



Setting up a committee

CORE04

Most voluntary groups are run by a committee. This can be known by a number of different titles, including Committee, Executive Committee, Management Committee, Council of Management and Board of Trustees

This information sheet is about setting up a committee to govern your voluntary or community group. It covers:

- **Trustees** – this section covers the duties of committee members, known as trustees, and a trustee person specification.
- **The roles of honorary officers** – this section contains role descriptions, and person specifications for the chair, vice-chair, company secretary/ secretary and treasurer
- **Effective meetings**
- **Sample form of declaration of commitment and qualification for trusteeship**

Trustees

The duties of a trustee are:

- to ensure that the organisation complies with its governing document, organisation law, and any other relevant legislation or regulations
- to ensure the organisation applies its resources exclusively in pursuance of its objectives. This means making sure that the organisation does not spend money on activities which are not included in the objectives, no matter how worthwhile or charitable those activities might be
- to contribute actively to the committee's role in giving firm strategic direction to the organisation. This means helping to set overall policy, define goals, set targets and evaluate performance
- to safeguard the good name and values of the organisation and to represent the organisation as appropriate
- to declare any conflict of interest while carrying out the duties of a trustee
- to be collectively responsible for the actions of the organisation and other trustees
- to ensure the effective and efficient administration of the organisation

- to abide by the organisation's policies, for example equal opportunities
- to ensure the financial stability of the organisation
- to protect and manage the property of the organisation and to ensure the proper investment of the organisation's funds
- to ensure the organisation is properly insured against all reasonable liabilities
- to appoint and support the employees and monitor their performance
- to use any specific knowledge, expertise or experience to help the committee reach sound decisions.
- to attend meetings, and to read papers in advance of meetings
- to participate in other tasks as arise from time to time, such as interviewing new staff or helping with fundraising
- to keep up-to-date about the activities of the organisation and wider issues which affect its work

Person specification for a trustee

Each trustee must have:

- integrity
- a commitment to the organisation and its objectives
- an understanding and acceptance of the legal duties, responsibilities and liabilities of trusteeship
- a willingness to devote the necessary time and effort to their duties
- strategic vision
- good, independent judgement
- an ability to think creatively a willingness to speak their mind
- an ability to work effectively as a member of a team

The roles of the honorary officers

The 'honorary officers' are trustees with particular roles. These comprise a chair, vice-chair, company secretary/secretary and treasurer. The roles of chair and treasurer are particularly important. The honorary officers are usually elected by the members of the committee at the annual general meeting. The organisation's governing document and legal structure may give the honorary officers specific roles, functions and responsibilities, so the following is a general guide.

The chair

The role of the chair is to provide leadership for the committee in setting the strategy and policies for the organisation. He or she is responsible for ensuring that the committee fulfils its responsibilities for the governance of the organisation.

The chair's role is also to work closely with the employees, supporting them to achieve the aims of the organisation. The chair should act as the channel of communication between the board of trustees and the staff.

The chair may act as a figurehead of the organisation and represent it at functions, meetings and in the press and broadcasting media. Other tasks include authorising action to be taken between meetings of the full board, and signing cheques and legal documents.

Other responsibilities of the chair include:

- planning the annual cycle of board meetings
- setting agendas and chairing committee meetings
- monitoring that decisions taken at meetings are implemented
- leading the process of appraising the performance of the employees
- sitting on appointment and disciplinary panels

Person specification for a chair

In addition to the qualities needed by all trustees, the chair should also possess the following:

- leadership
- experience of committee work
- tact and fairness
- good 'people' skills
- knowledge of the type of work undertaken by the organisation and a wider involvement with the voluntary sector and other networks.

The vice-chair

The vice-chair acts for the chair when the chair is not available and undertakes assignments at the request of the chair.

