



Briefing from the TUSC Registered Officers:

The way forward after this year's May elections – initial points to consider

A separate report has been produced on the results achieved by TUSC candidates in the various elections held on May 6th (see <https://www.tusc.org.uk/txt/446.pdf>). These were the first elections contested by TUSC since 2018, following the decision reached at the September 2020 All-Britain Steering Committee meeting to effectively re-launch the coalition, after the suspension of its electoral activity in November 2018.

Now that May's contests are over it is an apt time to review the functioning of TUSC in the period since the re-launch and begin a discussion on the way forward.

As has been the case in every year from 2011, we are proposing that the election report is published on the Candidates page on the TUSC website as a public record (see <https://www.tusc.org.uk/candidate> for the previous reports).

This briefing, however, is purely a discussion document. It contains some initial thoughts under different headings for steering committee members to consider with other TUSC members – including how we organise a wider discussion on the issues involved.

The *How TUSC Functions* rules

Appended to this briefing (pages 7-8) are the current rules which have guided how the coalition has operated to date, under the heading *How TUSC Functions*.

There are some clear anomalies – for example the rules specify that Scottish TUSC organises autonomously with its own Steering Committee but there is no similar provision for Wales, although this year's Senedd election campaign was effectively organised on an autonomous basis.

On this specific point our recommendation is that TUSC in Wales does organise autonomously – and that the All-Britain Steering Committee amends *How TUSC Functions* accordingly.

And as a more general point, while we would not want an overly formulistic approach as we all think about the way forward for TUSC, it would be a useful benchmark test for any proposed prescriptive changes to our practices and procedures to see if they could be formulated where applicable as an amendment or addition to the current rules.

But of course not every step forward that we could consider taking requires a change to the rules.

Consolidating local groups for next year's elections

That is certainly so for the issue of how to consolidate the local arrangements that developed for this year's elections in preparation for the contests that will take place next May – and to put structures in place for areas where there was no challenge this year.

How TUSC Functions is clear: local TUSC steering committees or branches should be established where possible for local government areas and parliamentary constituencies where it is planned to contest seats in future elections. They should be organised on a broadly similar basis to how the TUSC All-Britain Steering Committee is structured: operating by consensus and providing for the representative involvement of local trade unionists, the local branches of the TUSC constituent organisations, and a locally administered individual membership.

To encourage the early organisation of local groups in preparation for next year's elections we recommend that the All-Britain Steering Committee:

- (i) Publishes a new directory of future elections, last produced in 2018;
- (ii) Sets a target for local groups to have agreed an election agent (or agents) for next year's contests by the autumn, even if this is a provisional appointment;
- (iii) Organises a national zoom briefing meeting for agents before the end of the year.

Organising where there are no elections: People's Budget campaigns?

Next year will see elections in 202 councils, with all-up contests for every council seat in Scotland, Wales, the London boroughs and Birmingham, and a third of councillors up for election in most of the rest. But the continuing erosion of local democracy means that more and more councils have moved or are moving to four-yearly cycles of all-up contests, which has the effect of reducing the frequency of elections.

This means that there are some council areas that had TUSC candidates in elections (or Covid-delayed by-elections) this year which will not be going to the polls for scheduled local elections in 2022. These are Leicester, Bolsover, Mansfield, West Northamptonshire, Brighton & Hove, Isle of Wight, Folkestone, Spelthorne, Bristol, Cornwall, Cotswold, Forest of Dean, South Hams, Teignbridge, Stafford, Doncaster, and Rotherham. So what advice and help could the steering committee give for areas where there are no elections in the next year?

TUSC was founded as and still is primarily an electoral coalition, enabling trade unionists, community campaigners and socialists of different organisations and none to co-operate under one banner at the ballot box. But there is also a unity between its component parts around the importance of pushing local councils to resist cuts and austerity. The 2017 RMT Annual General Meeting, for example, set as union policy support for campaigning "to call on local authorities to set and implement 'No Cuts Budgets', that are legal by using their reserves and by borrowing to protect public services and front line jobs whilst campaigning against the austerity measures of the Tory government".

So one obvious step is for the All-Britain Steering Committee to encourage and support local anti-austerity campaigning, building on previous practice. For three years, for example – in 2016, 2017 and 2018 – TUSC published *How Much Reserves Have They*

Got? annual reports providing brief statistical profiles of the councils across England, Scotland and Wales that had Labour-led administrations.

