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## **Document: 001. The Role of the Chair**

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# The Role of the Chair

The Chair leads the organisation ensuring the Board of Directors / Trustees / Committee fulfils its responsibilities for its governance. They work closely with the Chief Executive and the employees to support them in achieving the aims of the organisation and acting as the channel of communication between the Directors / Trustees, staff and volunteers.

The Chair may act as a figurehead of the organisation and represent it at functions, meetings and in the media. Other tasks may include authorising action to be taken between meetings of the full Board, signing cheques and legal documents.

### **The Chair's duties will include:**

- Regular attendance at meetings
- Acting as spokesperson
- Planning and preparing meetings, setting agendas in liaison with the Secretary
- Conducting meetings efficiently and controlling discussion without monopolising it
- Making sure the purpose of the meeting is clear and that it is achieved
- Ensuring the meeting keeps to time and is properly recorded by the secretary
- Keeping things moving and managing conflict
- Being a support / link for all other committee members
- Acting at all times in the interest of the organisation
- Providing leadership to the Board in its role of setting the direction and strategy of the organisation
- Having the casting vote (depending on governing document)
- Providing Line Management where appropriate
- To ensure that Trustees fulfil their duties and responsibilities for the proper governance of the organisation
- To support, liaise with and, where appropriate, challenge the Chief Executive
- Monitoring that decisions taken at meetings are implemented

### **The Chair will need to know:**

- The organisation's aims, activities and methods of working
- Something of the other Trustees / Directors strength and weaknesses
- The political and legal environment in which the organisation operates

### The Chair should:

- Draw out ideas and contributions from colleagues (what do you think about ..., how do we best tackle this, what does your experience of these things suggest?)
- Guide them through the topic (are there any pitfalls / advantages we haven't considered, what are the costs, what are the alternatives?)
- Bring people back to the overall aims of the organisation (does this fit with our aims as an organisation?)
- Be a timekeeper and get clear decisions made (we are now halfway through the meeting – how long do we want to spend on this item – have we made a clear decision?) summarise what has been agreed, clarify what is to be done, and who is going to do it.
- Not have favourites, or someone dominating the meeting, but to give everyone an equal chance to be involved (what do people who haven't said anything yet think about this?)

### Person Specification for a Chair

- Leadership qualities and good “people” skills
- Experience of committee work
- Impartiality, fairness and the ability to respect confidences
- Knowledge of the type of work undertaken by the organisation
- Integrity, tact and diplomacy
- A commitment to the organisation and its objectives
- An understanding and acceptance of the legal duties, responsibilities and liabilities of Director/Trusteeship
- A willingness to devote the necessary time and effort to their duties
- Strategic vision and independent judgement
- An ability to think creatively
- A willingness to speak their mind
- An ability to work effectively as a member of the team
- A willingness to undertake training and development

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## How to Chair a Meeting

It is not always the extrovert or natural leader who makes the best Chair, although some leadership qualities are required. The skills of chairing meetings can be acquired and largely depend upon an ability to listen patiently whilst remaining aware of what else is happening around the meeting table. The Chair should not be afraid of making unpopular statements. The following points should be kept in mind when conducting a meeting:

- Involve new members from the start – if there are people attending for the first time introduce them to the others and ask other members to briefly introduce themselves.
- Begin the meeting with a short statement – to summarise the purpose of the meeting, what facts are known already, why a decision is required and how you intend to structure the meeting in order to reach a decision.
- Try to separate fact from opinion – ask members for the facts first. Summarise these and then go on to seek members' opinions
- Guide the meeting with a summary at each stage of the discussion – this will ensure everyone is clear about what has been achieved so far.
- At the end of the discussion, summarise the decision which has been reached and who is responsible for implementing the decision.

## The Vice Chair

The Vice Chair acts for the Chair when the Chair is not available and undertakes assignments at the request of the Chair. They will provide support to the Chair and where appropriate use the role to train as a future Chair.

**For resources, ideas and useful information please contact Community Action Norfolk on 01362 698216 or email [office@communityactionnorfolk.org.uk](mailto:office@communityactionnorfolk.org.uk)**

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