

# A short toolkit for school council co-ordinators



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## Contents

Ice breakers.....	3
Boundaries and possibilities .....	5
Yes/No/Maybe .....	5
Who decides?.....	5
School Councils are the end, not the beginning (presentation) .....	8
Slide 1.....	8
Slide 2.....	9
Slide 3.....	10
Slide 4.....	11
Slide 5.....	12
Slide 6.....	13
Planning an election.....	14
Do you need to have an election? .....	14
How do we set it up? .....	14
How long should it take? .....	15
Key lines of communication.....	16
Key documents.....	17
School policy on pupil participation.....	18
Some questions to get you started .....	18
Questions that need answering in a full policy.....	19
School council constitution .....	20
Tips for great meetings .....	22
Preparation .....	22
Meeting rules .....	22
Discussion format .....	24

## Ice breakers

### Group juggling

#### Method

- *Keep all balls hidden until needed.*
- Throw a green ball round the circle, each person only getting it once.
- Remember the order and repeat in that order, adding in extra green balls as confidence grows, until all three are going round the circle.
- Explain that red balls go along the same route, but in the opposite direction.
- Discuss what needs to happen to make this work well.
- See if you can get 3 green balls and 3 red balls all going at once. When it's working reasonably well, throw in some extra balls in a random order.
- Discuss what happened.

#### Resources

- In a bag:
- 3 x Green balls
- 3 x Red balls
- Some other coloured balls
- Space for everyone to stand in a circle.

#### Relevance

Learning names; Concentration; Focus on your task; Let people know what you're doing; Stick to the agreed format.

### Envelope game

#### Method

- *Before the session, write a series of questions to put in each of the envelopes. These should be amusing, vaguely revealing and quick to answer. E.g.:*
  - *If you were a superhero, what power would you have?*
  - *Where's the best place to eat?*
  - *If you had to watch only one TV show for ever, what would it be?*
- Split people into groups of 4 or 5. Ask them to pull their chairs into small circles, so they can see everyone else in their group.
- Hand each group an envelope and get one person to read it out to the rest.
- Each group follows the instructions on the envelope, which read:
  - Take a piece of paper out of the envelope.
  - Read it and tell everyone else in the group your answer.
  - Put the paper back and pass the envelope on.
  - Keep going round the circle.

#### Resources

- Chairs
- Envelopes with instructions on
- Slips of paper with questions on in each envelope

#### Relevance

Getting to know one another, seeing one another as more than just a, say Y3 pupil.

## Group counting

### Method

- Explain the rules to everyone:
  - As a group we need to count to 10.
  - No one person can say 2 numbers in a row (e.g. 2 and 3).
  - No one can say anything other than the numbers.
  - If 2 people speak at once we start again.
- As people find they can't do it ask people to suggest rules.
- Try these out one by one and see which work.

### Resources

- None

### Relevance

We all know where we're going, but if we're not careful we can't get there.  
Taking it in turns can help.  
Did everyone get a chance to take part? Did some people dominate?  
Using body language and non-verbal signals.  
Having a chair person, especially one who directs rather than speaking.

## Throwing an alien

### Method

- Everyone stands or sits in a circle.
- Explain the scenario: there is an invisible, face-eating alien loose.
- Put your hands to the sides of your head and wiggle them about (this is you trying to wrestle the alien off your face).
- The person on your right has to put her left hand to her head and wiggle it about.
- The person to your left has to put his right hand to his head and wiggle it about (this is them protecting themselves from the alien).
- Make eye contact with someone else across the circle and throw them the alien.
- That person has to 'catch' the alien by wiggling their hands next to their head and the people on either side each have to wiggle one hand.
- Get the alien thrown around quickly.
- You can get people to concentrate more by:
  - having more than one alien;
  - getting people to shout names of other people in the circle (does the alien follow the names or the eyes?)

### Resources

- None

### Relevance

Concentration; Eye contact; Using names.

