

Machynlleth Housing Cooperative

Shared Work Commitment Policy

This document lays out how we share work in the Coop and what is expected from members.

Housing Coops work on the basis of member participation. Each member has an equal say and has the opportunity to make an equal contribution to the success of a coop. This includes sharing workload.

What kind of work is shared in the Coop?

Much of the work involved in living in the Coop is common to living in any shared house – washing up, tidying, cleaning, cooking, taking out the bins and recycling. Some of the work is specific to being in a Coop, for example, facilitating a house meeting, managing the budget, inducting new members, performing maintenance tasks, writing policies, and lots of other things. It's important to understand that there is more work involved in living in a Coop than in a regular shared house, however we feel that the benefits - greater control over our housing, living affordably, a greater sense of community - make it worth it.

How is work shared in the Coop?

Some of the work is performed by members who hold roles in the Coop. These roles include Treasurer, Secretary, Maintenance Co-ordinator, Food Co-ordinator. Members holding roles have sets of tasks that they perform on an ongoing basis. For example, the Treasurer produces annual budgets, the Food Co-ordinator places wholesale orders of lentils, etc. To find out more about what each role involves, have a look at the Role Descriptions. If there is a role that you can see is not yet being fulfilled and you think would benefit the Coop then please do suggest it.

The rest of the work of running a house/Coop (including cleaning, washing up, tidying, cooking, gardening, etc.) is performed by all members in the most balanced way possible.

Each house has a culture of commitment to shared work. There are tools that can help with this. For instance, Clubbhouse currently uses a "10 minute notch sheet" to visualise work that is being done by members. It's a table showing the categories of work done in the house (e.g. cleaning, gardening, maintenance, finances, etc.) where members can make a notch against their name for every 10 minutes of work they undertake. This helps us to make invisible work (such as administrative tasks) visible. It's intended for self-evaluation, and is used for each of us to get an idea of how balanced things are. It also helps us to look after each other, by giving us a way to see if someone is ending up doing too much.

We try hard to avoid an imbalance in member contribution to shared work by empowering people to take on roles, providing inductions, training and support, rotating roles, organising work sessions.

Why do we care so much about how work is shared in the Coop?

Imbalances in shared work contributions can lead to negative impacts on the wellbeing of members. We want to ensure that members aren't put under undue stress or feel a disproportionate level of responsibility because too much of the workload is being left to them. As well as this, we want all members to feel that they are making a valued contribution and that they are an important part of how the Coop runs.

We also commit to sharing work fairly to challenge existing power and privilege dynamics that are present in any group of people. For example, [women in the UK spend on average 60% more time doing domestic tasks \(such as cleaning and washing up\) than men](#). These inequalities can have knock on effects for well-being, opportunity, security, health, etc. We all have a responsibility to proactively look for these biases in our own behaviours and attitudes and to work to change the way we do things to make things fairer. Our commitment to sharing work is one way we are attempting to do this.

What is expected of me in terms of Coop work contribution?

Members are expected to step up to invitations to act, and to support and empower each other to create a loving, creative and strong household community. We have a culture of acknowledging and celebrating the work contributed by members.

Some coops ask members to contribute a specific number of hours per week. We don't do that. Instead we prefer members to be conscious of how work is being shared and to look out for one another. Sometimes you are likely to contribute more one week and less another, if you have busy periods of work or are away from the house, for example. The idea is to create balance over time.

You're unlikely to take on a role (e.g. Secretary or Maintenance Coordinator) until you have settled in and understand how things work. However, you are expected to contribute to "non-role" tasks (cleaning, washing up, etc.) from the beginning of your time at the Coop.

It's important for you to attend house and Coop meetings as much as possible. You'll be expected to be open to taking on new tasks that come out of meeting discussions when you can (e.g. researching into buying a new fridge, talking to the neighbours about building a communal recycling shed, etc.).

All new members have a six-month probation period. This is to make sure that both new and existing members want to carry on committing to each other within the Coop. The probation period is also the time to see whether or not committing to shared work practices is for you. If you find that your lifestyle isn't compatible with a shared work commitment, or that you feel like you're moving in a different direction, it's important to reflect on that at this point. You can find out more about our probation process in the Secondary Rules document.

What should I do if I feel that I'm over-contributing to Coop work?

It's really important to raise this with your housemates (or the Coop, where appropriate), as over-working/over-responsibility can have knock-on effects on your life and wellbeing. This can be done at a meeting, or in a more informal setting, such as over dinner.

If you can think of some practical things that would help, propose them (e.g. "I feel like It's just been me cleaning the toilets for the past few months and I'm finding that difficult. Could we trial a toilet cleaning rota?"). If not, the Coop will work together to come up with some actions that can be taken to improve the situation.

What should I do if I feel that a member is under-contributing to Coop work?

Firstly, are they OK? Check-in and ask what's live for them at the moment. Remember that our work contributions can't be continuous streams of high productivity, and members might pass through periods of contributing less to the Coop during challenging times.

With that being said, it's not alright if consistent under-contribution goes on for a long time, or starts to affect the well-being of other members who then have to over-contribute to keep things running.

It's really not easy to talk to someone about this kind of issue, and these situations can be nuanced and complex. In some cases it might feel appropriate to raise it at a meeting, in others it might make more sense to have a one-to-one chat. Whatever happens, start with the assumption that the under-contributing doesn't stem from bad intentions. Be curious, maybe they have a block to participating that you haven't thought of. Are there any compromises or alternative ways for them to contribute? This is easier said than done! It's something we could all do with learning how to do better. Remember you're not on your own in dealing with this.

If the member is in their probationary period, you could raise the issue during their midterm or final review. You can find out more about our probation process in the Secondary Rules document.

What if there are times when I feel that I am unable to contribute?

It's really helpful to communicate and acknowledge times when you aren't able to contribute as much as you'd like, or when you're not able to meet an expected timescale for a task (this happens to everyone!). This can be done at a meeting, or in a more informal setting, such as over dinner.

If you feel like there's a block to you contributing, practical or otherwise, the Coop will try to support you in coming up with compromises or alternative ways to be involved. The

important thing is that we are conscious of how work is being shared and that we are committed to looking out for one another.

Can I be paid for my work in the Coop?

Only under very specific circumstances. Please see the Paying Members for Work Policy.