

PARENT COUNCIL RESOURCE



Section 5 – Practical Issues

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5. Practical issues

Setting the agenda

To get the most out of Parent Council meetings, it helps to have some structure and focus to the discussions. This makes sure that everything can be discussed and dealt with. Any member should be able to put forward suggestions for agenda items to the Chairperson or Secretary for discussion at a meeting. However, for confidentiality reasons, it is important to remember that the Parent Council cannot discuss matters relating to individual parents, children or staff members.

Furthermore, Parent Council meetings are generally open meetings and parents from the wider parent forum may attend. The Parent Council may want to decide how others attending meetings can participate in discussions.

Useful tips

- Set dates for meetings well in advance to avoid clashing with other events, groups or committees.
- Make sure that agendas are not too long. Three or four main items, apart from the standard items is plenty.
- Two hours is long enough for any meeting – make time for a tea break during your meeting.
- Standard items that will be on every agenda e.g. minutes and matters arising; sub-group actions and agreements, Secretary and Treasurer reports, should be dealt with quickly to ensure there is enough time to talk about the main topics.
- Check that actions agreed at the previous meeting have been carried out.
- It is a good idea for the Chairperson to ask for Any Other Competent Business items at the start of the meeting so that they can be scheduled into the meeting.
- Ask the Headteacher for important dates in the education calendar when there will be items to discuss e.g. when the setting or school Improvement Plan is required to be produced.



5.1 What happens if things go wrong?

No matter how well a Parent Council is running, there may be occasions when differences of opinion occur. Should this happen between the Parent Council and the Headteacher, discussions should focus on reaching agreement in the interests and well-being of all children and the setting or school, for whom the Headteacher is ultimately responsible. If agreement cannot be reached with the Headteacher, the case can be made to the local authority who may ask one of their staff to help resolve the issue.

5.2 Confidentiality

All Parent Council meetings are open to the whole parent forum unless they are discussing a matter that requires confidentiality. These are only likely to occur in exceptional circumstances.

5.3 Data Protection Policy

Parent Councils may be required to keep some personal information on its members, volunteers, members of the parent forum, helpers, friends and committee members in order to keep up-to-date with Parent Council business. To ensure that everyone is handling personal details appropriately and that they are fully aware of the requirements, Parent Councils should consider developing a Data Protection Policy. This Policy should be reviewed regularly. See Connect's website²⁷ for an example of a Data Protection Policy.

5.4 Useful contacts

The Parent Council may find it useful to establish a range of local authority or school contacts to whom parents can be referred to for expert assistance and support. This could include the local authority's Parental Involvement and Engagement Officer.

5.5 Treating parents fairly

Creating a culture across the setting or school where parents are treated fairly is really important. This should not be confused with treating everyone equally. The Equality Act (2010) places 'duties' on schools to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it;
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

This legislation was put in place to prevent direct or indirect discrimination against persons due to their:

- **Age** - a particular age group (for example, 18 year olds) or range of ages (for example 18 to 30-year olds).
- **Race** - race, colour, nationality (including citizenship) ethnic or national origins.
- **Disability** – a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on that person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.
- **Religion or belief** - religion, including a lack of religion. Belief refers to any religious or philosophical belief and includes a lack of belief.
- **Gender reassignment** - proposing to reassign gender, is undergoing a process to reassign gender, or has completed this process.
- **Marriage and civil partnership** - legally married or in a civil partnership. Marriage can either be between a man and a woman, or between partners of the same sex. Civil partnership is currently between partners of the same sex (NB the law is to be changed to extend civil partnership to a woman and a man).
- **Pregnancy and maternity** – in a non-work situation, protection against maternity discrimination is for 26 weeks after giving birth, and this includes treating a woman unfavourably because she is breastfeeding.
- **Sex** - being a man or a woman.

²⁷ <https://connect.scot/news/essential-information-parent-councils-bout-general-data-protection-regulation>

Shared Parenting

Parent Councils along with schools need to make sure they communicate with parents who share care of a child. Should a situation arise where parents who live apart but share the care and responsibilities for their child(ren) but both wish to remain members of the Parent Council, the Chair should discuss this with the Headteacher in the first instance and then with both parents. The matter should be handled sensitively, respectfully and confidentially at all times.

5.6 Planning for office bearer continuity

Planning for sustained involvement is important particularly because Parent Council membership changes as children move on or as and when personal circumstances alter. Arrangements should be put in place to ensure that where possible, the transition of office bearers and Parent Council members is as smooth as possible. See Connect's website for a handover checklist²⁸.

