

## Unions in the community

### A guide to trades union councils

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#### **Trades Union Councils**

Trades union councils bring together unions to campaign around issues affecting working people in their workplaces and local communities.

Trades union councils aim to:

- raise public awareness of rights at work and the union role in enforcing those rights.
- promote organising and recruitment drives to build union membership.
- support union and community campaigns for dignity and respect in the workplace and beyond.

With threats of racism and fascism, changes in the labour market and debates over the future of public services, the trade union voice in the community is as important as ever. The capacity of trades union councils to provide a local response and to organise trades unionists into coalitions

with other progressive forces is crucial. They do this by providing services which keep local trade unionists up to date with developments within the wider trade union movement, and by taking up relevant local industrial and community issues. This guide provides a brief introduction to trades union councils and how they work.

#### **County Trades Union Councils**

Most trades union councils operate at borough or district level. However, counties which have unitary authorities, that is a local authority covering the whole county, usually have county trades union councils which represent union branches throughout the county.

#### **How do trades union councils operate?**

In this section we describe the basic operation of trades union councils.

#### **Affiliation**

Trades union councils consist of representatives of trades unions or branches of trades unions which have members working or living in the area.

Where branch membership is spread over two or more trades union council areas, which is often the case these days with the development of large general unions, the branch can affiliate to more than one trades union council, with the agreement of the relevant councils.

#### **Representation**

Union branches usually appoint their delegates to trades union councils at their annual meeting. The number of

delegates that the branch is entitled to send to the council is determined by the scale of representation set out in each trades union council's rules.

Most trades union councils put a maximum limit on the number of delegates from any one branch, so that bigger branches do not dominate all of the work of the trades union council.

### ***Affiliation Fees***

Trades union councils funds are drawn mainly from affiliation fees paid by trade union branches based on their local membership. The amount of the affiliation fees is a matter for each trades union council to decide.

### ***Responsibilities***

Branches elect delegates to attend their local trades union council. That delegate then has the responsibility to represent the collective view of the branch within the trades union council.

Similarly, the officers of trades union councils are elected by the delegates to the council and are responsible to the delegates. As officers of a trades union council registered with the TUC, they also accept a responsibility to the TUC. This includes upholding the objects of the trades union council to work for and support the policy of Congress and the General Council of the TUC.

### ***Objectives***

The objects of a trades union council:

- a) to provide services to affiliated branches on a wide range of industrial, social and community issues;
- b) to promote the interests of all its affiliated organisations and to secure united action on all questions affecting or likely to affect those interests,

- c) to act as the local body of the regional TUC and the Regional Council, and to support and work for the application of such objectives as the TUC, Regional TUC or TUCJCC may from time to time determine,
- d) to improve generally the economic and social conditions of working people in their area, including seeking improvements to the social services, public education, housing and health;
- e) to help promote suitable cultural, educational, social and sports facilities for all local working people;

In no circumstances can a trades union council co-operate with or subscribe to the funds of fascist parties or any subsidiary organisation of these parties or any organisations whose policies or activities are contrary to those of the Trades Union Congress.

Trades Union Councils cannot subscribe to the funds of any political party although it can co-operate with the local Labour Party, providing it does not fund directly or indirectly in the furtherance of the political objects of the Labour Party.

### ***County Associations***

In England, all trades union councils registered with the TUC must also affiliate to the appropriate county association, unless the trades union council has been allowed by the Trades Union Councils' Joint Consultative Committee to operate as a county trades union council. The association is made up of elected representatives of affiliated trades union councils.

### **Objectives**

The objects of the association are set out in the model rules and fall within the following four categories - to:

- a) Act as a representative body of the Regional TUC in the county and liaising with the TUC Regional Council in helping to publicise and administer TUC policy,
- b) Promote the effective working of trades union councils in the county and to co-ordinate their activities, particularly by making representations to the county council and to other bodies at county level about matters of common concern to Trades Councils within the county.
- c) Promote the effective working of trades union councils in the county and to co-ordinate their activities, particularly by making representations to the county council and to other bodies at county level about matters of common concern to Trades Councils within the county.
- d) Assist, in conjunction with the Trades Union Councils' Joint Consultative Committee, the development of trades union councils in the county by helping them to obtain affiliations on full membership from all trade union branches in their areas and promoting the establishment of new Councils in particular local authority areas where none currently exist

### **Trades Union Councils' Joint Consultative Committee**

The Trades Union Councils' Joint Consultative Committee (TUCJCC) is a

Trades Union Congress committee which meets five times a year and consists of representatives of trades union councils and members of the General Council. The trades union council representatives are elected regionally by registered trades union councils in an annual postal ballot. The TUCJCC was established in 1925 and acts as an advisory and consultative committee on all matters concerning trades union councils. This enables the General Council on issues affecting trades union councils to consider their perspective before taking a final decision.

