

# LOCAL GROUPS

**A guide to getting started**

## **About Compass**

Compass is a home for those who want to build and be part of a Good Society; one where equality, sustainability and democracy are not mere aspirations, but a living reality.

We are founded on the belief that no single issue, organisation or political party can make a Good Society a reality by themselves, so we have to work together to make it happen. Compass is a place where people come together to develop the visions, form the alliances and take the action required for transformative change.

We have campaigned for a progressive alliance, democratic reform, UBI and much more. Our research has considered topics such as devolution and political extremism, amongst others.

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# **Please get in touch, join, support and work with us.**

Write to us at Freepost Compass

Email us at [info@compassonline.org.uk](mailto:info@compassonline.org.uk)

You can find us on X [@CompassOffice](https://twitter.com/CompassOffice)

To find out more about Compass,

please visit our website:

[www.compassonline.org.uk](http://www.compassonline.org.uk)

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## SECTION 1

# What is a local group?

## What is Compass?

Compass is an organisation with over 20 years of experience at the forefront of the fight for a Good Society. We believe that a better future, one built on equality, democracy and sustainability, can only be made a reality through cooperation and common consent.

That's why we work to create alliances between people who want to realise progressive values, and we're concerned not just with the question of what sort of society we want, but how we ought to bring a Good Society about.

Our work is underpinned by a commitment to 45 Degree Change. This means organising at the meeting point of horizontal and vertical power. We see powerful thinking and action appearing all across society already, and believe that meaningful transformation can be brought about when those pockets of energy encounter and are enabled by the formal structures of the state.

Over the years, we've campaigned on various issues related to a Good Society. These include a universal basic income, a Green New Deal, and electoral reform.

## What is a Compass local group?

Compass local groups are collaborative spaces at the local level for people of all progressive parties and none to come together, build relationships, share ideas and campaign on matters of shared interest.

In short, they're groups of progressive people who want to build support for, and take steps toward realising, a Good Society.

Every one of our local groups is unique, defining its aims and priorities according to the interests and expertise of its members, as well as the character of the local area.

## **The give and take**

You know your local area best, so you'll know how to most effectively take Compass ideas and campaigns into your communities.

We have an infrastructure in place to support your activity, alongside resources, funding and training. So, it's up to local groups themselves to make the decisions, plan the events, organise the meetings, and keep the show on the road - but not without support.

## **What do Compass local groups do?**

Our groups do all sorts of things. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- Most importantly, they create a space for progressives to connect and organise. Often, they provide a forum for members of different political parties, who might not otherwise cross paths, to collaborate and campaign together. Crucially, they offer those who are passionate about equality, democracy and sustainability, but are not involved in party politics, a place to contribute to the campaign for a Good Society.
- They campaign to realise progressive change, by taking action through canvassing, lobbying political candidates and representatives, and encouraging progressive cooperation in elections.
- They organise debates, discussions, and other events around progressive ideas and policy. Sometimes these might feature external speakers, such as policymakers, community leaders and academics.
- They facilitate research and action groups, which might produce reports and briefings on community issues. These sub-groups often contribute ideas to reports produced by the national Compass Office.
- They engage the general public in conversation about progressive ideas, and try to win hearts and minds. This might happen through running street-stalls, speaking at community events, or engaging with the local press.

## How does the Compass Office support local groups?

We have an **online hub** for local groups that has a whole host of resources: from templates for strategy planning for elections to sign-up sheets and posters, and guidelines on everything from facilitating negotiations to insurance and electoral spending.

For updates from the Compass Office, and so that groups can share ideas and collaborate, we run a **monthly Local Groups Call** open to all Compass members involved in our groups. These calls take place on the first Monday of every month, 6-7pm.

We have a **workspace on Slack**, which facilitates instant messaging within groups, with other Compass members and with the team at Compass HQ.

As a group develops, and when you're ready, we can **promote your activities**, meetings and events to our mailing list, the Compass membership, and via our social media channels.

Where possible, we support group activities **financially**; for example, with venue hire and refreshments at events. For campaigning, we contribute all kinds of **materials**, including leaflets, banners, badges, flags and posters. We can also assist in the design and provision of materials customised to different local contexts or for original, localised campaigns.

All of the Compass team are available to help local groups, and we love to get out of the office to see our organisers. Whether that be **joining groups in-person** to deliver training or to talk about the work Compass is doing nationally, we're always keen to join local groups in the field. The local groups team are also available for political, strategic, or technical questions, just drop us a line and we'll arrange to talk on Zoom.

