**Roles of Parent Council Office Bearers**

Your Parent Council may choose to have office bearers to help to organise how you work and to carry out some of the tasks that need to be done in order to run smoothly. Some parent groups have joint office bearers who work together and share out some of the tasks. Here are some of the common roles in groups and some of their possible tasks.

The Chairperson

The Parent Council should always be chaired by a member of the Parent Forum. The success of a meeting can depend upon how it is chaired but remember, the Chairperson is the person who makes sure things get done; not the person who does everything.

There are two basic jobs the Chairperson should do:

* Guide the Parent Council to achieve its aims
* Chair the meetings of the Parent Council

Some of the duties of the Chairperson include:

* liaising with the secretary or clerk and the head teacher on the agenda and meeting arrangements.
* contacting the head teacher before each meeting.
* welcoming members and introduce guests.
* ensuring fair discussion and that everyone gets a chance to have their say.
* stopping anyone taking over or dominating discussions.
* getting through the agenda on time.
* summing up issues, points and decisions.
* ensuring decisions are carried out.
* working with the treasurer to ensure that proper financial accounts are prepared for meetings, including the Annual General Meeting.

Before the Meeting

It is important that the Chair is well prepared for a Parent Council meeting.

The chair should draw up the agenda for the meeting in consultation with the secretary/clerk and the head teacher, who is adviser to the Parent Council, and can advise on the appropriateness of agenda items. It also gives the head teacher advance notice of what is to be discussed allowing him/her time to prepare any information required.

The chair should also ensure that all members of the Parent Council know they can submit possible agenda items. If an agenda item has been put on by another member that person would normally talk to that agenda item.

Copies of the agenda and any related papers should be sent to Parent Council members and the head teacher in advance of the meeting. The agenda should also be available to all parents either online, in a school newsletter or posted in the school. The exact timescale for this, which is normally one working week, should be included in the Parent Council constitution. This allows everyone to come to the meeting in a position to discuss issues on the agenda. It also avoids time being wasted at the meeting. A lot of time during Parent Council meetings can be lost by papers being unnecessarily tabled in the course of the meeting and members having to spend time reading papers during a meeting.

Local Councillors and the Parents’ Officer should also receive copies of the agenda and papers. The agenda should also be posted on the Parent Council's First Class intranet site.

During the Meeting

The progress made during a meeting is to a large extent in the hands of the Chair. The Chair should have a rough idea how much time should be devoted to each item on the agenda particularly if it is lengthy. That is not to say that discussion of an item should be cut short because the time allotted to that item has run out, but rather that the meeting should be kept moving and discussion should be focused on the subject in hand. It may be helpful to place a time limit on meetings to help focus the debate. Becoming bogged down on an item can often lead to frustration.

Where there is difficulty in getting agreement on a matter, the chair may be required to ask for a motion to be proposed. The chair should ensure that all Parent Council members are given the opportunity to participate in the discussion wherever possible. This means encouraging quieter Parent Council members to contribute to the discussion at the same time as ensuring that more dominant Parent Council members are not allowed to take over the meeting.

At the end of discussion of each item on the agenda, the chair should clearly summarise the decision(s) of the Parent Council on the subject concerned. This will help to prevent any confusion among members about the decisions that have been made and will also assist the clerk who has to write up the minutes of the meeting.

Where any further action is required on an item the chair should make clear what has to be done, by whom and by when.

Discussion of any item not on the agenda should be at the discretion of the chair. However, as a Parent Council meeting is a public meeting with an agenda published in advance, only items considered to be relevant and urgent should be taken under the heading of “Any Other Business”.

After the Meeting

The clerk should produce the draft minutes indicating where appropriate what action is to be taken in relation to specific agenda items and by whom. Once the draft minutes of the meeting have been prepared, the clerk should check the accuracy of these minutes with the Chair. The Head Teacher should also be involved at this stage, for example, to assist in clarifying terminology, although responsibility for approving the draft minute lies with the chair.  Appropriate action should be taken on relevant items and preparations begun for the next meeting.

