



# how to develop a community group

a **CNet**  
guide for  
community  
groups



**CNet**  
EMPOWERING  
COMMUNITIES

## Contents

### Setting up a community group or voluntary organisation

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#### **Key Questions**

page 3

What do we want to do?  
 Where do we want to do it?  
 Who do we want to do it with?  
 Are we overlapping with other groups?  
 Could we work in partnership with any other groups or organisations?  
 Do we have the time, energy, and commitment to do the work ourselves?  
 Do we have a plan of action?  
 Do we need a constitution?  
 Do we need a committee?  
 What is a general meeting?  
 Do we need a bank account?  
 Do we need to consider equal opportunities?  
 Does our work involve children and young people or vulnerable adults?

#### **Management Committee**

page 5

What is a management committee?  
 Who sits on the management committee?  
 What do individual members do?

#### **Responsibilities of a Management Committee**

page 6

Specific responsibilities  
 Running the groups and meetings  
 Helping the group keep on track  
 Finances  
 The provision of training  
 General organisation  
 Legal liability  
 Organising events and activities (including fundraising events)  
 Members of the group and people you work with  
 Employment and volunteers  
 Premises  
 Other useful information

#### **Constitutions**

page 9

Step by step help with writing a constitution  
 Checklist  
 Sample clauses

### **Officers of the Community Association and their Duties**

page 15

The essential officers  
 Additional officers  
 Electing additional officers  
 Other voluntary workers  
 Role of officers  
 Secretary's Role  
 What does the secretary do?  
 Taking minutes  
 Why is it important to have minutes?  
 The basic tasks for the minutes-takers  
 Sort out the basics  
 Writing rough notes  
 Some common problems  
 Some solutions  
 Tips on being a Good Secretary  
 Organisation  
 Share information  
 Don't take on everything  
 Golden rules  
 Assistant or Minutes Secretary  
 Publicity/Public Relations Officer  
 The Treasurer's Role  
 How to look after your group's money  
 The treasurer and the committee  
 Why keep accounts  
 Basic rules for dealing with money  
 Receiving money  
 Paying out money  
 Writing up the cashbook  
 End of month procedure  
 Cheque account  
 Reports to the committee  
 Reports to the AGM  
 Independent examination of accounts  
 The Chair's Role  
 How to chair a meeting  
 Some helpful tips  
 Keeping the meeting in order  
 Making sure everyone's view is heard  
 Getting through the business  
 Drawing it all together  
 Some things to avoid

## Agendas

page 22

- A basic agenda
- Who decides what's on the agenda?
- Items for your agenda
- How long will each item take?
- What order do items go in?
- When do you prepare the agenda?
- Annual General Meeting
- Some other things to think about

## Bank Accounts for Voluntary and Community Organisations

page 23

- Opening an account
- List of some banks and building societies

## Organising your Annual General Meeting

page 24

- What is the purpose of an AGM
- Check your constitution for any regulations about your AGM
- Venue, date, time
- Notice of meeting
- Sample agenda
- Accounts
- Minutes
- Getting people to the meeting and making it work

## Holding Public Meetings

page 25

- Why hold a public meeting?
- Planning the meeting
- Date and time
- Venue
- Publicity
- Theme and speakers
- Preparation for the meeting – practicalities
- On the night
- Format of meeting – general guidelines
- Follow-up
- Potential pitfalls

## CNet

page 28

## Setting up a Community Group or Voluntary Organisation

Setting up a new group or organisation involves a variety of tasks and there a number of things you will need to consider. The more aware of what you need to do the easier the task will be. Forethought and good planning at this stage can save a lot of wasted effort or work later. There are a lot of people with the expertise you need who can advise you and agencies that can help you. It has all been done before so you should be able to build on other people's experience and resources.

You may already have got a lot of work done in setting up. However it is good to check that there are not things you are not missing out or a better way of going about what you are setting out to do. Have a look at the list of questions below if only to reassure yourself that you have got it all set up right.

## Key Questions

### What do we want to do?

- ★ What exactly will the group that you are setting up do?
- ★ Is it just for those involved, its members, like 'a photography club'?
- ★ Is there a service you are offering to the community at large, like 'counselling for the bereaved'?
- ★ What do you aim to achieve?
- ★ How will you know if you are being successful?

### Where do we want to do it?

- ★ Where are you going to be based?
- ★ What area will your organisation cover – geographical or other (e.g. collectors of orchids, those with cancer)?
- ★ You could start locally and gradually expand rather than take too much on from the start. E.g. Bradford or West Yorkshire wide.

### Who do we want to do it with?

- ★ Who are your potential beneficiaries or members?
- ★ Do they want what you are offering?

★ Is there a proven need for what you intend to provide. You may be the only ones interested in 'bungee jumping' in your area.

#### ***Are we overlapping with other groups?***

★ Are there organisations that already offer what you intend to provide?

Duplicating can be expensive, a waste of resources and create ill feeling with those you compete with. Funders will not want to be a part of that. Joining an existing organisation and working with them saves a lot of hard work setting yourselves up and getting everything off the ground.

#### ***Could we work in partnership with any other groups or organisations?***

If there are groups already doing something similar you might work together to develop something new or set up a group for them in your area if they do not already reach there. You might share resources, premises and expertise.

#### ***Do we have the time, energy, and commitment to do the work ourselves?***

★ You may already have a core group of people who want to come together to form this organisation.

★ If you all have the time, energy and commitment to do everything yourselves you can get going.

★ If you need a lot more volunteers or other expertise you will have to be sure you can get this help

★ Community pages in local newspapers, local radio, notice boards in community buildings, libraries, schools, colleges, and health centres are all good places to let people know what you are doing and to ask for people to join in.

#### ***Do we have a plan for action?***

★ If everyone does what they want to do it is unlikely that the whole job of setting up your organisation will get done.

★ You need to be clear about all the jobs that need to be done and who is going to take on each task.

★ It is important to know when people are going to get these jobs done by and what help or

support they will need to compete these tasks.

A Plan of Action will tell your members, supporters, and other interested people, what you are doing, why, and how you will go about it. You will need a plan if you apply for a grant.

Your plan should explain:

★ What your group intends to do – Aims and Objectives.

★ How it intends to do it – Methods.

★ The resources it has available (e.g. people's time and support; any special skills; money, equipment; use of premises, etc).

★ Any further resources it needs, and how it hopes to find them (e.g. by finding volunteers or raising money).

★ How soon it hopes to do things – Timetable.

Drawing up a plan will help you to decide on priorities. For example, it might show that you have the resources to start one youth club, but not both; or that you need more money before you recruit more volunteers.

The plan will also mean that you can measure your achievements because you will be able to compare what you planned with what the organisation has actually done.

#### ***Do we need a Constitution?***

Everyone will have different ideas about what your organisation is doing and how to go about it.

Lots of constitutions have been written before and to get one off the shelf rather than invent it all yourself, works for most groups. It ensures that important bits are not left out and it is an opportunity for everything you need to think about to get discussed, but not copied –it needs to be unique and relevant to your own groups aims and objectives. Minimum requirement of officers is three.

