



# Chairpersons Information Pack for Community Groups in Flood Risk Areas



For a wide range of other information to support you and your flood risk community please view the Scottish Flood Forum web site and follow us on twitter.

This information pack acknowledges a wide range of information already used in community learning and development practice across Scotland and it has been adapted for use with flood risk communities.

[www.scottishfloodforum.org](http://www.scottishfloodforum.org)

 [@scotfloodforum](https://twitter.com/scotfloodforum)

## Contents

Introduction	Page 2
Flooding facts and figures	Page 3
Chairpersons role	Page 3
What type of leader are you?	Page 4
Getting people involved at meetings	Page 6
Conducting the meeting	Page 7
Guiding the meeting with questions	Page 8
What makes a good decision?	Page 9
How to make a good decision	Page 10
Don't be afraid to park	Page 11
Some Final hints and tips	Page 12
Useful links and information	Page 13

## Introduction

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This information pack will provide a range of information on roles and responsibilities, job description, leadership, getting people involved, conducting meetings and guiding meetings, decision making, advanced committee skills, hints and tips and provide useful links for flood risk community chairpersons.

The role of the flood risk community chairperson involves a range of communication and leadership styles, conflict resolution, mediation and emotional intelligence skills. This information note does not address these topics but seeks to highlight their importance for flood risk community leaders who can find themselves dealing with complex and challenging issues.



Because flooding is such a traumatic event, some hostility may have built up both within the community and towards external agencies. Consequently, the role of the chairperson in discussing problems and solutions is very important in helping the group take the right steps forward and taking positive action. One priority of the chairperson is to establish a good working relationship and partnerships with key agencies that have a responsibility for flooding.

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As an independent organisation, the Scottish Flood Forum (SFF) can act as a mediator in difficult situations and support you personally in your role as a chairperson representing your flood risk community and find your way through difficult meetings.



## **Flooding facts and figures<sup>1</sup>**

- Scotland's flood risk management strategies say that between 2016 – 2021 there are 108,000 properties at risk of flooding. 76% of these are residential. Climate change projections expect this number to increase.
- Every year it is estimated that there will be £252 million of flood damages across Scotland.
- 56% river. 23% surface. 21% coastal.
- The Scottish Government has pledged to make available £420 million available for all local authorities up to 2026 for flooding.
- SEPA are working to deliver 14 new flood warning schemes up to 2026.
- 42 formal flood protection schemes are being planned to protect 10,000 properties in multiple communities across Scotland.
- 134 flood protection studies are being planned to analyse the potential benefits of flood protection.
- 2000km of road in Scotland is at risk of flooding.
- 500km of rail passes through areas at high risk of flooding.
- 200,000 hectares of agricultural land is at risk of flooding.
- Flooding effects 250 million people each year globally
- 47% of all weather related disaster across the planet are due to flooding
- There are 33 flood resilience groups across Scotland with which the SFF has contact; who have reduced their flood risks by coming together and working in partnership.

## **Chairpersons Role**

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### **Overall purpose of role**

To co-ordinate the activities of the group and its members and provide guidance and leadership when required.

### Who the chairperson is responsible to

The committee or general meeting, which elected the chairperson and ultimately the members of your flood risk community.

### Specific duties

- Manage open, committee and other meetings with effective agendas
- Ensure members and others have fair opportunity to put across views
- Ensure orderly proceedings at meetings and debate properly covering the issues
- Ensure the constitution is upheld
- Prevent domination by one or a few individuals
- Help the process of reaching decisions
- Help resolve personality clashes

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<sup>1</sup> Figures correct as of October 2017 from SEPA flood risk management strategies summary

- Delegate tasks to other committee members.

### Others Include

- Be properly informed about the issues the group is involved with
- Take urgent decisions between meetings
- Account to the membership for the actions of the group
- Build unity of purpose
- Guides towards decisions within specified time
- Ensure clear agendas are set
- Ensure decisions are carried out
- Guide conduct of meetings
- Tries to promote consensus
- Ensure sufficient consideration of issues

You may know of other responsibilities that come up as the chairperson of a flood risk community group. The list is always changing as the role of the chairperson changes to suit your own set of unique flood risk circumstances.

