

### **PURPOSE OF THIS OUTLINE**

This outline has been prepared to enable the experience of serving on a parish select vestry to be an enjoyable experience and fulfilling in terms of Christian service.

Part of the challenge is that the principal document for the governance of a Church of Ireland parish - The Constitution - dates from 1870 and assumes much of what was in place at that date. This was when the church was disestablished, and thus ceased being the church of the state.

### **CHURCH AND CIVIL GOVERNANCE**

There are two principal documents of governance which determine the duties and responsibilities of select vestries. They are

1. The Constitution of the Church of Ireland which may be reviewed and changed by General Synod from time to time.
2. The diocesan regulations or schedule which can interpret some aspects of the Constitution where that responsibility is delegated by The General Synod to diocesan councils and synods.

The other major aspect of governance is civil law – including health and safety requirements, employment and management procedures in respect of lay staff such as sextons and organists, and child protection.

Both the civil law and General Synod law prescribe the responsibilities of a select vestry and each individual member of the select vestry is at the point of delivery where the ministry and witness of the parish is maintained, developed and safeguarded both legally and financially.

### **ELEMENTS OF GOOD PRACTICE**

How does a select vestry with good practice in place operate?

1. It has regular meetings
2. It has good administration – notice of meetings, agendas, minutes, financial reports relevant briefing papers etc, are well prepared and issued in sufficient time in advance of the meetings to enable prior consideration. Administration is a gift of the Holy Spirit.
3. It has good procedures in place for the conduct of business. e.g., the members may have agreed their own standing orders for the conduct of business, and agreed a code of conduct which is binding on all members. Whilst these are not stipulated or required by General Synod or diocesan authorities at present, any evaluation of good governance in the charities sector would expect such to be in place.
4. The members have a clear understanding of what the select vestry's areas of responsibilities are and they know where the boundaries lie between the vestry's responsibilities and those of the incumbent in respect of worship and aspects of parish ministry.
5. Confidentiality is assured. It is expected and respected.

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6. It communicates effectively to the parish and the wider community in co-operation with the incumbent.
7. The chair has a clear understanding of his/her role and the boundaries of responsibilities.
8. The members have a clear understanding of their individual and corporate roles.
9. Its working groups will be augmented with people with specific skills when deemed necessary by the members of the select vestry.
10. It ensures budget setting and financial oversight - accountability.

### **THE NEED FOR SMALL ONGOING WORKING GROUPS**

An efficient and responsible select vestry will have working groups in areas such as:

- A. Safeguarding Trust - for the protection of children and young adults. This 'Safeguarding Trust panel' is compulsory under The Constitution of the Church.
- B. Health and safety
- C. Christian stewardship and finance.

### **INITIAL BRIEFING AND INDUCTION OF NEW MEMBERS**

New members should be provided with an orientation or a training session. Otherwise, they can turn up at meetings with little idea of the responsibilities of the select vestry. They, and the church they seek to serve, deserve better.

A simple and effective induction session could include

- a review of the minutes of the last Easter General Vestry meeting
- a review of the minutes of the last 3 to 4 Select Vestry meetings
- a review of the last two sets of annual financial accounts with the principal items of expenditure and income highlighted
- the challenges which have been identified in these and other areas by the vestry
- the bye laws/code of conduct for members as accepted by the Select Vestry for the conduct of business within and personal conduct beyond the vestry meeting itself.

### **DUTIES OF SELECT VESTRY MEMBERS**

- attending meetings of the select vestry and any committees or working parties to which they may have been appointed
- seeking clarification of business and budget
- reporting concerns about problems or perceived improprieties

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- helping to agree a corporate plan and working collaboratively to achieve same
- dissenting from action when they have misgivings and insisting that their dissent be recorded in the select vestry's minutes
- resigning from the select vestry if they cannot fulfill their duties as indicated above

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

New vestry members need to know that some business is confidential and that it can be a breach of civil law in some circumstances to discuss business with someone other than another select vestry member. This is especially so in the area of employment and in the management of volunteers who can have the same rights in many areas as paid staff.

### **CODE OF CONDUCT**

From a parish in Down and Dromore - drafted and passed 2010

*We the Select Vestry believe that:-*

1. Each member of the Select Vestry - clergy and Laity - is a valued and much appreciated member of the parish.
2. Each member of the Select Vestry - Clergy and Laity - deserves the respect of other members, and therefore has a right to express their views on the business of the Select Vestry and to have their views listened to and accorded that respect.
3. Whilst we understand that words may be spoken in the "heat of the moment" especially when items are being discussed which may be of great importance to specific members, no member of the Select Vestry - Clergy and Laity - shall knowingly make a personal attack on the integrity of another member, or in any way slight any fellow member or fellow parishioners.
4. We will at all times try to watch our words carefully and if personal disagreements arise they will not be discussed nor allowed to interfere with the meetings of the Select Vestry.
5. The business of the Select Vestry is to be strictly adhered to - Fabric, Furnishings and Finance.
6. The business discussed at the Select Vestry meetings shall be confidential and that confidentiality should be strictly adhered to unless the Select Vestry wish the Parish to be acquainted with their discussion.
7. Our "Raison d'etre" is our service to God and our church and we promise to keep this at the forefront of our thoughts and actions.

### **CONTINUING DEVELOPMENT**

Continuing development, for example in Northern Ireland NICVA organises courses for the management committees of voluntary organisations, community groups and charities. See site on next page.

### DIY Committee Guide - web site

This site sponsored by the Charities Commission for Northern Ireland, NICVA and Volunteering NI, is a major cache of excellent short, well written, resource/briefing papers on almost every aspect of committee work e.g.,

- 1 [Characteristics of a good treasurer](#)
- 2 [What is the role of the treasurer?](#)
- 3 [What is the role of the secretary?](#)
- 4 [What is the role of the chairperson?](#)
- 5 [What is the role of honorary officers?](#)
- 6 [What is the role of sub-committees?](#)
- 7 [How to develop policies and procedures](#)
- 8 [What policies do you need to develop?](#)

### Popular resources

- 1 [Recording minutes of committee meetings](#)
- 2 [Drafting agendas for meetings](#)
- 3 [Example risk management templates](#)
- 4 [Worksheet: Rating risks](#)
- 5 [Model policies \(Charity Governance\)](#)
- 6 [Company secretary role description](#)
- 7 [Who's who?](#)
- 8 [Advice Note: Conflicts of interest \(NICVA\)](#)

Site also has a training calendar of events.  
<http://www.diycommitteeguide.org/>