#### ***Do we need a Committee?***

A constitution usually defines the governing body of an organisation as a Committee. You will at least need someone to Chair the meetings, Secretary to write down what happens at meetings and a Treasurer who looks after the money.

You can add other Committee Members with or without specific roles and duties.

### ***What is a General Meeting?***

All those involved in an organisation are usually members. Since it is run for them it is the members who usually, ultimately say how it is all organised. At the first General Meeting you should adopt your constitution and elect the Committee Members and Officers. You will normally have at least one General Meeting (Annual General Meeting) a year to complete business, authorise what the committee does and elect members and officers for the Committee for the forthcoming year. Present annual accounts and report.

### ***Do we need a Bank Account?***

You will need to have a way of handling your groups money. For this reason it is useful to open a bank account. The account should be opened in the name of the group and should have at least 2 signatories for all cheques. But it is often a good idea for groups to have 3 or 4 signatories on an account of whom ant 2 can sign cheques to cover when committee members are on holiday or unable to sign cheques for the group. It is good practice for signatories not to be related and live at the same address.

### ***Do we need to consider equal opportunities?***

It is good practice to consider equal opportunities before applying for funding. A funder may ask to see your Equal Opportunities policy statement and if you do not have one or worse still never considered the issues involved it could mean your application is rejected out of hand. This would waste a lot of effort. It would be good to discuss Equal Opportunities rather than just borrow someone else's policy statement so that you explore what issues of ethnicity/race, religion, gender and sexuality, ability/disability, age etc. are relevant to your group or organisation. When these have been discussed referring to a draft policy from elsewhere may be helpful in identifying issues you might have missed. Equal opportunities policy should apply to members, beneficiaries, volunteers, and paid employees and management committee members.

### ***Does our work involve children and young people or vulnerable adults?***

It is a requirement by law that those who work with children, young people and vulnerable adults are police checked by their employer or the organisation they undertake work for, as a volunteer. Or (have enhanced CRB checks).

The Disclosure Service provides a regulated 'one stop' service for England and Wales offering access to records held by the police, together with those held by the Department of Health (DH) and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES).

The Disclosure Service enables organisations to make more thorough recruitment checks, particularly for positions that involve regular contact with children and vulnerable adults.

There is help and information about related matters on the Disclosure Service website is at: [www.disclosure.gov.uk](http://www.disclosure.gov.uk)

### ***Child Protection Policy***

If your work regularly involves work with children or young people it would be advisable to draw up a Child Protection Policy Document so that those working on your behalf have guidelines to work to. Bradford Council's Early Years and Childcare Service will be able to help, tel: 01274 431813. Keighley CVS does CRB checks for voluntary sector groups, tel: 01535 665258.

Further help with setting up Community Groups and Voluntary Organisations can be gained from Bradford CVS, tel: 01274 722772; Keighley CVS, tel: 01535 665258; Bingley VA, tel: 01274 781222; Shipley CVS tel: 01274 580186, Ilkley CVS, tel; 01943 603348.

Googolplex is an independent CRB disclosure consultancy which is a registered Umbrella Body for the Criminal Records Bureau – they provide advice, training, policy consultation and implementation: [www.thegoogolplex.com](http://www.thegoogolplex.com)

## **Management Committee**

### ***What is a management committee?***

A typical community group ranges in size from a handful of members to a membership of a hundred or more. Legally it is an unincorporated association and it may also be a charity. Its governing body, the group of people, which runs its affairs, is commonly referred to the management committee. Most voluntary organisations begin as an unincorporated organisation – a collection of individuals working together. It may eventually become a corporate body such as a Company Limited by Guarantee.

Your group should have a constitution (or set of rules). A section of this defines the management committee, including its size and how often it should meet.

**Who sits on the Management Committee?**

The committee is drawn from members of the group and is elected by them, usually at an annual general meeting (AGM)

Groups often have officers, such as chair, secretary and treasurer and they too are part of the management committee. They may be elected by the full membership at the AGM or by the committee at its first meeting, according to the constitution. Although the officers carry out particular jobs in the group, they have no more legal or financial responsibilities than other committee members.

The committee may also invite other people to serve on the committee (known as co-opting). They may be members of the group but can come from outside, and are generally co-opted because they have particular skills or knowledge, but do not always have voting rights (depends on what your constitution says).

A very small group may meet informally and have no elected committee. Many groups with modest aims and activities run very successfully like this. In this instance, the entire group is the 'management committee' and everyone is responsible for the group's affairs. It is usual, however, that funders will only fund groups with at least three officers on the management committee.

**What do individual members do?**

Although every committee member shares responsibility, this does not mean that each member has to do everything. The job of members is to ensure that someone does each task and reports back to the committee. The tasks may be done by committee members, members of the group or people from outside. The most important thing is that the committee should work together and take joint responsibility.

**Responsibilities of a Management Committee**

Broadly, the committee's job is to ensure that the group:

- ★ Does what it was set up to do.
- ★ Has enough money and does not get into debt.
- ★ Is well run.

**Specific responsibilities**

In carrying out its job, the committee has to take account of good practice and the law. We have broken these responsibilities down into 10 sections:

1. Running the group and meetings.
2. Keeping the group on track.
3. Finances.
4. Fundraising.
5. The provision of training.
6. General organisation.
7. Legal liability.
8. Organising events and activities (including fundraising events).
9. Members of the group and people you work with.
10. Employment and volunteers.
11. Premises.

The management committee of every group has general responsibilities, which are covered, in section 1 and 2. These sections apply to very small and informal groups, as well as to larger groups.

If you organise activities such as fetes, fundays, sports events for children or a social club for people with learning difficulties, sections 7 and 8 should be helpful.

If you employ someone or have a volunteer doing a regular job or you manage premises, have a look at sections 9-10.

Within many of the sections, we suggest ways of organising your affairs to help you keep on top of things and carry out your responsibilities.

Finally, there is an appendix, which briefly describes what a management committee is, who sits on it, and what individual members do.

**Running the group and meetings**

- ★ Arrange regular committee meetings and general meetings of the group.

- ★ Organise the annual general meeting, including elections of the committee.

- ★ Take minutes, recording decisions and tasks clearly.

If you have a constitution, it will set out things such as how often meetings should take place or who is titled to attend. Although a group can run successfully without a constitution, it is advisable for every group to have some written rules. These rules can be very basic, but your group will run more smoothly if everyone is clear about the aims of the group, how it works, and who does what, and funders require your group to have one.

- ★ Brief and induct new committee members.

Many newcomers are thrown in at the deep end and given no idea of how the group works or what its aims are. It is not uncommon to find individual committee members who are unaware that they are part of a management committee with responsibilities. All community members must be aware of their roles and responsibilities and what is expected of them, i.e. attend meetings, taking part in decision making.

### **Keeping the group on track**

- ★ Review the group's activities – are you doing what the group is set up to do?

- ★ Use your money well.

Ideally, everything, which your group decides to do, will help it achieve its aims. However it is easy to get sidetracked. For example, raising money may become your main activity rather than the means to an end. It is a good idea for the committee to have a regular look at what the group is doing and assess whether it is achieving its aims.

