



**'How conference works'**  
**A Guide to Green Party Conferences**

Conference is the place where you can directly influence policy, have your voice heard and exercise your democratic right to shape the Green Party. It can be interesting, informative and enjoyable but also confusing initially. Don't give up! It may take a while to learn the ropes, but once you do it will be very rewarding.

If you are new to conference, attend the Fringe meeting designed to explain how Conference works to first-timers (and anyone else who's still a bit confused!)

## Registration and checking in

If - like most people - you have registered and paid online in advance, all you need to do is give your name at the check-in desk on arrival. You will be given a personalised conference folder containing an agenda (motions and voting papers) and timetable (what is happening when). Your folder will also contain your pre-printed name badge and lanyard (the thing that goes around your neck). Please wear your badge at all times inside the Conference venue and please remember to hand your name badge and lanyard back when you leave.

It's a good idea to take 30 mins to sit down and read the timetable brochure as you arrive as this will answer lots of your questions on, for example, wi-fi, what is where, catering.

If you are new to conference, you will be offered the chance to sit down at the 'First Timers Desk' where a conference veteran can talk you through the contents of your folder and give you some tips on how to navigate the next few days.

## Voting

If you are a member you will be given a set of two different coloured voting cards (one for each day) for use in plenary sessions when a vote is called. You will also receive a 'card vote' card (shaped like a ruler). This is used when the show of hands is too close to count. If this needs to be used the procedure will be explained by the Standing Orders Committee - please bring it every day.

Please note that lost voting cards cannot be replaced so please keep them in a safe place. You must have the correct voting card to vote.

## Who's Who

### Conference Committee

The Conference Committee is elected annually at Conference and is responsible for all logistical aspects and general running of the conference, including venue, catering, registration, entertainment. [conferences@greenparty.org.uk](mailto:conferences@greenparty.org.uk)

### Standing Orders Committee (SOC)

SOC draws up the Agenda for Conference and advises on the rules of formal debate. They sit at the front of the room during plenary sessions, but they will also have a table in the exhibition/catering area where you will be able to speak to them. SOC will endeavour to ensure there is someone available at the table at all times, and will guarantee there will be a member of SOC at the table for the 30 minutes prior to and after each plenary session, and there will be someone there most of the day on committee election day (Monday).

Speaker slips, nomination papers and emergency motion forms will be available from the stall at all times. At the SOC stall you will be able to: Ask questions about the process of passing motions at conference and the order of the agenda. Get advice on the content of an emergency motion (noting the instructions in the SOC report in the Agenda)

[soc@greenparty.org.uk](mailto:soc@greenparty.org.uk)

### Policy Development Committee

Policy Development Committee is responsible for facilitating the Party's policy-making process. If you want information about the policy-making process, for example how draft voting papers turn into voting papers, please have a look at the materials on the Policy area of the members' website <https://my.greenparty.org.uk/content/policy-process> and do come along to the policy process training, which is held together with the First Timers Guide to Conference session. Policy Development Committee will usually have a table near the stage in plenary sessions, and you can also ask questions there or leave a message, including contact details, outside plenary sessions. Policy Development Committee used to be elected at Conference, but is now elected in an annual ballot of all members.

## What happens when / different types of session

### Plenary Sessions

These are held in the main hall and nothing is timetabled against them. They are voting sessions where the formal business of Conference takes place. Items from the Agenda are discussed and voted on in these sessions. The Agenda is made up of motions put forward by members of the party for amending, or inclusion in, our "Policies for a Sustainable Society" (PSS) as well as Organisational motions (such as those amending the constitution).

All our policies can be found here: <https://policy.greenparty.org.uk>  
and a description of how we make policy is here:  
<https://my.greenparty.org.uk/content/policy-process>

The first piece of formal business is always acceptance of the SOC report, as this determines the order of business. During Conference, SOC supervises votes and speakers in the plenary sessions (see below). They also give procedural advice to the chairs of the plenaries.