Consequently, we recommend:

(i) That the All-Britain Steering Committee agrees to resume the reserves report series this year – based on the annual Statement of Accounts published by councils each summer;

(ii) Produces an update of the 2016 TUSC briefing document, *Preparing a No Cuts People's Budget* (see <https://www.tusc.org.uk/txt/355.pdf>), incorporating the work in the recent TUSC report, *Could Councils Implement the Policy Pledges in Labour's 2019 Manifesto?* (see <https://www.tusc.org.uk/txt/434.pdf>);

(iii) Encourages local TUSC groups in all areas – with or without elections in 2022 – to see if they could organise a local People's Budget conference in the run up to their council's 2022 budget-setting meeting.

This last proposal in particular has obvious value from an electoral point of view too – the largest number of council elections in England are in the four-yearly cycle that includes May 2023 (there will be 259 councils with elections then, over a hundred more than this year, and five city mayoral contests).

There may be council by-elections before then too. And, of course, there must be a general election no later than 2024.

Reaching out for anti-austerity unity at the ballot box

TUSC was formed as a federal coalition whose method of operation is designed to allow different organisations to collaborate under a common electoral umbrella without any infringement on their rights, activity or identity as autonomous organisations.

Beyond endorsing the TUSC core policies for each particular election, agreed by consensus – the right to veto – by all the component parts of the All-Britain Steering Committee (or the Scottish TUSC or TUSC Wales committees where appropriate), TUSC candidates are responsible for their own campaign, as the *How TUSC Functions* rules explain. The rights of participating organisations and their members authorised as TUSC candidates to produce their own material, and to promote their own organisation as part of their campaign, are fully guaranteed.

This inclusive approach has been maintained by the steering committee in the period since the relaunch of TUSC, evidenced in the correspondence with the SWP and the Communist Party of Britain (CPB) inviting them to discuss becoming constituent organisations, and the letter to the Socialist Labour Group on Hartlepool council prior to the by-election. We also agreed to invite the former Labour MP Thelma Walker, standing as an independent in the by-election – backed by the Northern Independence Party – to address the TUSC hosted eve-of-poll rally, although logistical problems prevented her from accepting.

However, in the context of this discussion on the way forward, the recent experience in Leicester is instructive. There were no scheduled elections in the city this year but there was a by-election in one ward, North Evington.

The local TUSC group, which involves the Leicester Socialist Party branch, and a BFAWU official and a former Labour councillor amongst a number of individual members, wanted to contest the seat.

However, hearing that the local Communist Party also wished to stand, the TUSC Group approached them to discuss whether the CPB's proposed candidate would be prepared to stand under the TUSC name with, of course, the full rights of a TUSC candidate to promote her organisation as explained before.

Tellingly, the response of the Leicester CPB branch secretary, in a letter to the local TUSC Group convenor, was that "while it's overall a sorry situation for two left parties to run against one another... we're in it to raise the profile of the [Communist] party locally" – which they obviously (but wrongly) thought they could not do while using the TUSC umbrella.

Part of the discussion on the way forward will be to consider what else can be done to make political organisations and campaign groups not currently involved feel as confident as possible that they could participate in TUSC without it unduly undermining their independent identity.

The RMT, Socialist Party and Resist and their input into TUSC

The best advert for the TUSC federal method, of course, is the experience of it in action, although that means it must be kept under constant review.

How do the constituent organisations of TUSC – the RMT, the Socialist Party, and Resist – feel about their participation? At the level of the All-Britain Steering Committee and at local level too?

The component organisations should be encouraged to give their views on the way forward through the formal meetings of the steering committee. But also, if they so request it, they should be able to meet separately with the registered officers of TUSC to discuss any points they may have about the functioning of the coalition.

We recommend:

- (i) That as the registered officers we make ourselves available to meet with the appropriate representatives of the component organisations to review their experience of participating in TUSC;
- (ii) That now the elections are over we attempt to organise discussions with the CPB and the SWP about them participating in TUSC as constituent organisations and that we continue a dialogue with Thelma Walker;
- (iii) That when we move to organising a wider discussion on the way forward for TUSC we explicitly invite other organisations to say what more they feel could be done to enable them to participate in the coalition.

The other TUSC 'component', of course, are the individual socialists, trade unionists and community campaigners who are not otherwise members of a constituent organisation of TUSC who wish to participate in our coalition.

What do we need to do here to take TUSC forward?

Organising individual members

How TUSC Functions stipulates that membership should be administered locally through TUSC groups but also that there should be provision for national membership for individuals unable to join a local group or establish one themselves.

The current practice is that completed join forms from the TUSC website (see <https://www.tusc.org.uk/support.php>) are added to the national mailing list and also circulated to the constituent political organisations, the Socialist Party and Resist, and the Individual Members' Representative on the All-Britain Steering Committee.

