

How to run a successful co-op

Student Co-op Homes



November 2025



SCH and ESCHA



Network of British and Irish student housing co-ops

- Aim to support and grow movement in the UK.
- X1 part time associate
- Board of directors
- Owns 2 properties
- Supports function, training, events, lobbying and promoting the movement

European Student Co-operative Housing Alliance



- Network of student housing co-ops from across Europe.
- Support network and events (2022 + 2024)
- 2026 planned for next event.
- 7 countries and many more co-ops represented.



What is a housing co-op?



A housing co-operative is a group of people who manage and control the housing in which they live. Each person is a member of the housing co-operative and has an equal say in decision-making. No member individually owns or makes profit at the expense of another. All members are expected to take an active role in providing and managing the accommodation and the level of rent the tenants pay reflects the cost of managing the housing. (Shelter definition)

A relevant definition for a Student Housing Coop:

An organisation where students democratically manage their living spaces to meet their common economic, social and educational needs, in line with the Co-operative Principles and where students pass the co-operative down from generation to generation.

7 Cooperative Principles

1. Voluntary, Open Membership
2. Democratic Member Control
3. Economic Participation
4. Autonomy & Independence
5. Education, Training & Information
6. Cooperation Among Cooperatives
7. Concern For The Community

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Created By: katy daleon photography



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BSHC CO-OP HOMES

The poster features a photograph of a young man with red hair, wearing a plaid shirt, sitting on a ledge and playing a guitar. The background shows a brick building and some greenery. The text is in bold, red, sans-serif font.

What is a housing co-op?

Two ways of thinking about this question.



A legally registered organisation

- Co-op / Bencom
- Company
- Charitable organisation

A legal entity with obligations under relevant law in a given nation, contracts with its residents (members), staff, other parties.

Important to ensure this is compliant with the law and fulfills these obligations.

A group of members/residents (a Society to use older language) who collectively through whatever governing form live in a more collaborate and democratic form of housing.

This groups develops an evolving set of cultural practices, work plans and handover of a culture that sustains a democratic and collaborative ethos around their housing need. There are many forms this can take and Co-operative cultures change over time with turnover.

At first it can be difficult to understand this - especially in newer co-ops or where someone is new to Co-ops, best approaches are proper induction, education and engaging with your Co-op - i.e. not just living in your house but participating.

In what forums are decision made?

In smaller co-ops (Birmingham, Seasalt & Glasgow for example) General Meetings are the primary way members exercise democratic control over the co-op.

- Smaller Co-ops may call these 'House Meetings' but must ensure appropriate notice given so members attending can make decisions for the Co-op.
- There may be devolved bodies (subcommittees/ working groups) that are authorised to undertake functions - i.e. finance, maintenance, etc that may have some power to make decisions.

Annual General Meeting (AGM) are a formal, mandatory meeting held once a year to conduct official business, such as approving financial reports, electing roles/officers.

Essential: All meetings must be minuted properly (attendance, apologies, date, actions), chaired properly and be well attended.

How to hold a productive meeting

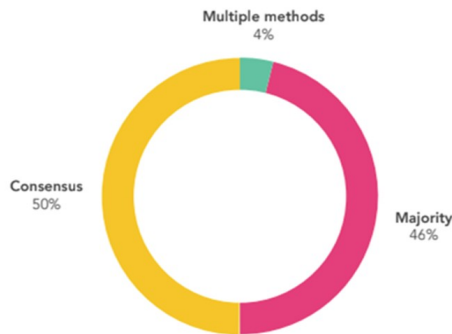
1. Importance of regular meetings - but ensure meetings are needed (avoid meeting fatigue)
2. Good chairing and facilitation
3. Keeping to agenda and relevant items
4. Ensure you go around members at various points - encourage quieter members to contribute and balance over contributions.
5. Ensure a clear set of minutes and/or actions list is produced and visible

Although this session is not about this specific topic we will flag some unhealthy signs / red flags for you to keep an eye out for today.

If you want advice in this area or SCH / Brighton & Hove Community Land Trust (BHCLT) to sit in on a meeting you simply need to ask - openness with your building owners can help them support you!

