

COMMUNITY COUNCIL MEETINGS GUIDANCE

See Section 6.0 of the Scheme – ‘Meetings’.

Effective meetings are important not just in ensuring the Community Council progresses what it is doing and any decisions which are made, but also in keeping members and others involved and interested. Meetings that drag on and on, with people straying off the point, not listening or being discourteous, can be a disincentive to even the most committed member. Good meetings are not just about getting things done but about respect and consideration for others.

1. AGENDAS

For all Community Council meetings - Ordinary, Annual General Meeting and Special Meetings - an agenda should be published by the Secretary at least seven days prior to the meeting taking place so that members and the public know what is to be discussed and can be prepared in advance. A standard format for agendas could include:

***Meeting of the NAME Community Council
at TIME on DAY, MONTH and YEAR in VENUE***

AGENDA

- (1) *Recording of membership present and apologies received.*
- (2) *The minutes of the last meeting are submitted for accuracy and approval.*
- (3) *Any matters arising (not already on the agenda) are addressed.*
- (4) *Correspondence (the Secretary should consider producing a ‘list of correspondence’ to be sent out with the agenda).*
- (5) *Reports, i.e., Treasurer; Elected Members; Police; Weekly Planning List; Licensing etc.*
- (6) *Consideration of other agreed items of business; as directed by the Chairperson*
- (7) *Any other competent business (AOCB).*
- (8) *Questions from the floor.*

Chairperson to declare date of next meeting and close meeting.

2. APOLOGIES

The apology of any Community Councillor who is unable to attend should be recorded in the minutes. This is important as a Community Councillor can be censured / vote of no confidence / disqualified if they fail to attend regularly and/or miss a specified number of consecutive meetings without good reason with or without submitting apologies.

It is also important to record who is present, so that it will be known in the future which Community Councillors put their names to any particular decision.

3. MINUTES

It is a requirement of the Scheme for formal minutes to be kept. This is usually the responsibility of the Secretary but the Community Council may agree to appoint from within itself, or engage for reasonable payment or otherwise, a Minute Secretary. This can free the Secretary to take a more active part in the discussions.

The draft Minutes should be circulated to all members, and to those others present at the meeting, to confirm the accuracy of the minute. It is good practice to circulate the draft Minutes within 7 days of the meeting. If there are occasions when this is not possible, the minutes should be circulated to members as soon as they are available. The Chairperson will, at the next meeting, ask whether everyone who attended the meeting is in agreement that the minutes are a true record of the meeting. If any member wishes to query any point this is the time to do it.

Once the minutes are formally approved, they cannot be changed. Only the minute of the previous meeting can be discussed and agreed at this stage. Discussions on the merits of any previously recorded decision should not be opened up at this point. A member should then propose the formal approval of the minutes as a true record. It is advisable to also seek a seconder to the formal approval.

If there are still objections, the matter should be put to the vote; the minutes can be formally approved by a simple majority or unanimously. This is recorded in the minutes of the current meeting. As in any other disagreement, a member whose views are not accepted and rejected on a vote can request that their dissent be recorded in the minutes.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MINUTE

Community Councils should avoid re-visiting any previously agreed decisions following approval of the minutes. The current meeting's agenda should ensure that previous and ongoing items are not forgotten, and that actions identified and taken up by members at the previous meeting, have been carried out. As all discussion is recorded in the current minute, items which have been completed can drop out, and items still ongoing remain to automatically come up at the next meeting. Any correspondence received relative to matters being discussed, and especially if requiring action, is best presented by the Secretary at the appropriate point.

5. CORRESPONDENCE

During correspondence, any letters, emails and telephone calls received since the previous meeting are made available by the Secretary for consideration and decisions for actions. To save time potentially long items need not be read out but referred to and made available for perusal.

Good practice would include compiling a correspondence 'bullet' list and circulating it with the agenda and draft minute prior to the next meeting. Attention may also be drawn to any short timescales or deadlines for responding. The Secretary and Chairperson may wish to discuss the most appropriate action to take, e.g., sharing information with members prior to the date of the next meeting and outlining any actions or decisions required.

6. REPORTS

Reports is the point in the meeting when regular attendees such as the local Community Police, Councillors and other Elected Members; Associate Members and Community Council representatives of any working groups or sub-committees, may give a brief update to the Community Council, advising on progress. Some reports will be regular, e.g., the Treasurer's report, whilst others will be occasional, e.g., Special Interest Items. For information, see section 7.0 on Report Writing).

7. SPECIAL INTEREST ITEMS – VISITING SPEAKERS

When there is an item of special interest it should be given its own spot on the agenda. It may be a presentation by a visiting speaker - in which case it can be a matter of common courtesy for the Chairperson to advance the item to the start of the meeting so the visitor does not have to sit through the routine business. This is not only common courtesy but particularly important if the speaker has far to travel, enabling them to get away as early as possible.