The team also help to **facilitate** negotiations, **moderate** debates, **run workshops** and trainings, and can help to run strategy sessions.

For established and active groups, we offer bi-annual training on our main **digital campaigning tool, Action Network**. This training allows local groups to independently contact the Compass mailing list in their area, host and promote their own public events, create online petitions, run letter-writing campaigns, and much more.



## Case Studies

What does all of this look like in action, and where have Compass local groups made a difference?

Here are a few examples of how our brilliant groups have made an impact in the past.

### Brighton and Hove

Since their efforts to broker progressive cooperation at the 2017 General Election, Compass Brighton & Hove has become a well-recognised force for progressive organising in East Sussex.

Their assessments of local political events have been reported in the press, as have their campaigns, such as petitioning local MPs to support democratic reform. National political figures and thinkers join their bi-monthly coffee mornings, a well-attended forum for discussion and debate on live political issues.

During the 2024 General Election, they endorsed and campaigned for two successful progressive candidates: Siân Berry in Brighton Pavilion, and Beccy Cooper in Worthing West.

[You can read the full story of Brighton & Hove here, and see what they're up to now.](#)



### South West Surrey

In a corner of Surrey once thought to be 'true blue', South West Surrey Compass has transformed the political landscape beyond recognition.

Their organising from 2017 onwards saw Jeremy Hunt MP's constituency go from being the 7th safest Tory seat in the country to the 121st safest in 2019. They managed to take control of their local council from the Tories by uniting progressives from all parties behind a shared platform, 'A Progressive Future for Waverley'.

Their self-published local magazine, 'The Compass', reaches over 12,000 local households, and their remarkable political journey is also the subject of a book, 'A New Way of Doing Politics'.

In 2024, they supported a legal battle against drilling for fossil fuels in the Surrey Hills, and took on Jeremy Hunt at the ballot box once more, slashing his majority to just 891 votes.

[You can find the full history of South West Surrey here.](#)

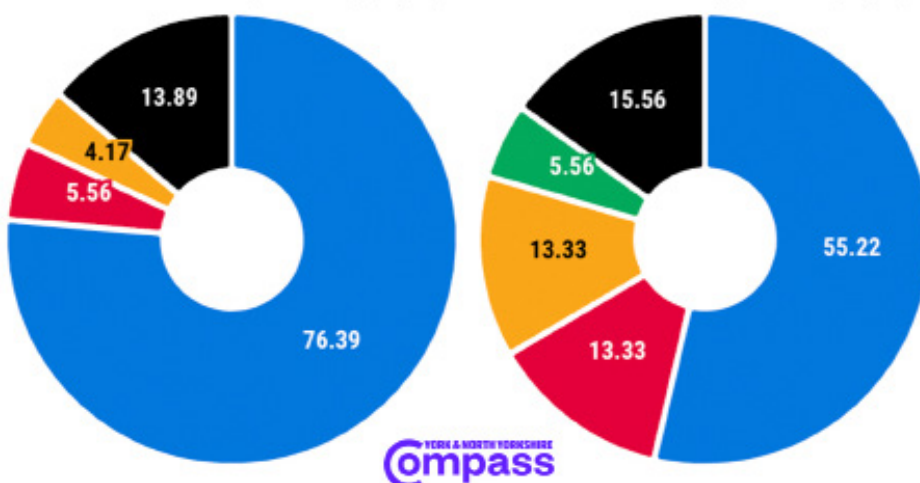
## York and North Yorkshire

Through promoting progressive cooperation at the 2022 local elections, Compass York & North Yorkshire saw all progressive parties gain seats on North Yorkshire Council - and the percentage of Tory seats down by over 20%. Their successful follow-up campaign forced a debate on electoral reform onto the agenda of the council's first meeting, and a well-attended demonstration coinciding with the meeting attracted extensive local media coverage.

Since then, they've worked hard to promote progressive ideas and relationships, contributing to events such as the Radix Festival of Ideas, and holding a 'Progressive Conversation' for the 2024 Mayoral Election in York's King's Manor, the former seat of the historic Council of the North.

At the 2024 General Election, they endorsed and campaigned for three candidates, two of whom were elected to Parliament: Luke Charters in York Outer, and Tom Gordon in Harrogate & Knaresborough.

