

Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils

(Affiliated to the National Association of Local Councils)

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GOOD PRACTICE NOTE DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF A CHAIRMAN AND TIPS ON HANDLING MEETINGS

A Chairman:

- Is a member of the Council and is elected annually
- Has the authority at meetings and must be obeyed
- Is the interface between the public and Council
- The one to welcome speakers and make them 'feel at home'
- Is to make sure the decision is clear for the clerk to act upon.
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The Chairman should:

- Know that the agenda was put up in time and be familiar with business to be covered
- Arrive in good time, adequately briefed and with all the necessary papers in correct order.
- Start the meeting on time
- Know that he/she has no more power than any other councillor except that of the casting vote.
- Ensure that all points of view have a clear hearing
- Keep the discussion to the point, and that it is relevant and ensure the Council deals with clear issues
- Understand the principles of debate and voting (see NALC Standing Orders and Chairmanship handbook)
- Remain impartial and not 'guide' councillors to his/her desired decision.
- Not allow the meeting to continue for more than 2 hours without a break
- Create an atmosphere which encourages participation
- Be in control of the meeting.
- Know that he/she cannot be a committee of one
- Respect the role of the clerk
- Co-operate with officers and Councillors
- Act as a representative of the council at civic or local events

The Chairman on his own has no power to make decisions without the Resolution of the Council.

The Chairman on his own cannot make decisions arising from the line management of the clerk.

The Chairman cannot decide which items should appear on the agenda for meetings. The Clerk is responsible for the agenda.

The Chairman should not involve himself in the day-to-day administration of the council.

Presiding at the first Annual Meeting of the Parish Council:

The retiring chairman, or in his or her absence, the vice chair must preside at the meeting for the first item on the agenda (after apologies and checking previous minutes) 'To Elect Chairman'. If it is a meeting after an election then the retiring chair or vice chair presides, even if they are no longer councillors. If both are absent then the council may appoint another councillor to preside. It is illegal for a clerk to take the chair at a meeting.

Election of a Chair:

If the presiding chair is no longer to be a member of the council then he only has a casting vote. If he is still going to be a member then he has a vote and a casting vote (he can vote for himself if he wants). The chairman of the council should give a report to the APM on the activity of the council (in this meeting, if he is not an elector in the parish, he only has a casting vote). Once voted in, the new chair signs his declaration of acceptance as the officer of Chairman and takes over the meeting immediately.

The Annual Parish Meeting or Parish Assembly:

To be held at any time between March and May each year to report to the parish electorate on the activities and performance of the Council over the previous year. The current accounts of the Parish must be available at this meeting. The chairman or vice chair should if present preside at this meeting.

Only persons recorded on the electoral register for the Parish are allowed to vote at this meeting. The Parish Council pays for the meeting. If a poll is called for then it must be paid for by the Parish Council.

How to Handle Public Disturbances during Meetings:

No one is entitled to interrupt or obstruct the proceedings of the Council or its committees. It is best to stop an interruption at once before the habit spreads, and although a Chairman would not wish to be rude he should cut short an interrupter; if good humour and conciliation fail to produce silence he may have to warn them that he will turn them out. If the warning is ignored it should be resolved without discussion that the interrupter is excluded and if he fails to leave he should be removed by force. Care should be taken to use no more force than necessary. It is not essential to call the police but it may be necessary.

The Chairman should never argue or allow argument with an interrupter. If the public becomes disorderly it may eventually be necessary to close the meeting or the adjourn to a more private place. It is, however illegal to decide to exclude the public from any future meeting. The press is in a privileged position inasmuch as its representatives must so far as possible be given facilities for taking their reports.

Finally the "Chairman's Box File":

It is good risk management for the Chairman to have a file which contains copies of the following, which maybe required if access to the Clerk's files is prevented: Employment Contracts, Deeds, Insurance details etc. Password to Clerk's computer. File only to be opened in an emergency

Alison Hodge, County Secretary

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