## Boundaries and possibilities

### Yes/No/Maybe

- Clear a space and ask everyone to come into the middle with you (if this is really not possible you can get people to do the exercise by pointing).
- Designate one corner to be 'yes', one 'no' and one 'maybe'.
- Ask questions, each time asking people answer initially by standing in one of the three corners.
- Facilitate a discussion by asking people to explain their answers and giving people the opportunity to move to a different position having heard other people's reasons.
- Of course you can use whatever questions you want, but you may choose to use some of these:
  - Should the school council raise money for school equipment?
  - Should the school council be fun?
  - Should the school council carry out all student projects?
  - Should every class have a class council?
  - Is it important for the school council to discuss the toilets?
  - Should the school council have its own money?
  - Should pupils have a say on what happens in lessons?
  - Should the head teacher chair school council meetings?
  - Should school council minutes be posted on the school council noticeboard?
  - Should only responsible people be allowed on the school council?
  - Should people who get in trouble be kicked off the school council?
  - Should there be one boy and one girl from each class on the school council?
  - Is the school council's main role to improve the school?
  - Is the school council's main role to represent all pupils?

### Who decides?

- 1) *Cut up the cards on the following pages (each group needs one set).*
- 2) Split people into small groups. If working with pupils and staff together have separate staff and pupil groups.
- 3) Get them to sort the cards as group, discussing each one briefly as they go.
- 4) You can ask different groups to do:
  - As it is now
  - How they think it should be
  - How they think pupils/staff want it to be (whichever they aren't)
- 5) Get the groups to look at one another's cards and discuss any differences or surprises.

**Pupils decide**

---

**Pupils and staff decide  
together**

---

**Staff decide, but pupils can  
make suggestions**

---

**Pupils are not allowed to  
talk about this**

<b>Appointing new staff</b>	<b>Litter</b>
<b>Assemblies</b>	<b>Playground / school field</b>
<b>Bullying</b>	<b>Punishments</b>
<b>Code of behaviour</b>	<b>Rewards system</b>
<b>Corridor displays</b>	<b>School council money</b>
<b>Discipline</b>	<b>School trips</b>
<b>Discos/parties</b>	<b>School dinners</b>
<b>Discuss individual pupils</b>	<b>School Development Plan</b>
<b>Discuss individual staff</b>	<b>How people get to school</b>
<b>Doing things for charity</b>	<b>Helping new staff settle in</b>
<b>Elections</b>	<b>The library</b>
<b>Uniform</b>	<b>'Green' issues</b>
<b>Homework</b>	<b>Water fountains</b>
<b>Lessons</b>	<b>School buildings</b>
<b>Wet break times</b>	<b>School rules</b>

## School Councils are the end, not the beginning (presentation)

### Slide 1



- What does the title mean?
- Keep coming up against this issue that 'we've got a school council, but it's not really effective'.
- The problem is that most have been set up to fail and once they do so, they will continue in that vein.
- An example [next slide]:



Slide 2

## STARTING IN THE RIGHT PLACE



Resurrection of school council begins! Any tips???

@teacherx Be clear of boundaries at the outset. Identify easy wins, both will get pupils and staff on side.

@AsherJac Thanks! Am drawing up plans.....this weekend! Arghhhhhh!

@teacherx Let me know if you want to bounce around any ideas, or if you're feeling stuck.

@AsherJac Oh - where to start? Step 1 - need staff and students.... Want to get elections up and running, then responsibilities...

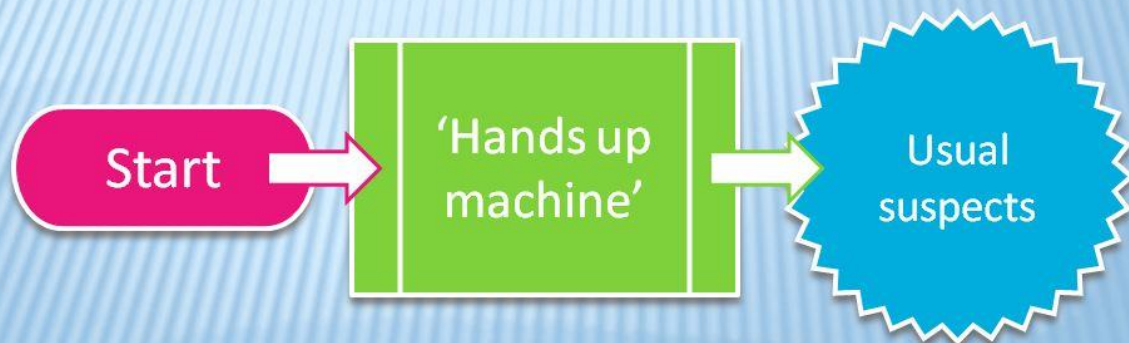
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- Twitter is, amongst other things, a place to ask questions.
- Here I come to save the day! (the lion face is me – for obvious reasons)
- As conversation develops major flaw emerges.
- Why would anyone vote for anyone not their friend if they don't know what the job is this person has to do?
- One of the reasons this school council may fail is because people got voted on who weren't the right people.
- Also, they were voted on for the wrong reasons, so people will forget and not hold them to account.
- We need to figure out what it is we want from pupil voice and then choose the best process for that, not start with the process and then try to fit it to everything else.