**2017 Seats by Party (%)    2022 Seats by Party (%)**



## **SECTION 2**

# **Getting started**

If you're interested in starting a local group where there currently isn't one, get in touch with our Local Campaigns Organiser, Luke, on [local@compassonline.org.uk](mailto:local@compassonline.org.uk), who can talk you through the process in more detail.

With the support of the Compass Office, you'll need to do two things to get your local group started.

## 1. Find your people

A local group needs members, so the first step you should take is to connect with other local progressives who might wish to be involved.

### Compass members and supporters

Compass has a membership of over 3000 people who are based all across the UK. We also have a mailing list of over 90,000 supporters who back our campaigns and projects.

Let us know where you are - whether that's a postcode, a town, a constituency, a county or a region - and we can reach out to members and supporters near you.

### Your network

Whilst we strongly encourage all those involved in Compass local groups to join the national organisation, you don't need to be a Compass member to get involved from the outset. You'll already have connections in your area who might be interested in the work Compass does - reach out to them and see if they're up for getting involved.

### Other organisations

Remember, our commitment to 45 Degree Change means that we're enthusiastic about coalitions of people of all progressive political parties and beyond. Who else might be interested in joining the movement for a Good Society?

Think about:

- Political parties
- Environmental groups
- Local issue and campaigning groups
- Faith groups
- Trade unions
- New and progressive media groups
- Community action groups

## 2. Get active

Once you have a few people, you need to get together and get to know each other. Relationships of trust and mutual respect are the touchstone of all good organising!

Think about how you might bring those people and more like-minded progressives together. Consider, for example:

- A brainstorming session to answer, “What would a Good Society look like in our local area?” This could be a one-time thing, or inform a series of future events and even a project to produce a report or local manifesto.
- A talk attended by an expert or a speaker, followed by a Q+A/discussion. We’re happy to assist you in getting a speaker lined up!
- An informal networking session, to facilitate 1-to-1 discussion. This kind of event needs to be structured carefully to make sure that people don’t only speak to people they already know!

### Looking for inspiration?

The events and conversations that you facilitate will be unique to the issues in your area, and the skills and interests of your group. If you’re not sure where to start, think about some of the following:

- Are any issues particularly relevant to your local area? Do you have a particularly high-profile Conservative MP, or are there any government policies which have been especially detrimental to your community?
- What knowledge, expertise, relationships and interests are already represented in your group? If you’re made up of members of different local political parties, perhaps you could look at electoral targets where progressive cooperation could be decisive. If you’re primarily made up of climate or electoral reform activists, maybe an event to discuss “How do we achieve X goal in our area?” would suit your group.
- Think about Compass’ national campaigns. Are there any upcoming elections at which a fractured progressive vote would be disastrous? Have any local authorities in your area been exemplary of progressive cooperation? How could you help build trust and cooperation across progressives in your area?

## **SECTION 3**

# **Building your impact**

## Building the group

So there's a few of you getting to know one another, and you're wondering what a Compass group can do in your area to make the most impact.

Again, there's no single answer. What the most appropriate strategy is for your group will depend on your general plans and aims, and the political culture and representatives in your area.

Here are some essentials and best practices to start.

- **Have a way to communicate.** To support Compass local groups, we have a UK-wide Compass channel on an app called Slack. This offers instant messaging with Compass staff, hundreds of other Compass members working around the country, and can host a specific messaging channel for your group. Creating a WhatsApp group is also a popular option.
- **Consider repeated, regular steering group meetings.** If there is a core group of committed attendees to your events, consider coming together to act as a steering group for the local group, and agree upon a monthly steering meeting or Zoom call. Together, you can plan events for the wider membership of the local group and share responsibility for the direction of your activities.
- **Always have an agenda** for your meetings and always **agree on next steps** at the end of each of your events/meetings. This might involve agreeing the date and time of a future meeting and/or some action(s) to be taken that cascades toward your strategic goals.

For example, if you want to engage with political candidates, you might draw up a list of candidates and assign responsibility for contacting each candidate to a group member. Or maybe if you're hosting a coffee morning, delegate responsibilities for venue logistics, promotion, and speakers.

- **Make a clear and time-limited plan.** Even if your group's aims are not focused on any particular win or electoral event - e.g. something more general like improving relationships between local progressives is your aim - creating a plan and timeline will help to keep things on track.

## Making a plan

Once your group has the basics down, it's important to have an idea of your purpose as a group and how you plan to keep the momentum going.

