



# Skills for CHC Chairs

Unit 1: Working with the Chief  
Officer



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HOW TO USE  
THIS UNIT

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You will need:  
\* the CHC Members' Handbook  
\* the Chair's Resource Pack  
\* pen and paper

You should set aside about an hour to work through this unit.  
[If it takes you more or less than that, it doesn't matter, as long as you feel you've given enough thought to the ideas].

Work through the unit steadily, reading the resource materials as you're asked to, and thinking through the questions and case studies. Much of the unit, like the role of the Chair, is about complex situations, which do not have simple yes/no answers. Reflecting on these situations, and deciding how you would behave, is the most important part of the learning.

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CONTENTS

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1. The role of the chair
2. Communication
3. The Creative Tension
4. Getting support for yourself

## 1. The Role of the Chair

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READ

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Role of the CHC Chairman  
[in your Resource Pack]

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NOW  
CONSIDER

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the list of Key Result Areas, on page 2 of the paper. Does this reflect your own role, as you see it? Note down any discrepancies, so that you can clarify them later with your Chief Officer.

The paper you were reading was drawn up by one regional association of CHCs. The Chair's role may vary in some details from one CHC to another.

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CHECK YOUR  
UNDERSTANDING

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Which of these tasks do you think  
belongs within the role of the Chair?

Definitely Chair's role	Shared with C.O.	Delegated to C.O.	Definitely not Chair's
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Writing the  
Annual Report

Speaking for the  
CHC on local radio

Encouraging a new  
member to join a  
sub-committee

Monitoring the budget

Checking that letters  
sent from the office  
are suitably written

Negotiating with  
senior NHS managers

Hiring and firing  
staff

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## ANSWERS

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	Definitely Chair's role	Shared with C.O.	Delegated to C.O.	Definitely not Chair's
Writing the Annual Report			/	
Speaking for the CHC on local radio	/	or	/	
Encouraging a new member to join a sub-committee	/			
Monitoring the budget				/
Checking that letters sent from the office are suitably written				/
Negotiating with senior NHS managers	/			
Hiring and firing staff				*

\* staff are employed by the Region, which is responsible for hiring and firing. However, the Chair is closely involved in this processes in relation to the Chief Officer.

The principle is that the Chair ensures that the CHC as a whole functions effectively; but day-to-day management is the Chief Officer's responsibility.

In the rest of this unit, we look in more depth at the respective roles of the Chair and Chief Officer.

## 2. Communication

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### CASE STUDY

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Lilian Freeman is the newly elected Chair of Shadwell CHC. She has been a member for three years. She used to work as a manager in a finance company, but took early retirement five years ago.

Lilian is very aware of the responsibilities of her new role, but also excited by the possibilities. As a member, she often felt frustrated that the CHC seemed to operate reactively. She would like it to become more dynamic and better known while she is Chair.

She's not sure how the Chief Officer, Joe Malik, will respond to this. In the past she thought that he was frustrated with her predecessor's laissez-faire style. On the other hand, she realises that Joe and the other staff have developed their own ways of working, and that she can't simply walk in and demand changes. The office seems to run smoothly.

Lilian and Joe had one meeting, the week after she was elected. Since then she has occasionally phoned him about specific issues,; but mainly she's concentrated on getting better informed. She's read through a lot of background material, and feels more confident about the content of the work. What concerns her now is how she can make things happen. She realises that the working relationship with Joe is going to be crucial, but she feels unsure of what to do to develop it.

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### CONSIDER

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what advice you would give Lilian on building up a good working relationship with Joe.

1.

2.

3.

4.

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NOW  
COMPARE

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your answers with ours.

1. Establish a pattern of regular meetings, rather than waiting for specific issues that need discussion.
2. Ask Joe how he sees his role and hers: compare notes.
3. Acknowledge and work through any differences of opinion.
4. Work out the boundaries: who takes which decisions? What does Lilian need to be involved in? What can Joe undertake without consulting her?
5. Find out about the workload in the office. What are the resources? What are the pressures? How much flexibility is there?

You may have had more ideas.



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SOME  
POINTS

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for you to discuss with your  
Chief Officer

- \* How often do you need to meet? Should you arrange a regular time each week/fortnight?
- \* If the two of you have different work patterns, what are the ground-rules? Is it OK to phone each other at home? If so, when: evenings up to a certain time? weekends? only in an emergency?
- \* What sort of decisions do you as Chair need to be involved in? What can the Chief Officer decide on her/his own?
- \* What sort of support and guidance do you expect from each other? Do your expectations of each other tally?

The key is to negotiate arrangements that are appropriate to both of you, and to the needs of the work.

### 3. The creative tension

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CASE  
STUDY  
continued

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Six months later, Lilian feels that she and Joe are working very well together. They get on well, they've got through a couple of crises successfully, and they're gradually making the CHC more lively and interesting to belong to.

The only time Lilian feels frustrated about working with Joe is when she has ideas for new areas of work. Then Joe seems to become extra cautious. His first reaction appears to be doubt: will there be time to fit this in? Will it get in the way of work they've already started? In fact, they have reached some kind of compromise when this has happened; but Lilian still finds the situation peculiar and irritating.

What do you think about this situation?

