

Getting the most out of your AGM



Local party AGMs should be a key date in the calendar – an opportunity for our internal democracy to mean something, an occasion when members can get involved and informed and a chance to help expand and improve the local party.

They are also very easy to do badly, making them badly attended and boring.

So here are ten tips on how to make the best out of your local party's AGM. Individually, each of them is pretty straight-forward but the collective impact can make a huge difference to how well a local party does at communicating and involving people.

1. Invite a guest speaker:

Remember, the formal business of the AGM does not have to be the only thing that happens at the event.

You don't have to be a large local party with a big name speaker; some of the best AGM speeches I've heard have been at very small local parties, hearing from a near-by Liberal Democrat council group leader.

A good speaker – and perhaps also a little training session? – makes the event more interesting, meaning you also have more people turn up who can take part in the internal democracy of the formal business.

2. Don't just invite current members:

For the formal business, it is important to know who is a paid-up current member, but if you've got a speaker then it makes sense to invite a wider group of people – including lapsed members and helpers who have never joined the party.

3. Invite those from neighbouring areas you work with:

Inviting people from neighbouring local parties or councillors from elsewhere in the same council area to an AGM is a good way of helping build local links.

4. Have a decent sign-in sheet:

A group of people in a room is a prime opportunity to make sure the local party has their full contact details – phone, email and mobile.

So why pass up on it by not asking?

5. Make sure new people are welcomed:

Obvious, but not always done!

One method that works well for many local parties is to have one person volunteer to make sure they personally talk to every new person who turns up and to introduce them to others.

Combine this with a simple rule for the event to make new people welcome rather than bemused: no acronyms to be used.

6. Work on the opening speech:

The first few minutes can really set the tone – welcoming and interesting or boring and lapsing into jargon?

The opportunity to set the tone for the event is an important one.

The speech should touch on the main political issues of the moment, as many members and supporters like to discuss political issues that often do not come up

much in the day-to-day work of running a local party.

7. Put effort into publicising the AGM's existence:

You need to mail out the formal business information such as the agenda, but it doesn't have to be presented in a boring, dry manner.

Try to answer the question, "why might this event be of interest to me?"

Remember to use email, Facebook, Flock Together and other online tools to publicise and to provide last minute reminders.

8. Publicise future events:

If you've got a group of people into a room once, now's the time to let them know when else they may wish to congregate in future.

9. Give people some campaigning to go away with:

Whether it's leaflets, petition sheets or other forms of campaigning, don't forget that we're not just a debating society.

10. Follow-up afterwards:

Email in particular means it now is very easy to let people have follow-up information after an AGM.

You don't need to wait a year until people can see the notes of what was decided, the text of the speech of your guest speaker, photographs of people enjoying the event and so on.

And of course if people who didn't come get the news that the event was interesting and successful, they are more likely to come next time.

Mark Pack, 4th October 2011