



**UBILAB**  
**Sheffield**

**How to get your local authority to pass a motion in support of a basic income pilot**

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This is a short manual that will tell you how to get your council to pass a motion in support of a Universal Basic Income (UBI) pilot in the area. It's been developed by UBI Lab Sheffield based on our experience in getting Sheffield City Council to [call for a UBI pilot](#) in the city.

The strategy behind this is that the more local authorities that pass motions in support of UBI pilots, the more the concept of UBI is legitimised and moves into the political mainstream. An opportunity for a fresh wave of media coverage of UBI is also created every time a council passes a motion.

The strategy is inspired by the work of Cllr Patrick Hurley, who got Liverpool City Council to pass the country's first motion in support of a UBI pilot in late 2018. This influenced our work in Sheffield, where we were able to get the Sheffield City Council to pass a motion in June 2019. We then advised councillors in Hull, who got Hull City Council to [pass a motion](#) in January 2020.

This manual is written from a UK perspective. Some of it may be relevant to UBI activists trying to do the same thing outside the UK, and some of it won't be. This manual merely details how we got Sheffield Council to pass a motion - it is not intended to be definitive or the only way to do it.

### **Map out the political landscape of the council**

Start by doing some background research on the structure of the council, how many councillors there are, and what party holds a majority (it may be a coalition). This is the party that you will need to persuade to support your motion - unless they're in favour of it, it won't pass.

It's worth working out who has influence within the ruling group, and which councillors are most likely to make things happen. If it's a Labour-run council, which ideological wing of the party is in control? Green councillors should already be in support of UBI as it's their party policy.

You could make a spreadsheet of all the councillors (or you may be able to download this from the council's website) to record whether you've spoken to them about the motion, and what their position on it is. You can also include space for notes so that every time you have a discussion with a councillor you can keep a record of the current position.

## **Professionalism allows councils to engage**

If you're part of a UBI Lab group, a lot of this is already in place in terms of the name, logo and branding. Making your group and your communications look professional makes it easier for the council to engage with you without potentially putting their reputation at risk. Remember this in all of your communications with councillors.

## **'Seed' the idea with councillors wherever possible**

Whenever you see councillors out and about, ask them if they've heard of UBI and your group. If you've already proposed your motion to the ruling party, ask them if there's been any updates on it. Ask them to discuss UBI and your motion with other councillors in their party group.

## **Map the existing networks that everyone in your group will be plugged into**

At UBI Lab Sheffield we sent round a spreadsheet by email and everyone in our group filled in what contacts they had, and what groups they had connections with. Keep a record of these and use the contacts to build support in your area for a UBI pilot. Local chapters of groups like [ACORN](#) and [Extinction Rebellion](#) are worth approaching as they may offer their support.

What civil society groups exist in the area that might support a UBI pilot - particularly those focused on poverty or anti-austerity politics? Securing endorsements and support from campaigns and other civil society groups may leverage support with politicians.

## **Introduce yourselves to local politicians**

We wrote letters to every councillor early in the process to introduce them to UBI Lab Sheffield and to let them know that we wanted them to pass a motion in support of a pilot. This letter used plain and simple language to explain:

- a) what UBI is
- b) who UBI Lab Sheffield were
- c) what we wanted them to do and why
- d) how they could get in contact with us

We sent slightly different letters to councillors of different parties. These included variations for each party depending on that party's political interests (the letter to Labour

councillors focused mostly on inequality, whereas the letter to Lib Dem councillors focused more on how a UBI would benefit entrepreneurs and independent businesses). Make things simple for councillors to read and understand. If the letter is too long, they won't read it because they don't have the time. If it's not written in plain English, they won't read it.

We wrote all the letters using the [Hemingway App](#), a free online tool which gives you a readability score for your writing and shows you where a sentence is too long or complicated. There's no need to post the letters - we dropped them off (in envelopes) at the Town Hall.

We can send you the letters that we sent to every councillor which you can use as they are or adapt.

On the same day as posting letters to all 84 Sheffield councillors, we sent each one an email to make sure that they definitely received the message - each email had the same short message and a digital copy of the letter to that councillor attached. This meant that they could more easily contact us by just replying to the email.

All the communication we got from councillors from this first communication was in response to our emails. We have examples of the emails we sent to councillors which we can share. You'll find email addresses for all councillors on the council's website. Matching the letter with an email is free, but takes a bit of time and organisation.

If you take the time to write letters (even if just the first time), councillors will take your group more seriously as you've put the effort in. For local politicians, it demonstrates a level of respect for their time. Anyone can send an email, but councillors rarely receive letters.

### **Speak as guests at political meetings**

Local parties often have ward meetings which include guest speakers. Tell councillors that you'd be happy to come along to one of their meetings to speak. In Sheffield we had success with this quite early on when we spoke at a Labour ward meeting in Walkley, which established a relationship between us and Deputy Leader of the Council (and now MP) Olivia Blake.

All elected councillors from that party and ward have to attend these meetings, as well as their agents. UBI Lab Leeds have had success with this strategy, speaking to three

councillors at a Kirkstall and Bramley Labour meeting as well as the activists they need for their campaigns. Having a direct audience with the people you need to persuade and their activists is a high impact activity.

### **Host events about UBI and invite councillors**

When we booked Guy Standing to speak at an event, we sent a follow-up email inviting all councillors to the event. You could also invite them to your regular meetings.

### **'We just want to pilot it'**

Stress at every opportunity that we don't know if UBI will definitely work, that we merely want to test it and find out. This makes you seem reasonable rather than radical, and potentially buys credibility with councillors from across the political spectrum.