If you are a larger group, it may be useful to have a systematic way of collecting information on your activities – it will make it easier to assess whether the group is on track. You will almost certainly need to have reliable information if you have to report to a funder on how you have used your grant.

### **Finances**

Every committee member is responsible for making sure that the group accounts for its money properly. It is not just the responsibility of the trea-

surer even though they deal with the money day-to-day.

If lots of people are handling money or the group takes in regular amounts of cash, it is a good idea to write some basic rules to ensure that everybody does the same thing and that the money is properly looked after.

- ★ Keep proper financial records.

- ★ If you have grants, make sure that they are used for the specified purpose.

- ★ Prepare financial reports for each committee meeting.

- ★ Prepare end of-year accounts, and have them examined if required by the constitution or charity law.

- ★ Draw up basic financial rules.

### **Fundraising**

- ★ Work out a basic budget and decide how you will raise the funds.

- ★ Raise the money!

Working out how much money you need and how you will raise it are not separate from the group's activities. You need to have a fairly clear idea of what your group will do in the coming year in order to work out how much you need. So, try to involve everyone on the committee or in the whole group in planning and fundraising. (See How to Fundraise booklet)

### **The provision of training**

Suitable training courses can help officers and volunteers learn new skills, build on their experience or acquire up to date information on the law as it affects their responsibilities. The allocation of funds for this purpose is therefore a worthwhile investment for the association, and training needs should be a regular agenda item at committee meetings.

### **General organisation**

#### *Insurance Policies.*

Some insurances, such as employer's liability insurance if you have staff, are a legal requirement. Depending on your group's activities other insurances may be a good idea, some required by your landlord or funder. There are a number of brokers which specialise in arranging

insurance for charities and other community organisations. There is also public liability insurance if providing activities / services to others / beneficiaries and contents insurance for equipment, e.g. computers.

#### *Equal Opportunities/Equality*

You should look at ways of trying to ensure that your group is open and welcoming to everyone in the community who wants to get involved. It may help to write a policy for the group, but the important thing is what you do. If you are applying for grants, most funders will ask you to show that you practice equal opportunities and many will ask you for a written policy.

#### *Charity Registration*

If your group's aims are wholly charitable and your annual income is over one thousand pounds, you may need to register as a charity. Have a look at the Charity Commission website: [www.charitycommission.co.uk](http://www.charitycommission.co.uk) Bradford CVS can offer help and advice on this subject as well.

#### *Trustees Report*

If you are a registered charity, you will need to prepare a Trustees Report and Annual Accounts for the Charity Commission and submit annual returns.

#### **Legal liability**

- ★ Take legal or other advice when in doubt.
- ★ Consider indemnity insurance.

Committee members can be held personally liable if the group gets into debt or has other legal problems. If there is no management committee, then every member of the group is liable. However, it is rare for individuals to face action and there should be no problems so long as the committee does everything it can to run the group responsibly.

It is possible to take out indemnity insurance to cover committee members if action is taken against them individually. However, this insurance will not be valid if the committee fails to run the group properly and responsibly so this type of insurance may not be good value for money. If you are a registered charity, you will need to get permission from the Charity Commission to take

out Trustee indemnity insurance unless your constitution already allows for this.

#### **Organising events and activities (including fundraising events)**

- ★ Check the regulations on areas such as public entertainment, raffles, crèches and childcare, or food and drink.
- ★ Apply well in advance for any necessary licences (contact your local council office).
- ★ Look carefully at safety (carry out a risk assessment) and first aid.
- ★ Consider insurance for accidents or cancellation of the event.

#### **Members of the group and people you work with**

You have legal obligations towards the people who you provide services to or work with, and to members of your group. As well as general obligations, you need to take account of:

#### *Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)*

Disability Rights Commission

<http://www.drc-gb.org>

Telephone: 08457 622 633

Textphone: 08457 622 644

Fax: 08457 778 878

DRC Helpline, FREEPOST MID02164,

Stratford upon Avon CV37 9BR

#### *Race Relations Act*

Commission for Racial Equality

<http://www.cre.gov.uk>

St Dunstan's House, 201-211 Borough High Street, London SE1 1GZ

Tel: 020 7939 0000 Fax: 020 7939 0004

Email: [info@cre.gov.uk](mailto:info@cre.gov.uk)

#### *Sex Discrimination Act*

Equal Opportunities Commission

<http://www.eoc.org.uk>

Arndale House, Arndale Centre, Manchester M4 3EQ

Email: [info@eoc.org.uk](mailto:info@eoc.org.uk)

Fax: 0161 838 1733, Tel: 0845 601 5901

#### *Criminal Record Bureau checks*

If you work with children under 18 or vulnerable adults, you may be required by law to carry out enhanced CRB checks on staff or volunteers.

Groups concerned include playschemes, after school clubs, sports activities for children, social

clubs for adults with learning disabilities or advocacy projects.

#### *Data Protection Act*

Information Commissioner

<http://www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk>

Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow,  
Cheshire SK9 5AF

Fax: 01625 524 510 Helpline tel: 01625 545 745

Email: [mail@ico.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:mail@ico.gsi.gov.uk)

#### **Employment and Volunteers**

If you employ one or more person, your group has a number of legal obligations, these include the following:

- ★ Employment laws such as the Employment Rights Act.
- ★ Terms and Conditions of employment for each employee.
- ★ Grievance and disciplinary procedures.
- ★ Health and Safety at Work Act.
- ★ Tax and National Insurance (PAYE).
- ★ Volunteers agreements.
- ★ Co-ordinating and training staff and volunteers

Another local group may be able to help with Terms and Conditions and procedures, but you will of course have to rewrite them to suit your circumstances.

Bradford CVS have a Model Employment Pact on their website: ([www.bradfordcvs.org.uk](http://www.bradfordcvs.org.uk))

There is also useful information on:  
[www.communitymatters.org.uk](http://www.communitymatters.org.uk)

HM Revenue and Customs (includes the former Inland Revenue) gives information and advice.

New employers should go to

[www.hmrc.gov.uk/newemployers/index.shtml](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/newemployers/index.shtml)

Or Employer Helpline: 0845 7143 143

In addition to your legal responsibilities, you will have to make arrangements to manage and supervise staff and volunteers. It is also good practice to have a written agreement with each volunteer setting out their terms and conditions.

#### **Premises**

If you own or lease premises you will need to consider a range of issues:

- ★ Health and Safety Legislation.
- ★ Fire Safety.

- ★ Public Health and Hygiene.
- ★ Lease or tenancy agreements.
- ★ Security of premises and contents.
- ★ Maintenance and general repairs.
- ★ Letting and booking arrangements.
- ★ Access for disabled people.

Contact your local council who are responsible for monitoring and advising on health and safety legislation in work premises. The council also issue licences, to some businesses, where high levels of safety and hygiene are required. If food is prepared or sold, you must register with the council before opening

Make sure that it is clear whether the landlord or your group is responsible for things such as security, maintenance and access. If you rent part of a building, check whether you are responsible for full maintenance of the rooms which you rent. If in doubt, get legal advice on this and any other aspect of a lease.

