



# Making your meetings more effective: Introduction

This module looks at how to run and manage effective meetings.

By the end of this module you will be able to:

- identify good venues for meetings;
- manage the time in meetings effectively;
- set an agenda for meetings;
- select officers for your committee and allocate responsibilities to them.

This module is in two parts:

- Part one contains the Development Notes on meetings.
- Part two contains the Session Notes, a video and a meetings checklist.



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MAKING YOUR MEETINGS MORE EFFECTIVE

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## Notes



## Making your meetings more effective: Development Notes

This module is intended to help you get more out of your Neighbourhood Watch meetings whether they are for four or five people in a private house or for all the members in the local school or church hall.

Think about some of the things we have all said about meetings at some time or another.

*“I don’t mind going to meetings but we don’t seem to do anything. It just seems to be meetings for the sake of having meetings.”*

*“Didn’t he go on? Most of the people there wanted to say something but didn’t get the chance, you couldn’t shut him up.”*

*“I don’t mind giving up an hour or so but it was still going on when we left. We had to get the children to bed and besides which the same things were just being repeated over and over again.”*

*“Do you ever get the feeling we are going to these meetings just to agree with what has already been decided?”*

*“The caretaker suddenly appeared at the door and we ran out of time. Trouble was we didn’t get round to discussing the most important items.”*

*“I’m not going to any more meetings there. That church hall is so cold I had to have a bath when I got home to thaw out.”*

Admit it, if you didn’t say it you thought it!



Enthusiasm is usually the beginning of a good scheme. When attendance at meetings starts to drop off, it is usually the beginning of the end.

Many scheme members will attend meetings as part of their everyday work. The format and rules of meetings will be very familiar. The difference being that at work you have to attend meetings. There is no law in this land which says that anyone has to attend Neighbourhood Watch meetings. Instead, they can watch TV, go to the pub, mow the lawn, do the stack of ironing, mend the car etc.

Going to Neighbourhood Watch meetings must beat the competition for members' time. It will only do that if it is worthwhile, interesting, and they enjoy going.

The rest of this module looks at two important elements of meetings:

- planning in advance;
- choosing officers to manage the meetings.



## Planning in advance

### Before we start, do we need a meeting?

Do you actually need a meeting? Avoid having a meeting just for the sake of it – people will lose interest if they feel that the meeting doesn't have a purpose.

How often you have meetings is important. Too often and you will not have enough items to fill the agenda; too few and people will start to lose interest in the scheme.

### So, we need a meeting

Having agreed that you need a meeting, the next decision is where to hold it. Keep in mind what was said previously – people must want to come to your meeting – so where you hold the meeting could make up their mind for them. You have probably heard these complaints before:

*“... we were crammed in that room like sardines, half of us had to stand or sit on the floor.”*

*“... the room was very nice but why did we have to go into town? Surely there's a suitable place on our own estate.”*

*“... the school hall is very good but I'm frightened to death of walking up the dark driveway.”*

In short, the venue must be:

- the right size for the number of people you expect to attend;
- conveniently located either in walking distance or near a bus route as not everyone will have a car;
- safe – people don't want to reach the venue by walking up dark alleyways or a badly lit road.



## Setting out the chairs

Setting out the chairs? Does it matter? Answer – yes! Remember the old school days when we all sat in rows facing teacher and teacher sat at his or her desk facing us? Most of us associate this layout with not so much being spoken ‘to’ as being spoken ‘at’. The same applies at meetings. Chairs arranged in straight rows with the ‘officials’ seated at a table facing the ‘audience’ gives the impression of being spoken at rather than a feeling of taking part in a conversation.

No matter what size the meeting you will get better results by arranging the seating in a circle. Sitting in a circle is much less formal and helps to make people feel that their opinions are welcomed.



## Public enemy number one – time!

Successful schemes are made up of a cross-section of the community and different people have different demands on their time.

If meetings are planned well enough in advance and are well organised, they should be well attended. Think about the following when arranging meetings:

- Set the date of meetings for the next six months or a year so that people can put them in their diaries. This also means that you can book venues for the meetings in advance.
- Always try to start the meeting on time and set a finish time.
- Bear in mind that some people will be working during the day or may have young children. Make sure the start time gives people the chance to get home from work and that the finish time is not too late.
- Find out which days are inconvenient or unpopular for meetings and avoid them. For example, Friday nights are best avoided.



## What do we want our meeting to achieve?

### Planning the agenda

Always make sure that the agenda is varied and interesting and that you are clear on what you want the meeting to achieve. Planning the agenda helps to stop the meeting from becoming a 'talking shop' and also helps to keep people interested. There are several things you can do to help you plan your agenda.

- Plan to have one 'special' item on each agenda. This could be a presentation from a guest speaker or a video on an issue that people are interested in. These can always be followed by a discussion. Useful guest speakers you could invite are:

#### **Council officers:**

Tradings Standards officer  
Highways Department  
Environmental Health officer  
Public protection  
Housing officer

#### **Other organisations:**

Fire Service  
Magistrates  
Specialist police officers  
Victim Support

- Distribute documents and papers for items on the agenda before the day of the meeting. People need time to consider the information and think about any issues they might want to discuss further.
- Have a system so that people can contact the Secretary with items for the agenda. This means that everyone feels able to have an item that is important to them discussed at the meeting.
- Arrange to have all the items for the agenda well in advance - for example 10 days before the meeting date. This is important if papers are to be distributed before the meeting.



