



## Parent Council Resource

A guide for parents to work in partnership with early learning and childcare settings, schools and the wider community to welcome all parents, gather their views and report back to parents, for the benefit of ALL pupils

**SEPTEMBER 2022**



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# Table of Contents

<b>1. Background.....</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1 Who is this Parent Council resource for?.....	4
1.2 Terms and definitions.....	5
1.3 Legislation and Policy.....	6
Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006.....	6
Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, as amended.....	7
Empowered System – Parents and Carers.....	8
Learning Together: Scotland’s national action plan on parental involvement, parental engagement, family learning and learning at home.....	8
Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.....	9
United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).....	9
<b>2. What is the role of the parent forum and the Parent Council? .....</b>	<b>10</b>
2.1 Parent forum.....	10
2.2 Parent Council.....	10
Pupil Equity Funding.....	12
Participatory budgeting.....	12
Cost of the School Day Toolkit.....	12
2.3 The Parental Involvement in Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher Appointments (Scotland) Regulations (2007).....	12
<b>3. Setting up a Parent Council.....</b>	<b>14</b>
3.1 The local authority’s role in establishing Parent Councils.....	14
Involving parents in identifying options.....	14
Role of a working group.....	14
3.2 Selecting office bearers.....	15
The Chairperson.....	16
The Secretary.....	16
The Clerk.....	17
The Treasurer.....	17
3.3 What is a Constitution?.....	18
3.4 Agreeing your Constitution priorities.....	18
Sub-groups.....	19
3.5 Getting the most from your Parent Council.....	20
What do parents bring?.....	20
What does the Headteacher bring?.....	20
Co-opted members.....	20
What can pupils bring? .....	20
Beyond the Parent Council.....	21
3.6 Setting ground rules and working together.....	21
3.7 Setting up a bank account.....	22
3.8 Improvement planning.....	22
3.9 Getting help and support.....	23
3.10 Community resources.....	23
Resources in the community.....	23
Family and the wider community .....	24
<b>4. Roles and responsibilities .....</b>	<b>25</b>
4.1 The Headteacher’s role.....	25
4.2 Communicating with the parent forum.....	25
4.3 Getting more parents on board.....	26
4.4 Pupil involvement.....	26
4.5 Other Parent Councils .....	26
4.6 Local authorities.....	27

<b>5. Practical issues.....</b>	<b>28</b>
5.1 What happens if things go wrong?.....	28
5.2 Confidentiality.....	28
5.3 Data Protection Policy.....	29
5.4 Useful contacts.....	29
5.5 Treating parents fairly.....	29
Shared Parenting.....	30
5.6 Planning for office bearer continuity.....	30
5.7 Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG).....	30
5.8 Safeguarding Policy.....	30
5.9 Public/Personal Liability Insurance.....	31
5.10 Code of Conduct – good practice guidance for meetings.....	31
5.11 Social Media Policy.....	32
5.12 Annual General Meeting.....	32
5.13 Accounts and fundraising.....	32
Money matters.....	32
Fundraising / Grants / Trusts.....	33
Charitable status.....	33
<b>6. Consulting with parents and the wider community.....</b>	<b>36</b>
6.1 Planning a consultation.....	37
6.2 Gathering and sharing parents' views.....	37
6.3 What should be included in the consultation?.....	37
6.4 Which consultation method is most appropriate?.....	38
Surveys.....	38
Focus groups.....	39
Public meetings / events.....	40
Informal methods.....	41
6.5 Analysing the results and feeding back.....	41
<b>7. Encouraging involvement.....</b>	<b>43</b>
7.1 Knowing your community.....	45
7.2 Building relationships.....	46
7.3 Working together as Parent Council members.....	47
7.4 Where else can I get information?.....	47
Connect.....	47
National Parent Forum of Scotland (NPFS).....	47
<b>Appendix 1 – Developing a Constitution .....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Appendix 2 – Safeguarding Policy Template .....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Appendix 3 – Annual General Meeting.....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Appendix 4 – Parent Volunteering Skills Audit Template.....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Appendix 5 - National Organisations .....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Reading List and Further Information.....</b>	<b>63</b>

# 1. Background

Parents make a real difference and they have an important role to play in helping their child's learning and development at home but also in early learning and childcare (ELC) settings, schools and the wider community.

The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 gives parents the right to receive information about their children's learning, to be represented, have their views heard and expressed.



Providing opportunities, supporting and building capacity amongst Scotland's parents to capitalise on children's learning experiences is key in raising attainment and closing the poverty related attainment gap. Research evidence shows that when 'parents, carers and other family members are effectively involved in their children's education, the outcome for their children is better'<sup>1</sup>.

Reference is made throughout this Parent Council resource to the application of the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 in settings and schools. This includes early learning and childcare settings, primary, secondary and special schools, and the community. It should be noted that the application of the Parental Involvement Act covers parents of children attending early learning and childcare provided in public primary schools. They are members of the school's parent forum and may join the Parent Council.

The Act does not apply to parents of children in 'free-standing' local authority nurseries or those attending early learning and childcare provided by a 'partner provider'. Nonetheless, we would encourage early learning and childcare settings who are currently not subject to the legislative requirements, to ensure there are effective arrangements in place for parental involvement and engagement and that the key principles highlighted throughout this resource are adhered to.

## 1.1 Who is this Parent Council resource for?

There are lots of ways in which settings, schools, parents, families and the community can work together to give children and young people the best possible education. Settings and schools are most effective when they develop positive relationships with parents and the learning community which they serve. This resource is designed to help support parents to work in partnership with early learning and childcare settings, schools and the wider community to welcome all parents, gather their views and report back to parents for the benefit of all pupils. It replaces the previous version which was published in 2006 and complements existing Education Scotland and Scottish Government information and advice about Parent Councils. It aims to:

- help parents understand the role and function of a Parent Council;
- answer some of the questions parents may have about Parent Councils;
- signpost parents to further sources of information and support;
- represent the views of the parent forum (all parents) at their early learning and childcare setting, school and in the wider community; and
- ensure the views of parents are listened to and taken into account.

Reflective questions are included throughout the resource to help foster better working relationships for the benefit of all children and families.

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<sup>1</sup> Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act Guidance, 2006, pi.

## 1.2 Terms and definitions

The term '**parents**' in this document refers to people with parental responsibilities (within the meaning of Section 1(3) of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995) and others who care for or look after children or young people. A person with 'parental responsibilities' refers to someone with the rights and responsibilities that parents have in law for their child. It is however, important to acknowledge that individual family units will comprise a wider range of people who might also contribute to a child's learning at home.

**'Child'** - For the purposes of support for children and families, 'child' means a person under the age of 18 years.

**'Family'**, in relation to a child, includes any person who has parental responsibility for a child and any other person with whom the child has been living<sup>2</sup>.

**'Parent forum'** is the collective term for every parent or carer with a child at a school. The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 gives each school's parent forum the right to set up a Parent Council.

**'Parent Council'** is a group of parents selected by members of the parent forum to represent all the parents of children at a school. Parent Councils were established under the Parental Involvement Act (2006) in recognition of the important role that parents can play, both in their own children's learning, and in the wider life of a setting or school.

**'Parental Involvement'** is about supporting pupils and their learning. It is about parents and teachers working together in partnership to help children become more confident learners<sup>3</sup>.

**'Parental Engagement'** most often refers to parents actively and meaningfully engaging in their children's learning. Such learning can take place in a variety of settings including early learning and childcare settings (ELC), schools, the community, through family learning and at home<sup>4</sup>.

**'Family Learning'** encourages family members to learn together as and within a family, with a focus on intergenerational learning. Family learning activities can also be specifically designed to enable parents to learn how to support their children's learning. 'Family learning is a powerful method of engagement and learning which can foster positive attitudes towards life-long learning, promote socio-economic resilience and challenge educational disadvantage'<sup>5</sup>.

**'Learning at home'** is the learning which happens in the home, outdoors or in the community. It takes place through everyday activities that families already do and can overlap with aspects of organised or active learning activities (Scottish Parental Involvement Officers Network, 2018).

A '**Stakeholder**' is an individual, a group or an organisation who has an interest in a project or a particular area of work.

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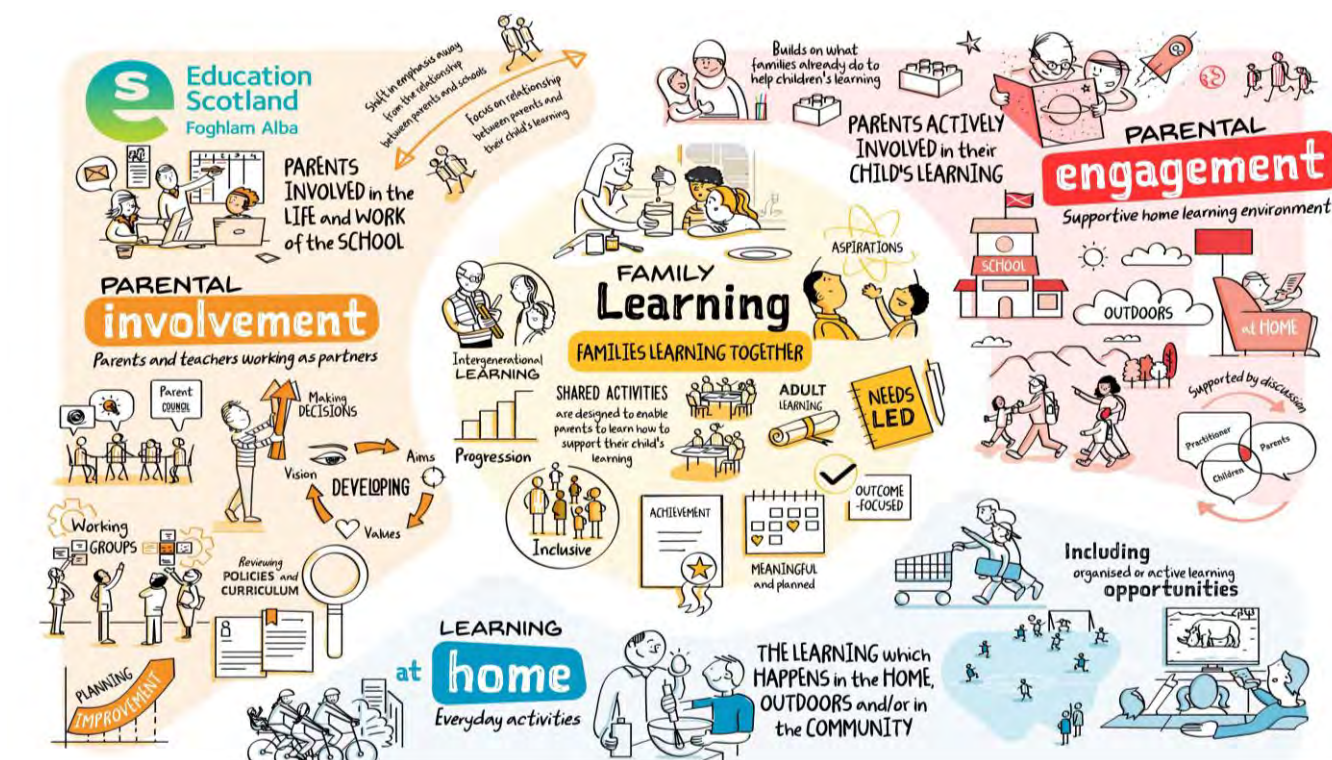
<sup>2</sup> Children (Scotland) Regulations, 1995 - <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1995/36/contents>

<sup>3</sup> Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act, 2006

<sup>4</sup> Harris and Goodall, 2007; Goodall and Montgomery, 2014

<sup>5</sup> Family Learning Network, 2016





This sketchnote aims to provide a visual representation of Parental Involvement, Parental Engagement, Family Learning and Learning at Home. It is taken from the 'Engaging families in learning – a thematic inspection of Family Learning'.

### 1.3 Legislation and Policy

There are a number of key legislation and policy documents in Scotland that parents should be aware of. Some of these are provided below.

#### Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006

In 2006, the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act<sup>6</sup> came into force. Within the Act, Scottish Ministers and local authorities have a duty to promote the involvement and engagement of parents in their child's early learning and childcare (ELC) setting or school and their learning. The Parental Involvement Act (2006) recognises the benefits of involving parents in the wider life of the school and the vital role they play in supporting their children's learning. Providing and strengthening the framework to support parental involvement and engagement is therefore a key focus of the Act.

Parent Councils have an important role to play in supporting parental involvement. Within the Parental Involvement Act (2006), there are three main areas where parents can engage in their children's learning and get involved in the wider life of the school. These are:

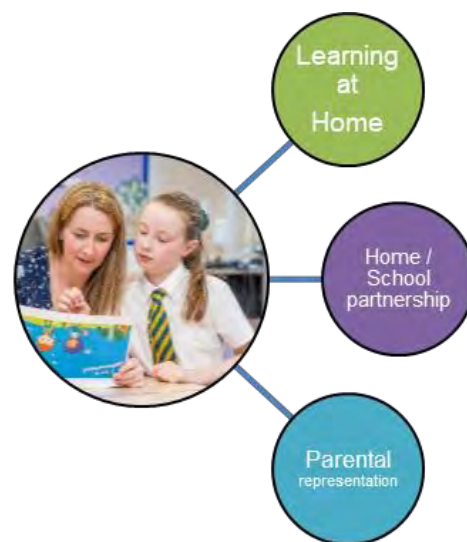
#### Learning at home

Parents are entitled under the Parental Involvement Act (2006) to receive information and support to help develop their child's learning at home and in the community. Learning at home should also be included in the local authority's Parental Involvement and Engagement Strategy which should be developed in partnership with parents.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2006/8/contents>

## Home/school partnership

Early learning and childcare settings and schools must be open to and encourage the involvement of parents in the work they do. They should consider ways of providing information that helps parents engage with them and their child's learning. This should also include community partnerships with local businesses, organisations and relevant stakeholders. Parent Councils can help with this.



## Parental representation

The Parental Involvement Act (2006) provides a framework for ensuring that parents have the opportunity to express their views and have these taken into account on policy matters affecting the education of their children.

The Act also makes provision for parents to be a member of the parent forum at a school and have their views represented to the school, local authority and others through the Parent Council. Some settings or schools may have parent committees or associations who will represent the wider parental view.

Additionally, parents are encouraged to express their views on the setting or school's arrangements for promoting parental involvement and engagement, as well as other matters or issues of interest or concern to them. These could include: supporting improvement across the school; reviewing school policies; changes to the school catchment area; a new school building.

The Scottish Schools (Parental involvement) Act 2006 Guidance states that:

- The Parent Council should have arrangements in place for establishing the views of members of the parent forum on the standards and quality of education provided by the school, or on other matters that appear to the Parent Council to be of interest or concern to members of the forum (p30).
- The Parent Council may also be involved in engaging with the parent forum about the full range of school policies, e.g. in relation to uniform, health and wellbeing, school ethos, etc. It can collate the views of parents and report them back to the Headteacher of the school and to the local authority as appropriate. The Parent Council can also make representations on such matters to other persons, including HMIE (p30)<sup>7</sup>.

Under the Parental Involvement Act, parents have the right to raise their concerns and/or make a complaint.

## Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, as amended

The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004<sup>8</sup>, as amended, provides a framework for local authorities and other agencies to support all children with their learning. It created the term 'additional support needs', gave parents and pupils a number of rights, including the right to access mediation, dispute resolution and refer decisions to the Additional Support Needs Tribunal. The Act also placed duties on local authorities to identify, meet and keep under review the needs of pupils for whom they are responsible. Further information is available on Parentzone Scotland<sup>9</sup> and Enquire's websites. Enquire is the Scottish advice service for additional support for learning<sup>10</sup>. Parent Councils can help schools share information with parents about helpful websites and organisations such as these.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/guidance-scottish-schools-parental-involvement-act-2006/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2004/4/contents>

<sup>9</sup> <https://education.gov.scot/parentzone/additional-support/the-additional-support-for-learning-act/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://enquire.org.uk/links/education-2004-amended/>

## Empowered System – Parents and Carers



The Empowering Parents and Carers Guidance considers the contribution of parents and carers in an empowered system.

Empowering parents means improving and strengthening the ways in which education staff engage with parents and families; and, ensuring they are at the centre of decision-making processes about their children's learning. Parent Councils have an important role to play in improving parental empowerment.

Further information can be found on the National Improvement Hub<sup>11</sup> and National Parent Forum of Scotland's nutshell guide to Scotland's Empowered System<sup>12</sup>.