If you hire rooms for meetings or other events, make sure you have good booking arrangements and agreement forms to make the conditions of room hire clear to the hirer.

#### **Other useful information**

Health and safety Executive

[www.hse.gov.uk/index.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/index.htm)

HSE Infoline: 0845345 0055

For Health and safety publications, including a guide to drawing up a Safety Policy and Accident Report forms, contact,

HSE Books:[www.hsebooks.com/books/](http://www.hsebooks.com/books/)

PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk, CO10 2WA

Tel: 01787 881165

UNISON, the public sector trade union has information sheets which can be downloaded from its website:

[www.unison.org.uk/safety/infosheets.asp](http://www.unison.org.uk/safety/infosheets.asp)

## **Constitutions**

### **Step by step help with writing a constitution**

A constitution is simply the aims and rules that your group will use. It's a written understanding of what your group is going to do and how it is going to do it. It is important because:

- ★ Without this written understanding people can easily find themselves at cross purposes and the jobs won't get done.
- ★ It will serve as a reference, and help to resolve problems in times of controversy.
- ★ Outsiders, especially potential funders, will want to see that your group is democratic and accountable. This involves having a clear procedure by which decisions are made.

For these reasons it is important to try and get a constitution that actually reflects the way in which you do things, or want to do things. There is no point in lumbering yourself with a lot of bureaucracy you don't want, or writing down loads of things you don't intend to do, simply because you think they are what people expect. It is best to have a discussion in the group and decide what everyone wants to do, rather than send someone away to draft a long document that everyone ignores!

The following information will help you draw up a constitution for what is termed as an 'unincorporated association'. It is entirely up to your members how you organise your group and, therefore, what you put in your constitution. This constitution will be suitable for your community group unless you plan to set up a limited company or a charitable trust – these are different types of organisations.

Your constitution should reflect what your group wants to do, and so will be different from the constitutions of other groups. Even so most constitutions have a similar structure and will have similar headings. You will probably want to include sections on:

- ★ Name of Organisation.
- ★ Aims (sometimes called Objects) of Organisation.
- ★ Powers.
- ★ Membership.
- ★ Officers.
- ★ Meetings.
- ★ Committee.
- ★ Rules of Procedure.
- ★ Finances

- ★ Dissolution.
- ★ Amendments to the Constitution.

If you are considering registering your group as a charity, you may wish to write your constitution along the lines of the model drawn up by the Charity Commission – this will make certain that it conforms to charity law. Even if you do follow the model constitution, it is still a very good idea to work through the following information to make sure you write a constitution, which suits your group.

You can download the Charity Commission model constitution from their website at: [www.charitycommssion.org.uk](http://www.charitycommssion.org.uk)

### **Checklist**

Sit down with other members of your group and try and answer the following questions before you start to draft a constitution. They cover all the basic organisational points: what you are called, how often you will meet, whether you will have officers, etc. they don't cover the Aims or the Powers of your organisation, or certain standard clauses. These will be dealt with in the next section.

#### *Name of Organisation*

The name of the organisation will be:

\_\_\_\_\_

#### *Membership*

Who will be allowed to be members of the organisation? (E.g. everyone who pays a membership fee, everyone who lives in a certain area, all users and volunteers at the project)  
Membership will be open to:

\_\_\_\_\_

*Will there be a Membership Fee?*

Yes / No

If so, how much? \_\_\_\_\_

#### *Meetings and Committee*

How many general meetings (open to all members) will there be each year? \_\_\_\_\_

*Will there also be a committee?*

Yes / No

How will they get there?  
(e.g. elected by AGM, invited)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How often will it meet each year? \_\_\_\_\_

**Officers**

Which officers will there be?

Chair \_\_\_\_\_

Vice Chair \_\_\_\_\_

Secretary \_\_\_\_\_

Treasurer \_\_\_\_\_

Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How will they be elected?

By the whole group at AGM? \_\_\_\_\_

By the Committee? \_\_\_\_\_

If you can answer the above questions then you are ready to write a constitution. Don't think that you have to use complicated or legal language. The main point of a constitution is that everybody can understand how the group runs. You are writing it for people like yourself, not for lawyers. If you make things complicated then the chances are that nobody will understand it and everyone will ignore it.

**Sample Clauses**

Below we look in more detail at the areas to cover and give some sample clauses that you can adapt. Don't put in any clauses that don't suit what you want to do.

**1) Name**

Every constitution begins with a simple clause.

Example:

"The name of the group / organisation shall be

xxxxxxxxxxxxxx

**2) Objects**

The objects clause should lay out the main aims of the group, what it does and who it works with.

Examples:

★ "To promote community activity in the area of Blackpool by providing equipment, advice, information and training to voluntary and community groups."

★ "To arrange social and support activities for single parents and their children, residents in the Queens Park, Highcliffe and Butterworth electoral wards".

★ "The organisation will not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, disability, sexuality, age, or on the basis of political, religious or other opinions."

**Notes**

If you aim to register as a charity then this clause has to make clear that the aims of your group are charitable in a legal sense. Both Bradford and Keighley CVS can support your group with charity registration and status.

If your work is specific to one geographical area, you need to define this clearly. Bear in mind that you may want to expand your area of activity in the future, so you may not want to define it too narrowly in your constitution.

**3) Powers**

In more formal constitutions there will be a clause which spells out more specifically what the group can do in order to achieve its aims. These powers are usually broad:

**Examples:**

★ "In furtherance of the above objects, the Association may.

★ Raise funds in a legal manner.

★ Borrow money and provide as security any property held in trust on behalf of the Association.

★ Rent buildings or land.

**Note:**

Your group (as an unincorporated association) cannot acquire property in its own right, so members of the management committee or some other organisation will have to hold the lease or own the premises on behalf of the group – the details should be spelled out in the clause.

If you wish to take out insurance cover to protect the management committee in the event of the

group collapsing with outstanding debts, it may be advisable to include this power in the clause.

#### 4) Eligibility for Membership

Any group will be composed of members. Your constitution should spell out who can be a member, how they can join, whether there is a membership fee, and the procedure for resigning or for membership being terminated. Looking at each in turn.

##### *Examples of a simple membership clause.*

- ★ The group shall be non-political.
- ★ Membership is open to, to be fixed at a members' meeting at such rate as is from time to time thought adequate.
- ★ Accounts shall be kept by the treasurer, submitted to an independent inspection and approved at a members' meeting.
- ★ Membership shall be open to anyone interested in taking an active part in the work of the organisation.
- ★ Voting, each member shall have one vote. Voting shall be by simple majority of those present and voting. In the event of a tie the chair shall have a second and casting vote.
- ★ Quorum, the minimum number allowed is three members of the committee, which shall constitute a quorum.

##### *Example of an Associate Membership clause.*

- ★ "The committee may invite any individual who supports the aims of the group to become an associate member. Such members shall have no voting rights."

##### *Note:*

Associate membership is useful, for example, if you want a friendly accountant who lives outside the area to do your books.

