contact a family
for families with disabled children

Strengthening Parent Carer Participation
Role and Responsibilities of the Chair and the other Committee members

- Welcome to this Contact a Family Webinar
- If there is a technical hitch, please do bear with us
- Those of you joining by pc, laptop, tablet or smart phone should now be able to see this introduction slide
Timing & Questions

• As there are so many attendees, it is not practical for verbal questions to be taken, therefore you will all remain ‘muted’ throughout.

• If at any point you have questions, please use the question icon on your GoToWebinar tool bar on your screen.

• This will allow you to type your question in to the text box and submit this to the Webinar administrator.

• I will select as many relevant questions to answer as time allows, if similar questions are received we will condense these where possible.
Q&A Session

• Further relevant questions, not covered in the time allowed, will be answered and posted on the Contact a Family website along with the recording of this Webinar, details of which will be circulated next week

• At the end of the Webinar a short questionnaire will launch, please take the time to complete this as this will assist with future online training events
Introductions
Purpose of the session

• Myth busting
• Importance of accountability and shared decision making
• What does effective governance look like?
• What is needed to make this work? Some practical considerations
• What does this look like in reality?
• Legal structures and responsibilities
Common Assumptions

• The Chair is in charge and makes all the decisions
• The Chair, Treasurer and Secretary do all the work
• Only the Treasurer needs to think about the money side
• We have to wait for the Chair to agree before anything is done
• If the Chair doesn’t agree we can’t do things
• The committee are there to rubber stamp decisions made by the Chair (& maybe the other officers)
• The Chair can veto decisions
The Dictator
Accountability

• Ultimate accountability is to parent carers in your local authority area
• Need to work together to develop and run a forum that can represent their views, in order to improve outcomes for children/young people
• Additionally accountable to funding organisations, eg Contact A Family/DfE, Local authority (as per grant agreements in place)
Openness

• The parent carer forum should be open, responsive and accountable to its members, partners, funders and others with an interest in its work.

• Make sure your terms of reference, governing documents, annual reports and accounts are published online and answer questions honestly and openly.
The forums legal structure will determine the kind of governing document it needs and who you need to report to every year.

There are a range of options that are available to forums:
- Unincorporated association
- Incorporated association
- Charity
- Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)
- Community Interest Company
- Limited Company

The right legal structure will depend on the aims of your forum, and you should spend time considering the options and seeking advice as to which would be most suitable.
Legal Structures

- Companies will need to be registered with Companies House and HMRC and annual report will need to be made to Companies House of who the directors are, contact details, number of shares they hold.
- Community Interest Companies or CICs may be registered either with Company House /CIC Regulator and they will also need to make a report to HMRC about their accounts.
- CICs will also need to prepare a report about how the community has benefitted from their work.
- If a registered charity or Charitable Incorporated Organisation then a report will need to be made every year to the Charity Commission outlining trustees, accounts and how the charities work meets it’s charity objects.
Unincorporated Associations

• Unincorporated Associations are a collection of individual people who have the same aims.
• If your forum is an unincorporated association then the forum won’t be recognised in law and an entity in itself
• This means that the individual members remain responsible for any money and decisions about it.
• You will be liable if anything goes wrong unless you take out specific insurance to cover yourselves.
• It is only by incorporating into a different legal structure that the forum would become an organisation recognised in law in its own right and able to take on contracts etc.
Governing Documents

Every forum should have a document outlining its governance structure and policies. This is likely to include:

• The forum’s legal structure
• Details outlining membership of the parent carer forum
• Information about the forum’s officers and committee, including how people are elected/appointed into roles
• Details of committee meetings, AGM and EGMs, including how members can add items to the agenda
• Decision making protocols, voting rights, delegated responsibilities to officers/sub-committees
• How decisions can be questioned/appealed by members
Forums may also wish to develop other policies, which could include, but are not limited to:

- Conflicts of interest
- Remuneration
- Confidentiality agreement
- Code of conduct
- Communications protocol
- Complaints policy
- Policies relating to employment of staff eg discipline, grievance, sickness, use of IT
It’s really important that everyone on the committee has a copy of the governing document and any other policies, and that they fully understand the implications.