How to Handle Paperwork

Parent Councils receive a substantial amount of necessary documentation from the Scottish Government and from their education authority in addition to reports from their head teacher. The amount received may appear at times daunting, if not overwhelming, and it is therefore important that the paperwork is properly managed. Not all the documents received will be of equal importance to individual Parent Councils and a method of sifting documents is therefore required.

As soon as possible after receipt of a document the chair and clerk should decide how to handle it. (The head teacher may be involved in aspects of this process depending on the nature of the document.) They might decide to:

* place the item on the agenda for discussion and issue copies of the document (or a summary) to all Parent Council members;
* circulate the document in advance of the meeting;
* arrange for the document to be tabled at the meeting, if it is considered that the document is for information only and need not be discussed; or
* take appropriate action without recourse to a Parent Council meeting and report orally to the Parent Council what has been done or is to be done.

It is important that, as far as possible, paperwork is handled as it arrives and not allowed to build up for future meetings of a Parent Council.

Time for discussion during the Parent Council meeting is likely to be significantly reduced if a large part of the meeting is devoted to the Chair and Clerk going through a long list of correspondence received since the previous meeting. However, it must be emphasised that although some correspondence can be dealt with outwith a meeting there will be other correspondence that must be discussed or brought to the attention of the Parent Council.  It is important that Parent Council members have sight of all relevant documents in advance of meetings in order that they can come along to meetings well prepared and items can be properly discussed.

Future Plans

A concern expressed by many Parent Council members is that the Parent Council lacks purpose. However, the development of a Parent Council is to a large extent in the hands of the members.

In order to ensure that a Parent Council’s purpose is clear, the Parent Council should set aside some time every so often to discuss this issue, to review progress and perhaps to try to identify a small number of realistic and achievable aims, eg aim to improve communication with parents by issuing a regular newsletter on Parent Council activities. (The Parent Council self-evaluation pack is a useful tool for identifying both purpose and aims.)

Once objectives have been identified, the Parent Council should attempt to prioritise these and, most importantly, determine how each can best be handled by the Parent Council. For instance, will the Parent Council require information or advice before it can make progress on a specific issue?

The Basics for a Successful Meeting

* prepare well – be early for the meeting
* know who is present in the room
* start the meeting on time – welcome everyone, particularly new members/invitees – check everyone has the relevant papers for the meeting

Minutes of previous meeting

* invite corrections, a proposer, a seconder and move that the minutes are approved

Matters arising

* those not already picked up on the meeting agenda
* keep it brief
* don’t go over old ground/decisions

The Agenda

* introduce each item briefly
* allow adequate time for discussion

Some tips:

* stay impartial
* encourage/invite individuals to have their say
* stick to the point
* recap at the end of each item
* aim for consensus – vote if necessary (chair has a casting vote)
* be clear about the decision/outcome of the discussion and have it minuted
* make sure everyone knows what they are responsible for doing if any specific tasks have been agreed

Any Other Business

At the start of the meeting, the Chair should ask if there are any other items anyone intends to raise under AOCB. If they are relevant and brief they can be included under AOCB. However if items raised are unsuitable they should not be discussed and if they require preparatory work by the head teacher, they should be held back to the next or a subsequent meeting.

Close the meeting

* Confirm the date/time/venue for next meeting
* Thank all for their attendance

Post meeting

* Check the draft minutes with Clerk and the head teacher

Practical hints

* sit where you can see the clock rather than having to regularly look at your watch
* sit where you can see everyone easily: this usually means sitting at the head of the table or putting chairs in an oval shape and sitting at one end.

The Secretary

The Secretary plays an important role in supporting communication between Parent Council members and between the Parent Forum and the Parent Council. It is important that the Parent Council agrees how members of the Parent Forum can get in touch with the Secretary and that these arrangements are well publicised so that all parents know how to make contact.