##### *Example of Group Membership Clause.*

- ★ "Any group whose work is supportive of the organisation may be invited by the management committee to become a group member."

##### *Note:*

This would be useful if, for example, an advice agency wanted to allow other agencies in the town to become members.

#### 6. Who is a member?

You must have an agreed procedure for deciding how people become members. Examples.

- ★ "Membership will begin when a valid application form is accepted by the membership secretary."
- ★ "Each management committee will consider applications for membership as its first item. Membership will begin as soon as agreed by the management committee."
- ★ "Membership of the Association will be free and all tenants will automatically become members unless they indicate in writing to the secretary that they do not want to be."

##### *Note:*

Even if you plan to have a very open membership, and an informal structure, it is a good idea to have a membership list. It is then clear who you mail about meetings and who can come.

#### 7. Membership fee

Whether you have a membership fee is entirely up to you. The advantages are that it makes it very clear who is a member – the people who have paid – and it raises a bit of money. The disadvantages are that it may put people off and that it can be fiddly to collect.

Examples:

- ★ "The membership fee will be as agreed annually at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) and will be payable by all members within a month of the AGM."
- ★ "Membership will be free."

#### 8. Ceasing to be a member

Essentially people can resign, their membership can lapse or (in extreme cases) they can be expelled. Examples:

- ★ "Members may resign at any time in writing to the membership secretary or verbally at a meeting."
- ★ "Any person no longer living in the area of benefit will cease to be a member."
- ★ "Any member not having paid their membership fee within one month of it falling due will be deemed to have resigned."

★ “The management committee may unanimously and for good reason terminate the membership of any individual. The individual concerned shall have the right to be heard by the management committee, accompanied by a friend, before a final decision is made.”

### 9) Meetings

You should spell out what meetings are expected to follow (agenda). At the least you will hold an Annual General Meeting to which every member is invited. There are inevitably going to be formalities involved in this. You will also want to outline what other meetings will occur.

★ The organisation shall hold regular meetings (at least bimonthly) to discuss its policy and administration. All members shall be entitled to attend, and these meetings will be fully publicised, especially on the organisation's project.

★ The Annual General Meeting will be held at such time and date as the management committee shall determine, provided that the interval between one AGM and the next shall not exceed 15 calendar months, and that 21 clear days notice in writing of the meeting shall have been sent to all members of the group.

★ All members will be notified in writing at least three weeks before the date of the meeting.

★ Items for the agenda, or motions to the meeting, must be given in writing to the Chair of the meeting no less than three days before the meeting date.

★ Nominations for the committee may be made at the meeting.

★ The quorum for the AGM will be 10% of the membership or 20 members, whichever is the smaller number.

#### Note:

A quorum is the minimum number of people that must attend a meeting for that meeting to make decisions on behalf of the group. Only members with voting rights can be included in the quorum. Take care not to make the quorum so high that you can never have a proper meeting. On the other hand, a quorum can prevent the organisation being taken in an unwanted direction by two or three people.

★ b.1) The Annual General Meeting will transact the following business:-

- (1) Minutes of the previous AGM.
- (2) Consideration of the Annual Report prepared by the committee.
- (3) Consideration of the Annual Audited Statement of Accounts.
- (4) Election of Officers and Management Committee.
- (5) Any other relevant business.

★ b.2) The Chairperson of the Committee may at any time at his/her discretion, and shall within 21 days of receiving a written request, call a Special General Meeting of the group for the purpose of altering the Constitution or of considering any matter which may be referred to him/her by the Committee or for any other purpose.

### 10. Example clauses for general meetings:

★ A general meeting open to all members will be held monthly on the second Tuesday of the month.

★ The quorum for a general meeting shall be 10 members. In the event of the meeting failing to achieve a quorum business may be discussed and proposals put to the next meeting for ratification. In the event of two consecutive meetings being inquorate the second meeting may call a special general meeting. Such a special general meeting will be deemed to be quorate.

★ The secretary will call a special general meeting if asked to do so, in writing, by ten members. Members will be given one week notice of such a meeting, and notice may be by telephone.

### 11. Example clauses for committee meetings:

★ The management committee will be responsible for running the association and will be responsible to general meetings.

★ The management committee will meet monthly between Annual General Meetings at a date and time to be agreed by the committee.

★ The secretary will, if requested by three or more members of the committee, call a special committee meeting. Such a meeting will be

called within a week of the request.  
Notification of members may be by telephone.

- ★ All members of the association may attend the committee meeting as observers but will not be entitled to speak, unless invited to do so, or to vote.
- ★ The committee may co-opt members. Only a third of the committee members at any one time may be co-opted members. Co-opted members do not need to be members of the association and sometimes they do not have the power to vote.

#### 12) Officers and Committee:

You need to say what officers the group will have and how they will be elected. You will also want to say whether there will be a committee and, if so, how large it will be.

Examples:

- ★ "The officers of the Association shall be:
  - A chair, who shall chair both general and committee meetings;
  - A secretary, who shall be responsible for the taking of minutes and the distribution of all papers;
  - A treasurer who shall be responsible for maintaining accounts."
- ★ "All Honorary Officers will be members of the management committee. In addition the AGM will elect seven other committee members."
- ★ "The officers of the Association will be elected annually at the Annual General Meeting."
- ★ "The officers of the Association will be elected by the Management Committee from among their number at the first meeting following the AGM."
- ★ "In the event of an officer standing down during the year a replacement will be elected by the management committee."
- ★ "Any member not attending a meeting without apology for six months will be determined to have resigned."

*Note:*

You may wish to elect more officers than the above. Larger organisations often have, for example, a vice chair and membership secretary.

- a) Such officers shall be appointed as are required to conduct the administration of the organisation. These will include a Chairperson, Secretary and a Treasurer. These officers shall be in charge of the day-to-day running of the organisation, but shall be answerable to meetings of members.
- b) The committee will have power to set up sub-committee's to deal with specific interests. Such sub-committees will be made up of members of the group, but the committee will have power to enlist the services of any person who will be or benefit to the group for any specific purpose. Such persons will not thereby become members of the group.
- c) The committee shall be elected at the Annual General Meeting. Vacancies arising through the year can be filled by elections at General Meetings.

#### 13) Rules of Procedure:

These spell out how you will run things. It is best to keep these as simple as possible.

Examples:

- ★ With the exception of the changes to the constitution all questions that arise at any meeting will be decided by a simple majority of those present and entitled to vote.
- ★ If the number of votes cast on each side are equal the chair of the meeting shall have an additional casting vote.
- ★ Any motion must have a proposer and seconder before it is discussed or voted on.

#### 14) Finance:

You need to spell out how you will deal with any money.

- a) The funds of the group shall be obtained through member's subscriptions and by means of any other fund-raising activities, as the committee may deem acceptable or necessary.
- b) Records of income and expenditure will be maintained by the treasurer and a financial statement given to each meeting.
- c) An account will be maintained on behalf of the association at a bank agreed by the committee.

Signatories to the account will be the officers of the association. Each cheque will require two signatures one of whom will normally be the treasurer.

