

From: compliance@libdems.org.uk

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Subject: Day 12 - Dealing with Branches



Managing Branches

Branch of Region / Branch of State

These are Local Parties that have been suspended, typically due to not having a Chair and/or Treasurer. Since they are registered with the Electoral Commission as 'accounting units' of the Party, someone has to look after them therefore it falls upon the Region in England or the State in Scotland and Wales.

The Regional / State Party gains control of the bank account and takes on the responsibility for compliance and producing Year End Accounts.

Branches of Local Parties

This guide is more about branches of Local Parties.

In many locations, branches are being abolished, primarily to improve compliance reporting and to eliminate extra committee meetings. Some have set-up **Campaign Teams** who coordinate activity in an area; these teams can be more proactive and agile and act under the authority granted to them by the Local Party Executive. The teams don't need to have AGMs, elect officers or do Year End Accounts as they are about getting things done, not administration of an organisation.



Rights for Local Branches to Exist

Branches can only exist if the Local Party has adopted the branch section within their Constitution (Section 8 in England, Scotland and Wales Model Local Party Constitutions). In England and Wales, this section is optional, i.e. if not adopted then no branches may exist. Again in England and Wales it is optional to allow the branches to have a bank account and Treasurer.

Branches are always subject to the authority of the Local Party; this is because under laws governing political parties, they technically don't have a separate identity to that of the Local Party for compliance purposes.

The Local Party Chair and Treasurer are responsible for compliance of the branches - the job might be delegated to branch officers, however the Local Party Officers remain responsible.

Each branch will need to have an AGM and elect its own officers and send representatives of the branch to Local Party Executive meetings.



Branches Without Bank Accounts

If the version of branches adopted is the one without them having a bank account, then any branch money is managed within the finances of the Local Party. The branch still needs to have executive meetings, have an AGM and elect officers (but won't have a branch Treasurer). This is like a Campaign Team except it has administrative duties beyond campaigning and the members of the branch elect the officers instead of the local party executive appointing them.

Branches With Bank Accounts

- Responsibility

As the Local Party Treasurer and Chair are responsible for all finances and compliance, this will include anything that happens in the branch. They need to make sure there are appropriate policies and safeguards in place to ensure branches report to them and don't do anything that will get them into trouble.

Branches cannot incur debts, so they can't borrow money, have an overdraft / credit card or do anything that will mean the Local Party has to pick up the bill later.



- Donations and Gifts

Donations and gifts received by a branch need to be reported on Lighthouse as if they were received by the Local Party. The Local Party Treasurer should get a monthly report of donations and gifts from each branch. When I was a Local Party Treasurer, I asked for all branch donations over £50, as that was some time ago now, so £100 is a better figure nowadays.

If a donor makes a donation or gift on the same day to more than one bank account, including different branches, the Local Party Treasurer needs to add these together and report the total amount received from that donor as if they made one donation to the Local Party. For example, a council group gives £300 to one branch and £350 to another branch on the same day - a single donation of £650 is to be reported for the Local Party.



- Year End Accounts

Branches with bank accounts also need to produce Year End accounts, get them approved by the branch Executive and inspected by an independent inspector. The accounts and inspector's report are then presented at the branch AGM.

The branch accounts have to be incorporated into the Local Party Year End Accounts. As the Local Party must send their accounts to HQ by 15th March, I recommend that a Local Party treasurer insists that the branches send their approved Year End account to them by February at the latest.

In the Local Party accounts, all you report for a branch are: total branch income; total branch expenditure and the branch's assets, bank, liabilities and reserves. Transfers to/from a Local Party and a branch are reported in the Local Party accounts as internal transfers. They are also part of branch income or expenditure in the Local Party accounts figures in the final Year End accounts.

If you have any further question about branches, please contact compliance@libdems.org.uk.



Lloyd Harris
Compliance Projects Officer
Liberal Democrats