### Learning Together: Scotland's national action plan on parental involvement, parental engagement, family learning and learning at home

This national action plan<sup>13</sup> follows on from the 'Review of the impact of the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006' carried out by the National Parent Forum of Scotland (2017)<sup>14</sup>. It sets out the Scottish vision for parental involvement, parental engagement, family learning and learning at home from pre-birth to age 18 and beyond. Although the plan sets out the national vision, it also allows for local and community innovation and flexibility. At the heart of this plan is communications and relationships based on trust, mutual respect and collaboration. Parent Councils are key to developing positive and constructive home-school relationships and good communications.

The aim of the plan is to:

- ensure that parents are supported to be fully involved in the life and work of their child's early learning and childcare setting or school;
- provide the right support, conditions and opportunities to help parents feel empowered to engage in their child's and their own learning;
- ensure there is a wide range of creative, meaningful and effective approaches to engaging parents and families appropriate to their needs;
- acknowledge and support parents in their key role as the primary educators of their children and in influencing the life and work of settings and schools;
- help settings, schools, local authorities, partners and stakeholders to engage meaningfully and collaboratively with parents in their children's learning and education related matters;
- expand access to family learning opportunities which meet participants needs;
- improve the quality of communication between practitioners, staff, parents and families;
- improve the skills of practitioners who work with parents and families across sectors including early years, initial teacher education, probation, post-probation, existing staff, leaders, front-line practitioners and support staff.



<sup>11</sup> <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/learning-resources/an-empowered-system/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.npfs.org.uk/downloads/empowering-parents-and-carers/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/learning-together-scotlands-national-action-plan-parental-involvement-parental-engagement/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.npfs.org.uk/downloads/review-of-the-impact-of-the-2009-parental-involvement-act/>



## Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act<sup>15</sup> sets out the requirements placed on local authorities, who are responsible for school provision in their area. It covers the following three provisions:

- consultation procedures for school closures and other proposals affecting schools which local authorities must follow;
- a local authority duty to take into account certain prescribed factors before deciding to consult on a proposal to close a rural school;
- replacement of the system of referring certain local authority decisions to the Scottish Ministers for consent with a power to call in decisions, but only in decisions relating to closures.

Parent Councils are required to be part of the consultation process where there are proposed changes to the above three provisions.

## United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child explicitly recognises the central role played by parents, carers, and families in ensuring that children grow up healthy, happy and safe. It recognises that families need protection and assistance to support the rights and wellbeing of children. Rights within the UNCRC require governments to recognise parental responsibilities and provide resources and support to help them fulfil their responsibilities, including assisting parents and carers to ensure children are provided with an adequate standard of living.

Parental responsibilities are directly referenced in articles 5, 18 and 27 of the UNCRC and references to parenting and the role of families are made throughout a large proportion of the articles.

Further information can be found [here](#).

## Reflective Questions

- How can the Parent Council support the relationships with the parent forum and the wider learning community that your setting or school serves?
- In what ways can the Parent Council work with the setting or school to achieve its objectives and make improvements where needed?

Parent Councils may want to consider their participation in the setting or school's improvement plan and think about how they can work in partnership to achieve these.



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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2010/2/contents>

## 2. What is the role of the parent forum and the Parent Council?

### 2.1 Parent forum

Membership of a parent forum consists of parents who have a child at a local authority school. Parents are automatically members of the parent forum for their child's school and it is important they are informed and know about this.

As a member of the parent forum, each parent can expect to:

- receive information about the setting or school and its activities;
- hear about what partnership with parents means in their setting or school;
- be involved in ways and times that suit them;
- participate in deciding how the Parent Council (or parent representative body) is organised and how it operates;
- identify issues they want the Parent Council to work on with the setting or school;
- be asked their opinion by the Parent Council on issues relating to the setting or school and the education it provides;
- work in partnership with staff at the setting or school;
- enjoy taking part in the wider life of the setting or school in whatever way they can.



One of the ways parents in the parent forum will be able to express their views is through the Parent Council.

### 2.2 Parent Council

Parent Councils are constituted bodies who are independent from the school and the local authority. As an independent body, Parent Councils are designed to be flexible but their main functions are to:

- work in partnership with the setting or school to decide on the key priorities to take forward;
- ensure that your setting or school, and learning is the best it can be;
- come to decisions which everyone is happy with or has had an opportunity to debate and discuss;
- benefit from the ideas, skills, knowledge, and opinions of all members;
- provide a voice for parents in settings or schools and in their local authority on issues that are important to them;
- improve the setting or school's understanding of how to engage parents in their children's learning and in the wider life of the school;
- support the setting or school to develop strong home/school partnerships;
- communicate regularly with the parent forum to hear their views and keep them informed;
- self-evaluate to inform improvement planning. Discuss the setting or school's strengths and areas for development from a parental perspective;
- help make links with the wider community;
- capture the unique and varied skills, interests, knowledge and experience that parents can offer;
- gather and represent the views of parents to the Headteacher, local authority and HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIe);
- promote contact between the setting or school, parents, pupils, providers of early learning and childcare and the local community;

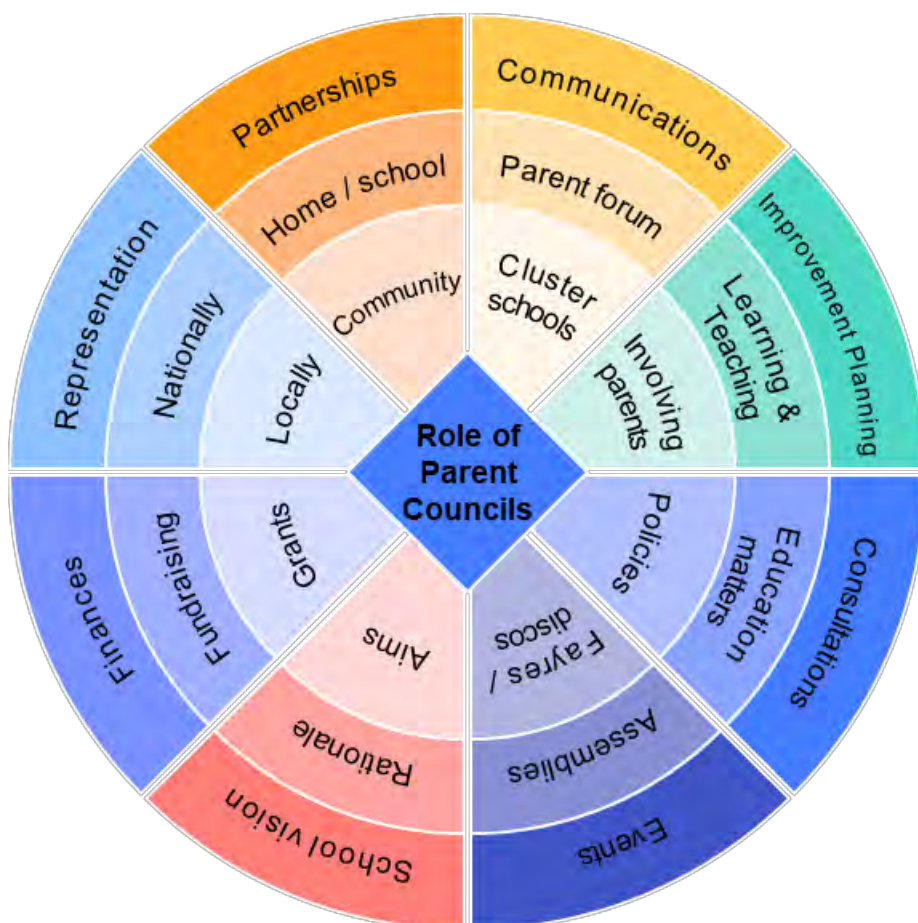
- fundraise in collaboration with the setting or school for the benefit of all pupils and families;
- apply for grants and seek out funding sources;
- organise events;
- play an active role in the recruitment of Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher appointments;
- contribute to the annual update of the School Handbook;
- contribute to school inspections;
- help with or undertake setting or school consultations;
- conduct business efficiently in accordance with the Constitution.

Parent Councils may want to support events and activities where families and children can learn and have fun together.

Learning can begin in settings or schools and continue at home or vice-versa. Information and support can help parents make the most of family activities to help children learn and develop.

Communication with parents is a key part of the Parent Council's role. Parent Council members work as volunteers on behalf of all parents on educational matters that are of importance to all.

When communicating with the parent forum, Parent Councils may want to ask which methods work best for them, e.g. email, written notes, drop-in mornings, text messages, focus group discussion, social media platforms, or online meetings. This will enable Parent Councils to speak to the setting, school and the local authority about the views of parents on issues that affect the setting or school.



Members of the Parent Council do not get involved in individual matters relating to any specific member of staff, pupil, or family. It may be possible to draw a general issue for consideration by the Parent Council from a specific concern without making reference to it e.g. what is the school's homework policy? What is the school's Anti-Bullying Policy? All individual matters should be referred to the Headteacher.

A Parent Council can decide on the type of group they want to represent the views of their learning community and interests. Parent Councils may decide that they want a representative from each year group in the school and include pupils, teachers at the school, or parents from a feeder primary or secondary school. This flexibility allows for a Parent Council which reflects its setting or school and which will encourage parents to get involved.

Parent Councils have an important role to play in helping ensure parents' unique knowledge of their own child, their valuable life experience and individual personal skills help enrich all children's education in their setting or school. One way that Parent Councils can do this is by helping parents to feed in their views and ideas, ensuring their input makes a positive difference to the life and work of the setting or school.

## Pupil Equity Funding

Settings and schools should 'consult and engage effectively with teachers, parents and carers, children and young people and the wider community when implementing approaches to closing the poverty-related attainment gap..... Teachers, parents and carers, children and young people and other key stakeholders should be meaningfully involved throughout the processes of planning, implementing and evaluating approaches'<sup>16</sup>.

## Participatory budgeting

Participatory budgeting is a way for people to directly vote on how money in their setting or school should be spent. Ideas are generated about how a budget should be spent, people then vote for their priorities and the projects with the most votes gets funded. Participatory budgeting is an effective way to engage with parents and pupils<sup>17</sup>.

## Cost of the School Day Toolkit

This Toolkit is designed to get everyone talking about the Cost of the School Day. It helps everyone in the setting or school and the wider learning community to join the discussion and have input into making Cost of the School Day changes. Every setting and school is unique and the Toolkit will help Parent Councils to develop plans that reflect their local community and context.

The Toolkit sets out the Cost of the School Day process in five straightforward steps. It features:

- editable action plans
- updated information
- resources to facilitate whole school conversations about the barriers that costs create and how to tackle them
- practice suggestions

Further information can be found on the Child Poverty Action Group's website<sup>18</sup>.

## 2.3 The Parental Involvement in Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher Appointments (Scotland) Regulations (2007)

The Parental Involvement in Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher Appointments Regulations (2007) makes provision for Parent Councils to play an active role in the recruitment process for appointing Headteachers and Deputy Headteachers of their child's school. Where this is the case, the local authority will involve the Parent Council in all stages of the process and will provide training to support members through this process.

Further information can be found in the Statutory Guidance<sup>19</sup> to the Parental Involvement Act and the Appointments Regulations<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> Pupil Equity Fund National Operational Guidance 2022 - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/pupil-equity-fund-national-operational-guidance-2022/documents/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://pbscotland.scot/pb-in-schools>

<sup>18</sup> <https://cpag.org.uk/cost-school-day-toolkit-updated-2021>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/guidance-scottish-schools-parental-involvement-act-2006/>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2007/132/made>



## What it looks like when things go well

- The Parent Council communicates with the parent forum in ways that work for parents.
- Parents know who to contact on the Parent Council and in the setting or school if they want to share views or have a query.
- Parents and the setting or school work together to support the health and wellbeing of children.
- Parents get lots of encouragement from the setting or school to take part in their children's learning – and there is evidence that they do take part.
- Settings, schools and teachers keep parents informed of what their children will be learning so that they can discuss this with their children at home.
- Parents and staff tackle areas of difficulty and concern together.
- Settings and schools provide specific fun activities for children and parents to do at home.
- Parents support their children's learning by helping with learning at home activities, homework and making links with other areas of school work.
- Parents spend one-to-one time with their children and also enjoy shared family activities and visits.
- Parents and children know that everyone's contribution is valued.
- Children receive additional support from the individual attention they get from their parents.
- The ways of communicating with parents reflect the diversity of parents and their needs.
- There are open channels of communication so that parents feel comfortable talking to staff.
- Parents are made aware of how their children's learning can be supported at home.
- Teachers discuss with parents and children the activities they undertake at home so that these can be incorporated into their learning in school.

## Reflective questions

- Does the Parent Council make parents aware of their membership of the parent forum?
- Do Parent Council members have a general knowledge of parental involvement, parental engagement, family learning and learning at home?
- Are Parent Council members able to promote parental involvement, parental engagement, family learning and learning at home when representing the views of parents at a local or national level?
- Is the Parent Council able to identify what it needs to carry out its functions and access appropriate training, information and/or resources?
- Does the Parent Council ascertain the views of the wider parent forum?



## 3. Setting up a Parent Council

### 3.1 The local authority's role in establishing Parent Councils

Within the Parental Involvement Act (2006), local authorities have a role and responsibility to encourage and support parents and schools to set up a Parent Council. Local authorities should do this in partnership with parents. The decision about what the Parent Council will look like – and indeed whether one is set up – is the decision of each parent forum. One of the most important issues to think about when setting up a Parent Council is that time will be needed to work through the process. The more time that is allowed to slowly work through the process, the better the quality of involvement will be.

#### Involving parents in identifying options

There are a range of ways parents can get involved in identifying the type of Parent Council they would like to see in their setting or school. The best place to start is to identify what the issues are for parents about their setting or school and the type of parental involvement and parental engagement they would like. Starting from this point can then lead parents to thinking about whether they want a Parent Council and if so, what type of group they would like. Some ideas to generate discussion about issues and what is already working in settings or schools include:

- A one-day conference held for the school or for parents across the local authority to share good practice and think about ways they would like to get involved in their child's education. As part of the conference, parents could identify whether they are interested in setting up a Parent Council and what they would like it to do.
- Running an open space event – this can be an excellent way for staff and parents to work together and explore areas of good practice or identify issues. Open space events are best run with a minimum of 20 attendees and a maximum of 100. Where possible, themes for discussion should be identified in advance of the event and attendees should be allocated to groups. The leader opens the event by introducing the theme which is then discussed in groups of between 4 and 10 people. Attendees are not expected to 'represent' the views of their setting, school or Parent Council. Gathering the views and ideas of individuals is the intended aim of the event. An example of a key theme could be 'How do we work together to involve and engage parents in their children's learning?' The issues for discussion could then be: What can schools do? What can parents do? What can others do?
- Holding an informal meeting for parents to look at what is working well and what parents would like to change.

Parents taking part in a conference, open space meeting or informal meeting could decide to set up a working group to develop and consider options to set up the Parent Council. The working group would be made up of a small group of parents from each year group in the school and the Headteacher to support and advise. It could also include representation from the Pupil Council. Once options are developed, parents could be brought back together to talk through the options.

#### Role of a working group

The role of the working group could include:

- identifying issues that are important to parents;
- considering the options for setting up a Parent Council which would support working on these issues;
- developing a draft Constitution (see Section 3.3) based on the various options for the Parent Council;
- communicating regularly with the parent forum to gather the views and approval about the options which the working group have suggested for the Parent Council and the Constitution;

- communicating regularly with the setting or school and involving the Headteacher and other staff to help consider these options;
- reporting back to the local authority with suggested arrangements for the Parent Council and the Constitution. Using this feedback, the local authority could prepare a programme of action to establish a Parent Council before reporting back formally to the parent forum with options to set up a Parent Council. The parent forum would then reach agreement about its preferred option.



## 3.2 Selecting office bearers

Parents may choose to have office bearers to help organise how the Parent Council works and carry out some of the tasks that need to be done in order for it to run smoothly. Some parent groups have joint office bearers who work together and share some of the tasks. Alternatively, it is possible for the Parent Council to decide that these roles can be shared at times to build capacity or to help with the transition of parental representatives.

Typically, office bearers include:

- Chairperson - who should always be a parent of a child at the school
- Vice Chair - who can help the Chair and stand in when they are absent
- Secretary/Clerk - to take minutes and handle all communication
- Treasurer - to keep a good record of all money related matters

An initial first task is to identify which office bearers are needed in your Parent Council and agree these. The Constitution may already state this. Once the office bearers have been selected, the new Chairperson can run the rest of the meeting.