Representation on the steering committee of individual members is currently achieved through election by those individual members attending the national TUSC conference.

This situation does put an onus on the local branches of the constituent organisations to help establish local groups and facilitate the involvement of local individual TUSC members within them (as indeed the branches of the Independent Labour Party and local Miners' Lodges did in the early days of the Labour Party).

But encouraging that is only part of the solution to the question of how to involve individual members. What about, for example, the areas where there are no local branches of the constituent organisations? More than half of a sample of completed join forms – from the time of the TUSC conference in February to the end of March – were from areas where there was no TUSC election challenge this year, for example. We must look at how individual members can be organised nationally too.

We recommend:

- (i) We continue the practise of surveying local groups, with regular reports to the All-Britain Steering Committee by the Local Group Development Officer;
- (ii) That we facilitate the Individual Members' steering committee representative to organise an 'Introduction to TUSC' national zoom meeting explicitly aimed at – and only open to – individual members of TUSC who are not members of a constituent organisation, and consider regular follow-up meetings;
- (iii) That we review the *How TUSC Functions* stipulation that the Individual Members' steering committee representatives should be elected by individual members "who attend the national TUSC conference"; and further, specify how many representatives for individual members there should be.

Supporting the leading individual trade unionists on the steering committee

The other founding goal of TUSC in 2010 was to act as a catalyst in the trade union movement to push forward the process of re-establishing a new vehicle for mass working class political representation after Tony Blair's transformation of Labour into New Labour. TUSC was never conceived as the alternative but as a lever on the trade unions to themselves take the decisive steps to create a new party. With Sir Keir Starmer reviving New Labour, and the opportunities opened up under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership now closed, this task is posed once again.

The unions must take the lead but, recognising that securing the formal participation in TUSC of national trade unions would not be uniformly – or easily – achievable, the *How TUSC Functions* rules provide for the participation in a personal capacity of leading

national union officials or national executive members on the All-Britain Steering Committee (as a step to achieving their union's official involvement), with equal rights under the consensus rule. As we have explained this latter safeguard means that no leading trade unionist on the steering committee, with their own 'constituency' within their union, can be 'bounced' into lending their name to anything happening under the TUSC banner if they feel they could not defend it.

Following the relaunch we now have leading trade unionists in this category participating on the steering committee from the NEU, PCS, UNISON, POA, NAPO, UCU and USDAW. What should be done to help them to promote TUSC and raise the arguments for independent working class political representation in their respective unions?

From the sample of completed join forms referred to earlier, over half said which union they were in, including members in UNISON, USDAW, UCU, PCS, NEU, the POA and NAPO. How do we connect them up (and the many others from those unions that have come in before and since) with the TUSC steering committee members from those unions?

And then, following the letter to trade union national executive members we circulated last autumn, what new measures could we take to persuade leading trade unionists from other unions to come on board?

Towards a general election core policy platform

There are no doubt other issues to discuss under the broad heading of the way forward, but the last point we are raising here for consideration is TUSC policy formation.

How TUSC Functions has the founding TUSC statement developed for the 2010 general election – updated for the 2015 general election – as a summary of TUSC's all-Britain core policies, with supplementary core policy platforms produced for annual local elections and other election campaigns. This year there were three platforms produced, for the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Senedd campaigns and the English local council elections.

But the all-Britain core policy platform was not updated for the 2017 or 2019 general elections as TUSC agreed not to contest them, given the possibility of a Jeremy Corbyn-led government.

Consequently, we recommend:

- (i) That the All-Britain Steering Committee agrees a process to produce a draft general election core policy platform by the second half of 2022, using the 2015 policies as the established 'default' policy to be amended or added to by the consensus method.

Dave Nellist
TUSC Chairperson

Clive Heemskerk
TUSC National Agent

12th May 2021



How TUSC functions

Introduction

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) was set up with the initial aim of enabling trade unionists, community campaigners and socialists to resist electorally the pro-austerity consensus of the establishment parties in the 2010 general election. After that election, however, a conference was held of candidates and campaign organisers which agreed to continue with TUSC for future electoral campaigns.

The position that was outlined in the TUSC founding policy statement remains. “The working class and peoples of Britain are facing a ruling class offensive against public services, incomes, living standards and trade union rights”, we wrote, and it is “an offensive which has support across all the establishment parties”.

That was why, our founding statement went on, “the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition will contest elections, to show that there is a clear left-wing alternative to policies of public sector cuts, privatisation, militarism and environmental degradation”.