5.7 Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG)

Only people who do regulated work with children and protected adults need to join the PVG Scheme. This is defined in law. It does not apply to parents helping their children, or to personal arrangements that parents may make with friends and family to look after their children.

Parent Councils should decide whether any role or work undertaken by individuals, as part of a Parent Council, is legally within the scope of regulated work with children. 'Work' can mean in a volunteering role. If the role within the Parent Council is legally identified as being regulated work, then it is for the Parent Council to require a PVG check so that it is linked with the individual and Disclosure Scotland know the Parent Council have an 'interest' in their record. Volunteer Scotland can help with this process.

It is not a requirement that all members of a Parent Council be PVG checked. However, a PVG check is desirable to ensure that Parent Councils do not inadvertently have unsuitable individuals in regulated work with children.

The Headteacher or local authority should be well placed to provide advice and guidance should there be any uncertainty. You can also contact Disclosure Scotland directly for advice via email (response@disclosurescotland.gov.scot) or you can phone their helpline on 0300 020 0040. The opening times are Monday to Thursday 9am to 4pm and Friday 9am to 3.30pm.

Your duty to refer to Disclosure Scotland

If Parent Councils do have individuals doing regulated work, you have a legal duty to report any harmful behaviour carried out by them to Disclosure Scotland.

You must make a referral when an individual has shown to have:

- harmed a child or protected adult;
- placed a child or protected adult at risk of harm;
- displayed inappropriate behaviour involving pornography;
- displayed inappropriate behaviour of a sexual nature involving a child or protected adult;
- given inappropriate medical treatment to a child or protected adult.

²⁸ <https://www.connect.scot/resources/running-committees-and-meetings-pack>

And, as a result, the Parent Council has:

- dismissed the individual;
- would or might have dismissed the individual but they left before you could do this;
- has permanently moved the individual away from regulated work with children or protected adults.

There are different ways 'harm' can be defined. It is important to remember that people can cause a risk of harm without actually doing anything directly.

It is a criminal offence, punishable by imprisonment and/or a financial penalty, if your Parent Council fails to refer an individual to Disclosure Scotland, when a referral ground is met. The Parent Council could be reported to Police Scotland if you commit this offence.

You can find guidance on making referrals on the [Disclosure Scotland website](#) or on their [Youtube channel](#). Free training on 'Your Duty to Refer' can be booked through [Volunteer Scotland Disclosure Services](#) (VSDS). You can also [contact VSDS](#) for advice on specific cases.

More information

Further details can be found on the following websites:

- Volunteer Scotland²⁹
- Connect³⁰
- Parentzone Scotland³¹

5.8 Safeguarding Policy

Parent Councils may wish to consider developing a Safeguarding Policy in the event that they – either as a group or via an individual member - are made aware of concerns regarding a child's safety. The Policy should pertain only to something that members become aware of directly through their role in the Parent Council. An example of a Safeguarding Policy is available in Appendix 2. This should be read in conjunction with Connect's PVG and Child Protection pack³².

²⁹ <https://www.volunteerscotland.net/disclosure-services>

³⁰ <https://connect.scot/resources/protection-vulnerable-groups-and-child-protection-pack>

³¹ <https://education.gov.scot/parentzone/getting-involved/protecting-vulnerable-groups-scheme>

³² <https://connect.scot/>

5.9 Public/Personal Liability Insurance

The Parent Council should consider the need for appropriate insurance for its activities and for any liability issues that might arise. There will be some circumstances where activities must be covered by Public Liability Insurance e.g. social events and school fayres, if being organised by the Parent Council. The need to obtain appropriate Public Liability Insurance should be carefully discussed and considered. A Parent Council will want to establish whether they are covered by the local authority's own insurance arrangements for Public Liability. Otherwise, the Parent Council should secure its own Public Liability Insurance.

Parent Councils should take the advice of their Headteacher or local authority who can advise them of insurance arrangements in their area. For example, it may be possible to buy into a group policy, or local authority arrangement for insurance. Useful advice and information on insurance can be found in the Scottish Schools (Parental involvement) Act 2006 Guidance (page 3)³³ and on Connect's website³⁴. Connect membership³⁵ includes membership-linked insurance.

Members of the Parent Council do not need to take out Personal Liability Insurance cover. The Parental Involvement Act (2006) states that members of Parent Councils do not incur personal liability for anything done, or said to have been done, in carrying out the work of the Parent Council, if this was done in good faith.

5.10 Code of Conduct – good practice guidance for meetings

The following guidance (used with permission from Connect) is intended to help Parent Council members understand their role. It can be tailored to meet the individual needs of Parent Councils. A Code of Conduct example can be found on Connect's website³⁶.