The majority of Parent Council members should be drawn from the parent forum e.g. parents of children at the setting or school, but others can be invited to join as co-opted members. These could include teachers, pupils, and community partners. It is up to the Parent Council to work out the structure that suits them. For denominational schools, the Constitution of the Parent Council must allow for at least one person nominated by the Church or denominational body to be co-opted.

Parents of children at the setting or school can be members of the Parent Council. However, the parent forum can agree that the Parent Council Constitution allows other people to be co-opted and agree the terms e.g. whether or not they have voting rights.

The local Church or denominational body can nominate someone to be co-opted onto the Parent Council of a denominational school.

A Headteacher or their representative has a right and a duty to attend Parent Council meetings, unless the parents and Headteacher decide otherwise.

With advice and support from the Headteacher, the Parent Council can also choose to set up a Combined Parent Council. This might cover more than one school or combine age/stage from early years through to senior phase. Below are some of the common roles and possible tasks.



## The Chairperson

The Parent Council should always be chaired by a member of the school's parent forum for that school. The success of a meeting can depend upon how it is chaired but the Chairperson should ensure things get done but not be the person who does everything.

There are two basic jobs the Chairperson should do:

- a) Guide the Parent Council to achieve its aims;
- b) Chair the Parent Council meetings.

Some of the duties of the Chairperson include:

- liaising with the Secretary/Clerk on the agenda and meeting arrangements;
- communicating with the Headteacher to ensure a good working relationship between the Parent Council and the setting or school;
- allocating a time slot for the Headteacher at the beginning or end of Parent Council meetings;
- ensuring that all statutory responsibilities are undertaken e.g. to share the Constitution, Annual General Meeting Minutes and Annual Accounts with the local authority;
- welcoming members and introducing guests;
- ensuring fair discussion and that everyone gets a chance to have their say;
- leading the Parent Council to consider inclusion and equality, so the voices of as many parents and carers are heard as possible;
- stopping anyone taking over or dominating discussions;
- getting through the agenda on time;
- summing up issues, points and decisions;
- ensuring decisions are carried out;
- working with the Treasurer to ensure that proper financial accounts are prepared for meetings, including the Annual General Meeting.



## The Secretary

The Secretary plays an important role in supporting communication amongst Parent Council members themselves and between the parent forum and the Parent Council. It is important that the Parent Council agrees how members of the parent forum can get in touch with the Secretary and that these arrangements are well publicised so that all parents know how to make contact.

Some of the duties of the Secretary are to:

- make arrangements for meetings and prepare an agenda in consultation with the Chairperson;
- send a notice of the meeting, venue and agenda to all Parent Council members so that they will receive them in good time for the meeting. Agendas should be sent out for all meetings even if they are held at the same time and place each month;
- it is recommended that the days and times of Parent Council meetings are varied to allow for participation of parents who may have different work patterns;
- you may wish to consider holding online meetings and/or in-person meetings, or a combination;
- keep a record of everyone attending the meeting and any apologies for absence;



- let Parent Council members know about all correspondence received and report any action taken since the last meeting;
- take a minute (or note) of meetings, record decisions and actions to be taken and by whom. This can be a task that is shared amongst members of the Parent Council to allow the Secretary to participate in discussions;
- keep a note of the terms of membership e.g. how long members have served;
- ensure the draft Minutes are shared with the wider parent forum as soon as possible after the meeting, or after they have been approved at the next meeting;
- provide minutes for all Parent Council members prior to or at meetings.

## The Clerk

Your Parent Council may have a Clerk appointed who will undertake all or some of the tasks of the Secretary. The Clerk is not a member of the Parent Council and has no voting rights. A Clerk can be paid either by the Parent Council, or through the local authority's arrangements with the Parent Council.

## The Treasurer

Every Parent Council that intends to raise money should make sure a Treasurer is appointed to handle the money coming in and going out of the group. The Treasurer is responsible, along with all members of the Parent Council, for the proper handling of the finances of the Parent Council.



The tasks of the Treasurer include:

- having a clear and accurate book-keeping system that records any money received and how the money is spent;
- maintaining the bank account. It is good financial practice to require two out of three of the office bearers' signatures on cheques to allow any money to be withdrawn or spent. A similar system should also be set up to sign off online payments and/or invoices;
- producing a report for each meeting stating money paid into, or out of, the account since the last meeting;
- advising on the amount of money available for the group's work and warning of excess expenditure.

Prior to the Parent Council Annual General Meeting (AGM), the Treasurer should arrange for the accounts to be independently checked (examined and signed off) and agreed with the Chair each year.

The Treasurer should present the independently checked financial statement at the AGM and answer any questions on the accounts. The person doing the independent checking does not have to be a

qualified accountant. It could be someone known to and trusted by the Parent Council who has some financial knowledge. The Headteacher or the Parent Council Treasurer of a neighbouring school may be possible options.

### 3.3 What is a Constitution?

The Constitution is your Parent Council's set of rules. It contains information such as the number of members, length of membership and details about co-opted members. It is good practice to review and update the Constitution on a regular basis to ensure that it complies with legislation. Further information about Constitutions is available in Appendix 1 and on Connect's website<sup>21</sup>.

### 3.4 Agreeing your Constitution priorities

There is considerable flexibility in how the parent forum chooses to organise their Parent Council but there are some important areas below for consideration.

It is important to ensure that each year the whole parent forum has the opportunity to help shape the Parent Council's priorities. This can be done by carrying out a simple survey or at a parent event in the setting or school. The Parent Council Annual General Meeting is an ideal opportunity to consult with other parents. It is also important to work in partnership with the Headteacher on this task as well as considering the views of pupils, perhaps through consultation with the Pupil Council. This will help ensure that the work of the Parent Council supports that of the setting or school.

Once the Parent Council has the basic arrangements set out, the next step is to agree as a group, what you want to achieve and the different ways you want to work. If a survey of parents' views hasn't already been undertaken, the Parent Council may wish to consider this to discover what their priorities are. The Parent Council may also want to check if the setting or school's improvement plan identifies any issues that need further discussion with parents, or ideas for activities, fundraising and/or joint working. Consideration should be given to what the Parent Council can do to support activities already planned, the work and life of the setting or school and the staff.

Parent Councils should be realistic in what they can achieve and prioritise the issues that are to be taken forward. After the priorities have been agreed, the Parent Council may wish to consider dividing into sub-groups or gain the help and support of other parents and involve them in specific activities.

In discussions with the Headteacher, at Parent Council meetings, ways of working together can be identified to help parents make the most out of learning opportunities in the home and community. For example, the Parent Council could work with the setting or school to develop information that explains new developments in the curriculum, how children are being taught and how parents can be involved. Or, the Parent Council could discuss the Homework or Behaviour Management Policy with staff and think about ways in which it can be made more relevant to parents. Online or in-person workshops could be run for parents to explain what they can do to help.

The Parent Council can support the setting or school in the events it holds for parents e.g. parents' meetings, concerts, seasonal events. Parents can also be encouraged to come along to these events. They should be held at times and in venues which are suitable for all parents and meet their needs.



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<sup>21</sup> <https://connect.scot/>

Some parents may find it difficult to join in with activities in settings or schools for a variety of reasons. Consideration should be given to ways of helping more parents get involved. Parents who do not attend Parent Council meetings may be just as committed to the setting or school and supporting their children's learning.

One very practical way to support the setting or school, and which can involve a larger number of parents is through social and/or fundraising activities. These can help families to feel welcome and part of the school community.

If the setting or school has a separate Parent Teacher Association (PTA), there may be an opportunity to work together to support each other's activities.

## Sub-groups

Sometimes it may be useful to organise a short or longer-term sub-group to carry out a specific task. A sub-group may also provide an opportunity to involve parents who are unable to commit to being full members of the Parent Council. If a sub-group is set up, it is important to ensure that it has a clear remit with someone responsible for its organisation and for reporting back to the full Parent Council regularly. Any sub-group work should be directed back through the Chair of the Parent Council and recorded in the Parent Council minutes. Decisions about spending funds raised by sub-groups, should be made by members of the Parent Council.

Some of the tasks to be allocated to a sub-group(s) could include:

- welcoming new families;
- inclusion and equality;
- organising fundraising;
- planning social events for parents, children and staff;
- supporting learning opportunities for parents with teachers and children in the setting or school;
- communicating with parents through a variety of platforms including newsletters, social media;
- working with staff on new approaches to learning and teaching and how parents can be involved;
- links with the community.

## Reflective questions / activities

- What does your Parent Council want to achieve? This is likely to take up most of the meeting. Parents may want to think about doing this as a fun exercise in small groups. Drawing on information from the setting, school or personal experiences, identify a range of topics. If the meeting is in person, these could be put up around the room. Or if the meeting is online, facilitators of the breakout rooms could feedback and present them via their screen.
- How does the Parent Council want to work? If there is a long list of priorities and a range of issues to be tackled, consideration could be given to setting up a sub-group(s) as a way of getting things done. These groups can also allow different members of the Parent Council to work on the things that interest them most or that they feel they can contribute to most usefully. Other parents can also be invited to join sub-groups to support the work of the Parent Council.
- Do any members of the Parent Council need practical support e.g. childcare, transport or digital devices to attend or join meetings? Parents may want to think about these issues when discussing the budget needs for the Parent Council with the local authority.
- How frequently do you think the Parent Council will need to meet? Consideration should be given to identifying and setting dates for future meetings for the academic year, which are suitable for everyone, as well as whether the meetings will be online and/or in person or a combination of these.



## 3.5 Getting the most from your Parent Council

Everyone on the Parent Council will bring something different and useful to help the Parent Council be successful. There may also be other parents in the parent forum and/or grandparents, relatives, community members and local authority staff who can help with the work.

Identifying the particular skills that the Parent Council needs, and finding out who has these, will be important to help make the most of everyone's contribution. Working with Parent Council members can also be a way of learning from other people and developing or sharing new skills.

### What do parents bring?

Parents:

- are experts on their own child(ren) and bring this information and knowledge about their children's needs;
- have unique and varied skills, interests, knowledge and experience;
- are members of their local community and have links (e.g. with businesses, shops and services) that the setting or school may not have;
- are in touch with other parents (members of the parent forum) and can represent a wider range of views.

### What does the Headteacher bring?

The Headteacher, or sometimes someone standing in for the Headteacher, has a right and a duty to attend Parent Council meetings but can send a deputy and will do so to give encouragement and guidance.



### Co-opted members

The Constitution for your Parent Council may include a certain number of co-optees.

Co-opted members:

- can contribute wider experience and knowledge relevant to the local community;
- can provide a link with parents of children who are about to join the setting or school;
- may have specialist skills or knowledge they can bring to the Parent Council.

For specific topics, the Parent Council can invite people with particular expertise e.g. the school nurse, or an architect for a new setting or school. Co-opted members are usually nominated at an Annual General Meeting (AGM) or an Emergency General Meeting (EGM). Notification of any co-optees should be made known to the wider parent forum where possible in advance of any meeting.

### What can pupils bring?

Helping all pupils is what the work of the Parent Council is all about. By talking to them, the Parent Council can learn a lot about their interests and priorities that can help in the planning of events. The Parent Council may wish to consider having a pupil representative as a co-opted member or offer a regular slot on the agenda for them to update e.g. on the Pupil Council's work or on any concerns or issues.



Pupils:

- have direct access to their parents and can be a good channel of communication;
- have strong views from first-hand experience of what they feel needs to change to make their setting or school better;
- can be encouraged, with the support of staff, to take part in activities with the Parent Council as part of the curriculum and may be able to help with devising and carrying out surveys of parents' views or using communication skills learned in class;
- can be a 'magnet' for encouraging parents to join activities in the setting or school;
- who are on the Pupil Council can help communicate with other pupils in the setting or school about the work of the Parent Council.

## Beyond the Parent Council

One of the main purposes of the Parent Council is to support the involvement and engagement of parents in ways that suit them best. This may be through events, sub-groups, responding to surveys, helping their children at home or getting involved in the setting or school. This may be online or in person. Be on the lookout for parents with particular skills that can support the setting or school and children's learning, from web design and careers advice to woodwork and gardening! Ask them if they would like to offer their knowledge and expertise. Many people can be shy to volunteer but will respond positively to an invitation.

There may be lots of other people e.g. grandparents, older brothers or sisters, other relatives who also have a lot to offer the school community. Grandparents in particular have a wealth of experience, skills and knowledge to offer. Most importantly, many of them also have time to volunteer and get involved.

## 3.6 Setting ground rules and working together

Setting ground rules that can be referred back to from time-to-time can help meetings run more smoothly. In considering ground rules the Parent Council might want to:

- set meeting dates well in advance and allocate a specific amount of time to them. Encourage the Headteacher to share the important dates for families in the setting or school calendar with the Parent Council and all parents at the start of the academic year. Include the dates of the Parent Council meetings;
- agree the agenda in advance and keep to it. Parents and Parent Council members can ask to put an item on the agenda. Include an opportunity for members to raise Any Other Competent Business (AOCB);
- identify topics to be discussed at every meeting e.g. welcome, apologies, approving previous minutes;
- share the agenda with the Headteacher as a courtesy so that the Headteacher can prepare;
- record action points clearly in the minutes and make a note of who has agreed to undertake the action and by when. Check progress on action points agreed at previous meetings;
- support the Parent Council and work as a team - everyone's contribution is important;
- listen to and respect each other's point of view;
- Encourage quieter members to take part and ensure everyone can participate fairly in ways that work for them;
- aim towards constructive discussions and decisions;
- consider what the Parent Council's approach will be when parents attend meetings - how they can raise issues via the Chair and comment. Depending on the issue, this could be discussed under Any Other Competent Business. Alternatively, it could be carried over as an agenda item for the next meeting to enable the Parent Council to be fully informed about it. While Parent Councils cannot get involved in individual issues, they can look at wider school policies and approaches;

- Consider having: a Complaints Policy; a Code of Conduct; and a Social Media Policy as helpful ways of handling issues or disagreements. At times, there may be a need to get wider parental views if there is an issue that is dividing opinion;
- ensure meetings start on time – Parent Council members should let the Chairperson know if they are going to be late or cannot attend.

### 3.7 Setting up a bank account

If the Parent Council has already been set up, there may already be an existing bank account. Should members of the Parent Council change, new signatories will need to be agreed in good time. Changing bank signatories can take time. If the Parent Council has not previously been set up, this is something that the Treasurer could be asked to do once they have been selected. Further information is available on Connect's website<sup>22</sup>.

### 3.8 Improvement planning

Settings and schools must develop their Improvement Plan in consultation with the Parent Council (or combined Parent Council), teachers, pupils, parents, people employed or working in the setting or school on an unpaid basis, and representative local bodies<sup>23</sup>. Parent Councils have a key role to support improvement planning by discussing the setting or school's strengths and areas for development from a parental perspective. To achieve this, the Parent Council should work closely with the Headteacher on the setting or school's Improvement Plan and consider how best to involve other parents in the process.

Improvement planning focuses on the quality of education, learning and teaching, assessment as well as the quality of the partnerships that are in place to improve outcomes for children. It should be part of a regular on-going cycle of self-evaluation and improvement.



As part of the Improvement Plan discussions, consideration should be given to encouraging the setting or school to have a Parental Involvement and Engagement Strategy. This should align with the local authority's overarching Parental Involvement and Engagement Strategy or Framework.

The Parent Council is a key group during the setting or school inspection process and members will be invited to meet with a member of the HMIE Inspection Team. Further information can be found on Parentzone Scotland<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> <https://connect.scot/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2000/6/section/6>

<sup>24</sup> <https://education.gov.scot/parentzone/my-school/inspection-and-review/understanding-inspection-and-review>

## Reflective questions

- Does the Parent Council have arrangements in place to develop or review a strategy or framework for Parental Involvement and Parental Engagement?
- Are pupils, the parent forum, wider community, partner organisations involved in the process of developing or reviewing the Parental Involvement and Parental Engagement strategy?
- Does the strategy cover the three levels of engagement with parents e.g. Learning at Home, Home/school partnership, and Parental representation?
- Does the strategy outline how barriers are being removed to promote parental involvement and engagement e.g. through a Family Learning approach, or a Home/school link Officer?
- Does the strategy outline how the setting or school will work with parents and families who find it difficult to support their children's learning due to family circumstances?
- How does the strategy promote equal opportunities and take account of the needs of particular minority groups in your setting or school?
- Does the strategy make appropriate links with duties under other relevant pieces of legislation e.g. Additional Support needs?
- Does the strategy take account of the training and development of staff and others working with children and their families?
- Does the strategy set out the arrangements for giving advice and information to parents who live apart but share the care and responsibilities for their child(ren)?
- Does the setting or school have arrangements in place to deal with concerns/complaints? Are parents aware of how to raise a concern/complaint with the setting or school?
- Does the strategy link to the 'How good is our School? (Fourth Edition)' self-evaluation framework?<sup>25</sup>
- Are there procedures in place to monitor, evaluate and review the strategy e.g. every 2 years?