Slide 3

## SO, WHAT HAPPENS?

Teacher: Right, you've got to vote for our class rep today. The winner gets to make decisions, and represent the school. Who wants to stand?



- This is a typical scenario for the election process in many schools.
- Middle is a predefined process, we go into this because staff and students have not been prepared.
- So we end up with all our stars, our usual suspects.
- Is this what we want?
- In general teaching has moved on from the 'hands up machine', but school councils haven't because it's outside of most of their experiences.
- We need to have the following discussion before we start.

Slide 4



- These four elements are highlighted in various research over the years, Ruddock/Fielding 2002, Whitty/Wisby 2007, and others.
- Now, really we may not see the pie chart as so equally split, or we may have different pie charts for different pupil voice projects, but we need to have considered it before we make a start:
  - What are we trying to achieve through this project?
  - So what type of people do we want to involve?
  - So how do we structure it?

Slide 5



- Need to move from thinking about the school council as doers, or even the thinkers.
- Use them as the involvers. Why the conductor as the image of this?
  - Monitors and co-ordinates the orchestra.
  - Quietest member of the orchestra.
- Train them to run other meetings, to identify who isn't involved and get them involved.
  - Example from GTCE research: Y6 pupils running circle time for cross-school groups.
  - School council members setting up action groups and co-ordinating between them.
- Be clear about what their role is.
- However, the conductor is far from a perfect analogy as an elected school council also need to be led by the electorate. Sometimes this may mean it needs to say difficult things. If you don't want this to be the case, don't have an election!

Slide 6

## REPRESENTATION VS. REPRESENTATION

- ✕ What turns you or people you know off politics?
- ✕ Who represents you in Parliament?
- ✕ Who represents your interests?



- This is not part of the presentation as such, but question to follow it, to get participants thinking about how an election process might be designed.
  - What turns you off politics: Does your school council do the same to pupils in your school?
  - Who represents you in Parliament: What about if you didn't vote for them?
  - Who represents your interests: What about if you come from a distinct group (ethnic, religious, cultural, gender, views, etc.)?
- Various factors come into play:
  - What voting system is used? (Is it used at all? Do you take it in turns, or draw lots?)
  - What are the constituencies?
  - Are votes secret?
  - Are candidates secret (i.e. People just see manifestos without knowing who wrote them and vote for the best manifesto)?
  - Do people have to write anything or give a speech? What about people who feel uncomfortable about these things – could they still be good representatives? If so, what provision is made for them?
  - How do people know what they are standing for?
  - How do people know what roles they are voting people into?
  - Is campaigning allowed? (If so for how long and are there any limits to what people can do as part of their campaign?)
    - Who is running the election?

## Planning an election

### Do you need to have an election?

It might sound an odd question when we're talking about school councils, but there's no reason a school council *has to* mimic local or national structures. A school is a small community, have you considered other ways you may be able to run student voice in a small community:

- Athenian democracy-style: The council is picked at random on a regular basis (e.g termly)
- Turns are taken: Everyone gets a chance in turn to represent their class on the school council.
- Direct democracy: There is no school council, all decisions are taken by the whole school (e.g. in assemblies, in class council meetings, or online).

### How do we set it up?

So, you've considered the options and decided that you do want to have an election – it's a great way to teach people about one of the key processes of our local and national democracy and it can really be used to promote your school council. You need an election plan, it should include:

1. Key dates:
  - a. Publicity ready
  - b. Nominations open
  - c. Nominations close
  - d. Hustings
  - e. Election day
  - f. Evaluation
2. Structure of the election (this should be in your constitution too):
  - a. Nominations process (do people nominate themselves or others? Do they need a seconder?)
  - b. Voting method (first past the post, single transferable vote, etc.)
  - c. Constituencies (by class, by year, by house, the whole school)
  - d. Who can vote (pupils only, staff only, pupils and staff, does anyone's vote count more than anyone else's – if so why?)
  - e. How people vote (online, in booths, in classes. All should be secret ballots)
  - f. Whether people vote for an individual or based on a manifesto (i.e. they don't know who they're voting for, they just vote based on a written manifesto with no name attached)
  - g. How and when results will be announced
3. Key documents
  - a. Nomination/application form
  - b. Guidance on campaigning and writing a manifesto
  - c. Ballot paper
4. Other issues:
  - a. When and how candidates can campaign
  - b. Who the returning officer is

