

Independent Custody Visiting Association
Guidance for Panel Chairs/Co-Ordinators
Chairing Meetings
August 2019



Purpose

This document is intended to give panel chairs and co-ordinators some guidance on what makes an effective meeting, what characteristics an effective chair has and some hints and tips regarding dealing with conflict in meetings.

What makes an effective meeting?

As a meeting chair, it is always useful to reflect on meetings you have attended, and what contributes to the most effective meetings that you have attended. The following is not an exhaustive list but has some tips on how to ensure that your attendees can get the most out of any meeting they attend.

Preparation

- Ensure that clear joining instructions including directions and a full agenda are sent out in good time prior to the meeting. Let attendees know what the start and end time of the meeting will be.
- Ensure that all papers for the meeting are sent out in good time prior to the meeting, and note whether printed copies of papers will be available or participants need to bring their own.
- When sending out the papers, make a note in the body of the email which ones will be discussed at the meeting and if any papers are for information only.
- Include the minutes of the last meeting so that people can ensure they have completed actions.
- Let attendees know if there are refreshments available, it seems like a small thing but helps for people to know if they need to bring their own coffee/water etc.
- Ensure that the format of minutes is agreed and known, are they full and formal minutes, a note of actions only or another format. Ensure that you have someone to take the minutes who is aware of the house style.

During the meeting

- Keep to time – ensure that the meeting starts and finishes on time and that the noted amount of time for each agenda item is utilised and doesn't overrun.
- Stick to the agenda - if topics arise outside of the agenda point see that they are noted, and returned to under AOB.

- Ensure that actions from the last meeting are given as updates and rolled over with timeframes if not complete.
- Actions are given fairly, are clear in what is required of the person completing them and are given a timeframe for completion.

After the meeting

- Agree time and location of the next meeting.
- Ensure actions for the chair are followed up in a timely manner.
- Ensure that the minutes are sent out as soon as possible so that everyone can track and complete their actions.

What makes an effective chair of a meeting?

The chair of a meeting has an important role to ensure that the meeting is an effective one. A meeting with a good chair who is aware of their role and responsibilities is more likely to be effective for all present. Below are some tips on what makes a good chair for you to consider.

- **Organised** - All business is discussed – meeting starts and finishes on time.
- **Good listener** - Everyone's views are heard.
- **Good communicator** - Clear decisions are reached, will not dominate the meeting.
- **Able to lead** - Will draw a balance between hearing everyone's views and getting through the business, will not use their position as chair as an opportunity to put forward their views to the exclusion of others.
- **Know yourself** – lead by example. Set and maintain standards. Have pride in what you do.
- **Know your team** – support people, recognise valuable contributions and encourage all to participate.
- **Know your business** – be prepared for meetings. Know the topic of all areas of business to be covered.
- **Work together** – be proactive. Act as a team. Support one another. Delegate if needed.
- **Be visible and accessible** – make your presence known. Be available before/after meetings. Communicate effectively at all levels.
- **Have courage** – make the difficult challenges. Have faith in your ability.
- **Priorities** – ensure agenda has the most important items prioritised.
- **Innovate** – make things happen. Question the way things are. Lead change.
- **Is polite** – ensure that all attendees are thanked for their contributions and attendance.

How can I deal with conflict between attendees?

Attendees will not always agree on everything in a meeting. Sometimes you might need to chair strong personalities with opposing views and it's really important that a chair manages this competently, fairly and ensuring that any disagreements do not dominate the meeting or make other attendees uncomfortable. Assertiveness is a key skill for a chair in this area.

An assertive chair:

- Gains the persons/peoples attention.
- Is specific in their overviews, discussions and questions for the participants.
- Take ownership (use 'I' statements – e.g. 'I think that's an important point, I will make a note but I am also aware of time and we will need to move on now').
- Acknowledge feelings/emotions of participants – (e.g. 'I can see you feel strongly about this and that is to be commended, I am really keen to see how others feel on this issue too').
- Shows empathy.
- Stays firm and polite.
- Is aware of their body language and voice.

Remember, assertiveness is not:

- Aggressive, Forceful or Overbearing.
- Unreasonable.
- Repetitive.
- Single Minded or Unyielding.
- Passive.

If you have conflicting views in a meeting you may wish to do one of the following:

- Set up a subgroup in order to consider the issue fully from all points of view.
- Ask for the participants who disagree to meet again outside of the main meeting in order to decide a way forward with the chair present.
- Let the participants know that you will take away both of their points, consider an approach and then consult with them prior to taking action.
- State that you need to seek advice on the issue from your scheme manager/other member of the OPCC to decide the best way forward and will be back in touch with them to update them as to progress.

If you can prepare effectively, be welcoming and assertive in your chairing and run a meeting to time, promoting engagement from all of your attendees, you should be well on the way to running effective meetings.