TUSC recognised at its foundation, and still does, that there can be “Labour and non-Labour candidates who agree with our policies, who share our socialist aspirations, and who will be supported by left and labour movement organisations participating in our coalition”.

It was also recognised in the founding statement “that there are different strategic views about the way forward for the left in Britain, whether the Labour Party can be reclaimed by the labour movement, or whether a new workers' party needs to be established”. But TUSC was and remains “united on the need for mass resistance to the ruling class offensive, and for an alternative programme of left-wing policies to help inspire and direct such resistance” to be fought for, including at the ballot box.

1. Elections and policy:

- (i) The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition should remain registered with the Electoral Commission and maintain and develop a structure that enables it to fulfil its core task. This still is to provide an opportunity for local groups of trade unionists, community campaigners and socialist organisations who want to stand candidates in elections to appear on the ballot paper, if they so wish, as part of a wider challenge – as TUSC candidates rather than as ‘Independents’.
- (ii) To this end, TUSC will endeavour to co-ordinate challenges in local and parliamentary elections. We will organise conferences open to local TUSC steering committees or branches, delegates from trade union branches, political organisations and independents supportive of TUSC, other local groups who are planning to stand candidates in such elections, and any other member of TUSC, and will back any efforts by TUSC members and supporters in Scotland to organise similar events to prepare for elections there.
- (iii) TUSC will also consider, on a case-by-case basis, endorsing candidates to stand under its banner at parliamentary and local council by-elections.
- (iv) The founding TUSC statement developed for the 2010 general election remains in place, with subsequent updating revisions, as a summary of TUSC’s core policies. In addition supplementary policy

statements shall be developed for local elections and other election campaigns, to be agreed at the relevant conferences, subject to the final approval of the national steering committee.

- (v) We also confirm that, as a federal ‘umbrella’ organisation, participating organisations will continue to be able to produce their own supporting material, subject to electoral law, as has been the practise successfully adopted in our election campaigns to date, which allow different organisations and local campaigns to collaborate under a common banner.

2. Structure and election organisation:

- (i) TUSC shall continue to have an All-Britain Steering Committee, comprised of representatives of the RMT, the Socialist Party, and Resist: Movement for a Peoples’ Party; plus in a personal capacity leading trade unionists and anti-cuts councillors. Representatives of individual members shall also be elected to the steering committee by those who attend the national TUSC conference who are not otherwise members of a constituent organisation. The steering committee will operate by consensus of its component parts.

- (ii) The adherence of further organisations will be subject to the approval of the steering committee. The steering committee can also agree to expand its membership to other leading trade unionists as it decides.

- (iii) TUSC supporters in Scotland shall continue to organise autonomously, with their own Scottish TUSC Steering Committee.

- (iv) Local TUSC steering committees or branches will be established, where possible, for local government areas and parliamentary constituencies where it is planned to contest seats on whatever broadly similar basis is appropriate for each.

- (v) Local groups should also operate by consensus and with provisions made for the representative involvement of trade unionists – including for TUSC supporters’ groups in unions where formal affiliation is not possible – and the local branches of the TUSC constituent organisations.

- (vi) Membership of TUSC should be administered locally through TUSC groups, including the setting and collection of membership fees, but with provision for national membership at a nominal £1 fee for individuals unable to join a local group or establish one themselves.

- (vii) The participants in TUSC recognise that this structure remains only an interim arrangement and that discussions must continue to take place on the best way to organise the coalition as it develops in the future. Future conferences of TUSC shall make provisions to include debates on this issue.

3. Candidates:

- (i) Candidates from organisations participating in the Steering Committee and the Scottish TUSC Steering Committee can expect to have their nomination papers for elections authorised by the coalition nominating officer as TUSC candidates if they so request. They can also stand, if they wish, under the existing registered electoral name of their organisation.

- (ii) Other prospective candidates, from local trade union organisations or other organisations, can also request to stand as TUSC candidates. All such requests shall be referred to the Steering Committee for decision.

- (iii) Prospective candidates will be asked to endorse the coalition’s founding core policy statement – and the relevant supplementary policy statement for the election they are contesting – but, with that provision, candidates will be responsible for their own campaign.

- (iv) The Steering Committee will have the final say on all coalition seats and candidates. Once approved by the Steering Committee, a candidate will be issued with a Certificate of Authorisation which shall only be withdrawn if the Steering Committee agrees by a new consensus decision to rescind its support.

- (v) The Steering Committee will seek to raise funds for national campaigning. For local challenges, the normal expectation will be that local deposits and campaigns will be financed locally.

Last updated at the TUSC steering committee meeting on 16th December 2020