



Working with your council

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Introduction

When campaigning for Space for Cycling, you will need to ensure you are working with the right people in the right local authority.

You will also need to have messaging that appeals to your target audience and – the more involved you get – some knowledge of how policy is made in a local authority.

This guide is geared towards getting a motion passed in support of Space for Cycling but includes various subsections on working with your local authority more broadly.

Remember, local authorities can differ massively. Use the following as a guide, not a set of instructions.

What do you want from your council?

Space for Cycling calls on councils to:

Plan

Produce a costed plan for a comprehensive network of safe, direct and accessible routes for utility cycling

Invest

Actively seek the funding to implement the plan

Build

Build the network using the most up to date high quality design standards

The ultimate goal is for your council to pass a motion to support Space for Cycling – and then hold them to account on delivering it. [A draft motion can be accessed here.](#)

There are various other things you may from your council too, for example:

- Improve an individual stretch of road
- Not go ahead with a particular roads project
- Form a [Cycle Forum](#) or [Local Access Forum](#), so that you have regular meetings to discuss cycling in the area
- You may just want to build a relationship with your local authority

Which council?

Different councils have different authorities. You need to liaise with the council that has highway authorities. These are:

- County councils
- Metropolitan borough councils
- Unitary authorities

[Learn more](#) about the responsibilities of different local authorities. [See here](#) to find which local authority area you are in.



Some local authorities also fall under a combined authority. These authorities have considerable influence over strategic transport planning across an entire region of multiple councils. [Find out more about Combined Authorities here](#). [See if you are in a Combined Authority area here](#).

Another local body you may find useful to open a dialogue with is the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). These are partnerships of local business and government that make funding decisions on various areas of policy but with a business focus. Infrastructure is often invested in – but it is up to you to ensure this is cycle friendly infrastructure. [Find your LEP](#).

You may find this [LEP Watch page](#) useful, produced by Campaign for Better Transport. It includes information about your LEP's history of spending and funding.

Who to contact?

Councillors

In a local authority, policy is created by elected councillors (shortened to Cllr). Councillors are local politicians who represent a ward. You can find out which ward you are in and who your councillors are [here](#).

Only councillors can submit a motion for debate at council. For the motion to make it onto the agenda, it must be proposed by one councillor and seconded by another.

Cabinet

Each local authority has a cabinet. Like at national government level, the cabinet is made up of councillors from the ruling party. Where there is no overall control of the council, a cabinet may be a coalition between different parties.

Each cabinet member has an area of policy that they look after. Generally speaking, the member that concerns you, as a cycling campaigner, is the member for transport. Some cabinets give their members different titles. (E.g in Oxfordshire, the Cabinet Member for Environment has responsibilities over transport).

Your council's website will have details of the cabinet, including minutes from their meetings.

Champions

Some councils also have 'Member Champions'. These are councillors with an area of specific interest that they want to promote. Some councils have a 'Cycling Champion' – but not all. Some councils have someone like a cycling champion but with a different title. The best way to find out if your council has one is simply to google terms like '[Local authority name] cycling champion'.

Remember, member champions have taken on the role because they want to promote it, not because they have any particular authority in the area.

Council officers



Officers in a council are not elected or affiliated to any political party. They are the staff responsible for implementing policy, not deciding it. In some councils, officers hold fairly substantial power as they are in place permanently, while councillors can be replaced each election.

Officers recommend policy stances to councillors. A motion being discussed at a council meeting will come with a recommendation from an officer. See our [guide to working with council officers](#).

Most – but not all – local authorities will have a cycling officer, or a cycling and walking officer. Some councils have a whole team, others might have one person working part time.

Find out what roles exist in the highways team of your authority. Even if there is not a specific cycling officer, there will be someone whose remit covers cycling. A road safety officer can be a good point of contact.

It is these people who will be given the workload if you successfully get a councillor to implement policy. It is also these people who will have a better understanding of how practically possible your ideas are.

Other individuals

The councillor with the most power is the Leader. Having them on your side could be instrumental in a successful campaign. You could contact them but they will probably pass your message onto the relevant cabinet member. A better option might be to cc them into any correspondence you have with the cabinet member.

The [Director for Public Health \(DPH\)](#) may have an interest in cycling and is worth getting in touch with. The DPH is a health professional. They are unelected but are responsible for determining the overall vision and objectives for public health in a local area or in a defined area of public health. The [health benefits of cycling are well known](#), so the DPH could be a useful ally.