It’s good practice that when handovers are done that these documents are shared with new committee members.

They should be made available for your membership - having a copy online and referring new members to it so they understand how the forum works and the rules of membership.
Role of the Committee

• Every forum should have a governing body, a group of people which manages its affairs. This is most commonly referred to as the management committee. However your own group may use a different name, such as executive committee or steering group.

• Your forums legal structure may call the group a Board of Trustees or Board of Directors.

• Some forums have a host organisation who hold their grant for them whether it’s their local SENDIASS, a voluntary organisation or the local authority.

• The forum should still have a group of parents who make decisions about the groups money and activities.
Role of the Committee

Broadly, the committee’s role is to ensure that the forum:

• does what it was set up to do, ie represents the voice of parent carers in your local area
• has enough money, does not get into debt & meets terms of any grant agreements
• is well run, with effective governance, and that it works within the law.

To summarise: the committee is ultimately accountable for everything the organisation does, including its spending and activities
Role of the Committee

In practical terms, the committee should look to:

• Develop and agree a strategic plan to guide and direct all activities of the forum. Be proactive, as well as reactive

• Manage the implementation of the forum’s activities and monitor their effectiveness

• Ensure there is an internal focus on developing the organisation as well as the obvious external focus of representing parent carers

• Be responsible for the recruitment, support/training and development of all volunteers (the committee and parent representatives)

- succession planning is key to long term survival!!!
The management committee/board must ensure that the organisation understands and complies with its own governing document, relevant laws, contractual obligations and the requirements of any regulatory bodies:

- Charity Law
- Company Law
- Employment Law
- Tax, NI, PAYE, Pensions
- Health & Safety
- Fundraising
- Contracts
- Data Protection
- Safeguarding
- Equality & Diversity
Committee as employers

• In forums that employ staff, the Committee is essentially the employer. They must ensure that appropriate policies and procedures are in place for staff, including line management, performance reviews and PAYE/NI
• This can be a big time commitment and places additional responsibilities on the committee, especially if issues arise
• Between 2016 and 2018 over 1,800,000 mainly small businesses and organisations will fall under the Pensions Automatic Enrolment legislation. Every employer in the UK must put certain staff into a pension scheme and contribute towards it. This is called ‘automatic enrolment’. Professional advice should be sought and detailed information is online http://www.thepensionsregulator.gov.uk/en/employers
KEEP CALM
‘CAUSE YOU’RE NOT ALONE
Decision Making Responsibility

- Ultimately decision making and powers lie with the forum committee as a whole (though sometimes the chair will have a casting vote if there is an even number of votes cast for and against an item)
- The chair does not have powers to make decisions on their own unless that power has been delegated to them by the committee.
- The committee can delegate powers to sub committees if their governing document allows it.
- It is important that these decisions are recorded in minutes of meetings and that minutes are checked to ensure that decisions are recorded properly.
Who are the committee?

• Depending on your governing document and legal status/set up - the committee may be elected from a wider membership of parents, appointed because of their expertise such as a Community Interest Company Board of Directors, or change on a regular basis depending on who has time and who turns up at meetings if it’s an informal reference group with a host organisation.

• Informal reference groups may be at a disadvantage and find there is no consistency in planning or decision making and it may end up with a host organisation taking a lead on making decisions about the forums development.

• Committees may be able to invite other people to join if they have particular expertise or represent particular groups – called co-opting. Your governing document will usually state if this is possible.
Who are the committee?
Committee meetings

- Should be held regularly, at a convenient time and location for the committee
- Travel expenses should be paid and refreshments provided
- Require a clear purpose and agenda – which should be sent out, with supporting papers, in plenty of time to allow committee members to read in advance
Committee meetings

• It’s usually left to the chair and secretary to set the agenda but every member of the committee can request that an item be added to the agenda – and the chair should involve the committee in setting each agenda.