## 3.9 Getting help and support

Now that you are on the Parent Council you may feel that you have taken on a big task. Remember that you are not on your own. The Headteacher will be a key contact and it will be important to work together and support each other. You and/or other members of the Parent Council may previously have been members of a Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and this experience will be useful.

The Parent Council may be new or have changed membership but new ideas should be welcomed as members work out together what they want to do and how the Parent Council is going to work. In addition, the setting or school, local authority, other people and organisations may be able to help support the Parent Council.

## 3.10 Community resources

### Resources in the community

Every community contains a range of services and resources that the Parent Council may be able to draw on. For example, consideration could be given to using community venues for some of the Parent Council meetings as they may be more accessible and parents may feel more comfortable there. This may be a useful approach too for secondary school Parent Councils or settings with a catchment area covering a number of communities or neighbourhoods.

There may also be opportunities for firms or businesses to offer practical help or donations to support activities e.g. donations of raffle prizes; sponsoring activities in return for some publicity; or tools and plants from a garden centre to support the creation of an eco-area in the setting or school grounds. Parents are often employed by local businesses and they can share information and encourage their

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<sup>25</sup> <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/self-evaluation/hgios4/>



employers to get involved. In addition, the links that parents have with their workplace can often be useful in developing contacts that can help children's learning by providing work experience, arranging visits or by linking their expertise directly into collaboration with teachers.

### Family and the wider community

Families (grandparents or other relatives) and members of the wider community can be a great source of expertise with a wealth of experience and knowledge that the Parent Council and setting or school can tap into.

Most people are very pleased to be asked and can be very creative in their ideas for how they can help.

Local faith groups are often in touch with parents and may be able to support the Parent Council by involving a wider group of people. The local Community Council or other community/charitable/voluntary groups in the area may be a valuable source of information and advice. The Headteacher in your setting or school will be able to advise on any specific requirements or procedures that need to be followed.



### What it looks like when things go well

- Parents feel that they are welcome in the school.
- There are lots of opportunities for parents to get involved in different activities and there is evidence that they do get involved.
- The setting or school understands the needs of all parents and develops ways of working which are supportive and inclusive.
- People are asked about what is important to them, and what they would like to see happening.
- Pupils are contributing their ideas about what is important to them and how they want parents and others to be involved. These ideas are used to increase the involvement and engagement of parents.
- Parents are motivated to continue their own learning.
- Everyone recognises that parents have other commitments and responsibilities in their lives.
- Parents are able to take part when and how they can. It is easy to step back and then pick things up later if circumstances change.
- Parents have the confidence to take part and the skills that parents have are used appropriately within the school.
- Teachers engage with parents in a variety of ways on a day-to-day basis in order to build a positive relationship.
- Settings and schools recognise the diversity of parents in their learning community and are inclusive of everyone. Information about the ways in which parents can get involved in the life of the setting or school should be made available in different formats and languages through existing communication channels and methods. Interpreters and signers are provided when necessary to ensure that all parents have access to important information.
- The school and Parent Council recognises the reluctance of some parents resulting from their own bad experiences at school and provides positive ways for parents to be involved in their own child's school at a level they are comfortable with.
- Where appropriate, support and training opportunities should be offered by schools and/or the local authority to anyone taking on a new role such as membership of the Parent Council or volunteering to help teachers with school activities.
- The Improvement Plan clearly indicates the different ways in which parents can be involved in the setting or school and their children's learning.



## 4. Roles and responsibilities

### 4.1 The Headteacher's role

The Headteacher has *a right and a duty* to attend Parent Council meetings. The role of the Headteacher is to:

- provide advice, guidance and support for the Parent Council;
- provide regular updates to the Parent Council on what is happening in the setting or school and what plans there are for development and improvement;
- provide information on issues affecting the setting or school;
- provide an annual update to the parent forum;
- be a link with other staff in the setting or school as well as other settings, schools and the local authority;
- support the involvement of pupils in the activities of the Parent Council and make the links to learning and the curriculum;
- provide opportunities for parents to join in activities in the setting or school and plan with the Parent Council about how this can happen;
- work alongside the Parent Council to help support the setting or school.

Parent Councils may find it helpful to have an allocated time slot for the Headteacher at the beginning or end of meetings. It is therefore good practice to discuss the agenda in advance with the Headteacher and ask if he/she has any items that should be included on it.

### 4.2 Communicating with the parent forum

Communicating with the parent forum is a key aspect of the Parent Council's role. It is crucial that the Parent Council seeks and represents parental views. As a Parent Council you will want to tell parents about what you are discussing and what you intend to do.

There are lots of ways in which settings and schools already communicate effectively with their parent forum. However, parents might have ideas on how to improve these further. Consultation (e.g. a questionnaire, survey or some focus groups with different parents) about the preferred methods of communication, which will work best for the parent forum, is good practice. It is for the Parent Council, in consultation with parents, to consider what range of communication methods will work best for their setting or school.

Methods of communication may include:

- In person – using setting or school events, or creating an event(s) to meet the parent forum and gather their views;
- Written communication – newsletters, posters, noticeboards, flyers, letters, questionnaires;
- Technology – email, website, social media platforms, apps, text messaging, online meetings.

Parent Councils should think about how best to contact parents of children who are about to join the setting or school, or how best to communicate with parents who require translation or alternative communication methods. Consideration should also be given to methods of communicating with parents who live apart but share the care and responsibilities for their child(ren).



## Points to consider

- Work with your setting or school to use their established communications methods such as texts messages to parents, social media posts or literature sent home in school bags.
- A newsletter for parents – or if the setting or school already has one, a specific Parent Council update section in the newsletter.
- Eye-catching posters with key information about events displayed in prominent positions in the community – the post office, doctors and dentists waiting rooms and supermarkets.
- Talk to the setting or school about how the Parent Council can communicate with and involve parents for whom English is not their first language or how others can be reached who may have difficulty with the existing communication methods.
- Try using technology to reach parents - if the setting or school has a website, include a Parent Council area featuring news and information; mobile phones; think about setting up a Parent Council website, blog or social media page to keep parents informed and get their comments back.
- Let parents know when and where Parent Council meetings are being held and that these are open for them to attend.
- The Annual Report that the Parent Council makes to parents does not necessarily have to be a formal report but could include photos or video clips of sponsored events (by the Parent Council) and be presented in a more visual way.

## 4.3 Getting more parents on board

Not all parents in the setting or school will feel comfortable or be able to formally join the Parent Council and/or attend meetings. Some parents may be willing to help out on a more ad-hoc basis. Others, for example, may never consider volunteering themselves but if they are personally approached by a Parent Council member whom they know, they may be willing to help out on a specific task or for a short period of time.

You may find it useful to keep a list of parents' contact details or a register of interests and skills that can be drawn upon when necessary. It is important to note that any information held by the Parent Council must be kept safe and used only for the purpose for which it was given. More information on data protection and records management can be found on Connect's website<sup>26</sup>.

## 4.4 Pupil involvement

Don't forget the pupils - they are after all on the front line of learning! The main aim of the Parent Council is to ensure that your setting or school, and learning is the best it can be.

Getting pupils' views, ideas and opinions about their learning experiences can be really enlightening. Pupils can be very helpful in developing priorities and activities. It may be appropriate to have input from pupil representatives at each Parent Council meeting. The Parent Council may be able to meet with the Pupil Council at suitable times throughout the year. Pupils can also help at events and are useful as a channel of communication to parents.

## 4.5 Other Parent Councils

Meeting up with or sharing information with other Parent Councils in your area can be helpful. Combining resources and expertise on local issues or challenges such as the need for better road safety or improving the quality of school meals can produce excellent results. There may be a shared interest in local events or in working with the same community members.

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<sup>26</sup> <https://connect.scot/>

## 4.6 Local authorities

Each local authority has a member of staff whose remit includes responsibility for parental involvement and engagement. Local authorities, settings or schools must provide support to enable Parent Councils to carry out their functions effectively. This might include:

- support with administration which may involve the appointment of a clerk, accommodation or other services e.g. photocopying;
- training support for running the Parent Council;
- training for recruitment of senior staff;
- reasonable financial support to help the Parent Council carry out its functions and to cover travel expenses for members who attend training and meetings. Parents should not incur any personal financial costs.

All local authorities should consult Parent Councils on their strategy to promote parental involvement and engagement. They will also have mechanisms in place to consult Parent Councils on other issues such as school closures, school holidays, changes to catchment areas, etc.

Most local authorities support Parent Councils to come together as a group to share ideas, experiences and issues. Meetings like this can help provide feedback to local authorities on their policies and services. It is worth finding out what happens in your area as this can be a good source of support for the Parent Council as well as an opportunity to exchange knowledge and ideas.

### Who else in your local authority can help?

The services below may vary across local authorities. Enquiries should be made to see what is available in your area.

- Community Learning and Development / Home Link teams - have knowledge and experience of supporting community groups and how they run. They may be able to put Parent Councils in touch with training opportunities that are available in the area that will help with the running of a Parent Council e.g. Holding effective meetings or The role of the Chairperson.
- Family Learning teams - are skilled at working with adults as learners and with families. They can support Parent Councils in reaching out to parents who may not find it easy to be involved in setting or school activities. Staff in these teams can suggest activities for parents and children to have fun and learn together.
- Libraries - can be a useful resource in the community to help Parent Councils publicise their events and also support specific activities e.g. a reading club or Family reading week.
- Sports and leisure facilities - often have family activities that can provide opportunities for children and parents. There is usually a Sports Development Officer or Active Schools Co-ordinator in each local authority who may have ideas for Parent Council activities. They may hold events or activities that the Parent Council can encourage parents and children to participate in as part of the Health Promoting Schools initiative.

## 5. Practical issues

### Setting the agenda

To get the most out of Parent Council meetings, it helps to have some structure and focus to the discussions. This makes sure that everything can be discussed and dealt with. Any member should be able to put forward suggestions for agenda items to the Chairperson or Secretary for discussion at a meeting. However, for confidentiality reasons, it is important to remember that the Parent Council cannot discuss matters relating to individual parents, children or staff members.

Furthermore, Parent Council meetings are generally open meetings and parents from the wider parent forum may attend. The Parent Council may want to decide how others attending meetings can participate in discussions.

### Useful tips

- Set dates for meetings well in advance to avoid clashing with other events, groups or committees.
- Make sure that agendas are not too long. Three or four main items, apart from the standard items is plenty.
- Two hours is long enough for any meeting – make time for a tea break during your meeting.
- Standard items that will be on every agenda e.g. minutes and matters arising; sub-group actions and agreements, Secretary and Treasurer reports, should be dealt with quickly to ensure there is enough time to talk about the main topics.
- Check that actions agreed at the previous meeting have been carried out.
- It is a good idea for the Chairperson to ask for Any Other Competent Business items at the start of the meeting so that they can be scheduled into the meeting.
- Ask the Headteacher for important dates in the education calendar when there will be items to discuss e.g. when the setting or school Improvement Plan is required to be produced.



### 5.1 What happens if things go wrong?

No matter how well a Parent Council is running, there may be occasions when differences of opinion occur. Should this happen between the Parent Council and the Headteacher, discussions should focus on reaching agreement in the interests and well-being of all children and the setting or school, for whom the Headteacher is ultimately responsible. If agreement cannot be reached with the Headteacher, the case can be made to the local authority who may ask one of their staff to help resolve the issue.

### 5.2 Confidentiality

All Parent Council meetings are open to the whole parent forum unless they are discussing a matter that requires confidentiality. These are only likely to occur in exceptional circumstances.



## 5.3 Data Protection Policy

Parent Councils may be required to keep some personal information on its members, volunteers, members of the parent forum, helpers, friends and committee members in order to keep up-to-date with Parent Council business. To ensure that everyone is handling personal details appropriately and that they are fully aware of the requirements, Parent Councils should consider developing a Data Protection Policy. This Policy should be reviewed regularly. See Connect's website<sup>27</sup> for an example of a Data Protection Policy.

## 5.4 Useful contacts

The Parent Council may find it useful to establish a range of local authority or school contacts to whom parents can be referred to for expert assistance and support. This could include the local authority's Parental Involvement and Engagement Officer.

## 5.5 Treating parents fairly

Creating a culture across the setting or school where parents are treated fairly is really important. This should not be confused with treating everyone equally. The Equality Act (2010) places 'duties' on schools to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it;
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

This legislation was put in place to prevent direct or indirect discrimination against persons due to their:

- **Age** - a particular age group (for example, 18 year olds) or range of ages (for example 18 to 30-year olds).
- **Race** - race, colour, nationality (including citizenship) ethnic or national origins.
- **Disability** – a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on that person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.
- **Religion or belief** - religion, including a lack of religion. Belief refers to any religious or philosophical belief and includes a lack of belief.
- **Gender reassignment** - proposing to reassign gender, is undergoing a process to reassign gender, or has completed this process.
- **Marriage and civil partnership** - legally married or in a civil partnership. Marriage can either be between a man and a woman, or between partners of the same sex. Civil partnership is currently between partners of the same sex (NB the law is to be changed to extend civil partnership to a woman and a man).
- **Pregnancy and maternity** – in a non-work situation, protection against maternity discrimination is for 26 weeks after giving birth, and this includes treating a woman unfavourably because she is breastfeeding.
- **Sex** - being a man or a woman.

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<sup>27</sup> <https://connect.scot/news/essential-information-parent-councils-bout-general-data-protection-regulation>

## Shared Parenting

Parent Councils along with schools need to make sure they communicate with parents who share care of a child. Should a situation arise where parents who live apart but share the care and responsibilities for their child(ren) but both wish to remain members of the Parent Council, the Chair should discuss this with the Headteacher in the first instance and then with both parents. The matter should be handled sensitively, respectfully and confidentially at all times.

### 5.6 Planning for office bearer continuity

Planning for sustained involvement is important particularly because Parent Council membership changes as children move on or as and when personal circumstances alter. Arrangements should be put in place to ensure that where possible, the transition of office bearers and Parent Council members is as smooth as possible. See Connect's website for a handover checklist<sup>28</sup>.

### 5.7 Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG)

Only people who do regulated work with children and protected adults need to join the PVG Scheme. This is defined in law. It does not apply to parents helping their children, or to personal arrangements that parents may make with friends and family to look after their children.

Parent Councils should decide whether any role or work undertaken by individuals, as part of a Parent Council, is legally within the scope of regulated work with children. 'Work' can mean in a volunteering role. If the role within the Parent Council is legally identified as being regulated work, then it is for the Parent Council to require a PVG check so that it is linked with the individual and Disclosure Scotland know the Parent Council have an 'interest' in their record. Volunteer Scotland<sup>29</sup> can help with this process.

It is not a requirement that all members of a Parent Council be PVG checked. However, there may be occasions where a PVG check is necessary or desirable. The Headteacher or local authority should be well placed to provide advice and guidance should there be any uncertainty.

Further details can be found on the following websites:

- Volunteer Scotland<sup>29</sup>
- Connect<sup>30</sup>
- Parentzone Scotland<sup>31</sup>

### 5.8 Safeguarding Policy

Parent Councils may wish to consider developing a Safeguarding Policy in the event that they – either as a group or via an individual member - are made aware of concerns regarding a child's safety. The Policy should pertain only to something that members become aware of directly through their role in the Parent Council. An example of a Safeguarding Policy is available in Appendix 2. This should be read in conjunction with Connect's PVG and Child Protection pack<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> <https://www.connect.scot/resources/running-committees-and-meetings-pack>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.volunteerscotland.net/for-organisations/disclosure-services/disclosures-latest/disclosure-checks/>

<sup>30</sup> <https://connect.scot/resources/protection-vulnerable-groups-and-child-protection-pack>

<sup>31</sup> <https://education.gov.scot/parentzone/getting-involved/Protecting%20Vulnerable%20Groups%20Scheme>

<sup>32</sup> <https://connect.scot/>

## 5.9 Public/Personal Liability Insurance

The Parent Council should consider the need for appropriate insurance for its activities and for any liability issues that might arise. There will be some circumstances where activities must be covered by Public Liability Insurance e.g. social events and school fayres, if being organised by the Parent Council. The need to obtain appropriate Public Liability Insurance should be carefully discussed and considered. A Parent Council will want to establish whether they are covered by the local authority's own insurance arrangements for Public Liability. Otherwise, the Parent Council should secure its own Public Liability Insurance.

