

March 2024

**To: Labour group Secretaries and Leaders**

cc: Regional Directors and Scottish and Welsh General Secretaries for information

Dear colleague

### **GUIDE TO PLANNING YOUR LABOUR GROUP AGM**

This update provides advice on the action that groups and local parties should take in preparation for group annual meetings.

Planning your group annual meetings well in advance will enable:

- full discussion and agreement by the group of the principles underpinning the process
- a clear understanding by all members of the procedures to be followed
- an opportunity for the group to propose amendments to your standing orders; these need to be sent to your regional, Scottish or Welsh office well in advance, being subject to approval by the NEC

The timetable for the group and council AGMs will be determined by whether you have elections to the council in May or not.

Labour group secretaries should:

- draft a timetable of action to be taken e.g. review of standing orders, provision of job descriptions and self-nomination forms to members of the group, notification to the Local Government Committee (LGC) secretary of the posts for which nominations are invited (we suggest all those with special responsibility allowances)
- place "planning the AGM" on a group officers/executive agenda for discussion and agreement on the way forward
- Consider any amendments required to the new model standing orders
- check that group members are paying their membership by direct debit and are up to date with their payments of the elected representative levy and to the group fund.

The key to a successful annual meeting is good planning and clear information for all group members and LGC officers, as well as an ability to be honest and sensitive in assessing people's expectations and their capacity to fulfil different roles. The guidance suggests that it would be helpful for group whips/other officers to undertake one-to-one interviews with group members in the lead up to the AGM to discuss members' views of their contribution over the past year, their expectations of future input, and their training and development needs.

Kind regards,

The Governance and Legal Unit

**The Labour Party**

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Version 1 (2021) – Internal sign off 010421

Version 2 (2022) – Internal sign off 070422

Version 3 (2023) – Internal sign off 060423

Version 4(2024) – Internal sign off 270324

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## **PLANNING FOR YOUR ANNUAL MEETING**

The key is to ensure that all group members and the LGC officers are aware of the processes to be followed. Your group should follow the nomination and appointment process in your standing orders.

Some groups may prefer to take the AGM in two parts, but this is no longer a requirement in party rules.

The AGM is the ideal opportunity to review the work of the group in the council, the party and the community over the past year and to discuss strategy for the following year; this includes the group's performance at the civic centre, but also its campaigning and communications with the party and the community. It is also important for the group to review progress towards the party's aim to ensure a proportionate level of representation of groups of people in our society who are currently under-represented in our democratic institutions.

As well as taking the reports of the leader and other group officers and holding the elections, it is the time to adopt the new standing orders of the group and review its finances.

### **Before the AGM**

- Group officers and/or the group executive should consider the new standing orders, amending them to suit your local circumstances, and send a copy to your regional, Scottish, or Welsh office to seek NEC approval.
- Group officers and/or the executive should try to anticipate the key issues for the coming year and therefore identify the probable key posts.
- Group officers meet with LGC officers to clarify the role the local party will play in the process.
- Group officers and/or the group executive make recommendations to the group meeting on the annual meeting process and timetable and the standing orders to be adopted. Group members should be reminded of the requirement that group officer positions and nominations should reflect the community which the council serves, and have regard to equality of opportunity. In particular, as a minimum, the gender balance of the group officers, any executive, and any nominations to other positions should reflect the gender balance of the group as a whole. Under-

represented groups should be encouraged to seek and be elected to positions, so that our groups will be more representative and diverse.

- It will be useful to accompany the nominations and elections aspect of the AGM with a strategic discussion about the key issues the council and group are likely to face in the coming year, and the role which the group should be playing on the council. This is especially important for groups who are in councils in no overall control. An annual discussion and review is required to reassess whether the group should play a role in a multi-party administration.
- If the group is in opposition or on a hung council, the group will need to anticipate that members nominated for positions will be acting as spokespersons or “shadow cabinet” members and preferably as scrutiny, consultative forums or quasi-judicial committee chairs.
- The timetable should give clear deadlines for the receipt of the self-nomination forms and clear guidance on how group members should put themselves forward for consideration, the skills and experience required for each post and the process that will be followed for all elections. It should also set out how and when the local party will be involved. A pack of group and council roles should be drawn up with a job description and job specification.
- It would be helpful to introduce a councillor appraisal scheme for your group. This could involve the group whip, possibly with another group officer, meeting with each member of the Labour group to discuss their performance over the past year, their contribution to the council, the group, and the party, and any development needs they might have or ideas they could share. This discussion should be confidential, should be consistently applied and should follow a standard set of questions for all group members.
- Four weeks before the AGM, the group secretary should send to all group members, the LGC secretary, group observers and local government candidates if you have elections, details of the arrangements for the group AGM, including a timetable, the roles and job specifications, and a self-nomination form.
- Two weeks before the AGM, a final agenda, self-nomination forms and group standing orders should be sent to all group members and observers. (NOTE – the rules require 14 days’ notice to be given of the group AGM, so having already published a schedule of group meeting dates including the AGM, this requirement will have been met. However, members should be given enough time to read all the

documentation in advance of the meeting; the recommended minimum time is three days.)