• Clear minutes should be written, to provide a comprehensive record of all decisions made. If you do not have a secretary, another committee member should be nominated to take minutes (not the Chair)
Agenda

Usually each agenda will have:

- Apologies – from committee members who can’t attend
- Minutes of the last meeting – these should be checked for accuracy, amendments noted and agreed by the committee
- Disclosure of any conflicts of interest
- Matters arising from the last minutes – any outstanding items or actions should be gone through at each meeting
- Other items - usually based on your activities and forward planning
- Finances – the treasurer should make a report to the committee at every meeting – finance is everyone’s responsibility
Conflicts of Interest

Possible conflicts of interest may arise for committee members. It is important that you have considered what actions you will take to manage these:

• Conflicts of interest policy
• Conflicts of interest register
• Declaration of any conflicts at meetings
• Committee member/officer not able to be involved with discussions or decision making relating to the item/s where there is a conflict
• You may need to ask them to leave the room, and have confidential minutes
Committee roles

It is useful to develop role descriptions for the various roles within a committee, to help ensure everyone is clear on expectations and delegated responsibilities. These should be agreed by the whole committee.

Possible roles:

Chair/Co-Chair  Vice-Chair
Secretary    Treasurer
Fundraising  Communications
Health & Safety Events
Role of the Chair

The Chair’s job usually falls into four main areas:

• 1. Chairing meetings.
• 2. Helping the committee to work together as a team.
• 3. Having an overview of the work of the group.
• 4. Being the main contact person for the group—though only if delegated.
Chairing Meetings

• Plan and think about the meeting in advance.
• Prepare an agenda.
• Make sure the meeting gets through all the necessary business.
• Make sure everyone gets a chance to talk and no one dominates.
• Make sure clear decisions are reached and any action noted as well as who is responsible for what.
• Start and finish on time.
Supporting the team

Committees work best if they work as a team
The chair is an important part of the team but not the boss (or dictator!)
It’s not your role to do all of the work or make all of the decisions
It is your role to involve the committee in decision making and take on whatever roles they are able to manage effectively
Involve the team in setting the agenda and dates of meetings
An Overview of the work

• The day-to-day work of the group is important, but someone needs to be thinking about the bigger picture.
• It’s not up to the Chair to decide the direction and activity of the group, but to help the committee work this out.
• Regularly remind yourself of your aims, and think about what needs to be done to achieve them.
• Once a year, have a discussion at the committee about the group’s plans for the coming year. What are the main things you want to achieve?
• Have a regular item on the agenda to discuss how recent events and activities went. For example, what worked and what didn’t at your public meeting, or the successes and challenges with an event.
Point of Contact

• The Chair is often the first point of contact for the Council, other voluntary organisations or anyone else interested in the work of the group.

• The Chair doesn’t have to be the main contact person – you can discuss this in your committee and agree who will take on this role.

• You may want to have a separate person to be the main contact for different areas of work such as new members, Local Authority Key contacts, Parent Representatives, support groups etc.

• Just because someone is the advertised contact doesn’t mean they have to respond to all requests immediately – it is best to remember that decisions need to be taken by the committee until responsibility is delegated out to a committee member.
Other Responsibilities

• The Chair may take on other responsibilities but only if delegated by the committee.
• The Chair should never make assumptions about the roles they can take on or cherry pick their role – it must be discussed and decided with the committee
• As with the role of the chair the role of the secretary must be thought about, discussed and agreed with the committee before being delegated to anyone.

• The role can be split into different roles such as minute secretary, events organiser membership secretary and general secretary among others.
Role of the Secretary

• Taking minutes in meetings.
• Keeping files of past minutes and reports.
• Letting people know when and where the next meeting is and what it is about.
• Helping to prepare agendas for meetings with the Chairperson.
• Writing and receiving letters on behalf of the group.
• Keeping members informed of what correspondence has been sent out and received.
• Keeping a record of membership.
• Keeping a record of important phone numbers.
Minute Taking Common Problems

- It is difficult to know exactly what has been agreed.
- No one is sticking to the point and lots of different suggestions are being made about what to do.
- The discussion jumps from one item to another before any of them are finished.
- Everyone is talking at once, and you can’t follow the discussion.
- There is a long, confusing discussion and you don’t know which bits are important to get down.
- You have been very involved in a particular issue and want to say things, but can’t minute at the same time.
- You are nervous about getting it right.
Top Tips for Minute Taking