Parent Council members should:

- support the ethos and values of the Parent Council and the setting or school and make it a welcoming place for all parents;
- feel like their work makes a difference to the learning community;
- treat everyone as an equal and always be respectful towards each other;
- ensure that guests leave meetings with a positive view of the Parent Council and what it is trying to achieve;
- respect and adhere to the decisions of the Parent Council;
- be involved and support the life and work of the school;
- ensure good practice especially when managing money and financial matters;
- declare any conflict of interest and avoid situations which could cause improper conduct;
- comply with the demands of external regulatory bodies, if any.

Parent Council members should not:

- name individuals at meetings
- discuss confidential issues outside of meetings;
- discuss individual issues or members of staff;
- post content on social media that is negative or abusive towards the setting, school or school community;
- discuss issues with the press without considering the best interests of the setting or school and the responsibility of the Parent Council towards this.

³³ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/guidance-scottish-schools-parental-involvement-act-2006/>

³⁴ <https://connect.scot/>

³⁵ <https://connect.scot/top-nav/become-a-member>

³⁶ <https://connect.scot/resources/running-committees-and-meetings-pack>

Good practice guidance for Parent Council meetings

- Time must be used effectively at meetings.
- Everyone should be given a chance to speak and to be heard, through the Chair.
- Members should contribute constructively at meetings.
- Each member's contributions should be valued and respected.
- Decisions will be made in the best interests of the whole school community.
- If a vote is needed, all Parent Council members should get a vote and decisions should be made on a majority basis.
- In the event of a tie, the Chair of the meeting should have the casting vote.

The Parent Council Chair should ensure that new members receive a copy of the Code of Conduct. All members should be supported with any training and/or help needed to fulfil their role(s).

The Code of Conduct can include information about what to do if a member acts in a way that is considered to undermine the objectives of the Parent Council. This may include their membership being terminated if the majority of parent members agree. The Parent Council member who has committed the alleged offence, however, must be given the opportunity to respond to the Parent Council (Right of Reply).

5.11 Social Media Policy

Parent Councils should consider having a Social Media Policy which is separate to the setting or school's own Social Media Policy. This Policy should set out the guidelines for the Parent Council and parents to use social media sensibly, rationally and respectfully. It should also set out the procedures for dealing with unacceptable behaviour. Ideally, this Policy should be reviewed on a yearly basis to ensure that it is up-to-date and is still fit for purpose. See Connect's Social Media Pack³⁷ for further information.

5.12 Annual General Meeting

Parent Councils are required to have an Annual General Meeting each year to feed back to the parent forum on the activities which were carried out on their behalf. It is a requirement to report to all parents once per year, so a written report for the Annual General Meeting is a good idea as this can be shared more widely thereafter. An example of a primary and secondary written report is available in Appendix 3.

5.13 Accounts and fundraising

Money matters

A number of local authorities provide a small budget for Parent Councils to cover administrative and running costs. During the course of the year the Parent Council may also raise funds and have its own expenditure. Parent Councils must keep a record of all income and expenditure. It is up to the Parent Council, with guidance from the Headteacher and the local authority, to consider how best to keep its accounts. Having a Treasurer's report at each Parent Council meeting showing a summary of income and expenditure is good practice. Template spreadsheets and guidance on keeping records is available in Connect's Money Matters Pack³⁸.

The accounts of a Parent Council should be independently checked and a signed copy presented to the Annual General Meeting by the Treasurer. This can be done by a suitably skilled parent or a community volunteer who is not on the Parent Council and is not related to anyone on the Parent Council.

³⁷ <https://connect.scot/resources/social-media-pack>

³⁸ <https://connect.scot/resources/money-matters-pack>

Additionally, all local authorities who provide funding directly to Parent Councils will require accounts to be submitted to them on an annual basis.

Parent Councils can, but do not have to take part in fundraising activities for the school community. Discussions on how to spend any fundraising money should be held between the Parent Council, the Headteacher and others in the learning community including parents and pupils.

It is useful to set out an approach to finance in the Constitution e.g. can your Parent Council apply for and receive grants? Or, how will your Parent Council handle counting and banking cash from fundraising activities?

Fundraising / Grants / Trusts

Fundraising for the setting or school has traditionally been an activity that many Parent Councils and parent groups have undertaken very successfully, and they have raised money to support their child's setting or school. However, it is really important to be mindful of limited family budgets. Bringing the school community together for social activities is more important than raising money. See Section 2.2 and the Cost of the School Day Toolkit for more information³⁹.



