



# Church of Ireland – Parish Handbook

## MAKING SELECT VESTRY MEETINGS EFFECTIVE

Effective meetings are vital to the functioning of the select vestry. They are the means by which the select vestry exercises its collective responsibility for the parish. Meetings are necessary for:

- Decision making
- Reporting and accountability
- Review
- Discussion
- Problem solving

In reality, running purposeful and participative meetings can be challenging. Challenges include:

- Long discussions with no conclusion
- Decision making on the basis of inadequate information
- Low attendance
- Uneven participation
- Unwillingness to ask questions

Meetings can become more effective if they are well planned with a clear purpose, effectively chaired and focused on decision-making.

### PLANNING MEETINGS

Well planned meetings are more productive. Responsibility for planning the meeting and circulating preparatory material lies with the chairperson (the rector) and the secretary. However, all select vestry members will need to ensure they have contributed relevant items to the agenda and have read all preparatory materials prior to the meeting.

To plan meetings effectively:

- Set dates well in advance to maximise the number of members available to attend
- Send a reminder notice closer to the time
- Clarify the purpose or focus of the meeting
- Ensure that reports are concise and comprehensible
- Ensure conflicts of interest are declared
- Ensure that minutes and agreed actions from the previous meetings are circulated
- Ensure that all papers are circulated well in advance
- Agree the meeting agenda in advance
- Identify which agenda items require a decision and which are for information or discussion

### PURPOSE OF MEETINGS

The purpose and objectives of each select vestry meeting should be clearly communicated to members in the meeting agenda. Examples of broad objectives are:

- Ensuring all activities are consistent with the parish's purpose and mission
- Monitoring financial performance
- Deciding the most appropriate methods of fundraising
- Discussing and making decisions on new proposals
- Reviewing progress towards a goal (e.g. fundraising, recruiting etc.)
- Planning for the future and identifying new opportunities
- Initiating or reviewing policies
- Delegating work to working groups or sub-committees
- Planning general vestry meetings

## EFFECTIVE CHAIRING

Chairing is a key factor in the effectiveness of meetings. In order of precedence, the select vestry meeting is chaired by the incumbent or other member of the clergy officiating in the parish, or the curate, or one of the churchwardens.

The role of the chairperson is to direct discussion, ensuring that the objectives of the meeting can be met, and that the select vestry effectively fulfils its responsibility in considering the items on the agenda.

This involves ensuring that:

- the chairperson is well briefed about each agenda item
- decisions are taken and recorded
- that parish and Church policies are applied
- there is full participation from select vestry members
- the agenda is followed
- there are time limits for the meeting as a whole and for agenda items

## QUORUM

The chairperson must establish that there is a quorum before proceeding to any business. The quorum is not less than half the voting membership of the select vestry.

## DECISION MAKING

Select vestries are responsible for making important decisions and must work together to do so. Effective decision making includes not only *what* is to be done but also *how*, *when* and by *whom*.

- Identify the relevant information and ensure the select vestry has considered it all
- Clarify the aim of the decision and ensure it is consistent with the aims of the parish
- Consider the available options, their advantages and constraints
- Plan what resources are needed and what steps should be taken to effect the decision

## VOTING

Voting is by a simple majority of those present and entitled to vote. At all meetings of the select vestry, the chairperson has an ordinary as well as a casting vote.

All select vestry members should be clear about exactly what has been decided and decisions should be clearly recorded in the minutes.

## HOW EVERY MEMBER CAN BE EFFECTIVE

Each select vestry member has a duty to make meetings effective, to work as a team and take joint responsibility for considering issues and taking decisions. Members should:

- Prepare for meetings by reading preparatory materials
- Forward apologies if you are unable to attend
- Arrive on time
- Use the agenda to follow the meeting
- Listen carefully to others
- Learn from other people and understand the roles of office holders
- Contribute to the discussion and try to keep to the point
- Ask questions if you are unclear or unsure – keep yourself informed about select vestry issues
- Consider all the options as impartially as you can
- Get behind decisions once they are made