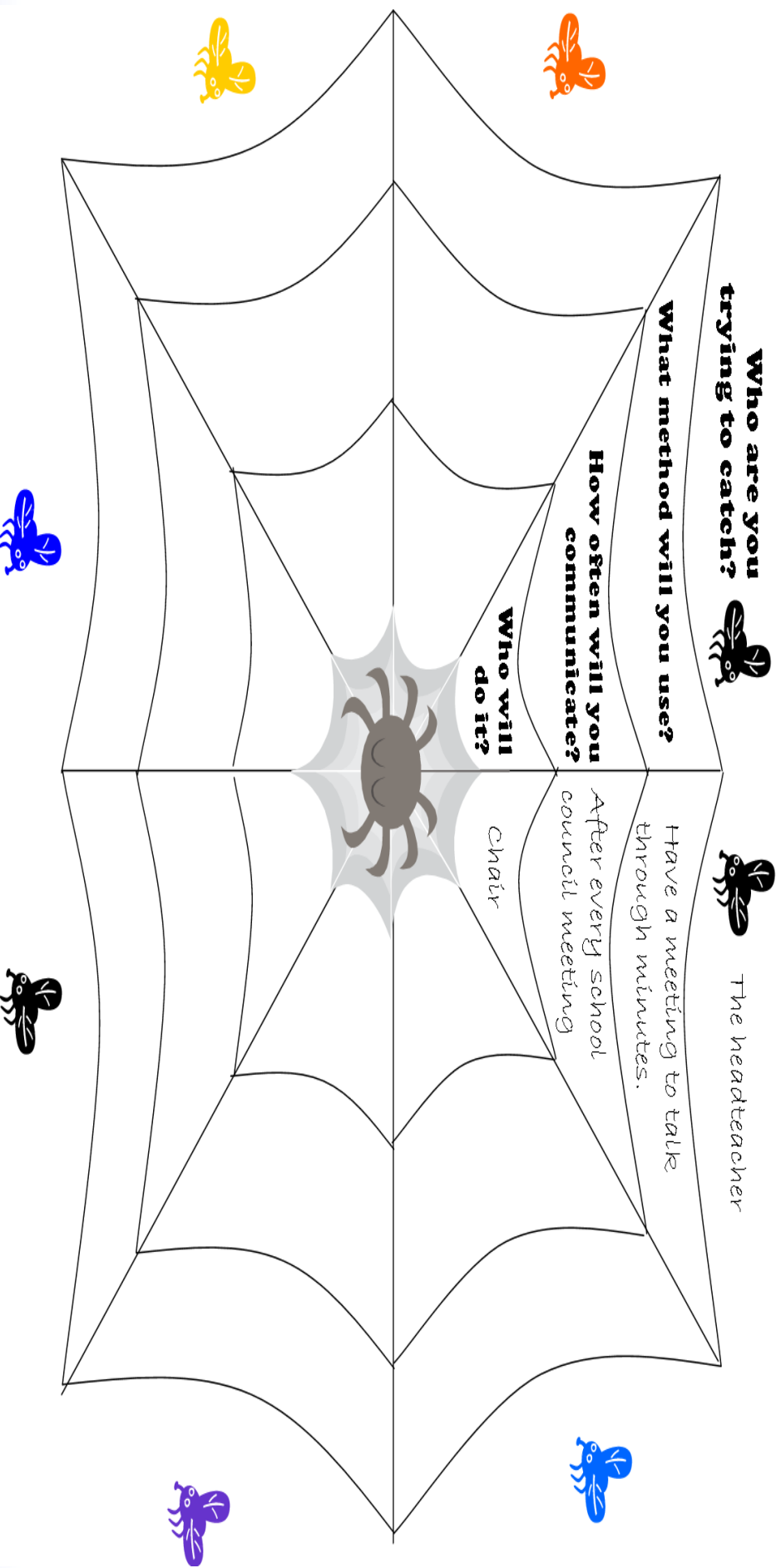
- c. Who the election team is (helping out on the day, designing publicity, collecting nominations)
- d. Whether the local council's Democratic Services team will lend you some voting boxes and booths (they are often keen to)
- e. How will people find out what it means to be a good school council rep? The current school council could run some training for the rest of the school so they know what qualities candidates need to have.