A current chairperson of a flood action group said this about the job of the chairperson:

*“The chairperson’s role is wide and varied and this should include building effective relationships and developing partnerships with responsible authorities. Local landowners, local authorities, SEPA and community councils all have an important role to play in managing flood risk and we need to work with them”.*

#### **Top Tip**

Remember, the Chairperson is not the person that does everything. A good Chairperson will share the workload amongst the wider group.

## **What Type of Leader are you?**

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### **Examining Leadership Styles: What Type of Leader Are You?**

For all community resilience groups the chairperson is one of the key contributors to the group. They have an important job to do in making sure meetings are run well, in building unity of purpose and in ensuring the group is effective in achieving its aims.

The chairperson is often the person who drives forward the group. They take on many additional jobs such as:

- Facilitator
- Diplomat
- Communicator
- Coach
- Leader

## Leading the way:

Sometimes, the way a Chair leads a group can define the way it performs:

For example, if the Chair leads in a way that is positive, actively listens to others' views and tries to find consensus solutions, the group is more likely to work well together and achieve its goals.

However, if a Chair leads in a way that does not value others' views, especially those that have less experience, this will turn committee members off and the group will be less effective.



Being a good leader is as much about helping to create a positive culture in your flood risk community as it is about having the skills to chair a meeting.

One of the first steps of becoming a good leader is to think about what your own natural style is and think about how you can adapt this to facilitate a positive culture. The table below may help you to think about your leadership styles and how you can adapt them for different situations in your flood risk community.

<b>Four Leadership Styles For Flood Risk Community Leaders</b>	
<b>Style</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Laissez Faire Leadership or hands off that requires minimal supervision to team members.	The chairperson of the flood risk community group delegates full responsibility for the drain inspections to a committee member to report their findings.
Autocratic or full control leadership where leaders make all the decisions.	During a flooding incident the chairperson of the flood group coordinates all the activities of local volunteers.
Democratic leadership where many views are sought and valued but final decision making rests with elected leader.	The committee of the flood group fully debate and inform the development of a flood protection scheme but the final decision rests with elected Councillors.
Transformational leaders communicate effectively with the team but delegate so they can concentrate on a bigger picture.	The chairperson of a flood group devolves all responsibility for organising a sub group to develop a resilience plan but takes part as a member of the sub group.

## Get People Involved in Meetings

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Although the chairperson on many occasions has to be firm in their control of the discussion, it is also important to avoid the temptation of showing any discourtesy or irritation towards members or guests. Not only does this lose the willingness of these difficult members it can also backfire and cause you to lose the support of useful members, in particular the quieter and less experienced members.

### ***Helpful Hints***

- ☺ **Make sure you know who has the up-to-date facts on all matters on the agenda**
- ☺ **Be clear on whether each agenda item needs a decision, or is for information.**
- ☺ **Use summaries and questions to guide the meeting**
- ☺ **Encourage participation but avoid domination by a few members**
- ☺ **Be prepared to be unpopular at times if it is for the benefit of the group**
- ☺ **However you are feeling, always aim to relax, give yourself time to prepare and don't rush things**
- ☺ **If you invite guest speaker it can be useful to ask them to speak first before you move on to normal agenda business.**

Sometimes the chairperson has to adopt the roles of mediator, enforcer and diplomat in order to assist in dealing with the more difficult members, such as:-

1. The ones who talk all the time
2. The ones who "know it all"
3. The ones who jump from one thing to another and never follows the agenda
4. The ones who agree to one thing at the meeting and then spend the next month criticising that decision.

### **Point to Remember**



Sometimes you may feel that chairing a meeting is a bit like trying to juggle many things at once, but with a good agenda, planning, preparation and teamwork meetings can be chaired very effectively.

### **POINT TO REMEMBER**

Other group members also have a responsibility to ensure that meetings work well, tasks get completed and decisions are taken!