- d) An annual statement of accounts must be produced at the Annual General Meeting, properly audited, by an auditor elected at the AGM, or independently examined, and who shall not be members of the committee.
- e) All money raised by the association will be spent solely on the objects laid out above.

**15) Insurance:**

The organisation shall maintain insurance for volunteers on its projects, and for injuries to third persons and damage to property.

**16) Dissolution:**

You need to decide what will happen if you decide to close the group down, and who is entitled to decide to do so.

Examples:

- ★ If a meeting, by simple majority, decides that it is necessary to close down the association it may call a special general meeting to do so. The sole business of this meeting will be to dissolve the association. At least 21 days notice will be given to members.
- ★ If it is agreed to dissolve the association all remaining money, once outstanding debts have been paid, will be donated to a local charitable organisation with similar aims and objectives. The organisation to be agreed at the meeting, which agreed the dissolution.

**17) Amendments to the Constitution:**

Once you have your constitution decided, you don't want to change it without good reason. It is therefore normal to expect most people to be in agreement with the change before it can be made.

Examples:

- a) Amendments to the Constitution may be proposed at the Annual General Meeting. Any such proposals to alter this Constitution must be delivered to the Secretary of the group not less than 14 days before the date of the meeting at which they are first to be considered. The proposal must then be circulated with the notice of the meeting.

- b) Any proposal to amend the constitution will require a two-thirds majority of those present and entitled to vote.
- c) This constitution shall only be altered by the consent of a two-thirds majority of the members of the organisation.
- d) Amendments to the constitution may be made at the annual general meeting or a Special General Meeting. Proposed amendments will be distributed with the agenda for the meeting.

## Officers of the Community Association and their duties

### **The essential Officers**

As with any other organisation, the minimum number of officers for a Community Association is the usual three – Chair, Secretary and Treasurer. However, the work of the association can more efficiently be performed by sharing it out amongst a larger number of officers.

One additional officer which all associations should appoint is a Vice-Chair to act in the Chair's absence or incapacity.

### **Additional Officers:**

#### *Other honorary officers*

These are appointed for two reasons: to share out the executive work of the association which would otherwise fall to the officers already mentioned, and/or to afford some recognition to people who have served, or are serving, the association in various ways.

Some associations have a President, and other officers which associations may find it useful to appoint are: - Assistant Secretary (or Minutes Secretary). Membership Secretary where the association has a Centre. A Lettings Officer or Bookings Secretary.

All committee members are unpaid, but being unpaid does not mean that they should be out-of-pocket as a result of their work for the association! Expenses should be recorded by the officer concerned and she/he should be reimbursed at suitable intervals.)

### **Electing Additional Officers**

Check your constitution as this will tell you

whether additional officers can be elected by your association's main committee as well as by the Annual General Meeting, and whether they are ex-officio members of the committee and/or any sub-committees.

### **Role of Officers**

All committees should have at least a Chair, Secretary and Treasurer.

*The Chair* is responsible for the smooth and fair running of the organisation. Their main job is to chair the meetings of the organisation.

*The Treasurer* has the day to day responsibility for the organisation's finances. Their main job is keeping financial records.

*The Secretary* is responsible for keeping people informed about the organisation's activities. Their main job is taking minutes of meetings.

### **Secretary's Role**

What does the Secretary do?

The exact work of the Secretary will vary from organisation to organisation. It is worth having a discussion in your group to agree what the responsibilities of all the Management Committee members should be.

This list can be used as a guide to the Secretary's job:

- ★ Taking minutes in meetings.
- ★ Keeping files of past minutes and reports.
- ★ Letting people know when and where the next meeting is and what it is about.
- ★ Helping to prepare agendas for meetings with the Chairperson.
- ★ Writing and receiving letters on behalf of the group.
- ★ Keeping members informed of what correspondence has been sent out and received.
- ★ Keeping a record of membership.
- ★ Keeping a record of important phone numbers.

How you organise this work is up to your group to decide. You may want to divide the jobs up amongst a number of people. You could have a

minutes secretary, a correspondence secretary, a membership secretary.

Or you may want to have a Secretary and Chairperson who work closely together, and share some of these tasks.

It just depends on the size of your group, the amount of time people have available, the skills people have, and what people like doing.

### **Taking Minutes**

Taking minutes is an important part of the job, and can be a bit daunting when you first start.

Minutes are simply notes taken during the meeting to remind you what was discussed and agreed.

They don't need to be long or complicated, in fancy language or perfect grammar. They do need to record clearly and simply what decisions were made at the meeting and who is going to carry them out.

### **Why is it important to have minutes?**

- ★ It is useful to have a written record of the meeting, what you've decided to do and who is going to do it – memories are unreliable! This is true even if the meeting is very small and informal.
- ★ Minutes keep members of the group who weren't able to attend a meeting informed about what went on.

### **The basic tasks for the minute-taker are:**

- ★ Taking rough notes during your meetings.
- ★ Writing up these notes neatly or typing them out.
- ★ Copying and distributing them to relevant people.
- ★ Keeping all minutes together in a file for future reference.

### **Sort out the basics**

- ★ Make sure you have a copy of the agenda to follow. If the agenda is produced in advance of the meeting, read it carefully and if possible go over it with the chair.
- ★ Get a decent pad of paper and some good pens.

- ★ Make up an attendance sheet in advance, and pass this around for people to sign.
- ★ Have the file of past minutes with you, in case any questions come up about decisions from previous meetings.

### **Writing rough notes**

The rough notes you take at the meeting need to be clear enough for you to make sense of them when you come to write them up!

The following things can help:

- ★ Start the page with the name of your group, date and place of meeting.
- ★ Always put an underlined heading for each separate item.
- ★ Leave a few lines/space between one item and the next, so you have room to add other points if the discussion comes back to it later in the meeting.
- ★ Underline or highlight decisions and who has agreed to do what.
- ★ Try dividing the page so you have a narrow column down one side for recording who has agreed to do what.
- ★ Remember that the minutes need to be understood by someone who wasn't at the meeting, so you need to give a bit of background. For example, put 'the people in Hargreave Court were disgusted by the rubbish in the street' rather than 'they all thought it was disgusting'.
- ★ The most important thing is to write the minutes up *quickly*. Don't put the job off for weeks – it makes a *huge* difference if the meeting is still fresh in your mind.

### **Some common problems**

There are some things that make every minute-taker's life difficult. Here are some of the most common problems:

- ★ It is difficult to know exactly what has been agreed. No one is sticking to the point and lots of different suggestions are being made about what to do.
- ★ The discussion jumps from one item to another before any of them are finished.
- ★ Everyone is talking at once, and you can't follow the discussion.

- ★ There is a long, confusing discussion and you don't know which bits are important to get down.

- ★ You have been very involved in a particular issue and want to say things, but can't minute at the same time.

- ★ You are nervous about getting it wrong.

### **Some solutions**

- ★ If a meeting is well run it makes taking minutes much easier. It's the Chair's job to keep the meeting in order – but they can only do this with the co-operation of everyone at the meeting.