8. TREASURER'S REPORT

The Treasurer should report on the financial situation of the Community Council at each meeting, on any money received and spent, and consider other budgetary related activity. At the very least, the Treasurer should state the current bank balance taken from the monthly bank statement including any income received or expenditure incurred since the previous meeting.

9. WEEKLY PLANNING LIST

Planning is often a key concern of Community Councils and to the general public. Community Councils should have a regular slot on their agenda to deal with planning matters - Development Planning applications and any response; considering current or emerging Local Development Plans; and responses to other forms of consultation.

Community Councils may consider establishing sub-committees or working groups to deal with planning issues, given the short timescales involved on occasion, and the degree of scrutiny often required. Any sub-committee or working group may meet between scheduled Community Council meetings (taking cognisance of closing dates for Planning responses), and report back to the main Community Council as appropriate.

10. LIQUOR LICENSING

Liquor licensing matters can also be a source of concern, and should likewise have a regular slot on the agenda. For those Community Councils experiencing a high volume of licensing matters, it may again be useful to establish a sub-committee or working group.

11. ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS (AOCB)

AOCB gives members the chance to raise issues and, in particular, matters brought to them by the public. Ideally, the Chairperson will move round the table giving each member the chance to raise topics in turn, time permitting. It should be expected that it may be more appropriate for some topics to form an item for the next agenda, to allow enough time for adequate and informed discussion.

12. DATE, TIME AND VENUE OF NEXT MEETING

It is important that everyone present knows or is reminded of the date, time and venue of the next meeting before the meeting breaks up, even if there is an existing published timetable of meetings.

13. ANNUAL GENERAL MEETINGS (AGM) AND SPECIAL MEETINGS

For every year at the AGM, a Community Council may consider election of office bearers – one year generally being the minimum period of time an office bearer is appointed. Although office bearers may be appointed for the term of office (4 years), until the next Community Council election.

At an AGM, normally the outgoing Chairperson will hold the position until the new Chairperson is elected unless they are also standing for this office. In which case, another member of the Community Council who is not standing for office should preside.

Upon election, the new Chairperson takes on the Chairing role for the rest of the meeting. Under some circumstances, meetings may be more efficiently conducted on the basis that the outgoing Chairperson fully concludes the meeting before handing over.

In normal circumstances no other matters may be raised at the AGM other than those on the set agenda. The AGM agenda will have been published at least seven days before the meeting. Although the previous year's AGM minutes receive final approval at the following year's AGM, the Secretary, and other members, should consider circulating the draft minutes of AGMs at the next following scheduled Ordinary meeting of the Community Council for approval in principle (rather than waiting 12 months).

The agenda for Special Meetings must be restricted to only those items requiring the convening of a special meeting. No other matters must be discussed. Any special resolutions should be passed or rejected as printed on the agenda. Any alteration should only be made with the consent of those present and then only if the Constitution allows for the printed resolution to be amended. A typical agenda for a Special Meeting could be:

***Special Meeting of the NAME Community Council
at TIME on DAY, MONTH, YEAR in VENUE
AGENDA***

- (1) Recording of membership present and apologies received.
- (2) The nature of the calling notice for the Special Meeting.
- (3) The business for debate, as described in the calling notice for the Special Meeting.
- (4) Chairperson to close meeting.

All Community Councillors present may vote; there is no provision for proxy votes. Minutes will be taken of the meeting and considered at the next regular meeting unless the meeting was held in private, e.g., a special meeting convened to consider a public complaint.

14. MEETING VENUES AND PUBLIC VISIBILITY

All regularly scheduled Ordinary meetings and Annual General Meetings (AGMs) are open to the public and members of the public should be encouraged to attend. Wherever possible, meetings should be held in an accessible venue within the Community Council boundary area, which is warm and open for people arriving, with accompanying tea and coffee (optional). If accessible venues are not available a suitable venue should be used.

Community Councils should consider having a minimum of three public notices displaying the date, time and venue of the meeting (not applicable to 'complaints' meetings), and ideally including the agenda for the next meeting. A list of meeting dates for the year ahead could be made available, and 'special items' could be highlighted to attract local interest. Notices should be displayed on websites, media pages, notice boards, shop windows or any other central place within the community.

15. MEETING LAYOUT FOR COMMUNITY COUNCIL MEETINGS

The recommended meeting layout for Community Council meetings is the U-Shape (boardroom style):

The layout consists of a series of rectangular tables set out in the shape of the letter U, with chairs placed around the outside for Community Councillors to sit.