- a] Lilian's right: it's good to have new ideas: Joe's being too conservative \_\_\_\_\_
- b] Joe's right: it's better to do the existing work well: Lilian's being unsystematic \_\_\_\_\_
- c] they're both right, and it's good to have a bit of disagreement \_\_\_\_\_
- d] they're both being negative: the Chair and Chief Officer need to be in agreement \_\_\_\_\_

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COMPARE

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your answer with ours

[c] seems the most constructive view, as long as the disagreement doesn't get out of hand. It's true both that the CHC needs new ideas, and that it shouldn't get carried away with them. It might help the whole CHC to have an annual review, so that existing work and new ideas are all evaluated, and priorities agreed by everyone.

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ONE  
CHAIR'S  
VIEW

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"We have a good working relationship now, but it's taken time and energy. Somebody said it's like a marriage of convenience: you haven't chosen each other, maybe you wouldn't, but you've got to get on with it.

"You soon learn as Chair that you can't know everything that's going on. I spend a lot of my time keeping myself informed, but even then Sharon [the Chief Officer] knows more. She's the one people talk to on the phone, she deals with the complaints, she's just there on the spot in a way I can't be. At first I found that really worrying: how was I meant to have an overview of her work when she knew so much more? The way I've found to dealt with it, is to be clear with myself as well as Sharon, about what I need to know and what I take on trust.

" At the same time, although I'm not Sharon's manager, I do have overall responsibility for the functioning of the CHC, and that includes her performance in her job. I think it's essential to be honest about that, rather than pretending we're just colleagues. I don't pull rank, and I don't set out to inspect the work in detail. It's more about having the kind of working relationship where I can ask why something's done a particular way, or voice my concerns, and we can talk about it.

"We say we have a creative tension between us, and I think that's what you need. We work very closely, I get a lot of support from Sharon, and I see supporting her as a crucial part of my job. But there's still a certain distance, which is about acknowledging where the power is between us."

CHC Chairs have to work in two ways with Chief Officers: collaborating closely, and remaining aware of the quality of the work. This is not quite the same as the dilemma for a line manager, who needs to support staff while supervising them closely. Nor is it the same as, say, the Chair of a local authority committee, who can demand certain behaviour of council staff. There are few exact models for this relationship, and the task for any Chair is to find the right balance.



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## A DILEMMA

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for you to think about.

Rajinder Gill has been Chair of Kettlewell CHC for two years. he and the Chief Officer, Kevin Bryant, have worked closely together, and Rajinder has a lot of respect for Kevin's knowledge and experience. He feels they have made the CHC much more effective over the time they've worked together.

In the past few months, however, Rajinder has got worried. Kevin seems to be working longer and longer hours, without ever getting through the workload. Kevin often seems tired and irritable, and the other day Rajinder overheard him shouting at Judith, the deputy.

At the same time, the office staff seem to be making more mistakes. The papers for the Mental Health Sub-Committee weren't sent out on time last month, and had to be tabled. Deadlines have been missed, and phones not answered.

Rajinder has tried asking Kevin if there's anything wrong. Kevin just said he was overworked, and changed the subject. Now Judith has phoned Rajinder at home, complaining about Kevin's aggressive attitude, and asking Rajinder to do something.

What should Rajinder do?

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LIST

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as many suggestions as you can think of. List also anything you think he definitely should not do.

1.

2.

3.

4.

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CHECK

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your ideas against ours.

1. Make a time to meet Kevin - maybe away from the office - and say what he's observed. If Rajinder talks about the work, rather than asking about Kevin's personal situation, he can respect Kevin's privacy and still ask him to concentrate on the impact on the CHC. A meeting like this has no formal status: it gives them both a chance to try and deal with the situation without resorting to formal procedures.
2. At this meeting, or maybe another when they've both had time to think, they should agree on a course of action. This might be about Kevin making priorities in his work; or Rajinder himself taking on more, if that's appropriate; or Kevin delegating more to Judith; or whatever else seems appropriate.
3. Rajinder needs to decide whether the problems are so serious that Kevin's line manager at Region should know. If Kevin won't respond to an informal approach, or if they can't find a way of dealing with the situation, he will have no option.
4. Rajinder needs to be careful about getting involved in Judith's complaint. If she wants to take out a formal grievance, she will have to use the Region's procedure, which won't involve Rajinder. He can express his own concern, based on what he overheard, but he must avoid taking sides or interfering in their work relationship.
5. He could talk through the situation with another Chair, to get another perspective and make sure he's acting appropriately. He could also consult the line manager at Region: but he needs to be aware of the potential impact on Kevin if he does this.

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THE  
PRINCIPLES

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for dealing with any issue about  
the Chief Officer's work:

- \* be clear about the limits on your own role. You have a legitimate concern, and a duty to take action where necessary; but you don't have the power to institute formal procedures.
- \* raise your concerns clearly and calmly, and listen carefully to the reply. If there's conflict, be prepared to consider whether you're contributing to it.
- \* if you've agreed on a course of action, give it time to work.
- \* take advice from another Chair, or from Region.
- \* if the situation still isn't resolved, raise it formally with the appropriate person at Region.

#### 4. Getting support

The role of Chair is a very complex and demanding one. For much of the time, you will be drawing on your experience both within and outside the CHC, to help you respond to new situations. You will also find the Chief Officer an invaluable resource of knowledge and experience.

At the same time, it's always useful to have another perspective on demanding situations, or on occasions when it's not appropriate to consult the Chief Officer. The other Chairs in your region are your natural support network. Get to know them, and make sure there are people you can call on, and who can call on you, for support and advice.

You can also contact ACHCEW if there are policy or practical issues you want to talk through.

