

Sheffield Palestine Solidarity Campaign:

Following the Co-op Bank's decision to close 3 Sheffield-based Palestine solidarity accounts, alongside a raft of other Palestine solidarity accounts across the country, these are actions you can take:

1. If you hold a Co-op account:

Close the account and join others next Thursday to do so in public (see point 3 below)

2. Send the Co-op a clear message about your views on their actions:

- a. Tweet@CoopBankUK
- b. AND Email the boss, Steve Britain (steve.britain@cfs.coop) He is the Chief of Staff and Director of Strategy.
- c. Write to the local manager of the Co-op Bank.

3. Join public protests against the Co-op.

- i. **DATE** Thursday December 3rd at 12.00 noon.
- ii. **PLACE:** outside the Sheffield Co-op Bank on Pinstone Road.
- iii. **AIM:** Announce your intention to close your account, complain in person OR offer general support to the campaign to reveal the Co-op Bank as deeply unethical where Palestine is concerned
- iv. **LATER:** there will be future protests outside the Co-op, including the New Year, when many accounts close.

4. Let your MP know about your actions and concerns:

- a. Write expressing your views and asking your MP to say what action they will take in support of constituents affected and as a matter of principle.
- b. Ask Labour MPs to make this an item for the newly formed Labour Friends of Palestine, recently launched with Paul Blomfield's full support.

5. Press release:

- a. A press release has been prepared.
- b. Consider following it up with letters to the local press.

6. Spread the word:

- a. We all have family and friends who may not be directly affected by the Co-op's decision but who will have concerns. Let your personal networks know and ask for their support in protesting to the Co-op.

7. PSC national strategy:

- a. PSC will keep us in the loop about their legal action and may well propose additional, co-ordinated actions which we can support.

FACT SHEET: The Co-op Bank closes accounts linked with Palestine.

1. The Co-op Bank prides itself on its ethical status.

In posters displayed on branch windows and within a lengthy booklet entitled “Our Ethical Policy: the Co-operative Bank”, the Co-op tries to carve out a special niche for itself in the world of banking. By using the language of morality, propriety and ethics, the Co-op seeks to position itself above the rest of its banking competitors.

Comments to be found in the booklet, which is available in branches of the bank:

- *“We’re not your usual bank”*
- *“We are proud of our passion for values, for ethics, for the community, for real people with real lives.”*
- *“We believe our ethical standards should be clear and transparent to everyone.”*
- *Values and ethics “...underpin how we run our business, distinguish us in the market place and run through everything we do.”*

Obviously, such statements mean that the rights-based work of campaigning for justice for Palestinians should find a natural home in the Co-op – not so any longer.

2. The Co-op’s self-proclaimed ethical position is now under question.

Over recent weeks the Co-op has closed, or announced that it will close **20 accounts** which support groups of people who are working for justice for Palestine.

3. Groups affected in Sheffield.

Here in Sheffield, the Co-op will close the accounts of the **Sheffield PSC, the Yorkshire Palestine Cultural Exchange Group and the Sheffield Palestine Women’s Scholarship Fund**. The Scholarship Fund supports 43 women in their studies in Gaza. (It is a Registered Charity and as such has been approved by the Charities Commission.) The YPCE promotes valuable projects especially for children. Sheffield PSC is nationally respected for its campaigning record.

4. What the Co-op says about its decision:

In the letters of closure, the Co-op says the accounts no longer match its “risk appetite” (the bank has a department called the Risk Directorate). In a conversation with a member of SPSC, Steve Britain (Chief of Staff and Director of Strategy) and David Bagley (Risk Directorate) categorised locations affected by their “risk appetite” criteria:

- Places where international sanctions apply
- Places which are “ actual or potential areas of conflict”
- Areas where there are “significant levels of civil disorder”

These criteria raise the risk “of where the money might end up.” Later in the conversation, the possibility of “money laundering” was added to the list of risks.

Steve Britain cited the regulatory framework within which they operate and said they needed to be consistent with other banks’ practice. He confirmed that **no** regulations stipulate Palestine to be a high risk destination for funds – regulators do not specify locations. **So the decision to classify Palestine as high risk is the Co-op’s decision.**

Some of the Co-op Bank's stated criteria could apply to Israel. In answer to the question as to whether bank accounts linked with Israel were being closed there was no answer. "I hear your question" was as close to an answer as we got.

National response to the Co-op Bank:

National PSC has consulted its legal advisers and will let us know exactly what the outcome is as soon as they can. We await their advice but meanwhile will take local action.

The full list of groups (to date) who have had their accounts closed or denied:

1. Abergavenny PSC branch
2. Abu Bakr Rauf Memorial Scholarship Fund
3. Boycott Israel Network
4. Bristol PSC branch
5. Cambridge PSC branch
6. Computers for Palestine
7. Discover Palestine
8. International Women's Peace Service Palestine
9. Liverpool Friends of Bil'in
10. Norwich PSC branch
11. Northern Palestine Solidarity Network
12. Nottingham PSC branch
13. Oxford PSC branch
14. Plymouth PSC branch
15. Saddleworth Women's Scholarship Fund
16. Sheffield PSC branch
17. Sheffield Palestine Women's Scholarship Fund
18. West Midlands PSC branch
19. York PSC branch
20. Yorkshire Palestine Cultural exchange