### **Make it easy for everyone you engage with to do the thing you want them to do**

We wrote a suggested motion ourselves so that Sheffield councillors could visualise actually passing something. We can provide this motion for you to use or adapt. Sending them a motion written in 'motionese' makes it seem more tangible - have a look at previous motions on the council's website and copy the language and style.

### **Press releases**

Write press releases for local journalists with multiple pictures and multiple quotes - they haven't got much time and if you do the work for them they're more likely to run a story. Many activist groups fall down in this area.

Research the local media (see **Local Democracy Reporters**) to find out who to send press releases too. As well as individual journalists most outlets will also have a newsdesk email address on their website. Send it to as many people as possible - if you have multiple contacts at the same outlet send your press release to all of them at once and CC in the newsdesk.

As well as local papers there may also be a regional paper like the Yorkshire Post or the Eastern Daily Press. Make sure you also send it to local BBC journalists as well as the BBC's local radio station.

Press releases should have loads of information in them (the journalists will pick and choose what they want to use) and should have at least three quotes. This will make the paper more likely to pick a story up if they don't have to chase quotes. Include a telephone number so that journalists can contact you if they quickly need more information.

If you have any, maybe one of your Green councillors could be quoted in a press release, or you could quote any local business owners you know who are in support of UBI or UBI pilots (again, this buys credibility).

Write press releases a week in advance and send them to local journalists "under embargo" until the right date. This will give them more time and make them more likely to write a story. You can find the four examples of press releases we've sent out on the [Press page](#) of our website. Feel free to borrow or adapt anything you want from these.

When you get your motion passed, make it your priority to get as much media coverage for it as possible. When Sheffield Council passed its motion, we emailed dozens of journalists in every outlet we could think of. If it isn't reported on, it might as well not have happened.

## **Twitter**

Use your group's Twitter account to find and follow every local councillor that is on there. This is a boring task but it's another way of making a connection, and a lot of the interaction we've had with councillors has been through Twitter after we followed them.

Just go through the list of councillors one by one and search them on Twitter. Find and follow local journalists too - just search '[area name] journalist' in the People tab and follow all of them, even the student ones. This makes it really easy for them to find and contact you.

## **Local Democracy Reporters**

Find out who the Local Democracy Reporters are in your area, and make connections with them early on. These are reporters paid for by the BBC but who work at the offices of local papers. Both the local paper and the BBC can run the stories they produce.

They're only able to only write stories about the council and local democracy, so they're always looking for new things to write about. These reporters should be your most

important allies in the media. Frustratingly there is no database of who the Local Democracy Reporters for each area are, but you can usually find them by search the name of your area and "Local Democracy Reporter" in the People search on Twitter. You could also try the same search in Google. There will be about three or four in big cities and one or two in smaller cities or areas.

### **Exploit local rivalry**

Even if it's silly, you could try saying to councillors, for example, in Leeds: "Why should Liverpool and Sheffield get this and not Leeds?! How embarrassing would that be for the UK's best city?" You'll know what the rival town or city is in your area - let councillors know that this is an opportunity to get one up on them.

### **Vision**

Provide a positive vision of how UBI could transform people's lives for the better, and transform your city or area for the better. Doom-mongering just makes people instantly switch off, as does overly technical talk about automation. Rather than say that we need a UBI to tackle climate breakdown, talk about the liberating effect it could have on people's lives. Use emotive and direct language - talk to councillors about the transformative effect that a UBI could have on the lives of single parents.

Tap into different potential benefits when talking to different people. Depending on the political interests of the person you're meeting, this could be poverty, inequality, health and wellbeing, the environment, the economy, small businesses or entrepreneurship.

### **Political spectrum**

Try to win support across the political spectrum. They might not go for it, but it's worth trying to engage with Conservative councillors if you have any. Definitely don't leave Conservative councillors out when you email all the councillors.

If you reach out to everyone, it becomes harder for your group to be written off as "just a Labour thing" or "just a Green thing." The Conservative councillors in Hull supported the motion there, on the basis that if there was going to be a pilot launched nationally it should be in Hull. In Sheffield, the one UKIP councillor at the time supported the motion. In Liverpool, Cllr Hurley's motion was passed by every single councillor unanimously.

## **Petitions**

Some councils have a mechanism where you can create a petition on their website (not all do - Sheffield don't). A group in Brighton have used this to set up a [petition to their council](#) calling on them to pass a motion. Look up whether your council run a petition service and use it if they do. This allows supportive members of the public to do something to show their support, even if it's only small.

## **Conclusion**

Above are the actions we took in Sheffield in the months leading up to the council passing a motion. Unless you have councillors in your group, the actual work of proposing and passing a motion at Full Council will need to be done by a councillor in the ruling group or coalition.

Using the above strategies, try and establish direct contact with a sympathetic councillor in this group who you can ask about this part of the process. You may be able to establish this contact right away in response to your introductory letter and email.

Keep up a dialogue with them and keep asking them if there's been any progress on the council passing a motion. Remember, this is an easy ask of councils as it doesn't commit them to actually spending any money or doing anything other than writing a letter to the government. If national government launches local UBI pilots, all councils in the country should want a pilot to be where they are.

Good luck with the strategy - it may take months or only a couple of weeks, but there's no reason why a council shouldn't pass a motion on this unless the ruling group are ideologically opposed to UBI pilots. Even then, it's worth a try.

Make yourself a nuisance. Keep contacting and writing to your councillors, and to the local media, until they pass a motion. Keep the pressure up. What you're asking for is a simple and easy action for them to take. Three councils of big cities having already passed similar motions reduces the political risk.

If you need any advice or further guidance in your area, please contact us either through [our website](#) or on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#).