### **Campaigning**

Here are some examples of trades union councils' activities over last few years:

#### **Supporting local union anti-privatisation campaigns**

- Salford Trades Union Council leafleted and organised a public meeting as part of the local union campaign against privatisation.
- Croydon played a co-ordinating role in a campaign to prevent all the remaining secular secondary schools in the borough being privatised as academies and trusts. This included petitioning in playgrounds, meetings for parents, mass lobbies of the Council etc
- Meanwhile, Swindon Trades Union Council campaigned against the selling off of council housing. The trades union council set up a Defend Council Housing Campaign involving local government unions and tenants. The campaign leafleted all of the meetings of tenants involved in the consultation process. The result was that

nearly 90 per cent of tenants indicated a preference to stay with the Council.

### **Workers' Memorial Day**

- In Bradford the trades union council held a remembrance event in Centenary Square. In London, Haringey Trades Union Council held a vigil after a short walk to the site of a building which collapsed two years previously, and where several workers narrowly escaped with their lives.
- The trades union council in Keighley established Keighley Worksafe in 1992, which is now a self sufficient organisation. The trades union council organised an event with Worksafe where they gathered 300 signatures on a petition calling for greater corporate accountability. Other trades union councils held wreath laying ceremonies. And in Wolverhampton the trades union council released 249 black and purple balloons, each one representing somebody killed at work that year.

### **Public events**

- Trades union councils are involved in organising May Day events every year, including those in Bristol, Norwich, Ipswich, London and Merseyside.

### **Meetings and conferences**

- Several trades union councils and county associations have organised themed conferences in their local areas.

For example, Chelmsford and District Trades Union Council held a Public Services not Private Profit rally with Mark Freeman (DGS POA), Jon Rogers (UNISON NEC member) and Manuel Cortes (AGS TSSA)

An earlier conference they held, on the relationship between the unions and the then Labour government, included workshops on globalisation, outsourcing and community unionism.

### **Publishing newsletters**

- Blackburn and South West Lancashire Trades Union Councils both publish a regular newsletter and have established their own websites. This can help to boost the profile of county associations and individual trades union councils.

### **Re-establishing trades union councils**

- Oldham Trades Union Council was re-established with a development grant (see below), helping in the fight against racism and fascism.
- A development grant was also used to re-establish Sefton Trades union Council.

### **Challenging racism**

- Greater Manchester used its development grant to carry out work in support of Asylum Seekers, as did Liverpool, and Blackburn put its grant to use in the local fight against racism.
- Four North West county associations held a residential conference on tackling racism in Blackpool. The seminar included

speakers from Searchlight, TUC Education and Oldham and Burnley Councils.

### **Annual Conference**

The Annual Conference of Trades Union Councils is usually held on a weekend in May. Each trades union council is entitled to be represented at the conference.

The principal objects of the conference are:

- a) to discuss the work of the TUCJCC
- b) to receive reports on resolutions which were carried by the previous year's conference
- c) to discuss ways of strengthening the organisation of trades union councils and county associations
- d) to receive the report of scrutineers on the ballot for membership of the TUCJCC.

### **Development Grant**

Every year the TUCJCC draws up a programme of work which outlines key priorities and campaigning objects for trades union councils.

To support trades union councils in locally implementing the campaigns outlined in the programme of work, the General Council has established a development grant. Grants of up to £300 each are distributed by TUC Regional Secretaries for activities developed in line with this programme.

County associations of trades union councils can also access the Development Grant to run campaigns with the specific goal of:

- establishing new trades union councils;
- revitalising existing trades union

councils

- boosting branch affiliations to trades union councils.

### **OTHER USEFUL PUBLICATIONS FOR TRADES UNION COUNCILS**

To support the work of trades union councils, the following publications can be ordered from the TUC:

- *The Model Rules and Guidance for Trades Union Councils and County Associations*
- *Trades union councils: unions organising in the community* – a leaflet to help promote trades union councils
- *The Directory of Trades Union Councils* – this lists the contact details of all registered trades union councils and county associations. Many unions use this to affiliate their branches to the appropriate trades union council. This year's directory is available by [clicking here](#)
- *The Programme of Work* – this is distributed every year following the Annual Conference. This year's programme of work is available by [clicking here](#)

For more information about trades union councils or to order a copy of any of these publications contact the Organisation and Services Department on 020 7467 1250 or go to <http://unionsinthecommunity.org.uk/>