Your MP does not have a say over local transport planning but does carry political clout. They can arrange meetings with the necessary individuals and provide political backing to your campaign. [Find your local MP](#).

Your Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and local police force are responsible for roads policing in your area. They could give backing to any kind of road safety campaign, though their interest in infrastructure may be limited. [Find your local force and PCC](#).

When to contact?

Consider what might be on the council's agenda at any one time and think about how that may affect your plans.

If there is an election, you may want to get candidates signed up to support your campaign, or ask parties to feature Space for Cycling in their manifestos.

If an election has just finished, you might want to email new councillors and congratulate them/introduce yourself and get cycling on their agenda early.

If there are no elections, simply get in touch with existing councillors. Look out for anything that may affect the success of your campaign. For example, has congestion or air pollution been in the news in your area? Is there a big highways project planned?

Communicating with your councillors

Key points:

- Be informed. Read our [briefings](#) and [ten common questions](#) page in preparation. Take copies with you to give out. Take copies of the [Space for Cycling Guide for Decision Makers](#). Get in touch for hard copies.
- Switch on the charm! Your job is to win people over. Being aggressive or short-tempered will only switch people off.
- Consider their perspective. Make it clear that improving conditions for people wishing to cycle is not about you as a cyclist, but about a better community.

When speaking to your councillors, don't assume any prior knowledge. Most councillors will not have any knowledge about transport planning or cycling. Explain your problem and proposal to them as you would any of your friends.

Focus on the wider community benefits of cycling, not just benefits to cyclists. Many councillors will not understand the benefits of cycling or they may see cycling as a fringe activity enjoyed by a few middle aged men in Lycra.

Try to paint a picture that shows nicer/safer community spaces that children and the elderly can freely travel around and enjoy being in. Discuss the impact on pollution/environment and how the local economy is likely to benefit. Explain that increased cycling means fewer cars on the road, which reduces congestion and travel time for people wishing to drive.

Our briefings include lots of information on the wider benefits of cycling. See in particular, our briefings on [air quality](#), [local transport](#) and the [economy](#).

Try to get into the mind of a councillor. How are voters likely to respond to your suggestion if it were implemented? Is there strong local support or opposition? How much will it cost? You don't need to have answers to these questions immediately but you will do well to show you have considered them.

See our briefing on how to get and demonstrate public support [here](#).

Do a little research on whoever you contact. Google their name with key words such as "cycling", "transport", "air quality" etc.

Take a reasoned tone and make sure you are informed. Be clear about what it is you are asking for. You will find you are more effective if you are seen to be a critical friend of the council, as opposed to an irate cyclist – no matter how tempting!

Offer solutions – don't just complain about the status quo. Make a [cycle network tube map](#) to illustrate how a network could look and where the gaps are in the existing network.



Take along this [draft motion](#). It is editable so you can adapt it to your local context.

[Give this presentation](#). Again, it is editable if you would like to include local-specific examples of cycle infrastructure or adapt your arguments to a local context.

Display community backing for your proposals. See our [guide to creating support](#).

Making first contact

Start by sending a letter to councillors who fit one or more of the below criteria, inviting them to an *informal* meeting. It may be best to initially meet councillors either individually, or in small groups of 2-4. You can contact your councillors using our [simple tool](#) or via [writetothem.com](#).

Councillors to try first are:

Councillors from the ruling party. This is particularly essential if you are working towards getting a motion passed by the council.

Councillors who have [pledged support](#) to Space for Cycling. Since the latest local elections, the list is out of date, but some names should still be in post. Just cross-check by searching for them on Google before contacting them.

The 'Cycling Champion', if your council has one.

One of your own ward Councillors. Again, see who these are using our [simple tool](#) or via [writetothem.com](#).

Any who fit more than one of the above boxes.

At the first meeting

View this initial *informal* meeting as a fact-finding mission.

Present the problem you are trying to address and the solution you are proposing. Be informed and make the case in a friendly, coherent and concise way. [Use this presentation](#). Take along any relevant briefings.