• If a meeting is well run, it makes taking minutes much easier.
• It’s the Chair’s job to keep the meeting in order, but they can only do this with the co-operation of everyone at the meeting.
• It is really helpful to have a clear agenda for the meeting, and for this to be followed during the meeting.
• One idea is to discuss and agree together some guidelines by which you’ll run your meetings.
• Some common guidelines are not interrupting, putting your hand up if you want to talk, not having side-conversations and keeping to the agenda item under discussion.
• Feel free to point out that it is impossible to take minutes if everyone is talking at once and not following the agenda.
• If it’s not clear what decision has been made, ask the Chair to clarify this. It is useful for the minute-taker to sit next to the Chair so that you can work together easily.
Top Tips for Minute Taking

• Discuss the agenda with the Chair before the meeting – the clearer you are about the content of the meeting, the easier it is to minute it.

• Go through your minutes with the Chair after the meeting. It can be helpful to check through what you’ve written with someone else.

• You may want to record the meeting, so you can check back when preparing the minutes. But only do so if you have permission from all attending.

• If you are concentrating on taking minutes, it does limit how much you can join in the meeting – it goes with the job.

• If there is an item where you have been centrally involved and have a lot to say, think about asking someone else to take minutes just for that item.

• Don’t worry if your minutes are not perfect. They are a working tool, and like everything it gets easier the more you do it.

• You should allocate the same amount of time as the meeting to write the minutes afterwards.
Other roles/responsibilities

• Review required roles annually as part of your committee planning process
• Identify the roles you need to implement your plans for the coming year
• Seek feedback from existing role holders – what is going well, what could be better
• Be proactive – people are often willing to help but do not always know help is needed, especially if your forum is running effectively
• Be flexible and responsive to the forum’s needs – if things aren’t working, change them
Other roles/responsibilities

• Not all roles/responsibilities require a position on the committee
• Consider what other roles you may wish to recruit volunteers for, for instance:

  Social media        Running coffee mornings
  Area representative  Disability representative
  Leading a project   Writing a newsletter/report
  New parent contact  Telephone enquiries
Support and training

- Recruiting and managing volunteers can take a lot of time and energy
- Important that everyone understands their role and how it fits within the forum’s work
- Consider developing an induction pack and process, maybe including a buddying system and training programme
- Contact A Family training, local voluntary organisations, other forums can all help with training
Induction pack

An induction pack and process will help new parent representatives and committee members feel more prepared and confident.

Possible items to include:

- Committee contact information
- Schedule of meetings
- Governance documents/policies
- Strategic plan
- Maps/venue information for meetings
- Role description
- Links to support and training
- Best practice ideas/tips
Succession planning

It is vitally important that the parent carer forum is a sustainable organisation and plans ahead for future leadership:

• Governance documents/policies for consistency
• Succession planning:
  • Open discussions re intentions of committee members
  • Proactive recruitment following skills audit/planning
  • Training and mentoring
  • Job sharing during handover period
  • Jointly agree how the incumbent will step away and what their future role may be
Summary

• Leading the forum is the joint responsibility of the whole committee, not just the Chair

• It is worth investing the time required to identify the most suitable legal structure for the forum, and to develop appropriate governance documents and policies

• Role descriptions and delegated responsibilities, as agreed by the whole committee, will help ensure that the workload is shared and that everyone understands what their role is
Summary

- You are not alone! There is lots of support and guidance available to help you
- Employing staff carries significant additional responsibilities, and professional input should be sought
- Nothing is set in stone. All roles and policies can, and should, be adapted as the organisation develops
- Succession planning is vital to ensure the future of the forum
- Working together can achieve great things – GOOD LUCK!!!
Questions?
Thank You

- Thank you for attending with us today

- A short questionnaire will launch at the end of this webinar

- Please take the time to complete this: it will help us plan future online training events including other topics you would like to see

- The recording of this Webinar, presentation and questions will be on the parent participation Resources page of Contact a Family’s website next week – an email confirming this will be sent to you once this is available