

## GUIDELINES FOR THE PC/PTA CHAIR

Both a PC and a PTA can operate as informally or formally as members want but even small or informal meetings need some direction and organisation, and this is the main role of the Chair. Everyone can learn to chair a meeting well, it just takes a bit of thought and practice.

### The main roles of a Chairperson

- makes sure PC/PTA meetings run smoothly and efficiently; are on time and are run in an inclusive and friendly way.
- delegates tasks to other members of the group and makes sure these are completed.
- should make sure all Parent Council/PTA members know they are there to represent all the parents in the school.
- is the spokesperson for the group and liaises with the headteacher/school/local authority.
- has an important role in the school inspection. (*See Connect leaflet "School Inspections"*)
- gives an annual report to the Parent Forum – usually at the AGM.

### Do you need a Chairperson?

It is good practice to have someone to act as Chair and it is law that the chair of a Parent Council must **always** be a parent/carer with a child at the school. This is not a legal requirement for PTAs, but it is best practice.

If your group is finding it difficult to get anyone to volunteer to take up the post of Chairperson, then the job could be done by more than one person taking it in turns to chair meetings.

### How do you prepare for a meeting?

The Chair needs to start by asking themselves the following questions:

- Have I invited parents and school staff to suggest items for the agenda?
- What are the targets for the meetings? What end result do I want from it?
- Are there any outstanding items from the last meeting?
- Do I need to get more information for any • discussion?
- Do I want to distribute any information in advance of the meeting?
- Is there a nominated person to welcome any people attending the meeting for the

first time?

The Chair shouldn't be expected to figure this out on their own but in consultation with other office bearers and committee members.

## Setting the ground rules

It is a good idea to decide amongst the group how meetings will be run by agreeing some simple rules; this makes chairing a meeting easier. Here are some ideas:

- Ask people to speak "through the chair" by putting their hands up when they would like to speak. They should then wait until the chair says it's their turn.
- Don't interrupt other people. If this is agreed beforehand then people are less likely to be offended if you ask them not to interrupt.
- Stick to the items on the agenda.
- Don't talk amongst yourselves.
- Respect other people's views.
- Keep contributions short and to the point.

Remember to remind people of the rules at the beginning of each meeting. It may take a while to get used to these rules but keep trying!

## Getting through the business

It's frustrating for everyone if a meeting doesn't deal with all the business it needs to or it drags on too long. It might put parents off attending in the future. Here are a few tips:

- Have a clear agenda – a list of things to be discussed – and time each item. This helps the Chair keep the meeting on track.
- Don't assume everyone understands what is being discussed.
- Always keep an eye on the time and move items on if necessary. Make sure a watch and/or clock is visible.
- Stick to the agenda and if someone tries to raise other issues, acknowledge them and ask if they would like the item put on the agenda for the next meeting.
- Stop private conversations as soon as they start.
- The Chair is there to facilitate the meeting, not to dominate it. They should not use their position as an opportunity to impose their own views.
- The Chair should not be afraid to delegate or to speak out.
- Draw discussions to a close by reviewing the main points and, if a decision is required then ask for a vote.
- Make sure that all views are heard.

## Involving everyone

Does this seem familiar – a meeting where no-one speaks up against a particular proposal, but afterwards lots of parents say they don't agree with it? It is the role of the Chair to make sure everyone's views are heard and to make sure everyone is involved in the meeting. There is a balance between restraining those who are over keen on the sound of

their own voice and encouraging those who are quiet, nervous or new to meetings. Here is some advice:

- If lots of people want to speak, keep a note of whose turn it is to speak next. Make sure they know you have noticed them.
- Stop people from talking too long. Be firm but not aggressive by saying something like "thank you for your comments; you've raised some interesting points. I'm going to stop you there for the moment so other people can comment".
- Give preference to people who haven't spoken before.
- Give opportunities for everyone to put their point of view and draw out the quiet/reluctant ones or anyone who hasn't spoken yet by asking questions like "Is there anyone else who would like to say something?"
- Try going round everyone in turn to get their views on a topic.
- Don't ignore people with their hands up in favour of those who are interrupting.
- Make sure that those with unpopular or minority views get heard properly and are treated with respect.

## Reaching decisions

It is the Chair's responsibility to help the committee to reach decisions:

- Listen carefully to the discussion and jot down key points – get the secretary/clerk to do the same.
- At the start of a discussion, remind parents of how much time they have and what decisions they need to make.
- Pull together points people have made and ask for a vote/agreement. Make sure this is written in the minutes.
- If a decision can't be made, then ask for a vote. In the event of a tie, the Chair should have the casting vote.
- If action has to be taken, decide who will do whatever has been decided.

## Dealing with difficult people

There are no easy answers to this but remember that the majority of the committee will be supporting you.

- Be prepared and make sure you will have people to back you up.
- Remind people of the meeting rules and that everyone has agreed to these.
- If people get into a heated discussion, summarise the points they have made and move the focus away from the individuals by asking what other people think.
- If someone is continually criticising then turn the question around to them, for example by asking "what suggestions do you have for a way forward?"
- On rare occasions you may have to deal with a really disruptive person. If this happens, ask the group for support, for example "do people want to spend more time on this discussion or move on to the next topic?"

## In summary:

- Be inclusive
- Delegate when necessary
- Make sure clear decisions are taken
- Keep to time and on track

## We would like to know

Did you use this leaflet? Did you find it helpful? Please give us your comments.

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- Free Information & Training Sessions
- Access to online meetings and surgeries
- Our Backchat newsletter and E-Updates
- Access to the member's-only section on the Connect website
- Regional Events and Annual Lecture
- Telephone and email helpline
- A wide variety of leaflets and other resources

You are welcome to use information from this leaflet however, if you do we ask that you acknowledge Connect.

### August 2018

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