- This layout style is often used for committee meetings e.g. Community Councils, where there is an audience, speaker, presentation or other focal point.
- The U-Shape is one of the most popular seating arrangements and can easily cater for members of the public, up to circa 50, attending a meeting sitting in rows facing the Community Council members.
- This seating also lends itself to training sessions and speaker presentations. It is also a good setup for focus groups.
- The openness of this setup gives each participant space that encourages wider participation because there is no preferential seating and all seats have an equally good view of the meeting inputs.
- This set up is more likely to: provide productive work space; encourage good interaction between participants; and because seating is around three sides of the room – it enables the public to clearly see the Community Council members as distinct from the public attendees.
- However, if attendee numbers become too large e.g. over 50 then consideration may lead to adopting a more suitable meeting layout e.g. theatre layout.

16. KEY ROLES OF COMMUNITY COUNCILLORS AT MEETINGS

See Section 3.0 of this Booklet – "Office Bearers' Roles' for specifics relating to the role of Chairperson; Secretary and Treasurer in meetings (and outwith meetings).

It is often the case that **members** are championing specific areas of the Community Council's work and they may be doing that through leading sub-committees. If this is the case then it is often important that they consider producing short summary reports or equivalent for the full Community Council meeting. They have a duty not to bring all the detailed discussions of a sub-

group into the full meeting, but to summarise the key issues; the progress being made; and to highlight any decisions that need to be made by the full meeting.

Similarly, the **Treasurer** should have produced a financial report for the regular and full meetings to enable the Community Council to look at and go over the main points as required and highlight areas where decisions or action may be required – at the very least this should be a statement of the current balance should there have been no financial activity since the previous meeting.

One of the main roles at the meeting for the **Secretary** (or Minute Secretary if appointed) is to formally record and produce the Minutes of the meeting. Taking formal Minutes is a commonly underrated skill. One of the main abilities within this skill is to be able to summarise a discussion focusing in on the following:

- topic being discussed;
- important facts;
- any significant points made;
- any major decisions made;
- actions agreed;
- timescales; and
- who is tasked with any actions.

Minutes are not required to be a verbatim account.

Everyone on the Community Council has a role in supporting the Chairperson in their efforts to make the meeting business-like, well-timed, pleasant and inclusive.

17. WORKING EFFECTIVELY AT MEETINGS

Meetings are important to the work of Community Councils. At meetings, opinions, ideas, feelings, good intentions etc. become decisions, and those decisions will ultimately be translated into practical action in the community. To influence what is going on in the community, it is vital that attendees participate effectively in the meeting.

Individuals present may have different, sometimes opposing views, therefore, it is important that meetings are Chaired effectively to ensure a balance between hearing what everyone has to say on a subject and getting through all the items of the agenda.

If there is something of major significance that an individual wants to raise at a meeting, the Chairperson, Secretary, and/or Treasurer will ideally be advised in advance, so that it may be included as an item on the agenda for the meeting. This means that the Chairperson can try to ensure that sufficient time is made available to discuss the item. An individual requesting an item on an agenda should be prepared to make a brief verbal representation to the meeting, setting out:

- the background to the item;
- what they think the central issue is;
- what they think ought to be done about it.

Be prepared to actively listen to other people's ideas on the matter; they may have information on the subject that you do not, that may help you to see things from a different perspective, or they may come up with ideas that offer a better solution. The key activity for a good Community Councillor is to make things happen for the community. Discussion, seeking consensus and

collective decision-making should be common practice; 'point scoring' at meetings should be avoided.

A member may be asked to participate in a sub-committee or working group of the Community Council in order to research some points for a future meeting of the Community Council. Sub-committees can play an important part in clarifying issues so that decision-making is easier. Sub-committees may involve some extra time commitment and members should try as far as possible to get involved so that the work of the Community Council is spread evenly and they get a deeper insight into what is going on at Community Council meetings.

A formal record of what was agreed at sub-committee meetings should be kept in an appropriate format. This formal record will be presented to the full Community Council meeting and will usually determine exactly what action is to be taken.

As a general rule, it is much easier to influence decisions by working together and co-operating, rather than by confrontation. This is equally true whether in meetings, in dealings with other members or in correspondence, e.g. when writing to Officials of the Local Authority.

Community Councils making a positive contribution can gain respect and be increasingly involved in consultations on any proposals affecting their community. It is crucial that effective working relationships are established.

18. USING TIME EFFECTIVELY AT MEETINGS

It is necessary to take a fairly disciplined approach to the use of time at meetings. Perhaps the single most damaging thing for any Community Council is unproductive meetings where the discussion is not focused on issues of importance to the community and where those doing the talking are more interested in their personal agenda than the agenda of the Community Council.

For those less used to public speaking or debating, it is sometimes useful to write down in brief on a piece of paper or card the particular points you wish to raise. This can help to concentrate thoughts and further discussion.