- Confirm that all group members are eligible to participate in the group AGM; the rules require them to be up to date with their Labour Party membership and their payment of the elected representative levy. Councillors must pay their membership at the standard rate and by direct debit.
- Recommend a rate for this year's group levy, and bring necessary paperwork for members to agree to the payment of the elected representative levy by direct debit if this has not already been done.
- Receive reports from the outgoing officers for circulation.
- The treasurer of the group should prepare a report on group funds – income and expenditure, and a budget proposal for the following municipal year.
- The whip or other officers may conduct one-to-one interviews with members of the group as an annual appraisal and review. The whip should ensure members have completed a declaration of interest form, and have lodged an up-to-date register with the monitoring officer.

### **At the AGM**

It is up to you to decide if you'd rather hold your AGM in one or two parts. The AGM should:

- Receive reports from the outgoing officers and on the group's finances.
- Have a review of the year and a discussion on future strategy.
- Hold elections for Chair, Leader, Deputy Leader, Whip, Treasurer and Secretary of the group and executive members (if your group has an executive).
- Decide on the nominations for council appointments and committee membership, according to the method in the group standing orders. All group members will have had the chance to self-nominate for positions. The leader must consult with group officers/executive on the appointments, and take into account the views of the group and local party.
- Elect the nominations for the chair(s) of overview and scrutiny committee(s). Cabinet members are not able to participate in these elections.

## **Nominations for council appointments**

Selections for nominations for council appointments are made by the group leader. The leader will discuss her/his views with the group officers and take into account the nominations submitted by group members for consideration. The leader will take into account the views of the group and the local party.

The specific method for selecting members for nominations depends on your standing orders and the choice of the leader. This is a delicate task, requiring tact and discretion from the people involved and informal discussions with those who have put themselves forward may be required. The leader should focus on building the best team of people to carry out the group's priorities for the coming year and strive to make the team as representative of the group and community as possible and have particular regard for ensuring any appointments reflect the gender balance of the group as a whole. This may be helped by the whip and/or other officers holding one-to-one appraisals/reviews with every group member to review their contribution over their past year, any training needs and expressions of interest in future roles, as well as their attendance and performance over the municipal year.

## **The role of the local party in the group AGM process**

Local parties do not have the right to determine who will be group officers or nominees to council positions. However, it is appropriate for the party to be consulted and to have an advisory role at the group AGM.

This dialogue and consultation will encourage councillors to continue to keep in contact with the party, to provide leadership in policy making and campaigning alongside party members, and to ensure that leading members give regular reports on council activity to brief and consult party members.

The key role for the local party before the group AGM is to challenge the group to elect a leadership that has the necessary skills for the posts and is as representative of the local party and local community as possible in terms of ethnicity, gender, age, and geographical representation.

The local party may submit names for consideration by the leader, but only in an advisory capacity.

Branches and affiliates may make nominations to their constituency General Meeting, which in turn will make nominations to the Local Government Committee. The LGC secretary needs to communicate the advisory recommendations of the party to the leader.

## **After the AGM**

In line with the NEC's commitment to improving equality and diversity at all levels of the Party, each member elected as a group officer, to the group executive, or to any leadership position on the council (civic appointments, appointments to outside bodies, chairs of scrutiny committees and other council positions) should be asked to complete a monitoring form and return it to the Secretary. The Secretary should then complete a monitoring report on behalf of the group and return it to the regional office.

All councillors should also be encouraged to complete the party's national equality monitoring form so the party is able to assess diversity within its representation in local government overall – [equalities-monitoring.labour.org.uk](http://equalities-monitoring.labour.org.uk).

Labour group Leaders, in conjunction with the appropriate Local Government Committee, will also be required to compile a report detailing the steps they have taken to increase equality and diversity within their group, and their plans to meet this objective in the year ahead. A model form will be provided to assist groups with this task.