## Conducting the Meeting

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As a chairperson it may be helpful to use the following to assist you further develop your skills: -

- ◆ Agree common ground rules that all members sign up to and that can be referred back to when things get tough. These could include:

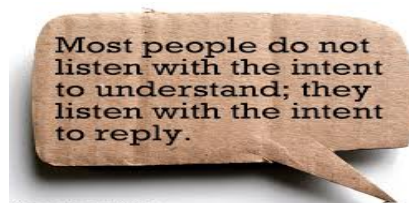
Switch phones off or put on silent	Let's be solution focused
One person speaks at a time	Stick to agenda
Everyone has the right to express views	No meetings longer than two hours
No personal attacks	Guests treated with respect
Avoid side conversations	No offensive behaviour

- ◆ Begin the meeting with a short statement summarising 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 the facts from opinion by asking members of the group for the facts first. Summarise these and then go on to seek members' opinions.
- ◆ Guide the meeting with an agenda and a summary at each stage of the discussion so that everyone is clear about what has been achieved so far. At the end of the discussion, summarise which decision has been reached and who is responsible for implementing that particular decision.

### POINT TO REMEMBER

It is the chairperson's job to ensure things get done – not to do everything.

As we have seen having the ability to listen patiently whilst remaining aware of what else is happening around the meeting table, and not being afraid to make unpopular statements and constructive comments will assist the chairperson conduct the meeting in an effective manner.







A standard agenda with large headings can allow most topics to be included in the meeting and a good tip can be to ensure that any addition items for the agenda are notified to the chair at the beginning of the meeting. The chair and secretary are the key people who set the agenda in the interests of your group so a close working relationship is always helpful with these office bearers.

## Guiding the Meeting with Questions

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- ◆ Encourage participation by asking leading questions. It is not the role of the chairperson to tell people what they think should be done. Use questions to draw out the quieter members and those with special experience or to deal with those who dominate discussions by criticising others.

**The six types of questions are as follows: -**

? The open question to obtain information:

“What experience do any of you have in this matter?”

? The overhead question addressed to the whole group:

“What solutions can we suggest?”

? The relay question in response to a question:

“That’s an interesting question. How would the rest of you deal with that situation?”

? The direct question to individuals, either to draw out special expertise or the quieter members, or to keep the discussion going:

“I wonder, Mr X, if you can tell us about your experience of this situation?”

? The re-directed question, bringing in more people to the discussion:

“Mrs B, do you feel the suggestion put forward by Mr X would be relevant for your situation?”

? The reverse question, asking the person who posed the question to answer it themselves:

“I understand you had to face this problem once. Perhaps you could tell us how you succeeded in overcoming it?”

## **What Makes a Good Decision?**

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There are four main features of a good decision. Good decisions are:

**Clear - Understood - Supported - Implementable**

### **Clear:**

Often the decision made in the meeting arises from discussing options. It's a good idea for the chair of the meeting to check at the end of a discussion -

**“So what we've just agreed is.....”**

### **Understood:**

The group should understand why the decision reached has been taken. This is true whether everyone agrees with it or not. Everyone at the meeting should be able to explain the decision and the reasons for it to someone not at the meeting. If you haven't understood a decision at a meeting, you should ask for it to be explained.

### **Supported:**

If your decision has been arrived at democratically, it will be supported by the committee members. Or will it? Once a decision is made, even members, who disagreed with it, should go along with the majority view.

It is often worth going over the merits of different possible decisions until a consensus is reached on the best decision. This might not be what you ideally felt would be best, but at least it would be supported by committee members.

### **Implementable:**

A decision will normally require one or more people to do something to implement it. Are they willing to do it? Are they able to do it? Will doing it mean progress for your community group?

## How to Make a Good Decision

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At the best of times discussions in community flood resilience groups can wander off the point. It's not easy to stick to the point, but it is necessary if you want to arrive at clear decisions.

Here is a checklist of steps to go through to help you reach decisions systematically.

### **D – DEFINE:**

Define the problem. Try to keep this clear and simple.

### **E – EXPLORE:**

Bring together the hard facts. If you're not too sure whether something is correct, don't bank on it being correct. Check it out.

### **C – CLARIFY:**

See that everyone in the group has and understands the information.

### **I – IDEAS:**

Think as widely as possible about the different ways to crack the problem. To do this well, you must be quite clear what you want to achieve.

