

The successful Association Chairman

– a guide to the role

Introduction

From the very start, it is important to bear in mind the purpose of the Association and what defines its success.

The Party document “Defining an Association” provides some benchmarks and the officers of an Association should always see their own role in the context of delivering the aims of the Association.

Knowing the rules

All Association rules are based upon Schedule 7 (or Schedule 7A for Federations) of the Party Constitution. Rules that are in bold type are mandatory, those in normal type may be varied to suit the Association so long as any changes are not contradictory to any of the mandatory rules.

The first thing a new Chairman should do is become familiar with the Association rules. The rules should not be used as an obstacle to activity, they exist so that every member will be treated fairly and has the opportunity to be involved.

Key Association rules every Chairman should know;

- Rule 6, who is a member of the Executive Council (the governing body of the Association)
- Rule 6.5, the powers of the Executive Council
- Rule 6.7, How to call a meeting of the Executive Council

The Chairman as Registered Treasurer

Although each Association should have a Treasurer or a Deputy Chairman who performs that role, it is in fact the Association Chairman who is legally the Registered Treasurer with the Electoral Commission and as such is responsible for ensuring that all financial returns required by the Party’s Compliance Department are made.

A successful Chairman and their Officer Team will focus on the three golden rules for a vibrant Association;

- 1 Membership**
- 2 Money**
- 3 Campaigns**

The Chairman alone cannot achieve everything and therefore must include others and encourage and motivate them to want to help and to be involved. The role is very much about leadership and team building.

- Rule 13, voting at meetings
- Selection of Local Government Candidates. This detail is in a separate document from the Association Rules entitled “Procedure for the Selection of Local Government Candidates”
- Rules 5.10 and 11, which relate to the Annual General Meeting, what it needs to cover and how the meeting is called.

Obviously this is not a comprehensive list of rules but they will get the chairman started on the right foot.

Copies of the rules of the Party including local government selections and other guides can be found at conservatives-blueprint.com under the “Assets” tab. But every Association should have its own set of rules and it is important to be familiar with those.

At the end of this are 20 commonly asked “self test” questions, all relating to the rules.

This includes ensuring that donations are permissible under the law and that the Annual Accounts are submitted before the end of March each year.

Further information on Compliance can be found on conservatives-blueprint.com and queries raised with compliance@conservatives.com

The Strategy Plan

An effective Association Chairman and officers will have a clear vision of what they want to achieve during their term in office.

Within 28 days of taking office they have to present their vision as a “strategy plan” to the Association Executive. This is both an opportunity to involve others in and at the same time get formal approval for the initiatives the officers want to run. The strategy plan is effectively the compass by which the Officers will steer the Association over the coming year.

Remembering the “golden rules” the strategy plan should cover the following points;

Meetings

The Constitution stipulates that there should be at least TWO meetings of the Executive Council and an Annual General Meeting each year. It refers to a “Management Team” but makes no rule as to how often it should meet.

It is therefore the Chairman’s task to strike a

Relationship building

The Chairman should work to forge strong relationships with councillors, Member(s) of Parliament, Police & Crime Commissioners, MEPs (while they remain), elected Mayors and Candidates.

The “Bigger Picture”

It is always important to keep in mind that the Conservative Party is a national organisation and that the local Association is one part of that.

Each Association falls within an Area and Region and has the right to elect the Area Management Executive and Regional officers. The Chairman is also a member of the National Conservative Convention which elects five volunteers to the Board of the Party each year. Meetings are held during the year under the auspices of these bodies to which Association Chairmen are invited. The Chairman is expected to attend these where possible to ensure that the voice of the Association

Membership

- Recruitment
- Renewal
- Branch formation

Money

- Budgeting
- Fundraising
- Reporting

Campaigns

- Selecting candidates
- Building delivery networks
- Survey and literature delivery
- Helping other areas (Campaign support)
- Training and briefing on campaigns and best practice

balance between absorbing all our volunteers’ time into meetings with the need to ensure that the Officers and Executive Council feel fully involved and consulted. The Chairman is entitled to attend all meetings of the Association and its branches and committees.

Sometimes a rift can develop between the local Association and the elected representatives and this should be easily avoidable by regular contact with the Chairman and officers.

is represented and also to feedback from these meetings to the Association officers and Executive.

A vital role for the Association is to ensure that its campaigning is targeted on winning elections that include but also those that extend beyond the boundaries of the Association. National and local by-elections, target Parliamentary seats that can make the difference between winning and losing a general election form our battleground and every seat should be looking at what it can do to help these. Again it is for the Chairman to ensure that the strategy includes campaign support to make this happen.

Summary - Ten top tips for the successful Chairman

- 1** The Chairman should lead the Association. Members join because they want to help the Party, the Chairman should harness and direct that help but can't dictate.
- 2** Not everyone will agree with their Chairman. That's OK, we are all involved in politics because we want to improve our local community and our country. We don't always agree how that should be done but a respectful conversation about our ideas should be used as a creative force that can help us evolve into something better.
- 3** Know your rules. We are a democratic organisation and the rules make sure everyone can play a part in the Party.
- 4** As an Association Officer you are entitled to attend all meetings of the Association. Attending branch meetings and events really helps encourage members to be involved. It also is a great way to build relationships so that opportunities can be spotted and problems nipped in the bud.
- 5** The Party has to report large donations it receives, (more than £500), as Chairman you are legally responsible for making sure this happens.
- 6** Your elected representatives (Councillors and MPs) are the public face and voice of the Party, make sure you have a good relationship with them and you support each other.
- 7** Regularly review the progress of the Association, its branches and your elected representatives against the strategy plan. If there is a problem better to deal with it sooner rather than later.
- 8** The Party has a number of websites you'll find helpful, conservatives-blueprint.com for all your printed materials and support information, votesource.uk for campaign data and management and conservativewebsites.org.uk for websites.
- 9** As Chairman you can face some difficult problems so don't be afraid of asking for help or advice from neighbouring association chairmen, your area officers or the staff at Conservative Campaign Head Quarters.
- 10** Enjoy yourself! A good Association can make a real difference to the Party's success and who represents your community, if you are enjoying the job your enthusiasm will rub off on others.



How much do you know?

Can you answer these 20 questions? Hint, the answers are in your Association's rules.

- 1** What are the objects of the Association?
- 2** How long after the AGM must the Officers present their strategy plan?
- 3** What is the governing body of the Association Called?
- 4** Who has day to day responsibility for the running of the Association?
- 5** Who can call an executive meeting?
- 6** How much notice should be given for an executive meeting?
- 7** What is a quorum for a meeting?
- 8** How many signatories are there on the Association bank accounts?
- 9** Who appoints them?
- 10** How long can an Association Officer hold the same position?
- 11** When must the Association AGM be held by?
- 12** Who can deal with any matter not covered in the Association rules?
- 13** How long must someone be a member before they can vote at Association meetings and ballots?
- 14** What 6 items, according to the rules, must be included in the annual report?
- 15** Who is responsible for ensuring that donations to the Association are properly reported?
- 16** What is the minimum number times the Executive Council should meet?
- 17** Who are the four groups of people who can attend the Executive in a non-voting capacity?
- 18** Who has to approve new committees or branches before they are formed?
- 19** Who "controls" the funds of the Association?
- 20** If a dispute can't be resolved locally who, in the first instance, should it be referred?