

## 1.2

# Members and Officer Bearers

### The Community Council Member

#### Role as a Member

As a Community Council member it is important that you recognise from the outset that you are required to play a role in your community. This means not simply offering your own views and opinions on local issues, or taking decisions that are based on your own self-interest.

The role of the Community Council member is one that requires you to represent the views of your community, or your section of the community. In practice, this will involve discussing issues with people in the community to clarify their views and assess the strength of their feelings on different topics.

You should seek to work together with other community council member's, promoting community engagement and consultation. Community council members must also remember to work with reference their code of conduct.

#### Taking on Viewpoints

It is also a good idea to encourage people to bring issues to you so that you can take them up at Council meetings. Try to check out the facts, however, before taking matters to the Council, and if there are two sides to the story, make sure that both of them are put forward. There is little point in taking up time at meetings to discuss problems that are based simply on misunderstandings or misrepresentations of the facts.

The task of any Community Council is to identify the needs and aspirations of its community and to take decisions that will lead to appropriate action in that community. At some point this might involve setting priorities on the competing or conflicting needs of different sections of the community.

Competition and conflict are normal in any community, so you shouldn't think of them as something that can be altogether avoided. What is important is that you approach competition or conflict in a fair and reasonable manner. This means taking a balanced view of your community's needs and aspirations and giving a fair hearing to representatives from different interest groups in your community. In particular, you should try to avoid being influenced by prejudice or bias, whether in the sphere of race, religion, gender or any other of the "labels" which get attached to people and to local issues.

## Conflict and Declaration of Interest

(see also Chapter 8, Dealing with Conflict)

At some point it may be that you will find some conflict between your own personal views and interests and those of the community that you are representing. If such a situation does arise, try to make sure that the views of the community take precedence.

Experience shows that if the views of individuals on the Council are allowed to take precedence then the community will very quickly lose confidence in the Council and its work may subsequently be devalued.

In some instances, it may be necessary and appropriate **to declare an interest** in the matter under discussion and to withdraw from that debate and decision-making. This is particularly important where pecuniary interests are involved. *Declarations of Interest* (financial and non-financial) should be recorded in the Minutes of the Meeting.

## The Chairperson and Vice Chairperson

The Chairperson has perhaps the most important single role to play in ensuring that Community Council meetings run smoothly. But even a good Chairperson will find the task exhausting unless all the Members of the Community Council are given a role.

The Chairperson is elected in accordance with the rules set out in the Community Council's own Constitution (your Secretary should be able to provide you with a copy).

In essence, the Chairperson's job is to make sure that decisions are taken on all of the items that are on the agenda. In practice, this usually means that the Chairperson will have to make judgements about how much time to allocate to each Agenda item. It also means that he/she may occasionally have to bring speakers back to the Agenda and generally encourage people to make their contributions brief and to the point.

In regular meetings the role of the Chairperson is a formal one; all speakers will be expected to address their comments to the Chairperson. This helps the Chairperson to keep control of the discussion. In Committee meetings, where proceedings need not be so formal, the Chairperson may be content simply to steer the general direction of the discussion – this may be described as an enabling role (see table overleaf). The extent to which a Chairperson adopts one or the other of these will be dependent upon the circumstances at a particular time or occasion. Set out overleaf are some of the characteristics of the two approaches.

Perhaps most importantly of all, the Chairperson is expected to know the rules by which the Community Council operates, and ensure that at all stages of its work the Community Council is operating in accordance with any procedures that are set down. In this context the Chairperson may be called upon to act as an arbiter when there is a disagreement about how the rules should be interpreted.

It is important to recognise that the Chairperson's role extends out with the meeting itself. The Chairperson may be called upon to act on behalf of the Community Council between meetings, or to represent the Community Council in dealing with outside bodies. This role may also be delegated by the Community Council to other Members.

Very often the Chairperson is seen as the "official spokesperson" for the Community Council and must be seen as authoritative and fair in all of their dealings with outside bodies, groups, individuals and the Press.

## Role of the Vice Chairperson

The Vice Chairperson has no specific duties other than standing in for the Chairperson when he or she is unable to be present.

The Formal Chairperson	The Enabling Chairperson
<b>General role and responsibilities</b>	
Encourage fair play	Have an overview of the task/goals of the meeting
Stay in charge	Help to clarify goals
Remain neutral	Help the group to take responsibility for what it wants to accomplish
Agenda and timekeeping	Help the group to carry out its tasks
Open the meeting	Have little emotional investment
Introduce all agenda items	Run through the agenda at the beginning and get the meeting's approval for it
Be familiar with all agenda items	Arrange in advance for someone to introduce each agenda item
Get through the agenda in the allotted time	Update latecomers
	Keep track of the time
	Evaluate how the meeting went at the end

The Formal Chairperson	The Enabling Chairperson
<b>Discussion</b>	
Select speakers	Encourage and help everyone to participate
Summarise discussion	Encourage expression of various viewpoints
End discussion	Encourage people to keep to the subject
Make sure that people keep to the subject	Clarify and summarise discussion
	Make it safe to share feelings
	Suggest ways of handling conflict
<b>Decision making and voting</b>	
Make sure decisions are taken and agreed	Suggest structures for decision making
Decide when to vote	Look for areas of agreement
Conduct the vote	Test to see if there is agreement
Make sure that the responsibility for action is allocated	Make sure someone will carry out decisions

## The Secretary

The Secretary is responsible for:

- The Agenda;
- The Minutes of the meeting;
- Answering all correspondence;
- Writing any letters;
- Circulating information to Members;
- Public relations, dealing with the Press, TV and Radio (this could also be delegated to the Chairperson) and social media (this could also be delegated to someone with skills in this area)
- Looking after visitors;
- Arranging the venue for meetings;
- Liaison with officials of the Local Authority;
- Supporting the Chairperson and providing (or obtaining) legal and other specialist advice.