### How long should it take?

After you've created your plan, you need to give it at least 2 weeks between announcing the election and voting.



## Key lines of communication



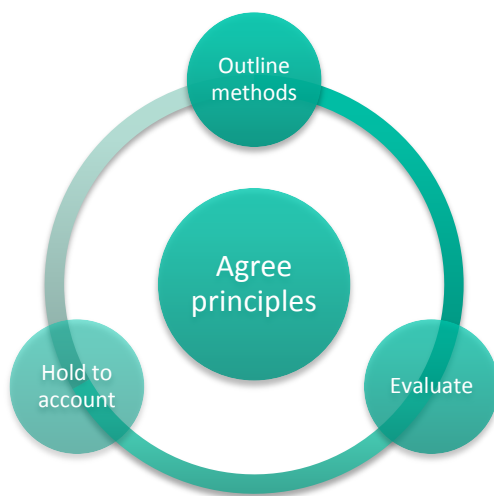


## Key documents

There are two documents you need to lay the foundations for successful, sustainable pupil voice and participation in your school.

School policy on pupil participation	School council constitution
How staff want to interact with students	How pupils want to interact with their council
Lays out how all staff need to take responsibility	Lays out how all students will be involved
Written by staff in consultation with students	Written by students with guidance from staff

The purpose of these is to allow staff and students to:



If you have a standard format and structure for policies and constitutions in your school it makes sense to follow them for these too. However, these are about involvement so there has to also be a way of presenting them that is accessible to all. You may do this by creating a simplified version, or you may try to write the whole thing in such a way that everyone can understand it (once you've done this you may find it useful to do the same for some of your other policies too).

Just because these are important documents doesn't mean they have to be

written down in words. You could use pictures, audio and video or even a combination, whatever you think would mean staff and students would actually see, understand and use them.

## School policy on pupil participation

*Scribble down some quick answers to the questions below to serve as a starting point for creating a policy – don't worry if you think not everyone will agree or they're not the 'right' answers, they're just to start off your thinking and to help you kick start others'.*

### Some questions to get you started

- What types of decisions should students always be involved in (and to what extent)?

*E.g. Reviewing policies; Choosing exam boards; Selecting charities to support; Scheduling the day; Any decisions that affect them; Everything except staffing.*

- Why does your school want to involve its students in decision-making?

*Ethos; benefits; legislation.*

- Who do you need help from to write this?

*SLT; staff; governors; students; parents; external people.*

- What is your next step (including a deadline)?

*E.g. Put on agenda of next Governors' meeting; Talk to Headteacher next Friday; Convene a working group by end of October.*

## Questions that need answering in a full policy

### *Ownership - who will write and review (and how often)?*

- Who will write the first draft?
- How regularly will it be reviewed?
- Who will review it?

### *Benefits - What are the benefits to the school of participation?*

- What is the school's reason for having this policy?
  - What is the vision?
  - What are the benefits for students?
  - What are the benefits for staff?
- What legislation or guidance does it support?

### *Practice- How will participation be practiced?*

- Which issues will students be involved in?
  - To what extent will they be involved?
- How will you ensure all students are involved?
  - If not all students are to be involved, why?
  - Is it enough that all of the opportunity to be involved?
  - If you're using a representative group, how are you defining representative?
- Are there any areas that are off-limits to students?
- How will the students interact with the other decision-making bodies in the school?

- What student participation structures will/can there be in the school?
  - What support will they get from the school?
  - Will adult involvement be limited in these be limited in any way?
  - Can students start their own?
- How will students be involved in school policy (this may vary from policy to policy, so it may be best to have something here that states that every policy will have a section defining student involvement)?
  - Design
  - Implementation
  - Evaluation

### *Policy- How will decisions be made (and challenged)?*

- What methods are open to people to challenge actions and decisions based on this policy?
- What methods are open to people to challenge this policy?
- How does this policy interact with others?
  - Does it automatically respect any?
  - Does it over-rule any?