Parent Councils should take the advice of their Headteacher or local authority who can advise them of insurance arrangements in their area. For example, it may be possible to buy into a group policy, or local authority arrangement for insurance. Useful advice and information on insurance can be found in the Scottish Schools (Parental involvement) Act 2006 Guidance (page 3)<sup>33</sup> and on Connect's website<sup>34</sup>. Connect membership<sup>35</sup> includes membership-linked insurance.

Members of the Parent Council do not need to take out Personal Liability Insurance cover. The Parental Involvement Act (2006) states that members of Parent Councils do not incur personal liability for anything done, or said to have been done, in carrying out the work of the Parent Council, if this was done in good faith.

## 5.10 Code of Conduct – good practice guidance for meetings

The following guidance (used with permission from Connect) is intended to help Parent Council members understand their role. It can be tailored to meet the individual needs of Parent Councils. A Code of Conduct example can be found on Connect's website<sup>36</sup>.

Parent Council members should:

- support the ethos and values of the Parent Council and the setting or school and make it a welcoming place for all parents;
- feel like their work makes a difference to the learning community;
- treat everyone as an equal and always be respectful towards each other;
- ensure that guests leave meetings with a positive view of the Parent Council and what it is trying to achieve;
- respect and adhere to the decisions of the Parent Council;
- be involved and support the life and work of the school;
- ensure good practice especially when managing money and financial matters;
- declare any conflict of interest and avoid situations which could cause improper conduct;
- comply with the demands of external regulatory bodies, if any.

Parent Council members should not:

- name individuals at meetings
- discuss confidential issues outside of meetings;
- discuss individual issues or members of staff;
- post content on social media that is negative or abusive towards the setting, school or school community;
- discuss issues with the press without considering the best interests of the setting or school and the responsibility of the Parent Council towards this.

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<sup>33</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/guidance-scottish-schools-parental-involvement-act-2006/>

<sup>34</sup> <https://connect.scot/>

<sup>35</sup> <https://connect.scot/top-nav/become-a-member>

<sup>36</sup> <https://connect.scot/resources/running-committees-and-meetings-pack>

## Good practice guidance for Parent Council meetings

- Time must be used effectively at meetings.
- Everyone should be given a chance to speak and to be heard, through the Chair.
- Members should contribute constructively at meetings.
- Each member's contributions should be valued and respected.
- Decisions will be made in the best interests of the whole school community.
- If a vote is needed, all Parent Council members should get a vote and decisions should be made on a majority basis.
- In the event of a tie, the Chair of the meeting should have the casting vote.

The Parent Council Chair should ensure that new members receive a copy of the Code of Conduct. All members should be supported with any training and/or help needed to fulfil their role(s).

The Code of Conduct can include information about what to do if a member acts in a way that is considered to undermine the objectives of the Parent Council. This may include their membership being terminated if the majority of parent members agree. The Parent Council member who has committed the alleged offence, however, must be given the opportunity to respond to the Parent Council (Right of Reply).

### 5.11 Social Media Policy

Parent Councils should consider having a Social Media Policy which is separate to the setting or school's own Social Media Policy. This Policy should set out the guidelines for the Parent Council and parents to use social media sensibly, rationally and respectfully. It should also set out the procedures for dealing with unacceptable behaviour. Ideally, this Policy should be reviewed on a yearly basis to ensure that it is up-to-date and is still fit for purpose. See Connect's Social Media Pack<sup>37</sup> for further information.

### 5.12 Annual General Meeting

Parent Councils are required to have an Annual General Meeting each year to feed back to the parent forum on the activities which were carried out on their behalf. It is a requirement to report to all parents once per year, so a written report for the Annual General Meeting is a good idea as this can be shared more widely thereafter. An example of a primary and secondary written report is available in Appendix 3.

### 5.13 Accounts and fundraising

#### Money matters

A number of local authorities provide a small budget for Parent Councils to cover administrative and running costs. During the course of the year the Parent Council may also raise funds and have its own expenditure. Parent Councils must keep a record of all income and expenditure. It is up to the Parent Council, with guidance from the Headteacher and the local authority, to consider how best to keep its accounts. Having a Treasurer's report at each Parent Council meeting showing a summary of income and expenditure is good practice. Template spreadsheets and guidance on keeping records is available in Connect's Money Matters Pack<sup>38</sup>.

The accounts of a Parent Council should be independently checked and a signed copy presented to the Annual General Meeting by the Treasurer. This can be done by a suitably skilled parent or a community volunteer who is not on the Parent Council and is not related to anyone on the Parent Council.

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<sup>37</sup> <https://connect.scot/resources/social-media-pack>

<sup>38</sup> <https://connect.scot/resources/money-matters-pack>



Additionally, all local authorities who provide funding directly to Parent Councils will require accounts to be submitted to them on an annual basis.

Parent Councils can, but do not have to take part in fundraising activities for the school community. Discussions on how to spend any fundraising money should be held between the Parent Council, the Headteacher and others in the learning community including parents and pupils.

It is useful to set out an approach to finance in the Constitution e.g. can your Parent Council apply for and receive grants? Or, how will your Parent Council handle counting and banking cash from fundraising activities?

## Fundraising / Grants / Trusts

Fundraising for the setting or school has traditionally been an activity that many Parent Councils and parent groups have undertaken very successfully, and they have raised money to support their child's setting or school. However, it is really important to be mindful of limited family budgets. Bringing the school community together for social activities is more important than raising money. See Section 2.2 and the Cost of the School Day Toolkit for more information<sup>39</sup>.



If your Parent Council is planning to take part in social and/or fundraising activities, they should discuss matters with the Headteacher and with the wider learning community. Everyone can then work together effectively to decide on how best to spend the money to improve the setting or school and benefit the pupils. Any funds raised should not be used for the running costs or essential equipment for the setting or school. Parent Councils should be aware that most local authorities have contract arrangements in place for the supply of equipment such as computer resources so there may be restrictions on what your parent group can buy for the setting or school.

Once targets have been identified, it may be effective to form a fundraising sub-committee. Some parents will have particular talents in this area and it may be a way of involving a wider group of parents to help with specific activities.

The Parental Involvement Act (2006) allows a Parent Council to raise funds by any means other than by borrowing. It may wish to consider applying for grants but these can at times have specific eligibility criteria. For example, if 'statutory organisations' are not eligible, then Parent Councils would not be eligible as they are a statutory body.

Further Information on organisations that distribute public money from the government and the National Lottery is available online<sup>40</sup>.

## Charitable status

It is for Parent Councils to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of charitable status. They might wish to consider what sort of financial advantage charitable status would bring e.g. Gift Aid, matched funding. Charitable status imposes certain legal requirements for submission of paperwork within strict timelines. These include how the Parent Council accounts are drawn up, how these are reported to

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<sup>39</sup> <https://cpaq.org.uk/scotland/CoSD/toolkit>

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.lotterygoodcauses.org.uk/>

others, the role of Parent Council office bearers (who would now be trustees as well) and the need to publicise that the organisation is a charity. Accounts must be kept and copies sent to the Office of the Scottish Charity Register (OSCR) each year with an annual return.

If Parent Councils are raising significant amounts of money within the school year, they may wish to apply for 'charitable status' by becoming a registered charity with the Office of the Scottish Charity Register (OSCR) if, on the evidence of its Constitution and activities, it passes the 'charity test' and its Constitution does not otherwise disqualify it from being considered a charity.



The Office of the Scottish Charity Register (OSCR) website<sup>41</sup> gives advice on what your Parent Council needs to consider. Information is also available on Connect's website<sup>42</sup>.

### What it looks like when things go well

- Parents, teachers and pupils are involved in identifying priorities for building the school community through social events (perhaps with some fundraising) and in generating ideas to achieve these.
- Different fundraising approaches are used for different purposes.
- Local businesses and shops are involved through donations of prizes or sponsorship of appropriate items or activities.
- Events and activities appeal to a range of interests and personal budgets – there is something for everyone.
- Social and fundraising events are an opportunity for parents and teachers to work together on a common task and develop positive relationships.
- Items are identified that meet the criteria of local trusts and 'community chests' and approaches for funding are made to these.
- There are whole school community events organised by pupils linked to educational activities within the setting or school e.g. enterprise in education.
- Activities follow the 3 'Fs' formula - Fun, Food and Families. Events that provide fun activities for all family members – adults and children – and also provide food are usually the most successful and the ones that people want to come back to again and again.
- Parents are able to contribute whatever skills or talents they have.
- The setting or school 'piggy backs' on any wider community and/or social events.
- There are some smaller scale ongoing events during the year as well as a few 'big' events.
- Everyone's contribution is appreciated.
- Success is celebrated and people are thanked.

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<sup>41</sup> <https://www.oscr.org.uk/>

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.connect.scot>

## Checklist:

- ☐ Have you got enough helpers? Is there someone who will make sure that everyone knows what they need to do for the preparation of an event e.g. setting up and tidying up?
- ☐ Do you need a licence, insurance, or to notify your existing insurer regarding your event?
- ☐ If you are planning something that is weather dependent, do you have a contingency plan?
- ☐ Have you covered any health and safety issues? Has a risk assessment been carried out?
- ☐ If you are hiring premises/equipment, have you time within the hire period to set up and tidy up?
- ☐ Have you organised enough for people to do at the event? Do you want or need to have a raffle, tombola, quiz or something else to involve or engage parents and contribute to the fundraising effort?
- ☐ Do you have a local authority license for the selling of raffle tickets prior to the event?
- ☐ Have you got enough food/drinks/jumble?
- ☐ Have you got the equipment you need e.g. plates/glasses/napkins/PA system/tables for jumble?
- ☐ Have you publicised the event early enough?
- ☐ If numbers are limited, have you made this clear so that people are not disappointed if they cannot get a place?
- ☐ Do you have a plan for collating attendance numbers?
- ☐ Do you have a plan for making sure that people accepting after you've filled your quota, are told in good time that they do not have a place?
- ☐ Have you got enough money to complete the organisation of the event before the money for ticket sales comes in?
- ☐ If you need a certain number of people to come along to break even, do you have a plan for how you are going to encourage more to come if numbers are looking low?
- ☐ How will you dispose of any leftovers such as jumble and/or food?

## 6. Consulting with parents and the wider community

Consultation is the term used to mean asking for opinion and feedback. This can be done informally, using a simple poll or conversation, or more formally with written questionnaires to gather views on a school's policy such as behaviour management or school uniform policies. Consultation can also be around gathering information for example on the best time to hold a Parent Council meeting.

Meaningful consultation is a worthwhile exercise because it presents an opportunity for parents to get actively involved in dialogue with the setting or school about a variety of matters that affect them, their children and the wider learning community. It is a way of finding out what their views and ideas are, and making sure the setting or school is aware of these so that they can be taken into account when decisions are made.

Encouraging and supporting parents to share their views, ideas and ensure they influence what happens at the setting or school, benefits everyone involved. Consultation should be a two-way process. Parent Councils can:

- talk and listen to each other about concerns or education related matters that have been raised ;
- seek the views of others such as the wider parent forum, pupils and the community before making decisions;
- report back to parents on the outcome of any consultation and how their views have been taken into account, in a timely manner.

Parents have a unique knowledge of their own child, valuable life experience and personal skills, as well as energy, creativity and a vested interest in making sure the setting or school is working well. Helping parents to feed in their views and ideas on a variety of educational issues, so that they are involved in educational planning and decision-making, will enrich children's educational experiences and help to ensure the setting or school is responsive to its local community's needs.

Your Parent Council has an important role to play in helping to create an environment where all parents know their views matter and they feel comfortable putting these forward.

Sharing parents' views with the Headteacher and staff, ensuring those views are listened to and taken into account, will be possible if the Parent Council and the setting or school have a positive working partnership. From the outset it is important that the Parent Council and the setting or school share a joint commitment to seek parents' views and ideas, and to ensure that these make a real difference.

Each setting or school and learning community is unique and there are a wide range of educational issues on which parents may wish to feed in their views. Parents should feel able to contribute and are confident to do so. Your Parent Council and setting or school can work in partnership to create an environment that supports this.

There are a wide range of ways to gain the views of parents and find out what is important to them. This guidance aims to help Parent Councils decide when to consult with the parent forum, what issues to consult on, and consider appropriate methods for consulting.

It is important that consultations are meaningful for those involved. The points below will help Parent Councils ensure that the parent forum know why their views and ideas are being sought. All parents should have the opportunity to put their views forward and understand how these will be taken into account.

Carrying out more formal consultations can help to ensure that obtaining parents' views becomes an integral part of the setting or school's decision-making process. Consultation provides a systematic way of collecting and measuring parents' views, which makes it easier to give those views prominence and ensure they are heard and taken into account.



## 6.1 Planning a consultation

When planning a consultation, Parent Council's may wish to consider the following reflective questions:

- As a Parent Council, what do you want to achieve as a result of the consultation with the parent forum?
- Is the issue suitable for a public consultation? Parent Councils should not consult on issues about individual pupils, families or teachers.
- Do you require the views of the full parent forum or just a particular group e.g. fathers or parents of children with additional support needs?
- Will the consultation help to make changes or improvements in the setting or school? If the process cannot influence decision-making, it is not a consultation.
- Consultation with parents could become an integral part of preparing and updating the setting or school's Improvement Plan every year.

## 6.2 Gathering and sharing parents' views

Each setting or school's learning community is unique and there is a wide range of educational issues on which parents may wish to contribute their views. These may include:

- how the setting or school communicates with parents;
- supporting delivery of Curriculum for Excellence by tapping into parents' skills, experiences and expertise;
- the processes involved in preparing children for key transitions, e.g. from early learning and childcare to primary, primary to secondary and secondary school to further education or employment<sup>43</sup>
- discussing the opportunities available to children during key periods of their school career, such as the Senior Phase (S4-S6);
- formulating the setting or school's priorities for improvement;
- revising existing setting or school policies and introducing new ones;
- any significant changes (for example, moving to a new setting or school building);
- developing or updating the School Handbook, website, social media pages;
- discussing the secondary school learning opportunities including available courses and exam performance.

Members of the Parent Council should work in partnership with the setting or school to ensure there is a process in place to obtain the views of parents. These could be highlighted in the setting or school calendar each year. For example, consultation with parents could become an integral part of preparing and updating the Improvement Plan every year.

## 6.3 What should be included in the consultation?

Parents should understand why they are being consulted and how their responses will be used. This information can be communicated in a covering letter, as an introduction to a questionnaire, or perhaps to accompany an invitation to a consultation event such as a focus group or meeting.

Other details to be included in the background information accompanying the consultation could include:

- who is carrying out the consultation and who is being consulted;
- what the Parent Council is consulting on and why it is important;
- what the different options are (if applicable);
- reference to any background information provided;

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<sup>43</sup> <https://education.gov.scot/parentzone/my-child/transitions/what-are-transitions>

- how parental responses will be used;
- details outlining the timetable;
- how the results and outcome of the consultation will be fed back;
- contact details to answer any queries relating to the consultation.

## 6.4 Which consultation method is most appropriate?

The consultation method that the Parent Council decides to use will depend on what it wants to find out and what is most suitable for parents. It may be necessary to use a combination of methods.

You should identify any barriers that may make it difficult for particular groups or individuals to take part in a consultation and consider how these can be addressed and overcome. Consideration should also be given to ways of including parents who live apart.



### Reflective questions

- Are there parents in your setting or school learning community who require consultation questions to be translated into another language e.g. Urdu, Polish, British Sign Language, Arabic, Punjabi?
- Do all parents have access to a computer or smart phone or will some require questionnaires and/or invitations to be printed?
- Should in person or online consultation events be held during the day, the evening, or a combination of both?
- How can the Parent Council work with the Pupil Council to obtain the views of pupils in the setting or school?

Time should be allowed to:

- research the issue;
- promote the consultation;
- send out background information;
- give parents time to respond;
- analyse the results;
- communicate the results to parents.

Consultations should be carried out during term time while taking care to avoid particularly busy times such as the start and end of terms.

### Surveys

Surveys are an effective way of finding out the views of stakeholders on a particular issue or subject in a structured way that enables the results to be analysed.

