

**Duties of a
Midlothian
Community
Council
Chairperson**

1. The Role of the Chairperson

The Chair has perhaps the most important single role to play in ensuring that Community Council meetings run smoothly.

The Chair is elected in accordance with the rules set out in the Community Council's own Constitution. The Constitution is very important because it provides the framework of procedures that will govern the work of your Community Council.

In essence, the Chair'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 Chair will have to make judgements about how much time to allocate to each Agenda item. It also means that he or 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 Chair is a *formal* one, all speakers will be expected to address their comments to the Chair. This helps the Chair to keep control of the discussion. In Committee meetings, where proceedings need not be so formal, the Chair may be content simply to steer the general direction of the discussion – this may be described as an *enabling* role. The extent to which a Chair adopts one or the other of these will be dependent upon the circumstances at a particular time or occasion. Set out below are some of the characteristics of the two approaches.

Perhaps most importantly of all, the Chair is expected to know the rules by which the Community Council functions, 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 Chair may be called upon to act as an arbiter when there is a disagreement about how the rules should be interpreted.

2. Representing the Community Council

It is important to recognise that the Chair's role extends out with the meeting itself. The Chair 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 office bearers or members.

Very often the Chair 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.

3. Formal Role and Enabling Role

During meetings, the Chair can be described as having two main roles - formal and also enabling. The following table details the various elements of these two roles:

THE FORMAL CHAIR	THE ENABLING CHAIR
<i>General role and responsibilities</i>	
Ensure 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 and to carry out its tasks
<i>Agenda and timekeeping</i>	
Open the meeting	Run through the agenda at the beginning and get the meeting's approval for it
Introduce all agenda items	Arrange in advance for someone to introduce each agenda item
Be familiar with all agenda items	Update latecomers
Get through the agenda in allotted time	Keep track of the time
Evaluate how the meeting went	
<i>Discussion</i>	
Select speakers	Encourage and help all to participate
Summarise discussion	Encourage expression of various views

THE FORMAL CHAIR	THE ENABLING CHAIR
End discussion	Encourage people to keep to the subject
Ensure that people keep to the subject	Clarify and summarise discussion
Make it safe to share feelings	
Suggest ways of handling conflict	
<i>Decision making and voting</i>	
Ensure decisions are taken and agreed	Suggest structures for decision making
Decide when to and conduct the vote	Look for and test areas of agreement
<i>Rules</i>	
Check that the meeting has been called in accordance with the rules	
Have a thorough knowledge of the rules	
Rules on points of order and procedure	
<i>Outside the meeting</i>	
Act on behalf of the organisation	
Pursue decisions made in meetings	
Represent the Council to outside bodies	
Ensure someone will carry out decisions	Ensure that responsibility for action is allocated