### **D – DECIDE:**

Having generated alternative ways to proceed, you must select the one to go for. For each option you considered, you should think through what might result if you adopted it. Is it the result you want?

You may decide to have a vote on alternatives. In small groups this is not usually the best way to proceed. Better to talk it through trying to reach a consensus about what to do.

### **E – ENACT:**

Who will carry out the decision? Do it! Has it produced the result you wanted? What is the next move going to be?

### **Top Tip:**

Always aim to start a meeting on time and finish on time and don't be afraid to remind people of timescales and remind people to stick to the agenda.

## Don't be Afraid to Park

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Even the most organised and effective meetings can lose focus. One agenda item can lead into a discussion about a related or similar issue. Each agenda item needs to be dealt with to the satisfaction of everyone at the meeting or it will become confused. Those taking part will not enjoy it and the meeting could end up achieving little or nothing.



One way of dealing with difficult meetings is to use the parking lot method. When the discussion drifts off the agenda to an issue that may be relevant but would require more detailed discussion. The chairperson or group can suggest that the issue is parked to be taken up at the end of the meeting or put on a later agenda. In addition, this can be achieved through using the sub group method with interested parties to explore the issues in more detail.

### **Possible ways to handle this:**

*“That issue is interesting but we don't have enough time to consider it fully. I propose that we park it for the time being and consider it more fully at the next meeting”*

This should be noted in the minutes so when drawing up the next agenda there is a note to remind everyone.

A chairperson of a local flood group said this about managing meetings:

*“We have had to park loads of technical issues in our meetings so we can get through the agenda on time and setting up sub groups has worked well for our group and keeps people engaged”.*

A chairperson of a flood action said this about making decisions:

*“When making decisions, I would make a point of saying to people, it is good if we can reach consensus and keep votes for when we really can't avoid them, even if that means postponing a decision to give people time to think it over”.*

## Some Final Hints and Tips

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- ☺ Hold meetings in accessible places.
- ☺ Send agendas and minutes out in plenty of time so those who cannot attend the meeting can stay involved and provide comments.
- ☺ Make sure that everyone gets a chance to speak at meetings – not just the most confident and articulate.
- ☺ Think about things that may hinder people from taking part such as language, disability, literacy, transport, accessibility, childcare and any other barriers to getting involved with your flood resilience group.
- ☺ Don't tolerate offensive comments or behaviour at your meetings, particularly of a racist or sexist nature.
- ☺ Be creative and try new ideas.
- ☺ Try out something new that will attract members.
- ☺ Link with other flood risk community groups and speak to other chairs.
- ☺ Most groups hold their meetings at regular times to encourage consistency.
- ☺ Mix your meetings with social events.
- ☺ Think careful about your social media and communications plan to engage the flood risk community.

## Useful Links and Information:

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### Scottish Flood Forum:

This link will provide a range of independent information and advice from the [Scottish Flood Forum](#) to support flood risk communities build resilience and recover from incidents.

### Scottish Government:

This link will give a range of information and resources on preparing, recovering and responding to flooding in your community from [Ready Scotland](#).

### Education Scotland:

This [link](#) will give a range of information and resources to assist engaging young people and children in learning about flooding.

### Scottish Environment Protection Agency:

These links will provide a wide range of information and resources on [flooding responsibilities](#) and duties as the strategic flood risk management authority.

This link will provide information on the [flood risk management plans](#) for your local area for 2016 to 2021.

### Scottish Water:

This link will provide information on [responsibilities](#) and what to do in the event of a flood and who to contact.

### Media:

This link provides a short film about [flooding in urban areas](#) and working with local schools to promote flood awareness and possible solutions.

This link will provide you with a film on [flooding, partnership working](#) and natural flood management from a flood risk community's perspective looking for solutions.

This link will provide a flood video produced by a [flood risk community](#) in England on their experience of being flooded.

### Flooding Specific:

This link provides information on the new [floodre insurance](#) scheme that is important in providing affordable insurance cover for at risk properties.

For further information and support or just an informal chat about your flood risk, community chairing and leadership skills contact [the SFF](#).