If your Parent Council is planning to take part in social and/or fundraising activities, they should discuss matters with the Headteacher and with the wider learning community. Everyone can then work together effectively to decide on how best to spend the money to improve the setting or school and benefit the pupils. Any funds raised should not be used for the running costs or essential equipment for the setting or school. Parent Councils should be aware that most local authorities have contract arrangements in place for the supply of equipment such as computer resources so there may be restrictions on what your parent group can buy for the setting or school.

Once targets have been identified, it may be effective to form a fundraising sub-committee. Some parents will have particular talents in this area and it may be a way of involving a wider group of parents to help with specific activities.

The Parental Involvement Act (2006) allows a Parent Council to raise funds by any means other than by borrowing. It may wish to consider applying for grants but these can at times have specific eligibility criteria. For example, if 'statutory organisations' are not eligible, then Parent Councils would not be eligible as they are a statutory body.

Further Information on organisations that distribute public money from the government and the National Lottery is available online⁴⁰.

Charitable status

It is for Parent Councils to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of charitable status. They might wish to consider what sort of financial advantage charitable status would bring e.g. Gift Aid, matched funding. Charitable status imposes certain legal requirements for submission of paperwork within strict timelines. These include how the Parent Council accounts are drawn up, how these are reported to

³⁹ <https://cpag.org.uk/scotland/CoSD/toolkit>

⁴⁰ <https://www.lotterygoodcauses.org.uk/>

others, the role of Parent Council office bearers (who would now be trustees as well) and the need to publicise that the organisation is a charity. Accounts must be kept and copies sent to the Office of the Scottish Charity Register (OSCR) each year with an annual return.

If Parent Councils are raising significant amounts of money within the school year, they may wish to apply for 'charitable status' by becoming a registered charity with the Office of the Scottish Charity Register (OSCR) if, on the evidence of its Constitution and activities, it passes the 'charity test' and its Constitution does not otherwise disqualify it from being considered a charity.



The Office of the Scottish Charity Register (OSCR) website⁴¹ gives advice on what your Parent Council needs to consider. Information is also available on Connect's website⁴².

What it looks like when things go well

- Parents, teachers and pupils are involved in identifying priorities for building the school community through social events (perhaps with some fundraising) and in generating ideas to achieve these.
- Different fundraising approaches are used for different purposes.
- Local businesses and shops are involved through donations of prizes or sponsorship of appropriate items or activities.
- Events and activities appeal to a range of interests and personal budgets – there is something for everyone.
- Social and fundraising events are an opportunity for parents and teachers to work together on a common task and develop positive relationships.
- Items are identified that meet the criteria of local trusts and 'community chests' and approaches for funding are made to these.
- There are whole school community events organised by pupils linked to educational activities within the setting or school e.g. enterprise in education.
- Activities follow the 3 'Fs' formula - Fun, Food and Families. Events that provide fun activities for all family members – adults and children – and also provide food are usually the most successful and the ones that people want to come back to again and again.
- Parents are able to contribute whatever skills or talents they have.
- The setting or school 'piggy backs' on any wider community and/or social events.
- There are some smaller scale ongoing events during the year as well as a few 'big' events.
- Everyone's contribution is appreciated.
- Success is celebrated and people are thanked.

⁴¹ <https://www.oscr.org.uk/>

⁴² <https://www.connect.scot>

Checklist:

- Have you got enough helpers? Is there someone who will make sure that everyone knows what they need to do for the preparation of an event e.g. setting up and tidying up?
- Do you need a licence, insurance, or to notify your existing insurer regarding your event?
- If you are planning something that is weather dependent, do you have a contingency plan?
- Have you covered any health and safety issues? Has a risk assessment been carried out?
- If you are hiring premises/equipment, have you time within the hire period to set up and tidy up?
- Have you organised enough for people to do at the event? Do you want or need to have a raffle, tombola, quiz or something else to involve or engage parents and contribute to the fundraising effort?
- Do you have a local authority license for the selling of raffle tickets prior to the event?
- Have you got enough food/drinks/jumble?
- Have you got the equipment you need e.g. plates/glasses/napkins/PA system/tables for jumble?
- Have you publicised the event early enough?
- If numbers are limited, have you made this clear so that people are not disappointed if they cannot get a place?
- Do you have a plan for collating attendance numbers?
- Do you have a plan for making sure that people accepting after you've filled your quota, are told in good time that they do not have a place?
- Have you got enough money to complete the organisation of the event before the money for ticket sales comes in?
- If you need a certain number of people to come along to break even, do you have a plan for how you are going to encourage more to come if numbers are looking low?
- How will you dispose of any leftovers such as jumble and/or food?