You can:

- use paper questionnaires sent home with pupils and/or handed out at events or in the playground;
- send an email with the questionnaires in the body of the email or as an attachment;
- use online questionnaires;
- use social media platforms.

If an issue is raised as the result of a survey, Parent Councils can use a focus group(s) or a public meeting/event as a way of exploring the issue in more detail.

Each question in the survey should have clear, concise language and avoid jargon and acronyms. Questions should also relate directly to the purpose of the survey. Questionnaires should ideally take no longer than 10 minutes to complete.

There are four different types of questions and a combination of these can be used to create a questionnaire. Before distributing a questionnaire, it is recommended that the survey is piloted or tested with a small group to gather feedback.

*Open questions* – allow parents to respond in their own words. They are good for finding out the views and ideas of stakeholders on a range of issues and to enable respondents to say what they think about the setting or school more generally. Larger numbers of open response questions may take more time to analyse.

*Closed questions* – require one answer or multiple-choice answers. Respondents select pre-set answers. These types of questions are good for finding out the opinions or preferences of stakeholders. Decisions following the consultation could then be made on a majority vote and to build a profile of respondents. Closed questions work well when there are likely to be a lot of responses returned.

*Ranking and rating format questions* – enable stakeholders to rank and rate a list of choices. Unless you are using an online survey tool that analyses the results automatically, this type of question might require additional work to analyse if the response rate is high.

## Reflective questions

- Will responses relate directly to the overall purpose of your consultation?
- Will respondents understand the questions and be able to answer them?
- Does each question have clear, concise language, without jargon or acronyms?
- Does the questionnaire use a mixture of open, closed, ranking and rating questions?
- Have you piloted or tested the questionnaire with a small 'control' group?

## Focus groups

Focus groups are useful for finding out parents' attitudes, feelings and views on a wide range of issues or policies, e.g. the Homework Policy. They involve small groups of parents (no more than 6-8 people).

In a focus group, a facilitator (the person running the group - usually the Chair) encourages open yet focused discussion about the issue, which can give a deeper insight into the views of parents. The quality of information obtained from a focus group is very different to that obtained through a questionnaire and can be an effective way of exploring an issue in greater detail.

Focus groups should be inclusive and representative. The Parent Council should consider inviting all parents to take part, those who fit the target group, or invite a randomly selected group of parents. If opting for the former and it is anticipated that too many replies to your invitation will be received, consideration could be given to running additional focus groups. Depending on the purpose of the focus group, it may be important to have representation from across different year stages.

Questions should be drafted and tested in advance of the focus group for the facilitator to use. Using open questions in focus groups encourages attendees to provide more detailed information. Providing comfortable surroundings, informal seating arrangements and refreshments will encourage parents to engage in an open discussion.

The role of the facilitator is to manage the discussion and keep it focused. The facilitator should:

- not be involved in the discussion;
- invite attendees to introduce themselves;
- confirm the purpose of the focus group and explain the complete consultation process e.g. any other methods such as questionnaires which are being used;
- start with a 'warm-up' question, something which helps put attendees at ease;
- remain impartial and ensure the discussion stays focused on the purpose of the consultation;
- keep to the time agreed;
- summarise the discussion for participants at the end and explain next steps.

A decision should be taken before the focus group on how the key points will be recorded. Having a note-taker to record the discussion may be an option. Either way, participants should be informed before the conversation begins.

Consideration should be given to how the information from the focus group will be taken into account and any wider consultation that is required thereafter.

### **Reflective questions**

- Have all parents or a randomly selected group who fit the target audience, been invited to take part?
- Have questions been prepared in advance to ensure you get the information needed?
- Have open questions been used to encourage parents to give more detailed information?
- Has a facilitator been appointed to guide and manage the discussion and ensure it remains focused?
- What arrangements are in place to record the key points arising from the discussions? Have participants been informed?
- Will the focus group be held in comfortable surroundings with informal seating arrangements and refreshments to encourage engagement in an open discussion?
- Are arrangements in place to send a summary of the discussion and details of any next steps to all parents?

### **Public meetings / events**

Organising a public meeting/event enables more parents to attend than holding a focus group(s). Note: if a large number of parents attend, some may find it more difficult to speak out. Arrangements could be made for parents to break into small discussion groups with a facilitator and/or note-taker to record their views.

### **Points to consider**

- Book the room well in advance. Check that it is not too big/small and is accessible for everyone. If you would like attendees to break into smaller groups, consider whether tables will be needed.
- Deciding who will Chair the meeting or event in advance is important. The success of a public meeting or event can depend on the Chair's ability to keep to time and ensure discussion remains interesting and focused on the purpose of the consultation. Make sure the Chair is well prepared.
- Decide if you would like to involve other speakers (think about whether there are opportunities for pupils to get involved). Speakers should be briefed in advance.
- Decide who will facilitate group discussions and who will take notes to record the discussions (you could ask Parent Council members) and brief them in advance.
- Plan for any equipment you may need such as a laptop, sound equipment or flipcharts and pens for group discussions. Check whether you need internet access and if this is available in the room or building.
- Prepare questions for the discussion groups in advance. Use open questions to encourage discussion.



- Invite all parents to attend.
- Prepare an agenda and send it out to all parents.
- Check equipment before the event. For example, is the projector working properly? Is the sound equipment working properly? Can visuals be seen from the back of the room?

## Informal methods

Simply asking parents what they think about something can be a really useful and informal method of consultation and used to complement more formal methods. It can be a particularly effective way of finding out the views of parents who find more formal methods of consultation difficult or intimidating.

## 6.5 Analysing the results and feeding back

Before undertaking a consultation, Parent Councils should consider the reflective questions below.

How will you:

- take the views of parents into account?
- analyse the results of the consultation?
- provide feedback to the Headteacher and the wider parent forum on the results?
- work in partnership with the setting or school to ensure the views of the parent forum are taken into account?
- provide feedback to the Headteacher and the wider parent forum on the final outcome?

The results of any consultation, formal or informal, should be looked at to make sure any issues for parents are identified and plans are made for any actions. This should then be shared with the parent forum in a format that is clear and makes it easy to understand how their feedback will influence change.

Parent Councils should work with staff in their setting or school to ensure that the results of the consultation are taken into account and help, where relevant to influence decision-making.

Parent Councils may wish to consider:

- using Parent Council meetings to discuss the results of the consultation and how they will be taken into account in an open and transparent manner;
- creating a sub-group that includes staff and parents to ensure the results of the consultation, and the views of parents in general, are reflected in decision-making;
- holding a public meeting or event to enable a much larger group of parents and families to influence how the results inform decision-making.

All parents should be made aware of the ways in which their views were taken into account and any decisions that were made as a result of that as well as the rationale behind them. This is important particularly when the final outcome of a consultation may not be what all parents had anticipated or hoped for.

After the consultation exercise, Parent Councils should review the process to consider how successful it was and whether, on reflection, changes should be made in the future.

## Reflective questions

- Did the consultation exercise provide the desired information and data?
- Were the right questions asked?
- Were the right people consulted?
- Were the right methods used for the consultation?
- Was the focus group, public meeting or event facilitated and/or chaired well?
- Were parents well supported, able to participate? Did parents receive the relevant background information?
- Did parents have faith in the consultation process?
- Do parents feel their views were listened to and taken into account?
- Are parents likely to participate in future consultations and/or focus group events?
- Do parents feel they received the right amount of feedback?
- How were parental views taken into consideration by the setting or school?
- Was the rationale behind any decisions made as a result of the consultation/focus group event clearly explained and communicated to parents?
- Following on from the consultation/focus group event, did anything change? For example, have parental views been reflected in the Improvement Plan for the setting or school?

## What it looks like when things go well

- Parents get information from the setting or school about a range of services and activities available in the community.
- The school and Parent Council of primary schools have positive relationships with the early learning and childcare settings in their community. Parents with children at those settings are welcomed at school and parent activities.
- Information about the setting or school is available in other community venues in particular; libraries, post offices, community centres, doctors' surgeries and shops.
- The setting or school has established relationships with Faith Groups in the area, churches, mosques and temples and is sensitive to religious customs and practices in school.
- Bi-lingual community members support parents for whom English is not their first language in communicating with the setting or school.
- The setting or school accesses additional help for families that need it from a range of other services to support parents and run groups in order to help them support their children's learning. These could include: speech and language therapy; health; educational psychologists; family support teams; Home Link Teams; social work; and Community Learning and Development Teams.
- The setting or school uses other community venues for some of its activities, for example swimming pools, sports and leisure centres, theatres and museums.
- Local businesses contribute to children's learning by offering visits or work placements and coming to the setting or school to talk about their work.
- Local shops and businesses support fundraising events or sponsor particular setting or school activities.
- The setting or school participates in major community events – for example summer fete, carnival or local celebrations.

## 7. Encouraging involvement

Helping parents to get involved in their children's learning is one of the most important ways of making a difference for children and young people. Encouraging more parents to become involved in the wider life of the setting or school is one of the main opportunities for every Parent Council. It is important to remember that involvement and engagement can take many different forms. Parents need opportunities to get involved and engaged in ways that suit them best. Parent Councils will only know what these are by asking them and by trying new approaches. Additionally, parental involvement and parental engagement can be very different in primary and secondary schools. For example, the physical interaction between parents and staff in primary schools change once a child moves to secondary school. There is no longer the familiar meeting at the school gate or the casual conversation where a parent can ask after their child's progress. Additionally, the focus of a Parent Council at primary and secondary can look very different.

Every parent wants the best for their child, but they may have good reason for not being able to take part in some activities run by the setting or school or the Parent Council. The reasons will be different for every parent and family so the Parent Council will need to ask them if there is anything they can do to support them to get involved.

There are numerous ways of encouraging parents to get involved in the life of the setting or school. All types of involvement make a difference. Involving parents in the wider setting or school learning community may also give them the confidence, and make it easier, to feed in their views on issues that matter to them.



While many parents may feel that membership of a formal body such as the Parent Council is not for them, they may feel more comfortable and/or willing to get involved in a one-off or short-term activity which utilises their existing skills. Creating a culture across the setting or school for parents to feel welcome is important.

One of the ways to help understand the wide variety of skills that parents have is to undertake a skills audit and to keep this stored securely in a database or spreadsheet which is managed by the setting or school. Staff may use the information to invite parents to enhance/enrich the curriculum through classroom events or special activities. Parent Council members could use it to identify parents to help with other activities to support children's learning which require diverse skills, interests and knowledge e.g. Developing the Young Workforce. An example of a Parent Volunteering Skills Audit is provided in Appendix 4.

Parents should know that the setting or school and their Parent Council are committed to ensuring they feel welcome. To help build a relationship with parents based on trust, asking for their views should be incorporated into everything that the Parent Council does. Below are examples of different opportunities for Parent Councils to engage with parents.

- ***Class and/or Area Representatives*** - Parent Council representatives are more likely to know and meet parents of children in the same class as their own child or living in the same area. This exchange of information can provide important opportunities for feeding parents' views into the Parent Council.

- *Email* - A useful, no-cost way of communicating regularly with parents. Use this as an opportunity to encourage parents to feed in their views by including an invitation in your standard email signature. For the purposes of continuity, Parent Councils may wish to consider setting up a generic email address. Whenever the Chair of the Parent Council changes, the password should then be reset. This will allow the new Chair to have access to previous email correspondence.
- *In person contact* - Talking to people in person can help them feel valued and break down barriers. Identify key events throughout the year that are well attended by parents and provide opportunities for members of the Parent Council to speak directly with parents. These may include parent evenings, school concerts and Christmas and summer fairs. Consider having a Parent Council stand and/or presence at such events to recruit new members, and to raise the profile of the Parent Council and generate interest. Informal opportunities such as tea/coffee gatherings can be very helpful.
- *Newsletters* - Useful for providing regular and concise information about a range of issues. They can be used to make parents aware of issues, meeting dates and also to ask parents what they think. Newsletters could be electronic, on the setting or school or parent council website and/or hard copy via the school bag. Ask for parental preferences.
- *Parent Council meetings* - Provide important opportunities for parents to discuss issues and put forward their views and ideas. Ensure all parents are invited and that they feel welcome to attend. If turnout is poor, try and reflect on why this may be. Set the meeting room up in a way that will encourage discussion. Some parents may find sitting around a long table intimidating so arrange seats into an oval or circular shape. Or use the staff room where chairs are likely to be more comfortable. Consider holding meetings on different days or times so that more parents have an opportunity to attend. During meetings the Chair should encourage all those attending to contribute to the discussion. Informal drop-in sessions with a rota of parent council members, perhaps just before the end of the school day, or just after the start of the day, might also be an option that works for some parents or Parent Councils.
- *Promotional literature* - The Parent Council's basic contact details should always be available on all Parent Council literature and communications, with signposting to other resources such as webpages. Some common phrases and subheadings on all communications could be included which would encourage parents to feed in their views.
- *School Handbook* - should include information about the Parent Council.
- *School noticeboards* - are an opportunity to showcase the work of the Parent Council. Put up photos of Parent Council members to give the Parent Council a 'human face' and invite parents to feed in their views.
- *Social media platforms* - are a way of communicating with parents and can be useful for letting parents know about Parent Council activities, and for enabling parents to get in touch with the Parent Council. It is important to promote responsible use of social media and to be aware that not all parents use social media.
- *Sub-groups or short-life working groups* - can be set up to focus on a particular issue. They provide opportunities to involve parents and can help channel parents' enthusiasm, commitment and expertise into areas they are interested in.
- *Suggestion Boxes* – can be placed in the reception area(s) of the setting or school. Make sure to publicise their existence and encourage parents to leave contact details so they can be involved in exploring any suggestions further.



- **Websites** - Not all Parent Councils have the resources to develop their own website but they can ask the setting or school for their own page on the setting or school's website. Some websites use online forms to allow parents to send views directly to a Parent Council email address. Some also have links to social media sites and/or have their own social media facilities.
- **Welcome packs** - develop a standard letter of welcome, or a welcome 'pack' to introduce the Parent Council and explain what it does to parents of children just starting at the school - for both Primary 1 and Secondary 1 parents, and those new to the area.

*A note on contact lists* - many of the communication methods above rely on having an up-to-date contact list. Some Parent Councils choose to send out information via the setting or school but if your Parent Council decides to maintain its own list, keep information safe and ensure it is only used for the purpose for which it was given and not shared with others. More information on Data Protection can be found on the Information Commissioner's Office website<sup>44</sup>. It is important to be clear with parents about the purpose of your database and to develop protocols for its appropriate usage. See Connect's Data Protection Pack<sup>45</sup>.

## 7.1 Knowing your community

'Community is an attitude and feeling of connectedness. When educators, parents, other citizens, and organisations work together to help students succeed, they strengthen the sense of community in and beyond the school'<sup>46</sup>. Scotland has experienced an increased effort and drive towards achieving greater community engagement through new and innovative methods of participation. These have included social media campaigns, online surveys, focus groups, public meetings and discussions, participatory budgeting and community action research<sup>47</sup>. Settings and schools do not exist in isolation but rather they are a key part of a network of statutory, private sector and voluntary organisations which support and serve the local community<sup>48</sup>.

Given that learning does not start nor stop at the school gates, some of the factors that can influence a child's outcomes can be in the family, community or in society<sup>49</sup>. Engaging with the wider community can bring positive influences across a range of areas. Settings and schools which 'actively engage the community in the life of the school and the school in the life of the community have positive impacts on educational outcomes. Community engagement contextualises learning, improves adult basic skills and provides positive role models'<sup>50</sup>. Settings and schools have a number of opportunities to tap into a considerable source of support to help strengthen their work as opposed to trying to shoulder it alone.

People can work together more easily when the factors below are all present:

- **Issues:** People are working together on matters which they think are important.
- **Ways of working:** Respect and value each person's contribution. Being realistic in terms of the time and effort it takes. The process welcomes and encourages people who have less experience or confidence, as well as including the children and young people.
- **Getting results:** Working together gets results. People can see their effort has been worthwhile and that they have been listened to.
- **Involving the community:** Working with people outwith the school to contribute knowledge, skills and experiences.

