

1.3

Meetings and Record Keeping

Frequency of Meetings

The frequency of meetings is laid in the Constitution of the Community Council. The Community Council shall meet not less than 6 times throughout the year (*excluding an Annual General Meeting (AGM) – if held*). The Community Council secretary must provide a schedule of meetings to the Community Council Liaison Officer, once agreed.

Meetings, Special Meetings and AGMs

Once in each year the Community Council may convene an AGM for the purpose of receiving and considering the Chairperson's annual report on the Community Council, the submission and approval of the independently examined annual statement of accounts and the appointment of Office Bearers.

Each Community Council will determine at the outset if and when they will hold an AGM and this must be agreed in the Constitution. Constitutions rule on the public notice required and the matters that can be considered at Annual General Meetings.

A typical AGM agenda will be as in the model Constitution which is contained in section 2. No other matters may be raised at the AGM, which have not been printed on the official agenda. The agenda must be published the prescribed number of days before the meeting as detailed in the Constitution.

For convenience, the Secretary should circulate the Minutes of AGMs immediately after the meeting, as well as 12 months later.

Special meetings may be called at short notice to deal with unexpected items that are urgent or to deal with a complaint for example (Section 4). The agenda for a special meeting must be restricted to only those items raised in the motion calling for the meeting. No other matters must be discussed. Voting will be as allowed by the Constitution, but generally voting members present may vote unless they have declared a conflict of interest. Minutes will be taken of the meeting and considered at the next regular meeting.

Agenda

For all Annual General, Special and regular meetings an agenda must be published by the Secretary well in advance in line with the Constitution so that everyone present knows what is to be discussed and can be prepared in advance. Some special meetings may be held in confidence and therefore a public notice may not be required. Whilst every Community Council operates differently; good practice would be to circulate the agenda 7-10 days prior to a meeting taking place.

Included with the new agenda is previous minutes and relevant papers that members need to familiarise themselves with in order to fully participate in the discussions and, if necessary make decisions on.

The order of business is contained with the standing orders of the Community Council (section 2).

Standing Orders

The standing orders of the community council determine the procedures and conduct of the meeting including the order of debate. These will be agreed at the same time that the Community Council agree their constitution. Community Council members should make themselves aware of their content.

Quorum

Every meeting of the Community Council shall have a quorum of voting members present before a formal Community Council meeting can proceed. The quorum for Community Council meetings shall be at least one third of the current eligible voting membership, or 3 eligible voting members, whichever is the greater. Associate members do not count towards the quorum. For the avoidance of doubt, the quorum for each Community Council is set out in in Appendix 1 of the Community Council Scheme.

The chairman or vice chairman must preside at a meeting of the council. In absence of both of these office bearers, any other Community Council member as the members present choose.

Absence and Apologies

The apology of any member who is unable to attend is recorded for the minutes. This is important as the Constitutions may bar Members who fail to attend regularly and/or miss a specified number of consecutive meetings without good reason, and the minute serves as the official record.

In cases of genuine hardship, i.e. illness, the meeting can overrule such a provision. Alternatively, the meeting may agree to enforce the ruling, debar the Member and maybe co-opt a substitute. In such cases the decision to undertake this action to bar a member or approve a substitute must be communicated to and approved by the Local Authority.

It is also important to record who was present, so that it will be known in the future, the Members who put their names to any particular motion. A Member present who strongly disagrees with a motion adopted by the Community Council on a majority vote can ask that his/her opposition be formally recorded in the minutes. In the extreme, whether or not a Member opposed a motion can have legal implications.

Guests at the Meeting

Most Community Councils invite representatives of local organisations such as the Police to attend their meetings, and others including Council officials or developers, to attend and speak to the meeting by special invitation. Such "guests" can make an important contribution to the meeting, but it is important to remember that they are just that, 'guests'. They are not elected or co-opted and do not have voting rights.

All formal meetings should be open to the public (and to the press) unless there are confidential matters that the Constitution permits discussion in private. It is common practice for the Chairperson to ask anyone attending whether they would like to address the meeting and/or take part in the discussion on matters which he/she knows to be of particular interest.

Please see section 3 - Forms and Templates for a suggested Attendance template.