19. ESTABLISHING PRIORITIES

It can be more difficult to deal with matters that are not practical issues such as 'grass cutting' or 'potholes in the road' and while these 'bread and butter' issues are an important part of the work of a Community Council, there are other matters which may appear to be less obviously important in the short term, but which may have a future bigger impact on the community, e.g.:

- changing economic conditions
- population changes in the local community
- long-term development proposals

Placing too much emphasis on 'everyday' issues should not lead the Community Council to overlook matters like the ones above which are of strategic importance to the community. To ensure this does not happen, Community Council members should think as a collective body and work effectively with Local Elected Members to progress other matters.

Try to be clear about which issues are most important for the community and which to allocate most time to. This may mean choosing between the short-term and longer-term matters. Always remember that strategic issues are important and should not be set aside simply because there is another issue that appears on the surface to be more urgent.

One way to get through complex issues that are important and long term is to break them down into chunks and deal with them one by one over a series of meetings.

Another approach would be to split up the task and allocate responsibility for bits of the task to different individuals or working groups/Sub-Committees of the Community Council.

Alternatively, Community Councils can deal with ongoing issues by requesting individual members with specific knowledge, experience or interest, to take on the role of 'looking out' for news on issues in local press or in the public sphere generally. This would also help in dealing with the wide range of consultation documents that Community Councils may be asked to respond to.

20. PREPARATION BEFORE AND ACTION AFTER MEETINGS

To assist with preparation before a meeting and actions afterwards it is best practice that the minutes are produced as soon as possible after a meeting and sent out to Community Council members and/or sub-committees so that people can see what was said; what had been agreed; and what would be done before the next meeting. The minutes should be sent to those who attended the meeting and to others who missed the meeting or who may be expected to do something as a result of the meeting.

The Secretary will, within 7 days from the date of the meeting (or as soon as possible after the date of the meeting and within 14 days), make the approved draft minute available to the public for inspection, eg, via websites; posted in libraries and/or other appropriate public space.

It is important to make the minutes of meetings publicly available so that the wider community has an understanding of what the Community Council and its members are doing. The minutes should also be written in such a way that it is easy to identify what actions and timescales have been agreed and who is responsible.

21. SUB-COMMITTEES (OR WORKING GROUPS)

It is common for Community Councils to set up sub-committees (or working groups) to look at particular issues, or deal with work that has tight deadlines. Sub-committees can prevent any one activity from overshadowing the agenda of a full Community Council meeting. In addition, a dedicated sub-committee can focus on its specific project or task and spend more time on the detail.

It is important that there are good connections and feedback between the sub-committee and the full Community Council meeting. When a need for a sub-committee has been identified, it should have a clear remit for its work; what it can and cannot decide upon; and what has to be given final approval by the Community Council. The full Community Council holds ultimate responsibility for the recommendations and actions of the sub-committees, and therefore the full Community Council must agree any important decisions it makes.

A Community Council sub-committee may operate independently from the Community Council or in the event that the Community Council ceases to operate (is dissolved). In which case, the sub-committee could operate as a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO). See

website for further information: link - <https://www.oscr.org.uk/becoming-a-charity/becoming-a-scio>. Fife Voluntary Action provides assistance to voluntary organisations. See website for further information: <https://www.fva.org/>.

22. CHECKLIST FOR MEETINGS

- (1) Do meetings start on time and finish on time?
- (2) Do meetings never or rarely exceed two hours in length?
- (3) Does everyone turn up? If not, have they put in their apologies?
- (4) Has everyone prepared by reading previous minutes and aware of the agenda?
- (5) Do minutes go out early after a meeting?
- (6) Are the minutes usually short and accurately reflect discussion, decisions and actions agreed?
- (7) Are the action points clearly stated?
- (8) Are they sent to everyone who should see them?
- (9) Does the Chairperson or other member follow up in between meetings to see what progress is being made and that people are geared up to report back at the next meeting?
- (10) Does the Chairperson work with the Secretary and any others to set the agenda ahead of the next meeting?

23. MEMBERS' INTERESTS - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

See **Section 11.0 of the Scheme** – 'Declarations of Interest'.

All members shall declare in advance any financial or other interest however minor that they or any person connected with them may have in any matter which comes before the Community Council for consideration and withdraw from the meeting if required.

If a member is unclear whether a matter is sufficiently material as to require them to make a declaration of interest, they should still declare it for the Community Council to take a view and to decide if the member should make a formal declaration of interest and withdraw.

Unless those members present who have been requested to form a view are not in a simple majority whether or not the matter requires a declaration of interest, the member will require to make a personal decision whether to declare and withdraw.

A Community Councillor, knowingly failing to declare an interest and withdraw, may be censured and possibly disqualified from membership.