

The Usdaw Guide to Labour Party Meetings

Resource Sheet 6

This Guide is for Usdaw members who are interested in getting involved in Labour Party meetings or representing their Usdaw branch as a delegate to the General Committee (GC) of their Constituency Labour Party (CLP). Constituency Labour Parties cover the same area as Westminster Parliamentary constituencies, whilst within CLPs there are usually Branch Labour Parties (BLPs) that cover smaller areas.

Constituency Labour Parties sometimes use different systems to organise. There are two common models that most use:

1. All Member Meetings and an Executive Committee

Some CLPs will have All Member Meetings that any member can go along to, like an Usdaw branch meeting. These usually happen monthly. At these meetings there are likely to be:

- Guest speakers and political discussions.
- Reports from the local Labour MP or candidate and any councillors, the Leader of the Labour group, Council Leader.
- Motions submitted that are discussed and voted on.

The meeting may at various times also take other decisions, such as appointing delegates to Labour Conferences and appointing delegates to other Labour Party bodies such as Local Campaign Forums.

Once a year there will be an Annual General Meeting. At this meeting the Party's accounts will be presented and an Executive Committee will be elected for the year.

The Executive Committee's role is to provide leadership and organisation to the Labour Party in that particular constituency. Often this committee will look at campaigning, finances and the day-to-day management of the local Party. This will usually be done at a monthly meeting. Roles on the Executive Committee usually include Chair, Secretary, Vice-Chair, Treasurer, Women's Officer and Youth Officer.

Sometimes there are other roles, for instance around trade union liaison, fundraising, campaigning or equalities.

2. General Committee Meetings

A different structure that some CLPs have, rather than All Member Meetings, is a General Committee. The purpose of this is to provide leadership and organisation to the Labour Party in that particular constituency. It is made up of delegates from different Branch Labour Parties (BLPs) and affiliated Trade Unions within the constituency, similar to an Usdaw conference. Officers and an Executive Committee (including Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Vice-Chair, Women's Officer and Youth Officer), for the more managerial, day-to-day items, will then be elected by this body, rather than by all members.

The General Committee is responsible for:

- Organising local policy forums to debate policy consultation papers and submit responses.
- Receiving reports from the Labour MP or candidate and asking questions about issues and policies.
- Appointing delegates and submitting resolutions to Labour Conferences.
- Appointing delegates to the other Labour Party bodies, such as the Local Government Committee.

Usually there will be one GC meeting a month, and they are often followed by some sort of informal social event.

Some CLPs use a system which combines elements of both the AMM and GC and will invite all members to their GC meetings, but only GC delegates will be able to vote on items such as electing officers, motions and appointing delegates. This is sometimes known as a 'hybrid' system.

If you are unsure what system your CLP uses and want to know, you can contact the CLP Secretary (details on your Labour Party membership card), or ring the Usdaw Politics Office on 0161 249 2452.

Getting involved as an Usdaw member

It's well worth going along to your local Labour Party meetings, or GC meetings where all members are invited, you can go along as a Labour Party and Usdaw member and have a say on motions, put forward the views of Usdaw members locally and ask for support with any campaigns your branch are running.

If the Executive Committee is elected at an All Member AGM, put yourself forward if you want to get more involved in the running of the local Party.

Being an Usdaw GC delegate

If your CLP has a GC, you can be an Usdaw delegate. This role will allow you to:

- Put forward the views of local Usdaw members to the Party and MP or candidate, asking for support for national or local campaigns.
- Let the local Usdaw branch know what is going on in the Labour Party, including election campaigns, policy discussions or social events that members can get involved in.

What does Usdaw gain?

GC delegates are very useful to Usdaw because they help us to:

- Gain support from local Labour Parties and MPs for our political campaigns. Often this is crucial.
- Build good relations with a wide range of local politicians and MPs – this can help in local campaigns, in disputes or in recognition claims.
- Support Usdaw candidates for Parliament.

What if I can't always make meetings?

No-one expects you to be able to make every meeting and you should not feel guilty if you cannot. As long as you are not taking the place of someone who could do the job better (and with each branch being able to send five delegates to each CLP that is rarely the case), whatever you can put into the role benefits Usdaw.

If you can make every meeting, that is great. If not, try to prioritise – for instance, just go along if there will be a discussion on a relevant issue like workplace rights, or if Usdaw has put forward a motion to the Party, or if there is a selection meeting.

What are the qualifications for being a GC delegate?

The qualifications are very simply:

- Membership of Usdaw and a political levy payer.
- Membership of the Labour Party.
- To live in the constituency.

If you are not a Labour Party member but would like to join, contact Usdaw's Politics Office on 0161 249 2452 for a form or visit www.usdaw.org.uk

How do I become a delegate?

For your branch to appoint you as a delegate it needs to be affiliated to the CLP. If it is not already, this can be done by:

- Completing Usdaw *Form AY* (ring 0161 249 2452 for a form) and sending it to Central Office.
- Affiliation costs £6 for 100 members (or part thereof) and payment will be arranged from the branch's Political Fund.

Branches can appoint two delegates for the first £6 and one additional delegate for each extra £6, up to a maximum of five delegates*.

Changing structures

Some Constituency Labour Parties are looking to change their structures from a General Committee to an All Member Meeting structure. Please let us know if this is proposed in your local Labour Party. As a union we strongly support General Committee structures, as this structure allows union branches locally to be properly represented and therefore strengthen ties between CLPs and trade unions at a grassroots level. It shows local branches that if they are to affiliate and financially support a CLP that there is a place for their voice and that their input is valued.

This is a shared view across trade unions and all Labour's affiliate unions have signed up to the following statement:

"Trade unions support delegate-based structures for local CLPs, because they allow trade union branches that have affiliated to the CLP to be formally represented and take part in the CLP's decision-making processes. All Member Meetings do not allow affiliated trade unions to be represented in CLP decision-making, and this weakens the relationship between the Party and the unions at a local level.

We believe that the link between the Party and the Trade Union Movement gives Labour a foundation in thousands of workplaces across the country. Together, trade unions bring the collective voices of nearly four million working people to the heart of our Party. It is this direct link to working people that makes our Party unique, and we believe that this link is crucial locally as well as nationally."

Any questions?

Please contact Usdaw's Politics Office

Tel: 0161 249 2452

email: politics@usdaw.org.uk

Usdaw
*Union of Shop, Distributive
and Allied Workers*