### *Communication- How will people be made aware of policy?*

- Who will be affected by this policy?
- How will they know and understand what it means for them?
- How will you ensure that new people to the school know about the policy?
- How will you know the policy is useful?

## School council constitution

If your school council is to be either self-managing or democratic it needs to have a constitution. People need to know what their roles are, how people get to be in those roles and what they can expect from people who do them. You need to prepare for problems before they come up, if you just deal with them when they do, you might be accused of being unfair.

Maybe the easiest way to think about a constitution is to try to put yourself in these people's shoes and think what would help them:

 <p>A parent coming to visit your school hasn't heard of a school council before and wants to know what it's for.</p>	 <p>A pupil in Y3 has suggested an idea to her class in circle time and wants to know what will happen.</p>	 <p>A pupil wants to get the whole school recycling, but isn't sure what to do.</p>
 <p>A pupil has been selected as the school 'returning officer', which means she has to run the election, but he's new and doesn't know what to do.</p>	 <p>A teacher has been asked to help run a year council, but isn't sure what he should do in the meetings.</p>	 <p>A member of 6<sup>th</sup> Form has just found out that the treasurer of the house council has used some of the house council's money to buy herself some magazines.</p>
 <p>A governor wants to get the opinions of all students in the school on a very important issue but she's not sure whether the school council represents all the students.</p>	 <p>A person elected on to the school council has been involved in a fight on the bus on the way home from school, some people are saying he shouldn't be on the council any more.</p>	 <p>The school council's Facebook group has a petition with signatures from almost the whole school saying that they don't like the way history is taught in the school. The Chair is not sure whether to show the Headteacher.</p>

Once you've thought about what would help all of these people and help avoid any other confusion people might have, you need to try to put those thoughts in order that makes sense to you. You might want to start it with a few simple sentences about what your school council is for.

What order the rest comes in isn't so important, but you should make sure to include:

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- Anything the school council will always do.
- Anything it will never do.
- What is expected of all people involved with the school council.
- How often the constitution will be checked and how it can be changed.

It can be really helpful to draw a picture of how all the bits of your school council join up. These would include class councils, house councils, year councils, action groups, sub-committees and so other pupil-run groups. You can also put on there how it links to other people in the school like the Headteacher, caretaker, governors, teaching assistants, heads of year, class teachers and so on.

## Tips for great meetings

A great meeting is one where:

- Everyone feels they were able to have their say about the important issues and were heard.
- Everyone leaves knowing what they have to do and by when.
- It's as short as it can be to get the top two done!

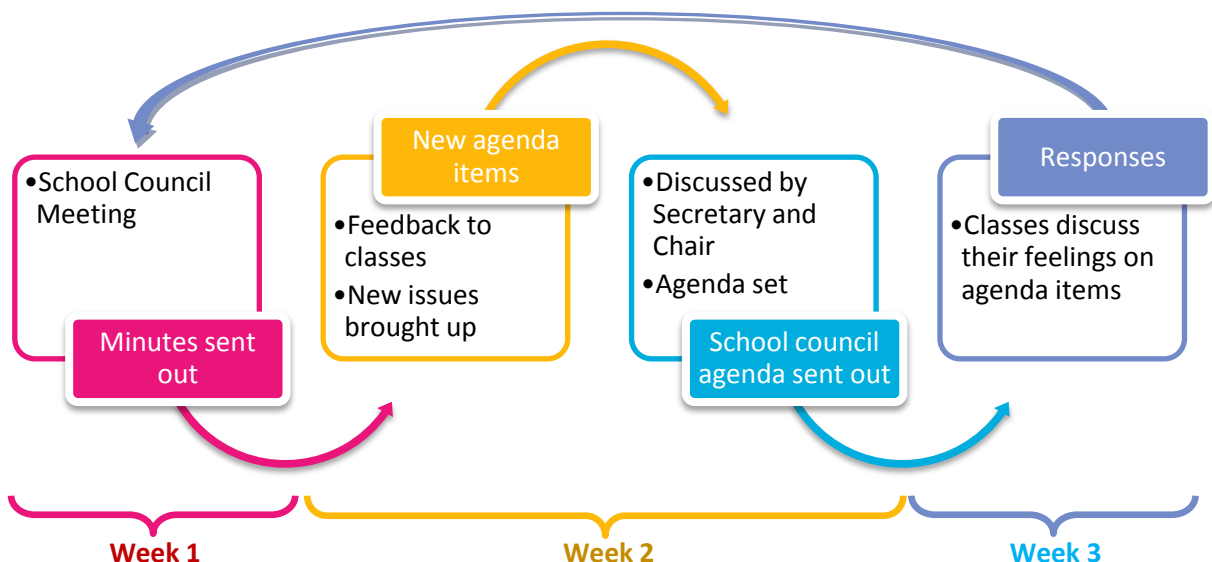
The only way to make this happen is to have a structure and stick to it. The three things you need are:

