



"Serving Parents
for 60 Years"

SPTC
53 George Street
Edinburgh
EH2 2HT

Tel: 0131 226 1917/4378
Email: sptc@sptc.info
Website: www.sptc.info



**Subcommittees – your
questions answered**

Now that Parent Councils are starting to get into their stride, many are thinking it would be sensible to set up subcommittees to run particular activities e.g. a communication subcommittee to produce a regular newsletter and set up/manage a website; a clubs subcommittee to run children's activities and a fundraising subcommittee to take on the activities traditionally carried out by a PTA. The benefits of subcommittees are that they help spread the workload and involve those parents who have a specific interest, but don't want to get involved in general discussions.

Do subcommittees have to be mentioned in the constitution?

There is no need for subcommittees to be specifically mentioned in the constitution. Most constitutions will include a clause that gives the Parent Council the general power to do anything that furthers its objectives/aims. This would include setting up subcommittees.

However, if you do choose to mention the specific power to set up subcommittees, you should not mention particular ones in case, in the future, you want to set up one that is not listed.

We have a PTA and have decided to merge it with the Parent Council. What do we have to do?

Although many people do not realise it, the PTA has a legal identity and this makes it responsible for its decisions and actions. If someone suffers an injury as a result of the PTA's actions, they can seek to claim damages. This means you cannot just "merge" the PTA with the Parent Council; first you have to get rid of the PTA's separate legal identity.

To do this, the PTA has to disband. A note should be sent to all PTA members (all parents and teachers at the school) inviting them to a meeting on a date about two weeks hence, when it is proposed to disband the PTA.

As long as everyone has been informed of the meeting and given the opportunity to attend, the decision can be made by those who actually turn up – usually not very many! It is then over to the Parent Council to set up a subcommittee to run the PTA activities.

How does a Parent Council set up a subcommittee?

Once the Parent Council has decided that it would be useful to have a subcommittee to take on responsibility for a certain activity, it has to write a remit explaining exactly what the subcommittee is there to do, how many people are on it, how it links in with the main Parent Council etc. A written remit helps avoid arguments in the future when folk have forgotten what was agreed. In some ways the remit is a bit like a constitution, but it is the Parent Council's document and they can change it, if they want to. In writing the remit, the Parent Council has to decide and specify the following:

Purpose

What is the purpose of the subcommittee: for example should there be a subcommittee just for fundraising; for fundraising and social events; or for fundraising, social events and children's activities/clubs? It is sensible to give the subcommittee a name that reflects its purpose, and there's no reason why you can't call the fundraising subcommittee "The PTA" if this helps everyone understand what it does.

Membership

How many people should there be on the subcommittee - it is sensible to specify a range, say 5 – 10, rather than a fixed number? Should it just be parents at the school or could there be co-optees? Must there be at least one Parent Council member? Will someone from the subcommittee automatically be invited to Parent Council meetings? It is helpful if there is at least one person both on the subcommittee and the Parent Council as this helps communication between the two groups.

Powers

How independent will the subcommittee be? This applies to all subcommittees, including club, communication and fundraising subcommittees. Will the subcommittee simply do what the Parent Council asks it to do? Will it be free to decide on a programme of events and activities and then run them? Will it have an operational budget that it can use to buy supplies/equipment for events? If it raises extra money, will it be able to decide how this money is spent or will it have to hand the money over to the Parent Council?

If the subcommittee is normally free to make decisions within its area of responsibility, can the Parent Council sometimes ask it to do something specific? Will there be limits on such direction from the Parent Council? It is particularly important to think through the powers to avoid arguments in the future.

Finance

Will the subcommittee be responsible for its own finances, or will everything have to be run through the Parent Council's finances e.g. requests for funding to buy supplies/equipment etc.

If it is decided that the subcommittee will manage its own finances, it can share an actual bank account with the Parent Council, but keep separate records of income and expenditure. The rules about good money management would apply and there should be regular reports to the full subcommittee.

Are there any rules that all subcommittees must observe?

The subcommittee must always remember that it is a subcommittee of the Parent Council, not independent, and this places certain burdens on it.

For example, if the Parent Council has a general policy that only Free Trade tea/coffee is used, then the subcommittee must abide by this policy. The Parent Council may have a rule on sponsorship which would be important for any sports clubs.

At the end of the year, when the Parent Council is preparing its report for the Parent Forum, the subcommittee must submit a brief note on its activities for inclusion in this report. If it has been decided that the subcommittee can be responsible for its own finances, it must still submit its accounts for audit and inclusion in the accounts of the Parent Council.

Who deals with complaints?

If someone has a complaint against a subcommittee, (for example, someone may complain that all the football clubs are for boys and there are none for girls) it is the responsibility of the Parent Council to deal with this.

What about public liability insurance

Where a subcommittee is clearly a subcommittee and there is a paper trail that provides evidence of this, then the activities of the subcommittee are covered by the Parent Council's public liability insurance. However, if there is no clear evidence that the group is a subcommittee, if the PTA was never disbanded, then the insurance company that provides cover for the Parent Council might refuse to cover the activities of the subcommittee on the grounds that it is acting independently and is a separate body.

Other leaflets available

1. What is a PTA/PA?
2. What is a Parent Council?
3. Constitutions Made Easy
4. A Model Constitution
5. Money Matters
6. Golden Rules - Advertising
7. Good Practice - Committees
8. Good Practice - AGMs

ABOUT S.P.T.C.

You may be interested to know that our membership insurance scheme covers:

- Public Liability
- Personal Accident
- Fidelity Guarantee
- Employer's Liability
- Extended Public Liability for hired-in entertainers
- All-Risks (for equipment purchased by the PTA/Parent Council)
- Short-term all-risks insurance for special events.

February 2008

Scottish Parent Teacher Council, the independent voice of parents, is a national organisation. It has been serving parents' groups in schools for 60 years. For further information and membership forms
write to:- SPTC 53 George Street, Edinburgh EH2 2HT **Tel:** 0131-226 4378/1917 **Email:** sptc@sptc.info
Website: www.sptc.info