Nuts and bolts of decision making

Primary decision-making method



Decision making - Majority vs Consensus vs Hybrid

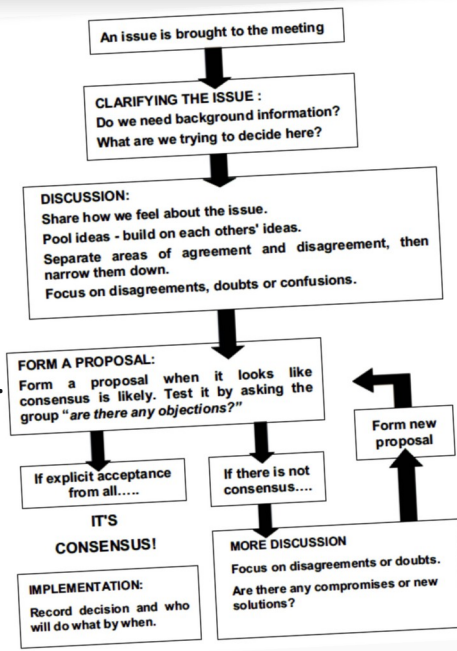
Different Co-ops make decisions in different ways and some are specific decisions are made differently to others:

- *I.e. A Co-op may make decisions by simple majority but when it comes to a house party for example this needs consensus of all members*

There is no right or wrong process - but adapting to what works for an individual co-op.

It may not be possible for everyone to agree around a specific decision but it is everyone's responsibility to respect the outcome of the decision making process.

If a Co-op wants to change how it makes decisions it can consult SCH on adapting the process or changing decision making forms, this should be a structural process and not off the cuff.



Roles within the Co-op



Mandatory: Required in Law

Secretary (more signing responsibilities, but tasks can be shared out across co-op members)

<https://www.uk.coop/resources/essential-society-secretary>

Optional: Not Required in Law but many Co-ops have them:

Treasurer - come to the next training on Finance - Wed 10th Dec, 12pm

<https://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/information/role-of-the-treasurer/>

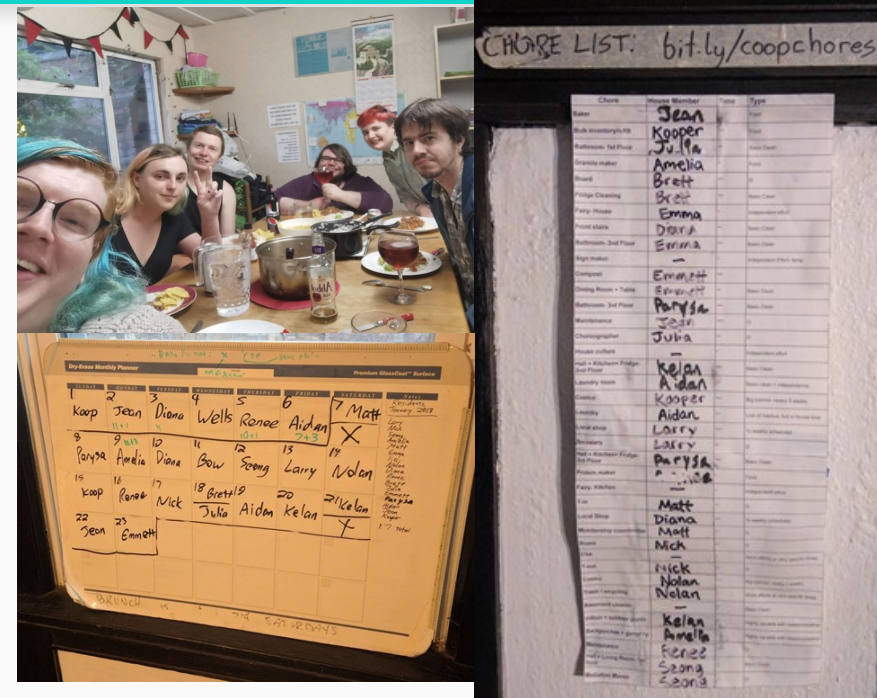
Chair / Vice Chair - Usually in larger co-ops. Facilitate meetings +/- external point of contact for the Co-op. Sometimes a function that is rotated within smaller co-ops - up to each co-op to decide if they want a dedicated person or to rotate. Essential with Chair/Secretary to ensure meetings take place and Chair is respected in meetings.

