

## **What is a Parent Council (PC)?**

Parent Councils have been around for a few years, but some parents - especially those whose children have recently started school – may be unaware of what the Parent Council is and what it can do for them. Hopefully this will help to answer some of the questions.

## **What are the main duties of the Parent Council?**

The first duty of the Parent Council is to represent the views of the parents at the school. Your Parent Council should help to create an environment where all parents know that their views matter, and where they feel confident and comfortable putting them forward. This link between parents and the school can really help to ensure that these make a real difference to the work and life of the school.

The duties of a PC are not laid down in legislation so it is up to each Parent Forum to decide what they want their PC to do.

*The Parent Forum is all the parents with a child at the school so all parents are automatically members. The Parent Forum is the body who should appoint the Parent Council to run matters on its behalf, and they also have the right to decide on their constitution, and this should be done at an Annual General Meeting.*

There are many things a PC could get involved in, including:

- Supporting the work of the school, for example, by advising the school on its policies, contributing to the school's handbook and development plan
- Promoting contact between all parents and the rest of the school community
- Organising social and fundraising events
- Discussing anything that's of interest to parents
- Being involved in the appointment of senior staff

As members of a PC, you are able to join the D&G Parent/Carer Council Forum (DGPCF). The DGPCF is a group trying to provide a voice for Parent Councils across D & G. The aim of the group is to be proactive in helping shape education across our region, and members of this group are now parent representatives on the Council's Education Committee, have joined the team working on the next Service Review, looking at how to work within the latest budgets constraints, and have been involved in shaping the last consultation, always with the aim of making these issues more accessible to parents who don't necessarily speak 'education' or 'finance'. The Forum has a Facebook page (Dumfries & Galloway Parent/Carer Council Forum) and meets once a term - new members are always welcome.

## **Do we have to have a Parent Council?**

PCs can include a sub group for Fundraising if the Parent Forum wishes to keep everything together, or you could choose to have a separate Fundraising Group/PTA and PC. Although the majority of schools in Scotland do have a PC, there are still a few which don't. Some groups have decided to use another name for their PC and there is nothing to stop you doing this, for example Parent Partnerships, School Associations, Friends of ...

## **If you do have a Parent Council...**

Make sure that the Education Authority has a note of your current contact email addresses. This is vital to ensure you receive communications from them, and from other groups that wish to communicate with all PCs – such as the D&G Parent/Carer Council Forum – but do not have access to all contact details. There is a form sent out from the Education Authority bi-annually to take these details but if you miss it, you can email [communityandcommission@dumgal.gov.uk](mailto:communityandcommission@dumgal.gov.uk)

## **What happens at meetings?**

Each PC should have at least a Chairperson, Secretary, and Treasurer as role bearers, and these are formally elected at an AGM. New PCs will need to adopt a constitution at their first AGM (templates can be found through Council's website links), and any changes needing to be made to existing ones must be done at AGMs. All other parents that attend are members - some schools will have different parents at each meeting due to family/work commitments, some will have the same parents every time.

PC meetings can be held as often as needed, but there should be at least one per term - fundraising groups can meet as needed throughout the year - and it is helpful for the Chair to meet with the Head Teacher (HT) beforehand to discuss agenda items the PC want to set and give both time to prepare any additional information required. HTs are invited to attend every meeting, and it is normal practice to give them space on the agenda to report on issues/events in school.

The *Chair* is usually the main link between the PC and the HT/School; any correspondence from the Local Authority will usually come via the school secretary so make friends with yours so that emails are forwarded and envelopes passed on without too much delay! The Chair's job at meetings is to make sure all agenda items are dealt with effectively - i.e. to ensure meetings run smoothly, giving everyone a chance to speak and making sure discussions are appropriate for the forum, i.e. individual cases should be dealt with privately before deciding whether there is a matter for the PC to take on board.

The *Secretary* takes the minutes and prepares them for circulation once they have been approved by the Chair. PCs get a grant from the Local Authority that should cover photocopying/training/travel expenses if needed.

The *Treasurer's* role is to handle the money for the PC's fundraising activities and the aforementioned grant from the Local Authority, and to keep financial records that can be audited at the end of the year. These can be as formal as you are comfortable with - some schools have computer spreadsheets and files, others use a notebook with in & out columns; both are fine as long as you can provide a paper trail for spending and incoming monies, so keep all receipts and invoices safe. These records are then used to give a report at each meeting, with current balances and expected expenditure etc.

Two weeks' notice should be given for meetings— be it through email, text, poster at school gate, item in school newsletter – and all parents and carers at the school have an open invitation to meetings.

### **Agenda Items**

These can vary from school to school but may include:

1. Present and Apologies
2. Approval of previous minutes
3. Matters arising (*anything from the last meeting that needs follow up or further discussion*)
4. Correspondence received by Parent Council
5. Fundraising & Events Calendar
6. Treasurer's Report
7. Head Teacher's Items
8. AOB
9. Date of next Parent Council meeting

You might like to add another item, DGPCF Updates, to ensure all parents are kept up-to-date with any issues the Forum are included in, such as Schools for the Future projects, Education Authority review teams, Education Committee issues being debated, etc.

### **Can anyone become a member of the PC?**

Any parent with a child at the school may become a member of the Parent Council. Parents must always be in the majority and the Chair must always be a parent with a child at the school. The Parent Forum will decide if there should be other members [this should be detailed in the constitution], for example, co-opted members who might be local Councillors, members of the wider community with an interest in or a link to the life of the school (e.g. doctor, police, anyone who can help your school).

### **Useful links:**

- D&G Parent/Carer Council Forum – the Forum is there to support PCs in all they are trying to achieve in their own schools, and across the region, by providing a link between Government/local authorities and parents dealing with everyday life at school.  
Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/Dumfries-Galloway-ParentCarer-Council-Forum-519437318196379/?ref=bookmarks>  
Email: [dandgparentforum@gmail.com](mailto:dandgparentforum@gmail.com)
- Resources are available on all aspects of Parent Councils on the Scottish Parent Teacher Council (SPTC) website at <http://www.sptc.info/> - take a few moments (or hours!) to visit their site for some brilliant resources and information.
- Also, have a look at the Education Scotland site – links from the D&G Council website <http://www.dumgal.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1481> or at <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/parentzone/gettinginvolved/parentcouncils/index.asp>
- Or the National Parent Forum of Scotland site: <http://www.npfs.org.uk>