- Make sure the agenda is balanced. Aim for a mixture of information items and action items, where decisions are taken about what can be done.
- If you are discussing an agenda item that involves another organisation make sure that you have the relevant people at the meeting or that you have enough background information from them for your agenda.
- When you agree a project or an issue to tackle make sure that what you want to do is not too ambitious. Be realistic and start with smaller tasks. People will feel encouraged once they achieve a task, but discouraged if the project fails because it is over ambitious.



## Choosing the officers

Finding the right officers for the committee is not always easy. It is important to have a chair, vice-chair, secretary and treasurer who can take a leading role in arranging meetings and making sure they run smoothly. People can be nominated and voted into these positions. It is a good idea to have elections for these positions once a year – this gives different people the opportunity to get more involved and means that others can have a break!

Each officer of the committee has a specific job to do.

### The chair and vice-chair

The chair and vice-chair of the committee make sure that the meeting is run efficiently and that people focus on priorities and don't stray off the subject. This includes:

- keeping an eye on the clock and making sure that the meeting makes the best use of the time available;
- encouraging all the members of the committee to work together as a team;
- maintaining order in the meeting;
- deciding points of order and other questions that need a decision at the time;
- having the discretion to give a casting vote if a decision can't be made without it;
- ending the meeting when business has been completed.



## The secretary

The secretary provides the organisational backing to the committee. This includes:

- organising agendas (with the chair and vice-chair) for meetings;
- taking notes of meetings to keep a record of any decisions made;
- sending the draft notes of the meeting to the chair and vice-chair to get them approved;
- once the notes have been approved - sending copies to committee members before the next meeting;
- making sure that copies of notes of meetings are kept in a safe place.

It is important that notes of all meetings are available for anyone who attended the meeting.

## The treasurer

The treasurer is responsible for the finances of the scheme.

This job includes:

- making financial records;
- reporting on the state of finances to meetings;
- finding out about sources of funding for the scheme;
- estimating the cost of projects you might want to undertake.



## Other committee members

As well as the officers we have already looked at, the committee can also have ordinary members. Their job is to support the chair, vice-chair, secretary and treasurer and to work on individual projects and one-off jobs.

It is useful to have other committee members as this stops the scheme from becoming too dependent on a few people. It is unfair to rely on the same people to do all the work. Also, if any of those people opt out, the scheme can hit problems.

Although the officers of the scheme have a key role, any member of the scheme should be able to contribute or help with any task that the scheme has agreed to take on.

## And finally

Keep the committee small, simple and working.

## Remember

**It is better to succeed in small things than fail in large ones.**

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**The next part of this module contains a video and notes for a session about meetings.**

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# Making your meetings more effective: Session Notes

## About this session

This plan is for a short session during one of your Neighbourhood Watch meetings. The aim of these notes is to:

- provide information about successful meetings;
- provide you with a structure for discussing how your meetings can be improved.

By the end of this session you will be able to:

- choose a venue for your meetings;
- plan how to use the time effectively in your meetings;
- set up an agenda for meetings;
- choose officers for your committee.

## How long the session should last

This session should last no longer than 45 minutes.

## How many people should attend

Fourteen to 16 people is about the maximum for this session. Too many and the session will become unwieldy, too few and you won't get enough ideas.

## The resources you will need

- a large room with seating in a circle;
- paper - the bigger the better.



## Session plan and time allocation

### Important note

This session can be used when you start up a new scheme or as part of a programme for an existing scheme.

### Introduction *5 minutes*

Ask the group if they have to attend any meetings on a regular basis. Get people to say what are the bad and good things about the meetings they go to.

### Discussion *5–25 minutes*

**In this part of the session you will be discussing your own Neighbourhood Watch meetings. If you identify some bad points about your meetings it is important not to get into a discussion about individual personalities. Try and concentrate on what your scheme can do to improve, not what individuals have done wrong.**

Ask the group whether they recognise any of the good and bad points in your scheme's meetings. List these on paper.

For each point try and find out why people think they are good and bad aspects of your meetings. Make a separate list of possible areas for improvement.

Use the checklist at the back of these notes as a reminder of things to consider during your discussion.



### **Action planning 25–35 minutes**

When you have identified possible areas for improvement write an action list of things you want to change.

### **Round off 35–45 minutes**

If you've agreed some changes to how you run your meetings, agree a time for when all the changes are to be in place. For example, if you want to use an agenda, this could be started in time for the next meeting. However, if you need to elect officers this will take longer, as you need to invite nominations and organise an election meeting.



## Meetings checklist

### Venues

Is your current venue:

- The right size?
- Conveniently located?
- Safe?

### Time

- Do you have dates for meetings set in advance?
- Do you have set start and finish times?
- Are your meetings on a convenient day?

### Agendas

- Do you have an agenda for your meetings?
- Are papers distributed before the meeting?
- Is there a system for putting items on the agenda?
- Is there a mix of different items on your agenda?

### Committee members

Does your scheme have:

- A chair and vice-chair?
- A secretary?
- A treasurer?
- Ordinary committee members?
- Is everyone in your scheme aware of what each officer is responsible for?