To be successful, a Community Council must have an energetic and conscientious Secretary prepared to put in the necessary time and effort. It is incumbent on all Members but especially the Chairperson to spread the Secretary's load by, for instance, delegating some of his or her responsibilities to others, either individually or to small sub-committees.

It is poor policy to overload your Secretary - you might find difficulty getting volunteers. The duties may be allocated to more than one person. It is essential that the Secretary has access to word-processing and photocopying facilities.

## The Treasurer

The Treasurer is responsible for issuing all cheques and making payments on behalf of the Community Council and any charities and/or other funds dispersed by the Council.

The Treasurer must manage the bank account, account for all funds received, and ensure money is only spent in a manner approved by the Community Council Members as recorded in the minutes.

The Treasurer must maintain the Community Council's financial records so that they disclose, with reasonable accuracy at any time, the financial position of the Community Council.

All cheques issued should be signed by at least two of the three agreed Community Council Members. These signatories should be agreed by the Community Council and recorded in the minutes as well as being notified to the bank in writing. **Authorised signatories may not be co-habitees.**

As a general rule, Treasurers should avoid paying out money except by cheque. This makes accounting for expenditure much easier.

The Treasurer must keep proper accounts of all receipts and expenditure and prepare an Annual Statement of Accounts. The Annual Accounts shall be independently examined by at least one examiner appointed by the Community Council, who is not a member of that Community Council.

A copy of the independently examined statement of accounts / balance sheet shall be forwarded immediately after the statement is approved at the AGM (if held) or ordinary meeting to the Community Council Liaison Officer.

The financial year of the Community Council shall be from October to September the succeeding year.

## Office Bearers

The Office Bearer's collective task is to:

- Ensure that the Community Council stays true to its values and mission;
- Ensure that the Community Council has the right operating structure in place;
- Make sure all Community Councillors understand the roles of the Office Bearers;
- Ensure that the Community Council has a plan for achieving its goals, is effective, accountable and lawful and has everything in place for the Community Council to work effectively.

It may be that a brief role description is written up for each of the Office Bearer positions to ensure that everyone understands the expectations of that role. Support and guidance is available to develop this, contact the CCLO to discuss this further.

Whilst it is recognised that the Office Bearer roles bring additional responsibility to being a Community Councillor all members have a core responsibility of advocating and representing the Community Council externally and to be aware of current issues that may affect the Community Council.

### **Associate Members**

Associate members can be appointed by the Community Council in addition to the total membership of the Community Council.

Appointment of associate members can broaden both representation, knowledge and expertise for specific projects or issues, for diversity and inclusion for those that do not wish to be a full member or wish to gain experience in the community council setting first, or to perform a specific role such as minute secretary.

Associate members do not count towards the quorum numbers required for a meeting and cannot vote on matters during a meeting. They are appointed for a fixed period set by the Community Council and do not have to reside within the Community Council area to be appointed. Associate members cannot however be elected or co-opted to any other Moray Community Council.

See Section 9 of the Community Council Scheme for more information.

### **Long Service Awards**

Long-Service Awards are a means of Moray Council recognising the service of Community Council Members over an extended period of time.

Awards, in the form of a certificate signed by the Convener and Chief Executive of Moray Council, are made to those who have served as Members of Community Councils for 20 years.

Applications for Awards should be made to the Community Council Liaison Officer (refer to form in section 3.4).

## Hints and Tips

### New member induction

Having an induction process for new Community Councillors is a great idea to ensure that they are clear and confident about their new role.

It is important that members understand and can articulate the purpose of the Community Council and the role that they play within the development and running of the Community Council during their term in office.

The table below is a quick checklist with induction ideas for consideration.

Offer a tour of the meeting venue(s)	
Introduce Community Councillors to one another and note any specific skills or interest	
Introduce Community Councillors to partners and support staff e.g. CCLO, local policing team	
Ensure Community Councillors are properly supported to carry out their role e.g. are you aware of training opportunities in your area and how these can be accessed by members?	
Are Members provided with key information about the Community Council – Constitution / Members handbook / latest annual accounts / minutes of recent meetings and do they understand these documents?	
Provide members with a list of dates of forthcoming meetings	
Provide members with contact details (subject to consent) for each other	
Provide samples of previous publicity materials to show the type of work / activities the Community Council has been involved with	
Ensure members know how to get issues on the agenda	
Ensure members know how to claim for out of pocket expenses	