- ★ One idea is to discuss and agree together some guidelines by which you'll run your meetings – for example not interrupting, putting your hand up if you want to talk, keeping to the agenda item under discussion.

- ★ Feel free to point out that it is impossible to take minutes if everyone is talking at once and not following the agenda.

- ★ If it's not clear what decision has been made, ask the Chair to clarify this.

- ★ If there is a particularly important or controversial decision it can be useful to check what you are writing down with the meeting. For example; 'so the meeting wants it minuted that we have agreed to boycott all Council meetings until they meet our demands.'

- ★ If you are concentrating on taking minutes it does limit how much you can join in the meeting – it goes with the job. If there is an item where you have been centrally involved and have a lot to say, think about asking someone else to take minutes just for that item.

- ★ If there is a long discussion try to pick out the main points and just list them. For example; 'There was a long discussion about rubbish collections and the following points were made...'

- ★ Discuss the agenda with the Chair before the meeting - the clearer you are about the content of the meeting, the easier it is to minute it.

- ★ Go through your minutes with the Chair after the meeting. It can be helpful to check through what you've written with someone else.
- ★ Don't worry if your minutes aren't perfect – this won't really matter, and like everything else it gets easier the more you do it.

### **Tips on being a good secretary:**

#### **Organisation**

- ★ File things! This is *very* important – you need to be able to find papers and reports quickly and easily. Get a stack of cheap cardboard folders and label them. Have a separate file for every important issue.
- ★ *File things quickly.* Don't let huge mounds of papers you haven't looked at build up. If you sort them out regularly it is a small and manageable job.
- ★ Have a 'to do' list or notebook. It helps to have everything you need to do written down in one place. Don't rely on your memory.
- ★ Get a book to record correspondence the group receives.
- ★ Get a diary to record dates of future meetings.

#### **Share information**

- ★ Make sure information that comes to you gets passed on, or publicised more widely. Often things for a group are sent to the Secretary and never get any further.
- ★ Work closely with other Committee members, particularly the Chair.

#### **Don't take on everything**

- ★ A common complaint from Secretaries is that they end up doing everything. Be clear with your Committee about what tasks you will do.
- ★ If you start to feel overburdened, talk about it with your Committee, and see if jobs can be shared out more.

#### **Golden Rules**

The main things to remember when you are taking minutes are:

- ★ Don't try to write everything down – it's impossible and not useful.
- ★ Concentrate on writing down WHAT has been decided and WHO is going to do it. These are the most important things to have records of.

- ★ Don't worry about producing the perfect minutes – it's not a test or a competition.
- ★ Give each item a separate heading.
- ★ Write your rough notes up soon after the meeting.

#### **Assistant or Minutes Secretary**

It is almost impossible for the Secretary to keep a committee meeting informed as to progress, listen to what others are saying and, simultaneously, attempt to take notes of proceedings. The association (or the committee concerned) should, therefore, try to find an assistant, less involved in the actual administration of its affairs, who will be able to take concise notes to form the basis of the Minutes. This person may also be able to assist the Secretary on other ways, such as their duplication and distribution.

#### **Publicity/Public Relations Officer**

Every association should attempt to enlist the services of someone responsible for this important part of its work. Ideally a person with some contacts with the local press and/or radio station, or with some experience in preparing news items, is required. The person concerned will have to consult with the other community association officers as to what aspects of the association's work require the publicity, and prepare suitable press releases, news, items, statements and advertisements. "Letters to the Editor" should not be overlooked, though the Secretary or Chair should sign these.

Relations with other organisations must not be forgotten. An important public relations task is the creation of a mailing list divided into different sections for the different groups of people and organisations the association will need to contact at different times depending on the association.

Where an association issues a magazine or newssheet, its contents can form a valuable part of the community association's publicity. Even if there is a separate editor, he/she will have to work very closely with the publicity/public relation's officer.

#### **The Treasurer and the Committee**

- ★ As Treasurer, you have day-to-day responsibility for dealing with money. It is your job to keep accounts and report to the committee.

- ★ The whole committee is responsible for deciding how the money will be raised and spent.
- ★ Apart from small amounts (which may be left to the treasurer's discretion) the whole committee should agree on spending decisions. The committee, not just the treasurer, is responsible for ensuring that proper records are kept.
- ★ Sometimes the committee leaves the treasurer to get on with it alone, only showing an interest at the AGM or when something goes wrong. This is worrying for the treasurer and also means that the association does not make the best use of its money.

### **Why keep accounts?**

- ★ Because your association is responsible to all its members for any money which it receives and spends; every member has the right to know how the money has been used.
- ★ To keep track of money (e.g. to ensure that you have collected all the subs or to avoid paying a bill twice) and to know how much you have available.
- ★ To help make the best use of your money. Your records will help you work out how much money the association needs next year and then budget accordingly.
- ★ To help with fundraising.
- ★ If you apply for a grant to the Council or to a charitable trust, they will ask to see accounts as proof that the association is well run and will use the grant properly.
- ★ If you are trying to decide whether to run a raffle or have a stall at a local fete then past records will show which raises the most money.

### **Basic rules for dealing with money**

Each association may deal with its money in a slightly different way depending on circumstances. But there are basic rules for dealing with money, which apply to everyone.

- ★ Be methodical. Keep clear records at the time of money, which you receive or pay out. Do not rely on memory to write it up later.

- ★ Make sure that you have paperwork for any money which you take in or pay out. Keep paperwork in number or date order. This is best done by using treasury tags or a ring-binder. It will make it much easier to look through your records.
- ★ Always record the full amount of cash you receive or pay out. For example, if you take in cash from a jumble sale and then use some of it to buy tea and coffee, you should record both the total takings and the cost of the supplies.
- ★ Keep the association's cash separate from your own.
- ★ Do not hold on to large amounts of cash; bank it as soon as possible.
- ★ Check regularly that the cash in your tin equals the balance in your cashbook.
- ★ Building society or bank account – make sure that two people are required to sign cheques or withdrawal forms. Many associations put down the treasurer, chair and secretary as signatories to the account – any two of the three sign the cheque.
- ★ Check bank statements carefully.

### **Receiving money**

- ★ Issue a receipt whenever you take in cash. It is best to use a small duplicate book with numbered pages. Record the total, the date, the name of the person handing over the cash, and where the cash came from (e.g. subs). Hand over the top copy as the receipt and keep your copy in the book.
- ★ When you receive a cheque, file the paperwork (e.g. a covering letter with a grant) and write on it the date on which you received the cheques.

### **Paying out money**

- ★ Get invoices or till receipts for all purchases. This rule applies to both cash and cheques.
- ★ When you pay out cash, write out a petty cash voucher. Ask the person receiving the cash to sign for it. Staple the till receipt, firm's bill or bus tickets to the voucher. Give the voucher a number and keep them in number order.
- ★ Paying by cheque: make a note on the cheque stub of the value of the cheque and who it is made out to. Write the number of the cheque on the firm's bill.

- ★ Paying by cheque from a Building Society treasurers or savings account: when you ask the building society account to write you a cheque to pay a bill, write the date of the cheque on the bill.