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<sup>44</sup> <https://ico.org.uk/>

<sup>45</sup> <https://connect.scot/news/essential-information-parent-councils-bout-general-data-protection-regulation>

<sup>46</sup> Epstein, 2016, p611

<sup>47</sup> Lightbody, 2017

<sup>48</sup> Welsh Government, 2015

<sup>49</sup> Cummings et al, 2011

<sup>50</sup> Welsh Government, 2015, p4

## Reflective questions

- Do you have sufficient knowledge about the school population and local community to help you support parents?
- Do you have information about the ways parents are already involved with the setting or school?
- Are there partners in your community who could help deliver the setting or school Improvement Plan?
- Which potential partnerships do you wish to develop and build upon?
- How can you best utilise the services of your community partners to help take forward the Improvement Plan?
- Is there a community representative on the Parent Council?
- Are local shops and businesses supporting fundraising initiatives or are they able to volunteer their time to help the setting or school?
- Are community representatives involved in developing, reviewing and evaluating the Improvement Plan?
- Do you participate in community events to help establish relationships with community groups including faith groups?



## 7.2 Building relationships

There are lots of ways to build relationships with parents.

- Parent Councils may be made up of year representatives but if not, having a link parent for each year group is one way of building relationships with more parents.
- Use every opportunity to chat to parents – at the setting or school gate, at a parents' evening, over tea and coffee at a setting or school event, or in the local neighbourhood.
- Social events can be a good way for parents and staff to get together and meet each other and share views and opinions as well as having a good time and build relationships.
- Remember the “3 F's” – Fun, Food and Families. Events that cater for all family members, provide refreshments and are enjoyable are most successful.
- Choosing the right kind of event can be important – a fashion evening can be successful in secondary schools and Quiz Nights with parents and children are also popular.
- Snowballing – where one parent agrees to bring along or introduce another – can be effective in getting people involved and building relationships.
- Make links with parents who already help in the setting or school in other ways, e.g. running clubs, helping with the library. Giving consideration to holding an annual event to celebrate the parent and community volunteers in your school is a good reason.
- Utilising a Family Learning approach to engaging families in a fun, needs led universal programme can support increased involvement and build positive collaborative relationships with parents. Family Learning can be a conduit to increasing parental engagement in their child's learning.

## 7.3 Working together as Parent Council members

Making your meetings interesting and enjoyable will help make your Parent Council a success. Parent Council meetings will be more effective when there is agreement over what is expected of members and everyone works together.

Working together as a team is essential and can be summed up as:

**T** – Together  
**E** – Everyone  
**A** – Achieves  
**M** – More

## 7.4 Where else can I get information?

There are a number of key national parenting organisations across Scotland who work with Parent Councils, policymakers, practitioners, settings, schools, parents, pupils and communities on engaging parents and families. Two key national organisations are listed below and a more extensive list is provided in Appendix 5. Many local authority websites and social media pages also have useful information for Parent Councils.

### Connect

Connect is a membership organisation and charity for parents with children at settings and schools in Scotland. Connect offers information and advice to parent groups and parents/carers to support parental engagement in children's learning and school lives, for the benefit of children and young people. Connect is led by a volunteer [Board of Director/Trustees](#) and has a dedicated [staff team](#). Further information can be found on Connect's website<sup>51</sup>.

### National Parent Forum of Scotland (NPFS)

The National Parent Forum of Scotland<sup>52</sup> helps to ensure the voice of parents in Scotland are heard. The Forum is made up of parent volunteer representatives from each local authority area in Scotland. It represents parents across Scotland and works in partnership with Scottish Government, local government and other organisations involved in education and child wellbeing issues to ensure that parents have a voice in education. Parents voices can be heard through:

- focus groups and online surveys
- attending national and local events
- access to information about educational policy and legislation
- parent friendly information through the 'in a nutshell' series of information leaflets and links

Details about who your local National Parent Forum of Scotland representative is can be found on NPFS's website<sup>53</sup>.

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<sup>51</sup> <https://connect.scot/>

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.npfs.org.uk/>

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.npfs.org.uk/npfs-area-representatives/>

# Appendix 1 – Developing a Constitution

The Constitution is your Parent Council's set of rules. It contains information such as the number of members, length of membership and details about co-opted members. It is good practice to review and update the Constitution on a regular basis to ensure that it complies with legislation. Sample Constitutions are below and further information is available in Section 3.3.

## Purpose

To develop a Constitution for the Parent Council.

This section sets out questions and suggested wording for a Parent Council Constitution. By working through the questions, the answers will give you suggestions for the type of Parent Council which will suit your school. An example of a Constitution and a template are provided below. The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 sets out arrangements for the membership and functions of a Parent Council. Whilst there is no need to repeat them in the Constitution, they will remain legal requirements. The same point applies to any other piece of relevant legislation. This section should be studied closely alongside the guidance on the Act.

## Topics to consider

How your Parent Council works is determined by what is set down in its Constitution. The main function of a Constitution is to describe the Parent Council, what its objectives are and how it will carry these out.

The questions in the various topics below are based on setting up a single Parent Council but these can be adapted accordingly for Combined Parent Councils as the issues will be similar.

### Topic 1: Name – What do we call ourselves?

The parent forum decides on a name for the Parent Council. It is not necessary to call it a Parent Council, it could be called 'Friends of the School'. The name chosen helps tell people what the Parent Council stands for and what it is trying to achieve.

### Topic 2: Aims/objectives - What is the role of the Parent Council and how should it carry out this work?

The role of the Parent Council falls broadly into the following areas:

- supporting the school in its work with pupils
- identifying ways to involve and meaningfully engage parents in their child's learning
- representing the views of parents
- promoting contact between the school, parents, pupils, settings, local authority, partner organisations, practitioners and the community
- reporting to the parent forum

In writing the aims/objectives for the Parent Council, these should be kept broad, rather than focused on particular issues and ideas. This is to ensure that they do not limit the Parent Council's ability to act in the future if a different issue arises.

The formal functions of the Parent Council are described in the Parental Involvement Act (2006). These do not have to be included in the Constitution but parents might decide to reflect them in the Constitution, provided they are consistent with the Act itself.



When drawing up the aims and objectives, consult with the parent forum about its priorities. Consider the activities your Parent Council might wish to be involved in. For example, does your Parent Council want a bank account?

Your local authority will provide guidance in establishing your Parent Council and Constitution.

### **Topic 3: Members**

The size of the Parent Council can be as small or large as parents think it needs to be in order to fulfil the role of Parent Council. The size might also vary according to the number of pupils, diversity of parents and the context of the school. It is for the parent forum to decide on the number of members that are to be on the Parent Council but having a minimum and maximum, rather than a fixed number is recommended.

If you have a small Parent Council, there may not be enough people to do all the work. Should you have a large Parent Council, it may be difficult to run the meetings. Consideration should be given to having sub-groups (accountable to the Parent Council) to help share the workload. However, it is worth remembering that it is unlikely that Parent Council members will be able to attend every meeting, so whatever size the overall Council is, most meetings will have fewer people than this attending. If you only have a small number of parents involved at any time, use this as a platform to build on.

### **Topic 4: Appointment of Parent Council members**

#### **Parents**

Members of the Parent Council should be drawn from the parent forum, carers and guardians of pupils at the school.

#### **The Headteacher**

The Headteacher of the school has a right and a duty to attend meetings of the Parent Council, or to be represented. The Headteacher can play an important role in advising the Parent Council on all issues relating to the work of the school, what it does to involve parents, as well as general education matters of interest to parents.

#### **Church representatives**

If your school is a denominational school, then the Constitution of the Parent Council must allow for at least one person nominated by the church or denominational body to be co-opted.

#### **Some questions to think about in selecting Parent Council members:**

- how do parents join the Parent Council e.g. they could volunteer or be nominated by another parent?
- how can barriers be removed to allow all parents the opportunity to be involved in the Parent Council if they wish to?
- do you want to have one or more representative from each year group at the school, including parents from the early learning and childcare setting attached to your school?
- do you want to appoint substitutes or job share(s) to ensure each year group is always represented at Parent Council meetings even if one member is unable to attend?

Once you have made decisions about these questions, another decision needs to be made about how the members should be elected.

## **Appointing Parent Council members**

- What would make it easy for parents to get involved if they wish to?
- What happens if you get more volunteers than there are places available? You could consider having a list of parent volunteers/helpers or sub groups/committees.

### **Some questions to consider**

- How does your Parent Council make a decision about which parents join the Parent Council?
- Do you want to run an election?
- Do you want to put all the names in a hat and have a draw for the successful candidates?
- Can you still involve the people who volunteered, but were not chosen for the Parent Council, on sub-groups?
- How long should membership of the Parent Council last e.g. 1, 2 or 3 years?
- Can parents become members of the Parent Council during the school year? If so, what process is in place to allow this to happen? Usually they are co-opted on to the Parent Council until the next Emergency General Meeting (EGM) or Annual General Meeting (AGM).

## **Topic 5: Representation**

In addition to parent members, the parent forum can decide to co-opt other members e.g. from the wider community onto the Parent Council.

### **School staff – teaching and support staff**

If the parent forum wishes, and the school staff are willing, it can invite school staff (both teaching and support staff) to be co-opted onto the Parent Council. This helps take forward a whole school partnership approach. However, you will want to ensure that parents remain in overall majority on the Parent Council. A parent forum could decide, for example, that they want their Parent Council to be made up of two thirds parent members and one third co-opted teacher/staff members to strengthen partnerships within the school.

If school staff agree to participate in the Parent Council, they may decide they simply want to nominate representatives. Alternatively, there could be an agreed rotation among staff.

### **Pupils**

Parent forums, in taking account of pupils' views, may wish to do so in the following ways:

- there could be formal and/or informal liaison between the Parent and Pupil Councils
- there could be pupil members co-opted onto the Parent Council
- the pupil council and the Parent Council might have the chance to send representatives to each other's meetings as and when it is appropriate

## **Topic 6: Co-opted members**

The parent forum can decide to co-opt others in addition to teachers, pupils and support staff onto the Parent Council. There may be people who can bring a particular area of expertise and skills or someone might be able to help develop strong links with the local community. The parent forum can decide if they wish to co-opt other members of the community onto the Parent Council.

If the parent forum decides to invite co-opted members to join the Parent Council, the arrangements for their involvement should be set out in the Parent Council Constitution. The parent forum will also need to think about how many co-opted places they want to provide and for how long co-optees will serve. Once again it will be important to consider the impact co-optees will have on the overall size of the Parent Council and on the balance of membership.

A person does not always require to be co-opted to benefit from their experience. The parent forum or Parent Council can decide to invite people with particular expertise to attend meetings as and when it is necessary. Consideration could be given to inviting local councillors, community councillors, MSPs etc as guests and to support the work of the Parent Council.

## **Topic 7: Office bearers**

There is no requirement for Parent Councils to have office bearers although there are specific tasks that have to be carried out. For example, meetings have to be chaired, agendas set, minutes taken, regular communications with all parents maintained and the finances managed. It might be helpful therefore to have some clear roles identified within the Parent Council. The Parent Council can decide to appoint a Clerk to provide administrative support and look after the Parent Council's financial accounts. Having office bearers within a group is recommended as good practice. Office bearer roles can be shared if provision for this is made in your Constitution and/or noted as part of your Annual General Meeting when Office Bearers are appointed.

The parent forum can decide to have Chair-to-Chair meetings but this person must be a parent of a child at the school. There is flexibility around how the role of the chair operates. For example, the parent forum could decide that the role of the Chair will be shared and each parent member takes a turn at chairing Parent Council meetings. The Chair must always be a parent at the school.

### **Questions for parents to think about**

- Do we need office bearers? If so, which office bearers do we need?
- Do we want to have one chair of the Parent Council chairing meetings or do we want to rotate this around the other Parent Council members?
- Do we want the office bearers to be agreed by the Parent Council, or by the parent forum?

Office bearers can be agreed at the Annual General Meeting (AGM). Or if office bearers are to be chosen by the Parent Council members after the AGM, you may wish to ask the Headteacher, or an independent person, to chair that part of the meeting to ensure the process is transparent.

In the event that the child of a parent who chairs the meetings leaves the school, consideration should be given to possible interim procedures. For example, a vice-chair could act as chair for the time being, provided they are still a member of the parent forum. Alternatively, the role of Chair could be shared among parent members of the Parent Council until the Annual General Meeting.

## **Topic 8: Feedback to the parent forum**

The Parent Council acts as the collective voice of all parents within the wider parent forum. It is important that the Parent Council has flexible arrangements in place for hearing the views of parents, representing these to the school, or the local authority, or other body and providing feedback to the parent forum.

The Parent Council has to report back at least once a year to the parent forum but it is also important to have good quality ongoing communications. These arrangements do not need to be set out in the Constitution. The Constitution should outline how a special (or extraordinary) general meeting can be called as well as how the AGM is called (see below).

### **Annual General Meeting (AGM)**

It is good practice for the Parent Council to hold an Annual General Meeting. At an Annual General Meeting the Parent Council should formally report back to the parent forum and new members may be selected (the Parent Council's Constitution may allow members to be co-opted between Annual General Meetings). These would be among the matters for the parent forum to decide when agreeing the Parent Council's Constitution. If the parent forum decides to have an Annual General Meeting, a new Parent

Council will need to hold this within 12 months of commencing, and then every 12 months after that. It is important that people know in good time about the meeting and feel that they are welcome and able to attend.

### **Topic 9: How should the Parent Council carry out its work?**

Clear arrangements about how the Parent Council organises and runs meetings can help them operate more effectively and efficiently. Some key areas to cover are suggested in Connect's Constitution template<sup>54</sup>.

#### **Questions for parents to think about**

- How often are the Parent Council and any working groups going to meet?
- How will decisions be made?
- What happens if an important matter needs to be discussed between scheduled meetings?
- How can the Parent Council be clear about what is expected of its members? Should the Parent Council adopt a Code of Conduct?

### **Topic 10: Notes of meetings**

Parent Councils should keep the parent forum informed by making copies of the Parent Council's agendas and minutes of meetings available.

### **Topic 11: Confidentiality**

Parent Councils are required to be open and transparent. In general, all meetings of the Parent Council are open to the public. However, the Parent Council, (including the Headteacher) also has the right to meet in private during discussion of any matter which the Parent Council considers should be dealt with on a confidential basis due to the sensitive nature of the discussion.

Individual cases relating to pupils, teachers or parents at the school are not matters for Parent Council involvement. For example, if there is a case of bullying at the school, the Parent Council may discuss the general bullying policy but must leave any individual case of bullying to be addressed by the school and others as appropriate.

### **Topic 12: How do we look after the finances of the Parent Council?**

Responsibility for the Parent Council's finances lies with all Parent Council members. The Parent Council is accountable to the parent forum.

Whilst some Parent Councils may ask their clerk to handle their finances, most will appoint a Treasurer, a designated parent member of the Parent Council who is confident with financial record-keeping and managing a bank account. This is even more important if the Parent Council/parent group fundraises. It also ensures direct accountability to the Parent Council. This role involves reporting regularly to the Parent Council (an agenda item on finances should be included at every meeting). The local authority can provide guidance on financial regulations.

The Treasurer also provides an annual financial report which is made available to the parent forum at the Annual General Meeting. This report includes details of income and expenditure and should be independently checked and examined by someone with finance skills and experience. The independent examiner does not need to be an accountant. It could be someone known to and trusted by the Parent

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<sup>54</sup> <https://connect.scot/>



Council and who has some financial knowledge. The Headteacher or Parent Council Treasurer of a neighbouring school may be a possible option. If the Parent Council is a registered charity, there are additional specific legal requirements for financial record-keeping and reporting.

It is advisable to establish good financial practices, procedures and policies, such as safe-cash handling (two people count cash, record it in writing and counter-sign; cash is not kept at home etc). The accounts should be reviewed and presented at the Annual General Meeting.

Further information for Treasurers and Parent Councils can be found on Connect's website<sup>55</sup>

### **Topic 13: Changing the Constitution**

The Parent Council Constitution will set out how changes should be made to the Constitution. Usually, this requires a certain notice period to all parent forum members with information about the proposed changes. Changes can usually be made at the Annual General Meeting or at an Extraordinary General Meeting. Arrangements for calling an Extraordinary General Meeting and for voting on motions e.g. to change the Constitution are usually set out in the Constitution. A majority view (show of hands or more formal vote in writing) to support the change is usually required.

### **Topic 14: Dissolution of the Parent Council**

If your Parent Council is dissolved, the Parental Involvement Act (2006) requires that any remaining funds and other property are passed to the local authority and, so long as the school continues, be used for the benefit of the school. Where the reason for your school's Parent Council being dissolved is that a Combined Parent Council has been established, the Parent Council's property passes to the new Combined Parent Council.