Minute Taking and Format

It is a requirement of all Constitutions that formal minutes are kept of meetings. This is the responsibility of the Secretary but the Community Council may agree to appoint from within itself or engage for payment or otherwise, a Minute Secretary. This frees the Secretary to take a more active part in the discussions. However responsibility for the minutes rests with the Secretary, even though a Minute Secretary may be employed.

The minutes to be approved should be circulated to all Members, and to those whom you wish to confirm the accuracy of the minute within 30 days of the meeting. The minutes of the previous meeting are formally approved at the next meeting.

- The Chairperson should ask whether everyone is in agreement that they are a true record of the meeting concerned;
- If any Member wishes to query any point this is the time to do it. Once the minutes are formally adopted they cannot be changed;
- Any suggested amendments are discussed and, if agreed, a suitable alteration adopted. It must be stressed that only the record of the previous Minute 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 in the proceedings. It is incumbent upon the Chairperson to rule accordingly;
- A Member now proposes the formal adoption of the minutes subject to any agreed amendment. Many Community Councils require there be a seconder;

- If there are still objections the matter is put to the vote, otherwise the minutes are adopted 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 his/her objection(s) be recorded in the minutes.

In some community councils, they routinely record the meetings for archival purposes or to assist with the writing of the minutes. This practice has some Data Protection issues which members must be aware of. Please refer to the further dedicated section **1.20 on Recording meetings** for more information.

Format of Minutes

Minutes in a standardised format must be taken of all regular meetings, AGMs and special meetings. They must record the date of meeting, time and location, those present, apologies received, who was the Chairperson, all appointments, votes, agreed expenditure, topics discussed and agreed actions. Except in the case of formal motions they are not required to record every word said, rather they must *summarise the views* of Members and *record conclusions*.

Good minute taking is a skill, so that neither too little nor too much detail is included. A common fault is pages and pages of minutes that do not allow the reader to grasp the key points and decisions made. As the permanent record of the Community Council's business, they are a very important document with both historical and legal implications.

The format of the minutes follows closely that detailed for the agenda with subheadings/numbering corresponding to agenda items and each topic discussed. (refer to section 3 for a minute template)

Matters Arising

Matters arising should relate to any outstanding actions avoiding the necessity for each item to be listed on the agenda. This procedure ensures nothing is forgotten and that actions promised at the previous meeting have, in fact, been carried out. As all discussion is recorded in the current minutes, items completed drop out, items still ongoing should come up at the next meeting. Any correspondence received relative to matters being discussed is best read out by the Secretary at the appropriate point.

Formal Motion

A "formal motion" is a motion, the wording of which is agreed precisely and recorded in the minutes. It can be passed unanimously, or be subject to a vote. In the case of AGMs and special meetings, the wording of the proposed motion is usually (often by the Constitution, must be) set out on the agenda calling the meeting. The results of any vote must be detailed in the minutes and, if they so request, the names of those opposing the motion listed.

Correspondence Received

During the meeting any letters, emails, telephone calls and direct messages via any social media pages held by the community council, if appropriate, received since the first meeting on new topics are read out by the Secretary and any necessary action by your Community Council decided. To save time, long, complicated or routine items are not normally read out but referred to and circulated to Members either prior to the meeting or later.

Treasurers Report

The Treasurer can report on the financial situation of the Community Council, on any monies and expenditure and consider other budgetary related matters.

Reports

So far the meeting has involved only the Members (and co-opted Members) unless the Chairperson invited comment on any particular item from others presented. '*Reports*' is the point in the meeting when regular attendees such as the local Police, Community Warden and local Councillors are asked to give a brief report to the Community Council.

This is the point at which the Community Council learns what others are doing and in the subsequent discussion can advise on what not only the Community Council but the local community think. Some reports will be regular, i.e. to every meeting, others occasional.

Special Items

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 the Chair may 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 him/her to get away as early as possible.

Planning Issues

Planning is often a key concern of Community Councils and to the public in their areas. Many Community Councils have a regular slot on their Agenda to deal with planning matters. These can range from considering planning applications and how they should respond to these to dealing with developing Local Plans or considering responses to other forms of consultation. Some Community Councils establish sub-committees or working groups to deal with planning issues given the timescales involved and the degree of scrutiny often required.