Find out from them:

- Are they willing to submit the motion?
- What are their views?
- Who else should you speak to?
- What are the cabinet member for transport's views on cycling?
- How do other councillors in their party view cycling?
- Are there any obvious allies?
- Are there any councillors that could potentially derail the plans?
- Which council officers should you speak to?
- Ask for contact details of the group member secretary. This person has the ability to open up discussions with the party as a whole.



Follow up on first meeting

From this meeting, you will want to set up follow up meetings and appear regularly at public meetings (this process might take lots of meetings!) The councillor(s) you met with should be able to give a steer as to who best to meet with.

A couple of options:

Meet with the transport cabinet member

If the councillor you speak to thinks the cabinet member may be supportive, see if they are happy to meet with them and get a more rounded idea of their views. Don't feel insulted if they may want to meet without you there. This might allow the cabinet member to speak a bit more freely. But equally, you can always ask if your presence would be helpful.

If the cabinet member is supportive, you could try to get a motion passed straight away. The thing you will need to consider is whether or not you will get enough votes from other councillors for your motion to be successful (you need at least 50% of councillors to vote in favour).

Attend party group meetings

Ask the group member secretary for the leading party (get their details from a councillor from their party) for a ten minute slot on their next party meeting agenda.

These meetings normally take place on a monthly basis. It could take a few months to get on the agenda.

If you do get a slot, this is your opportunity to present your proposal and gauge how councillors from that party are likely to vote. More on this below.

Meet with the relevant council officer(s)

You may want to meet with the relevant council officer(s) to get a steer on what is practically possible. Have they made a map of where a strategic cycle network would go? Do they have a rough idea of how much a network would cost to produce?

How much money can you feasibly ask for in the council motion? Will there need to be more staff in order to implement your proposals? How long would it take to implement your proposals? How does that affect funding?

Meet with other Councillors

If your council is made up of councillors from lots of different political parties, you will probably need to get support from multiple parties.

Any councillors identified as potentially problematic could be worth meeting with.

What you need to do will likely hinge quite heavily on the political make up and general cycle-friendliness of your council.

Turn up at council meetings



Members of the public can speak at council meetings if registered before a deadline, usually a day or more ahead. Contact your council's democratic services to register.

Go to the Cycle Forum or Local Access Forum

If one does not exist, speak to a councillor about setting one up.

Getting your motion to carry

If you do get a Space for Cycling motion on a council meeting agenda, you're next job is to ensure it carries (passes).

For this to happen, you need to get over half of the Councillors to vote in favour.

The support of the ruling party is crucial, as they make up over half of the councillors. An effective way of persuading them would be to speak to the party group leader. Ask them for an agenda item at their next meeting. If you do get a slot, this is your opportunity to present your proposal and gauge how Councillors from that party are likely to vote.

At the meeting, you can present this PowerPoint. Edit it as you wish beforehand to adapt it to local context. Be sure to read our briefings so that you are well informed and don't hesitate to get in touch with Cycling UK Head Office for a practice run at presenting or just for a chat to help you prepare.

Once you have presented, ask for a private policy vote on your motion (you will have to leave the room for this). If you have managed to persuade over half of the attendees at that meeting to vote in favour of your proposal and make it group policy, then councillors from that party group will be 'whipped' (required) to vote in favour of it when/if it does make it to full council meeting.

If you cannot get an item on the party group meeting agenda, you can try persuading just the group member secretary to make your motion party policy.

Though the leading party are the most crucial, do not stop there. The more support the better. This is crucial if your council has no overall control of the leading party do not have a substantial majority.

Ask all councillors over the phone or via email to vote in favour of the motion. Get any other supportive residents in the area to do the same.

Register to speak at the council meeting. There are normally a few minutes at the beginning of each council meeting for public speaking. Contact your council's democratic services to register. You will need to register before a deadline, usually a day or more ahead. There are not usually questions. You may want to read up on some of our [briefings](#) before you speak.

Get supporters along to the meeting. Contact anyone you know to be supportive. Alert local press. See our [working with the media briefing](#).

If the motion carries

Give an enthusiastic thanks to all the Councillors who were instrumental in getting it passed and to all Councillors who voted in favour of your proposals.



Issue a press release to local media in response. Offer praise to the council and your support in making a success of the motion moving forward.

Arrange follow up meetings with councillors and council officers to hold them to account on the promises of the motion.

Get in touch

If you need any support with working with your local authority, our dedicated campaigns team are on hand to help out.

Please contact Tom Guha on:

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