Some of the duties of the Secretary are to:

* make arrangements for meetings and prepare an agenda in consultation with the chairperson and head teacher.
* send a notice of the meeting, the venue and the agenda to all Parent Council members so that they will receive them in good time for the meeting. Agendas should be sent out for all meetings even if they are held at the same time and place each month.
* keep a record of everyone attending the meeting and any apologies for absence.
* let Parent Council members know about all correspondence received and report any action taken since last meeting.
* take a minute of meetings, recording decisions and actions to be taken and by whom. This can be a task that is shared amongst members of the Parent Council to allow the Secretary to participate in discussions.
* provide minutes for all Parent Council members prior to or at meetings.

The Paid Clerk

Your Parent Council may have a paid clerk appointed who will undertake all or some of the tasks of the Secretary.  If the Parent Council employs a clerk they should notify the Parents' Officer who will issue the relevant claim form for the clerk.

The Role of the Clerk

The position of the Parent Council clerk is important and should be understood by the Chair.

There are, however, a number of activities that could be considered to form the principal duties of a Clerk. These include:

Handling Correspondence

The clerk should receive the Parent Council’s mail and send out all correspondence from the Parent Council.

Agenda

The chair, the head teacher and the clerk should consult in drawing up the agenda.

Circulation of Agenda and Papers

The Clerk should send out the agenda and papers, along with a copy of the minutes of the previous meeting, to members, the Head Teacher, local councillors and the North Lanarkshire parents’ officer. The agenda and papers must also be made available for public inspection within the school.

Minute Taking

The clerk should take minutes at Parent Council meetings. It is a matter for the Parent Council to decide whether the minutes should be a comprehensive record of discussion or whether they should be a summary of decisions taken and action points.

Advice on Procedures and Statute

The clerk should be able to advise the chairperson and the Parent Council on procedural and statutory matters and should have a working knowledge of the constitution. Accordingly, the clerk should bring a copy of the Parent Council constitution to every meeting.

Preparation of Minutes

The clerk should prepare draft minutes for approval by the chairperson. These minutes should clearly show decisions taken, actions to be followed through and the person(s) responsible for so doing.

Public Display of Papers and Minutes

Before the meeting, the clerk should post up the agenda and papers (except those relating to confidential items) in the school. After the meeting the Clerk should post up, in the school, the draft minutes once the Chair has approved them. Additionally, the minutes should be posted on the school website.

Circulation of Minutes

The clerk should circulate minutes as directed by the Parent Council. In addition to copies going to all Parent Council members and the head teacher, they should also be sent to the Parents' Officer and the appropriate local councillors. They should also be available for parents by posting on the school website, posting in the school, local church(es) and/or included in the school newsletter. The minutes should also be posted in the Parent Council's online site within the First Class forum.

Receiving Resignations

The clerk should receive any resignations in writing from Parent Council members. Appropriate actions should be taken to ensure the membership as outlined in the constitution is rebalanced.

The Treasurer

Every Parent Council that intends to raise money should make sure a Treasurer is appointed to handle the money coming in and going out of the group. The Treasurer is responsible for the proper handling of the finances of the Parent Council, but not the actual raising of money.

The tasks of the Treasurer include:

* having a clear and accurate book-keeping system that records any money received and how the money is spent.
* maintaining the bank account. It is good financial practice to require two out of three of the Officers' signatures on cheques to allow any money to be withdrawn or spent.
* producing a report for each meeting stating money paid into, or out of, the account since the last meeting.
* advising on the amount of money available for the group's work and warn of excess expenditure.
* arranging for the year's accounts to be independently checked (audited) and agreed with the Chair prior to the Parent Council Annual General Meeting ( AGM).
* presenting the audited financial statement at the AGM and answering any questions on the accounts.

Sub groups

It may be useful to have some sub-groups of the Parent Council to carry out some specific tasks. If you are setting up sub-groups these should be given a clear remit with someone taking responsibility for organising the group and reporting back to the Parent Council.

Some of the tasks you may consider allocating to sub-groups might include:

* organising fundraising
* planning social events for parents, children and staff
* communicating with parents which might include a newsletter
* working with staff on new approaches to learning and teaching and how parents can be involved
* links with the community.