



# The role of the Chairperson

A guide to the duties and responsibilities of a Chairperson in a small voluntary organisation



## The role of Chairperson

The Chairperson's role consists of two separate parts: Planning and running meetings: being sure everything is covered and decisions are made when required; keeping order; helping the group deal with differences of opinion and conflicts; being sure that everyone who wants to has a chance to speak. Ensuring the organisation as a whole makes and sticks to priorities and policies: serving as a spokesperson for the group; making essential or emergency decisions between meetings; helping workers to deal with difficult situations.

## General Responsibilities

- To chair meetings of the organisation, both committee meetings and general meetings.
- To be the spokesperson, or official 'voice' of the organisation between meetings.
- To liaise closely with the secretary about dates, arrangements, agendas, correspondence for committee meetings, and content of minutes.
- To liaise with the treasurer about the financial state of the organisation.
- To have a clear idea of the Group's constitution/Memorandum and Articles and their limits.
- To ensure the Group's staff and volunteers are supervised and supported.
- To take overall responsibility for health and safety, legal and insurance matters.
- To take a good deal of responsibility but must always be accountable.
- To take the lead in Public Relations for the organisation.
- To have a clear idea of what the Group wants to achieve and how, in the next few years.

### Before each meeting:

Get together with the secretary to go over the minutes of the last meeting, plan the agenda, and agree which decisions need to be made at the meeting. Ensure that all information, documents, and papers are at hand for the meeting. Be well prepared on topics for discussion!

### At each meeting:

It helps to arrive early as members may wish to speak to you prior to the meeting. Start the meeting on time. If necessary, set time limits for any item which is likely to continue for a lengthy period, always remember to allow sufficient time for each person to have their say. Be aware when discussions are no longer productive and conclude.

Facilitate discussion during the meeting and encourage all members to participate. Share out tasks as appropriate. Bring items on the agenda to a conclusion with a brief review of points, which may involve inviting specific proposals from the committee. If a vote has to be taken ask for a formal proposal and clarify the procedure. In the event of a tie the

chairperson can have the casting vote. (Guidance in your governing document.) State clearly the agreed outcome of discussions and votes. At the close of a meeting fix arrangements for the next meeting and liaise with the secretary on actions resulting from the meeting, e.g. press releases or letters.

#### At the beginning of each meeting:

- Welcome people and introduce visitors or newcomers, if appropriate,
- ask everyone to introduce themselves.
- Ask for apologies for absence.
- Briefly explain the agenda, saying which items will need decisions and which are for discussion or consultation. Ask if there are any other items for inclusion, and indicate whether they will be added to the main agenda or be covered under any other business
- New items if minor, which do not fit under agreed headings should be included under 'any other business' or held over until the next meeting.
- The chairperson should introduce each item or introduce the person who will do so.
- As far as possible the discussion should be kept in the most helpful order; usually facts first, then opinions and feelings, followed by broad ideas for action, firm proposals, and a decision if one is required.
- A chairperson should spend most of the time listening, taking notes if necessary, and summarising regularly. A chairperson should be firm but sensitive, and not afraid to keep the discussion going and to the point.

#### A strong Chairperson

Good chairing does not simply depend upon following the duties and responsibilities to the letter; it is more than that. A good chairperson has to be aware of the difficult and demanding task he or she has taken on. A good chairperson must be well prepared before each meeting and be forewarned of possible controversial or delicate items on the agenda. A good chairperson must always appreciate that in this position there will be less opportunity to voice his or her own opinions at meetings.

A good chairperson must know all committee members and be able to recognise 'strong' and 'weak' members of the committee. It is the Chair's particular responsibility to put at ease new members at their first meeting and to encourage participation by all. A good chairperson will know the goals for each meeting and will not allow time to be wasted. The Chair must develop a sensitivity as to when discussion is no longer fruitful and bring such discussion to a meaningful conclusion.



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