### **What it looks like when things are going well**

- Dates for all meetings are shared at the start of the academic year.
- Notification for Annual General Meetings are shared in accordance with your Constitution e.g. at least 2 weeks in advance along with the agenda.
- Notification for Emergency General Meetings are shared in accordance with your Constitution e.g. 2 weeks in advance along with the agenda and a copy of the Draft Constitution if you are proposing changes (where appropriate). Parents are able to submit their views and comments via the school office or the Parent Council email address (within an identified timeframe) and attend meetings either in person or online. Settings/schools should be asked to support this process in order to ensure that all parents are given the opportunity to contribute to meetings. Feedback should be given to parents on how the setting or school is taking forward parents' views after a consultation.

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<sup>55</sup> <http://www.connect.scot/>

# Appendix 2 – Safeguarding Policy Template

## ....X.... School Parent Council Safeguarding Policy

### 1. Aims of this policy

....X....Parent Council take the welfare of children, young people and vulnerable adults seriously. As a Parent Council we may be made aware, either individually or as a group, of concerns for a child's safety. This policy pertains only to something you become aware of directly through your role in the parent council.

This policy should be read in conjunction with Connect's PVG and Child Protection pack and the school's Child Protection and Welfare procedures. Check Connect's website and search for the relevant topic (<https://connect.scot/>).

### 2. Action

- If there is an immediate risk to a child you should call 999.
- In the event that you are made aware of a safeguarding risk to a child, you should contact the safeguarding officer at the school or the Headteacher at your earliest convenience.
- If the group is made aware of any safeguarding risk to a child, one named person (the Chairperson) shall be responsible for reporting to the safeguarding officer or the Headteacher at their earliest convenience.
- When one person is made aware of a risk to a child, they should not discuss this with other members of the group to ensure confidentiality is kept as much as possible.
- If anyone in the group is made aware of any other issues that do not constitute a risk to a child but that may need to be investigated or taken further, they should bring the information to the group for discussion.

### 3. Complaints

Any complaint will be investigated in line with the Parent Council Code of Conduct. If an individual harms a child or puts a child at risk of harm, the Parent Council should discuss this with the Headteacher in the first instance. Thereafter it may be necessary to inform the police and/or make a referral to Disclosure Scotland. The Parent Council may take the decision to remove the person from their post or they may leave of their own accord.

# Appendix 3 – Annual General Meeting

Example of an Annual General Meeting written report

## **Name of Parent Council Annual General Meeting (AGM) Date**

The Parent Council is a group of parents who represent parent views and work in partnership with school staff and the local authority to achieve the best for all pupils. Having a Parent Council allows the collective view of parents to be represented on matters such as the quality and standards of education at the school and other matters of interest. During Year X, the Parent Council was grateful for the support of 2 co-opted members from the local community and 2 staff members who attended on a rotational basis. Local councillors attended our meetings on a fairly regular basis which provided a useful link to local authority priorities. The Parent Council meets approximately 6 times per year with all meeting dates agreed at the AGM. In his first year as head, ....Name.... identified a clear role for the Parent Council in his plans to improve the school experience for all of our children. The Parent Council was used as a sounding board for several new policies and initiatives in the school and members were pleased with this consultative approach. The appointment of a new deputy head will continue to bring change and an opportunity to strengthen the wider school community.

### **Summary of issues that the Parent Council was consulted on, informed of and participated in during Year X.**

- Continued programme of improvements to the school building
- The school's delivery of the curriculum
- Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)
- The School Improvement Plan
- Content of the school handbook
- Updates from the Pupil Council
- School trips and social events
- Parking and road safety
- School dress code
- Anti-bullying for Scotland's Children and Young People, Promoting Positive Behaviour Policy
- Appointment of a new Deputy Head (2 members of the Parent Council involved in the appointment)

### **Fundraising**

All funds raised by the Parent Council are used to support the work of the school and extra-curricular activities. In the past year we have supported the following:

- Primary 7 residential trip
- Refreshments at Christmas parties
- Refreshments at sports day
- Medals for sports day
- Dictionary for each P7 pupil
- Classroom supplies

## Membership

The Parent Council needs new members to keep it vibrant, particularly parents whose children are at the start of their school experience and have a long association ahead of them. Everyone on the Parent Council brings something different and something useful to make it work, so please don't think you have nothing to offer. If you are interested in becoming a member, please join us at the AGM or get in touch:

E-mail:.....

Telephone:.....

All parents and carers are welcome to attend Parent Council meetings. Updates from the Parent Council and minutes of all meetings are available on the school website .....

We will continue to use the school newsletter to keep you informed. Parents who have provided us with their email address will receive communications by this method. Please let us know if you would like to be added to the email distribution list.

Dates for all meetings in Year X will be confirmed at the AGM.



Example of a Primary or Secondary school Accounts

## ....X....**School Parent Council Accounts for Financial Year X**

**BALANCE BROUGHT FORWARD £.....**

### **INCOME**

Funding from local authority	£.....
Raffle at Christmas Concert	£.....
Raffle at Parents Meeting Year X	£.....
Cultural Evening Raffle Year X	£.....

**Total Income** £.....

### **EXPENDITURE**

Clerk's fees	£.....
Netball Club	£.....
Football Team Strips	£.....
Baking Club	£.....
Hockey Sticks	£.....
Drama Club stage make-up	£.....
Science Club	£.....

**Total Expenditure** £.....

Bank Balance as at: Date/Year £.....

Name:....X...

**Treasurer**

**Independent Examination by:** .....Name.....

Local authorities may require a separate return for how the Parent Council has spent any local authority allocation. Your local authority should provide you with any specific paperwork requirements for this.

# Appendix 4 – Parent Volunteering Skills Audit Template

## How will responses be used?

.....setting / school will use your responses to this Skills Audit for the purposes of parent volunteering and/or for .....Parent Council.

Your responses will be handled, processed and stored in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018. Responses will be store securely in a restricted access file and deleted after .... years.

To withdraw from this Skills Audit, access your data or if you have any further questions before completing it, please contact:.....

I understand why I am being asked to provide information which means I could potentially be identified.	Yes / No
---	----------

I agree to my responses being used for the purposes explained above .	Yes
---	-----

I understand that any information I give will be treated confidentially and securely in accordance with the terms of the General Data Protection Regulation and Data Protection Act 2018.	Yes
---	-----

I understand I can withdraw from this Skills Audit at any time and that my data will then not be used or processed	Yes
--	-----

1. Name of Parent

2. Best contact phone number

3. Email contact

4. If you might be able to offer your skills, knowledge or help in any of the following areas, please tick all that apply:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art / Design / Graphic design  | <input type="checkbox"/> Languages (other than English)             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Citizenship (including charity work, equality)                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Library / books                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Computers / ICT  | <input type="checkbox"/> Marketing / Public Relations / Advertising |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Construction / interior design / architecture                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Media (e.g. print, video, film, TV)        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cooking / food   | <input type="checkbox"/> Music                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cycling  | <input type="checkbox"/> Money / banking                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Debating / public speaking   | <input type="checkbox"/> Nature / wildlife                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Drama / performance / staging  | <input type="checkbox"/> Outdoor education / skills                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dressmaking / sewing   | <input type="checkbox"/> Photography                                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental issues   | <input type="checkbox"/> Printing                                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Event planning   | <input type="checkbox"/> Politics                                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> First aid  | <input type="checkbox"/> Science                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Food / beverage supply / handling  | <input type="checkbox"/> Sports / physical education / bike-ability |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fundraising  | <input type="checkbox"/> Therapy (beauty / hairstyling / massage)   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Health / wellbeing (physical and mental fitness, welfare, counselling etc) | <input type="checkbox"/> Trade skills / materials                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gardening / landscaping  | <input type="checkbox"/> Transport (bus / truck licence)            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Geography / travel / other cultures  | <input type="checkbox"/> Web design / development                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> History (interest, knowledge or first-hand experience)                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Writing (science / journalism / comics)    |

Other (please specify)

[illegible]

## Appendix 5 - National Organisations



**Aim:** to represent and support the development of the ethnic minority voluntary sector across Scotland.

**Offer:** empowering communities, working towards an inclusive society by establishing structures which recognise diversity and empowers ethnic minorities.

[www.bemis.org.uk](http://www.bemis.org.uk)



**Aim:** to give all children in Scotland an equal chance to flourish.

**Offer:** support and empower children and young people, families and the workforce across Scotland through policy and participation projects, research and a profession learning programme.

<https://childreninscotland.org.uk/>



**Aim:** to promote and support the establishment and maintenance of education through the medium of Gaelic.

**Offer:** information on Gaelic medium education, advice leaflets and reports, news on activities of Comann nam Parant groups.

<http://www.parant.org.uk/index.php/>



**Aim:** to make parental engagement in education and learning as good as it can be.

**Offer:** provide resources, advice and evidence-based learning opportunities for school communities, parents and professionals. Engage with and share parental perspectives across the system and with policymakers.

<https://connect.scot/>



**Aim:** encourage and enable people with dyslexia in Scotland, regardless of their age and abilities, to realise their potential.

**Offer:** providing and promoting high quality information, advice, training, support and services; influencing and achieving positive change; and giving people with dyslexia a voice.

<https://www.dyslexiascotland.org.uk/>



**Aim:** to provide the very best start in life for every child in Scotland.

**Offer:** delivery of: services working with children and families together; services for providers of early learning and childcare; high quality relevant professional learning services for the workforce; advocacy and advisory services relating to legislation, policy and practice

<https://earlyyearsscotland.org/>



Advice and information about additional support for learning



**Aim:** to raise awareness of children's rights to extra support in school; help families and schools work together; provide advice to children and young people.

**Offer:** provide easy to understand advice and information; help families find local education and support services; share practical tips to help families.

[www.enquire.org.uk](http://www.enquire.org.uk)

[www.reach.scot](http://www.reach.scot)





**Aim:** to support families of people affected by imprisonment.  
**Offer:** helpline; direct support to children and families across Scotland; training and awareness raising; develop policy and practice.  
[www.familiesoutside.org.uk](http://www.familiesoutside.org.uk)



**Aim:** to work with a wide range of organisations to help them support dads.  
**Offer:** a range of services including training, consultancy, events, research and media work.  
<https://www.fathersnetwork.org.uk/>



**Aim:** to provide clear and accurate information for educators and armed forces parents.  
**Offer:** introduction to the Scottish education system; understanding of the geography and education resources available.  
[www.forceschildrenseducation.scot](http://www.forceschildrenseducation.scot)



**Aim:** to work in partnership with national and local government, other organisations involved in education and child wellbeing issues, parent forums and parent councils.  
**Offer:** provide parental perspective at local and national level; work in partnership with education authorities, national government.  
[www.npfs.org.uk](http://www.npfs.org.uk)



**Aim:** to support parents to develop skills and have more fulfilling relationships with their children.  
**Offer:** a range of evidence-based/accredited parenting programmes and training opportunities to parents across Scotland.  
<https://www.parentnetworkscotland.com/>



**Aim:** to offer support to children and families in Scotland.  
**Offer:** provide information service to parents and carers including information about organisations that have helplines for parents; share research, policy and good practice with practitioners who work with families.  
<https://www.parentingacrossscotland.org/>



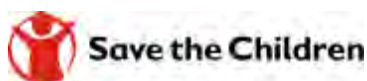
**Aim:** to provide training for practitioners to support parents, carers and children to learn together; to improve the home learning environment and build positive attachment relationships.  
**Offer:** training in evidence-based early intervention programmes that supports positive outcomes for parents, carers and children.  
<https://www.peeple.org.uk/>



**Aim:** to build the capacity and competence of adults to effect change by challenge bullying behaviour involving children and young people.  
**Offer:** provide adults with the practical skills and confidence to respond to children who are bullied and those who bully others.  
[www.respectme.org.uk](http://www.respectme.org.uk)



**Aim:** to support the education and wellbeing needs of Scotland's Armed Forces children and young people to reach their full potential.  
**Offer:** to work in partnership with individuals, groups, government, educational, military and other institutions.  
[www.rcet.org.uk](http://www.rcet.org.uk)



**Aim:** to give children the chance to thrive and reach their full potential.  
**Offer:** to work with families, nurseries, schools and government to tackle the poverty related early learning gap.  
<https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/>



**Aim:** to change lives through reading and writing.  
**Offer:** share benefits of reading, singing and playing; gift books; work with teachers to inspire children to develop a love of reading; work with adults with low literacy.  
<https://www.scottishbooktrust.com/>



**Aim:** to promote and support Catholic education in Scotland.  
**Offer:** to work with parents and families, partner associations, individuals and church agencies to promote and support Catholic education, seek and represent the views of the Catholic community on issues of national significance.  
<http://sces.org.uk/>



**Aim:** to help parents, children, families affected by divorce or separation.  
**Offer:** provide advice, assistance and other support, helping build relationships between parents who live apart but share the care and responsibilities for their child(ren) and schools, in support of children's learning.  
<https://www.sharedparenting.scot/>



**Aim:** the national skills agency, supporting people and businesses in Scotland with careers advice and guidance, apprenticeships and skills planning.  
**Offer:** to deliver services for individuals and employers that help them achieve their ambitions. Skills Development Scotland delivers Scotland's careers service through every state secondary school, its network of centres throughout Scotland and its helpline.  
<https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/>  
<https://www.myworldofwork.co.uk/>  
<https://www.apprenticeships.scot/>  
<https://www.digitalworld.net/>



**Aim:** to provide a network of support for local authority officers across Scotland who are working on parental involvement and engagement.  
**Offer:** to meet formally as a network 3 times per year to share good practice and communicate informally by email.  
 Scottish Parental Involvement Officers Network  
 (e-mail: [bskirrow@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:bskirrow@eastlothian.gov.uk))



**Aim:** to provide advice and support to enable organisations meet a range of educational, development and regulatory requirements.  
**Offer:** to provide products and services in skills, training and education which positively impact on individuals, organisations and society.  
<https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa>



**Aim:** to help children and families from travelling communities to access relevant and flexible learning opportunities throughout their lives.  
**Offer:** a professional support network, community development programmes, training, information and resources.  
<http://www.step.education.ed.ac.uk/>

# Reading List and Further Information

Cummings, C., Dyson, A. and Todd, L. (2011), '*Beyond the School Gates, Can Full Service and Extended Schools Overcome Disadvantage?*' London. Routledge.

Epstein, J.L. (2016), '*School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Preparing Educators and Improving Schools*'. Boulder. Westview Press.

Goodall, J. and Montgomery, C. (2014), '*Parental involvement to parental engagement: a continuum*'. Educational Review, Vol. 66, No. 4, 2 October 2014, pp. 399-410(12). Routledge.

Inspection and Review - <https://education.gov.scot/education-scotland/what-we-do/inspection-and-review/>

Lightbody, R. (2017), '*Hard to reach' or 'easy to ignore'? Promoting equality in community engagement*'. Edinburgh. What Works Scotland.  
<http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/publications/hard-to-reach-or-easy-to-ignore-promoting-equality-in-community-engagement-evidence-review/>

Parent Communication Plan - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-improvement-framework-parent-communication-plan/pages/4/>

Review of the impact of the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 - <https://www.npfs.org.uk/downloads/review-of-the-impact-of-the-2009-parental-involvement-act/>

Scottish Executive (2006), '*Scottish Schools (Parental involvement) Act 2006 Guidance*'. Edinburgh. Astron.  
<http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2006/09/08094112/0>

The Scottish Government (2006), '*Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006*'.  
[http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2006/8/pdfs/asp\\_20060008\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2006/8/pdfs/asp_20060008_en.pdf)

The Scottish Government (2012), '*School Handbook Guidance. Information for local authorities and schools following the Education (School and Placing Information) (Scotland) Regulations*'. Edinburgh. APS Group Scotland  
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/school-handbook-guidance/documents/>

The Parental Involvement in Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher Appointments (Scotland) Regulations (2007) - <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2007/132/made>.

Welsh Government (2015), '*FaCE the challenge together: Family and community engagement toolkit for schools in Wales. Main guidance*'. Welsh Government.  
<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-12/face-the-challenge-together-family-and-community-engagement-toolkit-for-schools-in-wales-main-guidance.pdf>

## Websites

Education Scotland website - <https://education.gov.scot/education-scotland/>

Local authority websites - <https://www.cosla.gov.uk/councils>

Parent Club - <https://www.parentclub.scot/>

Parentzone Scotland - <https://education.gov.scot/parentzone/>

The Consultation Institute - <https://www.consultationinstitute.org/>

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Livingston  
EH54 6GA

**T** +44 (0)131 244 4330  
**E** [enquiries@educationscotland.gov.scot](mailto:enquiries@educationscotland.gov.scot)

<https://education.gov.scot/>

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