General governance pointers:

- Smaller co-ops - avoid knowledge concentration in one person and ensure proper handover of information in role changes.
- Ensure everyone has an understanding of how they can contribute.
- Do not vote passively - if you don't understand ask questions and if the Co-op cannot understand a decision - seek help from SCH / BHCLT

Work allocation / Labour Planning

- How to ensure work happens & keep up momentum.
- Sharing work responsibly/ future proofing
- How to avoid overload/burnout
- Have fun - organise socials, food, etc with other members



Communication

Positive clear communication

- Practice active listening.
- Ensure everyone understands their responsibilities.
- Be honest about challenges and reach out to SCH/ the wider network for support.
- Time out, but keep talking.
- Understand that democratic decision making can be challenging/slower but rewarding.

Further: positive and proactive communication with SCH and BHCLT can only help your Co-op.



Co-op culture



Co-op as community.

Social – get newer members involved right at the start and inducted. Invite SCH and other Co-ops to visit! Or plan a visit

Think of other ways to Cooperate i.e. Food and Dining Co-operation, etc. Co-ops that eat together thrive together!



Co-op legal requirements

Register with a governing body - In all Co-ops present this is Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) and you can view your registration on the FCA Mutuals Portal.


Having a set of registered rules that comply with laws like the [Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014](#),

Appointing specific officers like a Secretary

Don't reinvent the wheel - Use Model Rules and seek advice / templates for appropriate policies - do not repeat hard work that is already out there!

Understand your existing policies – but also understand they are not static and your co-op needs to adapt to circumstances and approach over time.

How to onboard new members

Standard checklist (share after session) 

Allow time for questions/feedback

Welcome pack for all new resident members (ESHC)

How to keep policy knowledge active and relevant?

Ask members “What you’d wish you’d known”

		Who?	Time
	Quick check in	All	
Introduction	What is a housing co-op?		10 mins
	How is it run?		
	Work allocation tasks within co-op		
	Lease arrangement and responsibilities		
	Mission and values		
	Short -term goals		
	How the co-op works - All members to engage and participate - run by General Meeting and Annual General Meeting (AGM)		
	context – background of co-op		10 mins

Health & Safety

Risk Assessment

- Identify risk
- Document observations
- Evaluate risks (can include ranking system - or priority high to low risk)
- Detail - how to mitigate risks



Health & Safety

Ensuring properties are free from hazards

Safe gas and electrical installations

Comply with fire safety regulations

Fire brigade offer house visits for free friendly advice

Fire exits and procedure

Carrying out DIY work

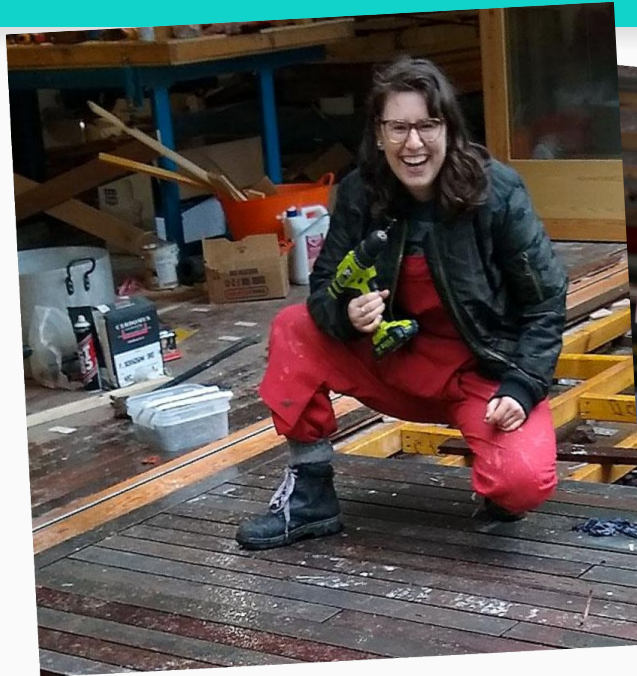
If in doubt **ASK** many of you are new to this, regulations can be complex but you must ensure members are safe.