(Refer to Section 1.13 – Planning and Licensing for more information)

Development Plan

Community Council involvement is an important part of Development Plan preparation and the Council carried out extensive consultation at all of the various stages of the Plan. Local engagement exercises are often arranged by Community Councils as a means of obtaining local views and responses to proposals. Similar consultation takes place on any subsequent

policy documents such as Supplementary Guidelines or Development Briefs. (see also Section 1.13 and Section 5)

AOCB

Any Other Competent Business (AOCB) gives Members the chance to raise issues and, in particular, matters brought to them by the public. Normally, the Chairperson will move round the table giving each Member the chance to raise topics in turn. It may be the case that items raised here are unable to be dealt with but, if not, can be added to a future agenda.

Time and Place of Next Meeting

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

Minute Summary

A formal minute will always be required, however not everyone in your community will be drawn in to reading this.

Producing a minute summary allows you to capture the main points from your Community Council meeting and is a good way of ensuring the community are aware and up to date of what the Community Councils are doing; it also provides ongoing promotional opportunities.

Please refer Section 3 – Forms and Templates for a suggested template.

Correspondence after a Meeting

Following a Community Council meeting, there may be a number of items that require investigation by Officers in Moray Council. Community Councils are asked to correspond, in the first instance, to the Community Council Liaison Officer at Moray Council, Council Offices, High Street, Elgin, IV30 1BX, communitycouncil@moray.gov.uk

The Community Council Liaison Officer will acknowledge the enquiry on behalf of the Chief Executive and request investigation by the relevant officer(s). The agreed timescale for responding to Community Council enquiries is 5 working days to acknowledge the correspondence and 20 working days to provide a full response.

Circulation and Retention of Minutes

The minutes of all meetings should be circulated to all Members and copies should be made available to the public at local libraries or in other public places including the Community Councils noticeboard if appropriate within 30 days from the date of the meeting and ratified minutes within 14 days of approval.

Copies of minutes should also be circulated to, local library and to the local community and other interested parties via copies placed on notice boards or, for example, deposited in local Post Offices. A copy of the minutes must also be supplied to the Community Council Liaison Officer at the Local Authority. The Local Authority also has a dedicated page on www.moray.gov.uk/communitycouncils for each Community Council where approved minutes are uploaded.

Draft minutes can be uploaded to the website but must be identified as '*Draft*'. These can be replaced with approved minutes when available. This allows Community Council information to be available to their communities as soon as possible.

Good practice would be for draft minutes to be circulated within 7 days and ratified minutes immediately following the date of the meeting. This reminds members of any actions to be taken and keeps communities informed of Community Council business.

Minutes of all meetings must be retained for future reference and passed on to each new Secretary when a re-appointment occurs for safekeeping. Minutes, agendas and accounts should be kept in perpetuity. Other material should perhaps be held for at least 5 years. Contact the Community Council Liaison Officer should you have issues with holding material, particularly if the community council is dissolved for any reason and the material can be passed to the next established community council.

Some material may have historic importance in the future and Community Councils may wish to discuss this either with the archivists who look after Moray Council's records, the Library Service or a local Heritage Society before anything is disposed of. For more information on Archives visit <http://www.moray.gov.uk/localheritage>

Working effectively in meetings

Meetings are of crucial importance to the work of Community Councils. It is at meetings that opinions, ideas, feelings, good intentions etc. get translated into hard decisions, and it is those decisions that will ultimately be translated into practical action in your community. If you really want to influence what is going on in your community then it is vital that you learn to participate effectively in the work of your Council's meetings.

It is perfectly normal that, in any meeting, the individuals present will have different, sometimes opposing, views. For this reason it is important that meetings are chaired effectively so that there is 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 you want to raise at a meeting make sure that you tell the Secretary in advance so that it can be included as an item on the agenda. This means that the person in the Chair can try to ensure that sufficient time is made available to discuss your item. If you do put an item on the agenda be prepared to give a short presentation to the meeting setting out:

- The background to the situation (no more than is necessary);
- What you think the central issue is;
- What you think ought to be done about it.

Be prepared to listen to other people's ideas on the matter; they may have information on the subject that you don't, or they may come up with ideas that offer a better solution than yours. Remember that the key thing for a good Community Council Member is to make things happen in the community. Point scoring at meetings is a distraction that everyone can do without.