Speaker slips: There is no way to guarantee that everyone who wants to speak on a specific motion at conference will be able to do so. In order to balance the range of speakers, and to provide a balanced debate on the issues, speaker slips are used. These contain a small amount of information, which the chairs can use to identify speakers. The slips can be obtained from and returned to the SOC stall (usually in the exhibition/catering area), or at the SOC table in the plenary room. Chairs will attempt to choose fairly between those who have submitted speaker slips to speak on an issue, and those who raise their hand in the conference hall. This will hopefully ensure that there are responses to the points raised as well as pre-planned responses. If you wish to put a procedural motion, particularly one which will potentially curtail the debate, it is advisable to put in a speaker slip to allow the chair to call you at the appropriate point in the debate.

If you have any questions about items on the Agenda, then please ask a member of SOC to explain the procedure. [soc@greenparty.org.uk](mailto:soc@greenparty.org.uk).

### Attunement

Each plenary session starts with a one-minute period of attunement during which all activity stops and no-one will be able to enter or leave the hall. This is a time for calm reflection. Please do not talk or move around during attunement.

### The Agenda and SOC Report

The formal business of Conference is compiled into the Final Agenda by SOC. Conference must approve the Agenda before debate can start. This is done by approving the SOC report, which is always the first item of formal business at Conference. This is where you can chal-

lenge rulings, such as out-of-order motions, and other amendments, if you are unhappy with SOC's decisions.

## **Voting and Ballots**

Any Party member may vote at Conference, so long as they have registered and received their voting cards (three colours, one for each day of voting at conference). Voting is by show of hands, holding the correct voting card for that day. For a motion or amendment to be carried, it requires a majority of those voting for over those voting against. Some motions, such as those that amend the Constitution or the Philosophical Basis, need a two-thirds majority. This requirement will be made clear by the Chair ahead of any vote.

### **A card vote (ballot)**

When you register you will be given, in addition to your day voting cards, a strip of four "ballot" cards, which are used in card votes. A card vote is held in plenaries if requested by 10 or more members, usually if the "show of hands" vote is particularly close. To vote in a card vote, tear off the rightmost of the four ballot cards, put an X in either the 'for' box or the 'against' box, and hand to SOC who will collect them from members.

### **Proxy votes**

Members who are not present at conference are able to provide someone who is attending with a proxy vote card which they are able to use in the event of a card ballot (a secret ballot which uses ballot cards, not a hand count of votes). There is an online system so that members can assign their proxy to a member attending conference very easily via the members' website here: <https://my.greenparty.org.uk/form/proxy-vote-submissions-conference>

### **Speaking in plenary sessions**

Any member may ask to speak during a debate, simply by raising their hand with that day's voting card. In calling members to speak, the Chair will usually give priority to members who have completed a speaker slip to ask to speak on that matter, and handed the slip to SOC before the start of debate. These slips are available from the SOC stall. It is also a good idea to attend and make your point at the relevant workshop, which the Chair will usually attend.

The Chair will be concerned to achieve a balanced debate, representing the various points of view to inform members' decisions on how they will vote. The Chair will aim to call new as well as experienced speakers, and to ensure gender balance.

Speaker slips can be obtained from the SOC table. The "start of debate" means before the motion was moved, even if you only want to speak on an amendment. However, if a debate continues into a second session, slips may also be handed in before the restart in the second session.

### **Fringe meetings**

These are 'extra-curricular' meetings organised by a variety of individuals and groups (including external organisations), such as discussion sessions, policy working groups or

training sessions. They are not part of the formal business of Conference, but may cover educational or topical issues.

## **Workshops**

Before a paper or motion is considered in a plenary session, there is a workshop for discussions in small groups. If you have questions about the proposal, or wish to take part in the plenary debate, it is helpful if you attend the workshop, though it is not essential.

Workshops are held for a variety of reasons:

- to discuss motions that will be debated in plenary sessions (so that the knotty problems can be sorted out in a less formal atmosphere)
- discussions of draft voting papers (*not yet tabled as motions to be debated in the plenary sessions*)
- organised by Policy Development Committee to facilitate policy development for future Conferences to consider.