Things can fizzle out without a plan in place, especially given that lots of the people involved in Compass local groups tend to be involved with other political, social, and community projects too.

Again, there's no catch-all formula for keeping up the momentum. What the most appropriate strategy is for your group will depend on your general plans and aims.

Here are the key questions to guide your plan:

- Where are we now?
- What do we want to happen?
- What's going to get in the way?
- How are we going to implement the plan? What do we need to do?

The team at Compass HQ is always happy to go through planning processes with local groups, and to give tips and advice where possible.

## Projects and campaigns from HQ

Lots of groups choose to run local versions of the national campaigns and projects that we run at Compass HQ.

Some of our campaigns are specifically designed so that local groups can pick these up and get stuck in at the grassroots. For example, our 2024 General Election campaign, **Win As One**, was conceived of nationally but run by local groups. Our national focus was on seeing a cross-party caucus of pro-PR MPs elected to Parliament. Locally, Compass groups built the relationships and power to actually get these MPs elected.

Other campaigns and projects we run aren't designed specifically for local groups, but can be picked up by groups with ease. For example, some local groups have worked on issues raised in some of our national publications, such as community resilience to political extremism.



## The boring, important stuff

Whilst operating as a Compass local group, you'll be representing Compass as an organisation, so we're counting on you to demonstrate our values of care, tolerance and respect in all that you do. We also want to make sure we are supporting local groups as much as possible. To that end, we have some governance requirements to be aware of.

### Compass membership

The core organisers of Compass local groups are Compass Members. By core organisers, we mean those that are on steering groups, making strategic decisions, representing Compass in public or to political candidates, handling money for the group, requesting campaigning materials, and liaising with HQ.

[To join Compass, click here.](#)

### Recognition agreement

Once a Compass local group is comfortably established, we ask representatives to sign a Recognition Agreement (RA), which the Compass Office signs too.

In short, the RA sets out that the national organisation allows you to use the Compass name and branding for campaigns and activities which are in keeping with our aims and values. This is for your benefit as much as ours - it formalises our commitment to supporting your autonomy in organising in your local area.

### Group representatives

We ask that each Compass local group has at least two Compass members willing to act as representatives for the group. This isn't a demanding role - these two people will primarily be the designated point for liaison between the group and the Compass Office. If we need to get in touch with your group, we'll get in touch with these representatives.

### Other group roles

Depending on the scope and size of your local group, you might wish to consider electing people to fill roles such as Chair, Secretary and Treasurer. We have a set of model rules and guidelines if you decide to do this.

## Money

Compass has financial resources available to support your activity where possible. We've supported local groups to hire venues and arrange catering, and to print campaigning materials, for example. If you'd like to access financial support, you'll need to request this before the expenditure is made.

We ask that expenditure on resources such as leaflets and posters is run by the Compass Office especially, for a couple of reasons. Firstly, we have a supply of leaflets and other campaigning materials ready-to-go, and we can get these sent out to you very easily - though we understand that local campaigns often require non-general materials.

Secondly, money spent on resources of this kind can, in some cases, count toward regulated electoral spending. This introduces strict legal requirements, which we have a duty to comply with as an organisation.

## Electoral campaigns

The Electoral Commission's rules on campaign spending don't just apply to the printed materials just discussed. For that reason, if your local group is actively involved in campaigning during any election(s), please get in touch with the Compass Office so we can make sure that you have all that you need to run your campaigns free of hiccups.

This isn't to rein you in - it's so we can help. Part of the work Compass does nationally is concerned with the electoral landscape for progressives. For example, we regularly produce reports and analysis on progressive policy and political parties. We also have capacity and skills in the team to help with research, graphics, digital activism and resources like conversation toolkits and letter templates. Moreover, we might have intel on history or relationships between parties in your area that could be useful.

So, if your local group is planning to get involved in any elections, we ask that you make the local groups team aware, and keep us posted.

# COMPASS IS THE PRESSURE GROUP FOR A GOOD SOCIETY

We believe in a world that is much more equal, sustainable and democratic. We build alliances of ideas, parties, and movements to help make systemic change happen.

**JOIN COMPASS TODAY**

[action.compassonline.org.uk](https://action.compassonline.org.uk)

The logo for Compass, featuring a stylized '@' symbol followed by the word 'compass' in a lowercase, sans-serif font.

 [@CompassOffice](https://twitter.com/CompassOffice)