Sometimes you may be asked to participate in a working group in order to research some points for the next meeting of the Community Council. Working groups can play an important part in clarifying issues so that decision making is easier at future meetings. Although working groups may involve some extra time commitment you should try as far as possible to get involved so that the work of your Community Council is spread evenly and you get a deeper insight into what is going on at Community Council meetings.

As a general rule, it is much easier to get your way by working and co-operating, rather than by confrontation. This is equally true whether in meetings, in dealings with other Members or in correspondence, for example when writing to officials of the Local Authority.

Community Councils that make a positive contribution command respect. Local Authority Councillors and officials value their opinions and consult them before any proposals affecting their community.

Dealing with Obstructive and Offensive Conduct during meetings

There may be occasion where you have to deal with members and general public who are argumentative, disruptive, negative, or who are not contributing.

It is important to deal with the problem from the outset and not ignore it. A difficult member or disruption by members of the public will upset the balance of the meeting, kill momentum, de-motivate members and keep the community council from accomplishing their business.

There is a difference between people who participate in a lively discussion, challenge current thinking and contribute actively to ideas and those maintain a negative stance, make issues personal and create bad feeling.

It is important to manage negative conflict, some approaches include:

- Listen to conflicting views
- Identify common goals between members
- Build on agreements already in place as you try to resolve differences
- Avoid anyone placing blame and making accusations
- Depersonalise - it's not about the person, it's about the resolution of a problem or challenge

- Communicate respect to everyone at all times, member should reflect on the code of conduct
- Use a positive tone throughout
- Maintain zero tolerance for personal attacks – the chairperson should never allow it to happen, stop it when it does, making it clear that it won't be tolerated.

Provision is made with the standing orders of the Community Council, to deal with poor conduct during meeting and minimise disruption and in extreme cases expel an individual from a meeting.

(refer to section 1.8 – Dealing with Conflict for more information)

[Refer to Section 5 Members of the Public Unacceptable Behaviour Policy](#)

Hints and Tips for Effective Meetings

Community Councillors should;

- Attend meetings regularly; arrive on time and stay to the end. (Send apologies to the Secretary if you are unable to attend);
- Arrive at the meeting with all the relevant papers, having read them beforehand. As a Community Councillor receiving your minutes should not be a routine act of looking over them and forgetting about them. Read them over, are they an accurate record? - Has anything been left out, are there matters arising that you want to discuss further at the next meeting, are there points for you to action before the next meeting? Make notes then store your minutes in a file and bring them to meetings;
- Be able to take an active part in the discussions in an informed and positive way;
- Make enquiries beforehand if necessary to ensure that you are well informed and briefed about items for discussion;
- Be prepared to start discussions;
- Be prepared to give an opinion without dominating meetings;
- Keep to the agenda and be mindful of the aims and objects of your Community Council;
- Be supportive of other members of your Community Council;
- Listen to the views of others in attendance.

Dates for Meetings

- Set these well in advance;
- Set a system in place for sending out reminders of the dates and times and venue of meetings;
- Establish a pattern e.g. the first Wednesday of the month.

Before the Meeting

- Publicise all meetings well in advance and as broadly as possible – remember to include local partner agencies, your local Elected Members and most importantly your community;
- The Chair should plan an agenda in consultation with the other Officer Bearers;
- Issue an agenda for every meeting to all members and previous minutes (in good time to allow members the opportunity to read through these before the next meeting);
- Invite any outside bodies you wish to attend, include a brief of what you expect from them if you are inviting them for a specific reason e.g. Police, community group representatives;
- Check your venue booking.

During the Meeting

- Knowing who everyone is helps so make sure people introduce themselves;
- Make sure the meeting is quorate (check your Constitution);
- Record the names of everyone who attends (including who they are representing if appropriate) and record any apologies received;
- Keep focused on the business and the decisions to be made;
- Remind everyone to avoid jargon, acronyms or abbreviations that some people may not understand. This can make people feel left out and may prevent them from contributing to the meeting;
- Encourage everyone to participate. Everyone's point of view is accepted and their input is valued;
- Make sure decisions are recorded in the minute with the name of the person responsible for any action;
- Finish on time.

After the meeting

- Type up the minutes as soon as possible after the meeting and circulate;
- Act on the decisions that you made.

Remember

Your meetings are part of your Community Council being open and accountable to the local community therefore how you conduct your meetings is very important.