual General Meeting of the Women's Branch (please see guidance below).

### **Can a Women's Branch send delegates to the General Meeting of the CLP?**

Women's Branches can send delegates to the CLP General Meeting however, the CLP General Meeting must agree changes to the basis of representation within its rules and standing orders. This establishes how many delegates the branch should send.

### **Steps to establish a Women's Branch**

1. Organise an Annual General Meeting (AGM) for your Women's Branch - ensure women members of your CLP are notified at least 14 days prior to the meeting.
2. Within the notice to all women members, there should be a request to put themselves forward for any position on the Branch Executive Committee, which they may be interested in.
3. At the beginning of the AGM, record the establishment of the Women's Branch in the minutes
4. Circulate the model rules for the branch to all members in attendance. These cannot be amended without first getting approval from the Regional Director. You can find these documents on the [Labour Party website](#).
5. Where possible the following officers should be elected: Chair, Vice chair, Secretary, and Treasurer. The Women's Branch should also appoint two auditors when required and other functional officers can be elected as required.
6. The Women's Branch Executive Committee should consist of the officers, the Women's Officer(s) of any CLP(s) covered by the Women's Branch and, if required, not more than four other members.
7. After the AGM, the Branch Executive Committee should notify their Regional/Welsh/Scottish Office about the transition – the change will be signed off by the Regional Director/General Secretary for your region/nation and the National Women's Officer for the Labour Party.
8. Any CLP covering the same area as the new Women's Branch must be informed of the establishment of the Branch, and where necessary the Branch should be added to the CLP Standing Orders.
9. AGMs should be held annually to elect Executive Committee members.

### **Who can Women's Officers contact for support?**

If you have any questions or need support, please contact: [women@labour.org](mailto:women@labour.org)