Health & Safety

Main risks

- Slips and trips
- Electric/gas safety
- Fire at night
- Asbestos
- Legionella - low risk
- Rodents



Recruitment

- Where to recruit
 - We can guarantee that a Co-op will have new members every year.
 - Be a 'legitimate provider' (Listed with Unions, Universities, etc and develop these relationships.
 - Dynamic, active recruitment
- Good lead in time
- Proactive recruitment
- Clear interview process with standard questions
- Expectations of membership explained



Upcoming online training modules

Finance - Understanding rents, budgets and finances - delivered by BHCLT
Wed 10th Dec, 12pm - 1pm

2026 training modules to follow include:-

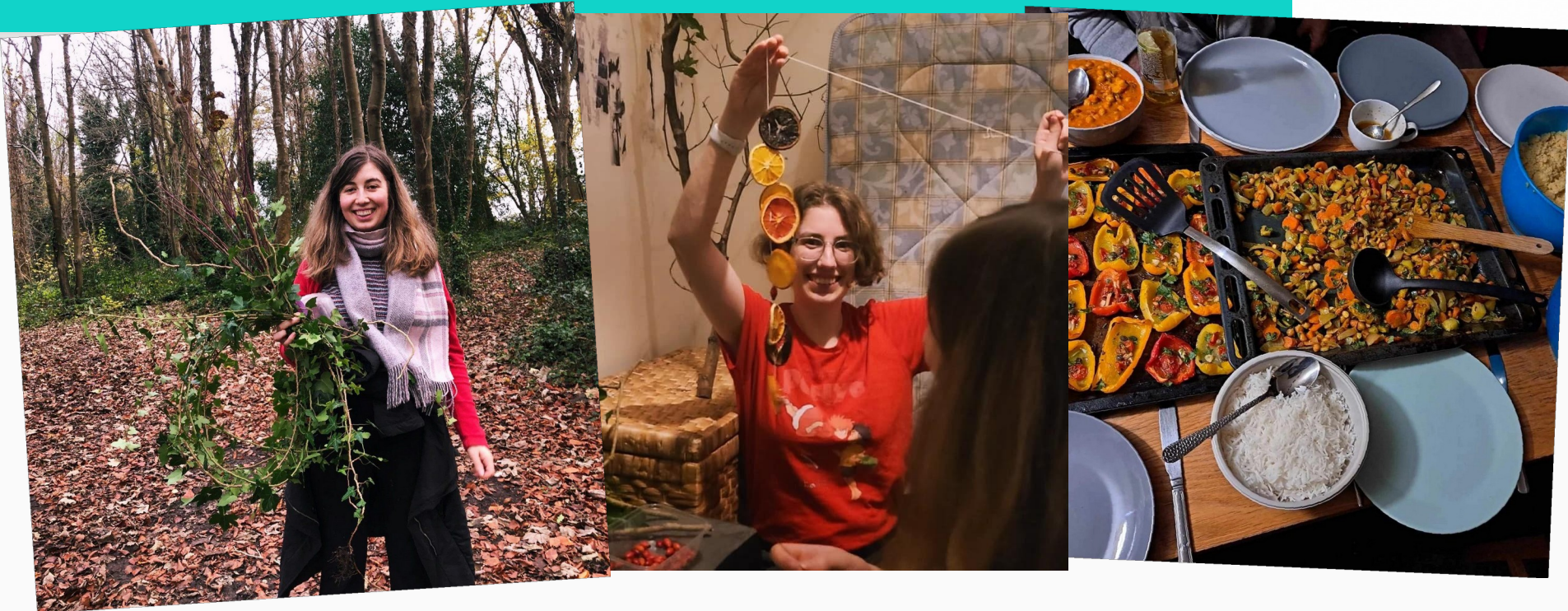
How to have tricky conversations

Maintaining your home

Mapping your networks

Core training is delivered on an annual basis

Thank you - any questions/feedback?



Share one idea you will take away from the session to share/implement with your co-op