Any member can attend a workshop. A report from the workshop is given to Conference at the start of the relevant debate.

## **Training sessions**

Training sessions cover a range of topics designed to help assist the Party with growing its support and winning elections. They are for members only.

## **Emergency and Late Motions (EMs)**

All ideas for motions have to be proposed by an advertised deadline around ten weeks before the start of Conference (the Pre-Agenda deadline). There is also a Late Motions deadline, which is usually two weeks before the start of Conference, which allows motions to be brought forward where the Green Party needs to react to a situation that has arisen or substantially changed since the Pre-Agenda deadline.

Once the Late Motions deadline passes it is still possible to propose an Emergency Motion. This type of motion must be consistent with, and cannot change, existing party policy. It enables Conference to address situations that have arisen or changed substantially in the period immediately before Conference, and during Conference itself.

Emergency Motions are most often used by the Press Office to facilitate publicity for a Green Party message on an important topical issue. EMs can also be brought by individual members to address a topic that they feel is important. All EMs need to be presented in writing (and ideally provided to SOC in a digital form that can be easily displayed during the plenary debate) at least an hour before they will be debated; must be no longer than 250 words; must be signed by at least 50 (fifty) GP members; must not fall foul of the provisions in the Standing Orders for SOC ruling motions out of order.

Plenary time for Emergency Motions is available at various times during the conference. If you want to propose an emergency motion to be discussed by Conference, you should

discuss it with SOC and the External Communications Co-ordinator before submitting. They will help with how to draft, how to 'sell' and where/when to place and find them.

### **Getting more involved in the Party**

The Green Party is democratic, allowing all members to participate in policy-making and running the Party by holding elections for all committees at Conference.

Policy is developed outside Conference by members drafting motions either to create new policies or to amend existing policies. The detailed rules governing the submission of motions and the organisation of Conference agendas are developed by Standing Orders Committee.

Standing Orders are very important in ensuring the smooth running of Conference organisation ahead of time and on the day so there are significant lead-times (over three months) for proposing motions, workshops and fringe meetings. There are usually more motions and topics put forward for inclusion at Conference than can be accommodated in the time available, so members are also given the opportunity to vote in the *Prioritisation Ballot* six weeks ahead of Conference. This allows all members the opportunity to vote for the motions which they believe should be given priority. Even if a motion reaches the agenda, there is no guarantee that all motions on the agenda will be heard because of lack of time.

The Party is well aware that only a small minority of members use the website regularly or can attend conference so is looking at ways of providing more opportunities for all members to participate more fully. Live streaming of Conference is one development, and other suggestions are under discussion as part of the Governance Review.

Nominations, hustings and elections for committees are held at Autumn Conference, with bye-elections held for any vacancies at Spring Conference. Talk to current committee members to find out about their work. Put yourself forward for nomination by two Party members if you feel that you want to contribute to the Party's management. Attend the hustings at Conference where candidates promote themselves. And vote in the elections.

Seven committees are elected at Conference:

1. Standing Orders Committee
2. Dispute Resolution Committee
3. International Committee
4. Equalities and Diversity Committee
5. Green World Editorial Board
6. Campaigns Committee
7. Conferences Committee

### **Chairing**

The chairing of plenary sessions is organised before the start of conference. Contact SOC if you are interested in chairing a session, at this or future conferences.

Guidance is available on what the job entails and the best way of acquiring the necessary skills is by co-chairing alongside someone with experience. We are always keen to encourage newcomers and broaden the expertise within the Party.

## **GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS/INITIALISATIONS**

GP(EW) – Green Party (of England and Wales)

GPEX – Green Party Executive

GPRC – Green Party Regional Council

SOC – Standing Orders Committee

PSS – Policies for a Sustainable Society

EM – Emergency Motion

ERO – Electoral Returning Officer

PDC – Policy Development Committee