1. Preparation: Have a regular pattern for sending out and collecting information.
2. Rules: Set rules so everyone knows how to work well together.
3. Format: Have a structure for your meetings that allows all voices to be heard, important questions to be asked and that means you get through your whole agenda.

*Remember a council meeting isn't about the councillors' views, it's about the views of the people they represent. If you give people an agenda at the meeting, you're making sure 90% of the people in the school won't get heard.*

## Preparation

If people have information early they can prepare and that means what is said in meetings will be better thought through and a lot of time can be saved. Have a plan for sharing information that's the same for every meeting. It might look something like this:



## Meeting rules

You need to set some rules for the meeting and have a chair person whose job it is to make sure everyone sticks to them and to the structure of the meeting.

Think about what goes wrong in meetings, what makes you annoyed or uncomfortable and then think about what rule or strategy might avoid that in your next meeting.

What goes wrong	What rule might prevent this
<i>People just moan about everything</i>	<i>Positive suggestions only: 'We should ...'</i>
<i>Things get personal</i>	<i>Don't mention names, talk about behaviour</i>

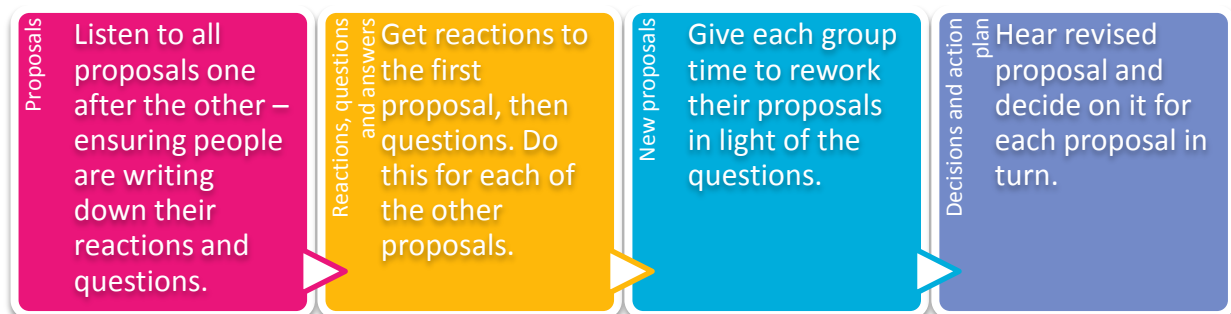
You could also think about what to do if people are getting bored, losing concentration or things are getting too heated.

- Could you get people up out of their chairs to stretch?
- Could you use an active method to continue the discussion?
- Could you split people into pairs or small groups to discuss their thoughts?
- Could you stop to play a quick game?
- Could you quickly ask everyone to answer a silly question about themselves to lighten the mood?

## Discussion format

Stage	How this works	What this should look like	What should be put into the minutes
<b>Present the proposal (an idea for action)</b>		This should present an action, not a problem ('we should...')	Title (detail should already be attached to agenda)
<b>Get quick reactions from everyone</b>	Everyone takes it in turn	Was his/her class supportive of the idea? An overwhelming reaction either way could mean you skip to the decision	
<b>Questions and answers</b>	Hands up to ask a question	These should be phrased as questions, not points.	Key questions
<b>New proposal</b>	Proposers add in anything that came up from questions	The proposal may change completely to something like, 'we will find out answers to these questions for the next meeting.'	New proposal
<b>Decision</b>	Ideally consensus, if not, vote		How decision was made (i.e. consensus, vote – how many votes)
<b>Action Plan</b>		WHO is going to be in charge of doing WHAT by WHEN?	See left.

If you've got a lot of items on the agenda rather than going through this process for each one, you could do something like this:



If you've got a lot of people in your meeting or some people who talk all the time, only let people ask a set number of questions (e.g. each person can only ask 3 questions per meeting).