The company secretary/secretary

The role of the company secretary is to support the chair by ensuring the smooth functioning of the board. The responsibilities of the company secretary include either doing the following tasks or delegating them to a member of staff and ensuring that they have been carried out:

- making all the arrangements for meetings (booking the room, arranging for equipment and refreshments, organising facilities for those with special requirements, etc.)
- preparing agendas as set by the chair and circulating them with any supporting papers in good time
- receiving agenda items from other trustees/staff

- checking that a quorum is present
- minuting the meetings and circulating the draft minutes to all trustees
- ensuring that the minutes are signed by the chair once they have been approved
- checking that trustees and staff have carried out action agreed at a previous meeting
- circulating the agendas and minutes of the annual general meeting and any special or extraordinary general meetings
- sitting on appraisal, recruitment and disciplinary panels as required

Person specification for a company secretary/ secretary

In addition to the qualities needed by all trustees, the company secretary should also possess the following:

- organisational ability knowledge or experience of business and committee procedures
- minute-taking experience, if this is not being delegated to staff

The treasurer

The treasurer takes the lead in overseeing the financial affairs of the organisation. He or she must ensure that the organisation is financially viable and that proper financial records and procedures are maintained.

The responsibilities of the treasurer include:

- preparing and presenting budgets, accounts and financial statements
- checking that the financial resources of the organisation meet its present and future needs
- ensuring that the organisation has an appropriate reserves policy
- preparing and presenting financial reports to the committee
- ensuring that appropriate accounting procedures and controls are in place
- liaising with paid staff and volunteers about financial matters
- advising on the financial implications of the organisation's strategic plan
- ensuring that the organisation has an appropriate investment policy
- ensuring that there is no conflict between any investments held and the aims and objectives of the organisation
- ensuring that the accounts are prepared in the form prescribed by the Home Office regulations, included in the annual report and submitted to the relevant statutory bodies
- ensuring that the accounts are audited in according to Home Office regulations, and that auditors' recommendations are implemented
- keeping the board informed about its financial duties and responsibilities
- contributing to the fundraising strategy of the organisation
- making a formal presentation of the accounts at the annual general meeting and drawing attention to important points
- sitting on appraisal, recruitment and disciplinary panels as required

Person specification of a treasurer

In addition to the qualities needed by all trustees, the treasurer should also possess the following

- financial experience and business planning skills
- some experience of organisation finance and fundraising
- the skills to analyse proposals and examine their financial consequences
- a preparedness to make unpopular recommendations to the board
- a willingness to be available to answer financial enquiries from staff or trustees

Effective meetings

The most important thing a committee does is meet together to make decisions. Meetings should be well planned for effective decision-making.

The agenda should be thought through in advance, with each item given time according to whether it needs an immediate decision, or further information or a discussion before a decision can be made.

Typical agenda order:

1. Apologies
2. Approval of the minutes of the previous meeting
3. Matters arising
4. Items
5. Any other business

Minutes are a formal record of the meeting. They should be approved and signed off by the chair at the beginning of the following meeting. They should be brief, highlighting action to be taken and decisions made. Good minutes record who has to do what, and by when. Copies should be sent to those involved.

Financial reporting is one agenda item that will appear at pre-set dates during the year and everyone on the committee should know these dates.

Further reading

The Charity Commission produces a wide range of information on the roles and responsibilities of committee members. See

www.charitycommission.gov.uk

Form of declaration of commitment and qualification for trusteeship

I am committed to achieving the objectives of [name of organisation]

I understand the responsibilities and liabilities I am taking on in becoming a trustee of [name of organisation] and agree to devote the necessary time and effort to my trusteeship.

I am not disqualified from acting as a trustee under section 72 of the Charities Act 1993.

Signed:.....

Date:.....

Section 72 of the Charities Act 1993 disqualifies people who:

- have been convicted of any offence involving dishonesty or deception;
- have been adjudged bankrupt or sequestration of their estate has been awarded and (in either case) they have not been discharged;
- have made a composition or arrangement with, or granted a trust deed for, their creditors and have not been discharged in respect of it;
- have been removed from the office of organisation Trustee or Trustee for a organisation by an order made by the Commissioners or by the High Court, on the grounds of any misconduct or mismanagement in the administration of the organisation for which they were responsible or to which they were privy, or which they by their conduct contributed to or facilitated;
- have been removed, under Section 7 of the Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Scotland) Act 1990 (powers of Court of Session to deal with management of charities), from being concerned in the management or control of any body;
- are subject to a disqualification order under the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986 or to an order made under section 429(2)(b) of the Insolvency Act 1986 (failure to pay under county court administration order).