### **Writing up the cash book**

Your bookkeeping will depend on the circumstances of your association. There is no single “right” way. It is best to keep things as straightforward as possible.

### **Some basic tips for writing up your cashbook:**

- ★ Keep separate records of (a) your cash and (b) your bank or building society account.
- ★ Have separate columns in your cash book to record each amount which you receive or spend and also to show how much you have left (the balance). Do this for both the cash account and the bank account. (If you have a building society treasurers or savings account the balance is shown in the pass book) this will help to ensure that you do not spend more money than you have available.
- ★ You may be asked to show how much the association has made from jumble sales, or grants or subs. Or you may need to know the spending on phone calls, stationery or bingo cards. So, each time you take in or pay out money record the amount under a heading of this type. There are no standard headings – use ones which are useful to your association, such as items of expenditure which are covered by your Council grant.

### **End of month procedure**

#### **Cash account**

- ★ If you have a lot of entries each month in your cash account, it is best to rule off the page at the end of the month. Add up each column. Check that the balance in your book is the same as the cash in the tin. Carry over the balance to the new month.
- ★ If you have very few entries simply check your balance against the cash in your tin.
- ★ If you cannot get your cash account to tally with the cash in the tin, do not carry over the error to next month. Write “error in cash” and just the book so that it allies with the actual cash.

#### **Cheque account**

- ★ When the bank statement arrives, this gives you the opportunity to check that you have written everything correctly in your account book and that the bank has not made any mistakes with your money.
- ★ Tick off each cheque in your book, which appears on the bank statement (and any sums which you have paid in). Have you written any cheques, which do not yet appear, on the statement? Did you make a last minute deposit, which is not on the statement? You will need to take these into account.
- ★ NB: Once you are satisfied that you have written up your book correctly, it is your book (not the bank statement) which tells you how much money is available to spend.

#### **Reports to the committee**

- ★ Your report gives a summary of the information in your cashbook so that the committee knows the financial position. The committee should decide how much detail it needs and whether a verbal is enough.
- ★ You should always be in a position at any meeting to say how much money the group has available. For small groups, this may even be enough. However, to give the committee a more useful picture, it is best to report:
  - Amount received and amount spent so far this year.
  - Money available in cash account and bank or building society.
  - Expected bills and income over the next month or quarter.

#### **Report to the AGM**

This must be a written report showing:

- ★ Total amount received, with a breakdown of the receipts (i.e. how much the association received from grants, subs, bingo and so on).
- ★ Total amount paid out, with a breakdown of the payments (how much the association spent on stamps, stationery, etc, and large one-off payments).
- ★ The amount of money left (“balance of funds”) and where the funds are held. You should show how much is in the bank or building society (and give its name) and how much you hold in cash or float.

### **Independent Examination of Accounts**

- ★ There is no legal requirement for most small community organisations to have an independent examination of their accounts.
- ★ Many organisations, however, include in their constitution a clause that accounts must be independently examined before they are presented to the AGM.
- ★ Some funders, such as the National Lottery, make it a condition of the grant.
- ★ Many small associations choose to have an independent examination as it:
  - Provides an itemised written account for the treasurer to present to the AGM.
  - Helps reassure a new or unconfident treasurer.
  - Helps sort out any problems with the accounts.
  - Demonstrates to members and to other organisations that the accounts are in order.
- ★ The independent examiner need not be a professional accountant but must be someone from outside the association who is competent to examine accounts, such as a finance worker, bank manager or Council treasurer.

### **The Chair's Role**

#### **How to Chair a meeting:**

What are the Chairperson's main responsibilities?

- ★ Getting the meeting through all the business in the time allotted.
- ★ Making sure it is clear what decisions have been made.
- ★ Making sure it is clear who is going to do what tasks.
- ★ Keeping the meeting in order – stopping interruptions and irrelevancies, and allowing everyone to be heard.

#### **The agenda:**

- ★ You will need an agenda to help you organise the business to be discussed at the meeting.
- ★ If the meeting is very small and informal, you could simply agree the agenda at the start of the meeting.
- ★ If the meeting is larger or more formal, or you want to let people know in advance what you

will be discussing, you will need to prepare an agenda before the meeting. Sometimes the Chair and Secretary do this together.

The sample agenda below shows you what items are usually included in an agenda.

#### **Some helpful tips:**

##### *Keeping the meeting in order.*

How well the meeting runs depends on the people at the meeting, as well as the Chair. It makes a Chair's job easier if the group has agreed some basic rules about how they want the meetings to work – think about discussing this in your group.

##### *Making sure everyone's view is heard.*

- ★ In larger and more formal meetings it is usual to ask people to speak 'through the Chair'. This means they put their hand up when they want to speak, and then wait until the Chair tells them it is their turn. The Chair keeps track of whose turn it is.
- ★ In a smaller meeting you may want to be more informal, but you still need to make sure that everyone gets a chance to speak. Be aware that some people find it more difficult to talk at meetings than others, and try to make it easier for them. On the other hand, some people like to talk all the time, and you need to be firm about stopping them.
- ★ It can help to say something like "is there anyone who hasn't talked yet who would like to say something about this..." or "Abdul has spoken several times already so I'm going to let Deloris go next..."
- ★ Sometimes it works well to go round everyone in turn asking them what they think about a particular issue.
- ★ Before a decision is made, or you move on to another item, check that everyone has had his or her say.
- ★ Don't let people interrupt all the time. This is really frustrating for the person who is trying to talk, and leads to frayed members. Politely ask people to wait until the person speaking has finished.

##### *Getting through the business*

- ★ Keep an eye on the time, and remind the rest of the meeting – e.g. "we really need to move on

if we are to cover all the other business. We need to make a decision about... our options are..."

- ★ If it is clear you are not going to get through all the business, suggest that some items are left until next time, e.g. " this discussion clearly needs more time, I propose we give it an extra 10 minutes and drop the report back on the trip to Blackpool..."
- ★ It is always better, if possible, to give a clear suggestion, rather than say something vague which leads to endless debate.

#### *Drawing it all together*

- ★ At the end of a discussion, summarise the main points and what has been decided.
- ★ If the meeting has agreed to do something, make sure you've also agreed who is going to do it.
- ★ Make sure the minute taker has had time to take down the decision and who will do it.

#### *Some things to avoid*

- ★ Don't use your position to push your views.
- ★ Don't talk too much yourself.
- ★ Don't let someone talk a lot because they are your friend or you are a bit wary of them.
- ★ Don't ignore people who want to speak.

## Agendas

An agenda is simply a list of things you want to discuss in your meeting. It is useful because:

- ★ It helps you plan the meeting.
- ★ It helps you to get through the business of the meeting efficiently.
- ★ It helps people at the meeting follow what is going on.
- ★ It gives people the opportunity to think about the meeting in advance

It is formally the Chair's job to prepare the agenda. However, in a lot of groups the Secretary and the Chair work together to produce the agenda. This can make life a lot easier.

Some very small and informal groups simply work out the agenda together at the start of the meeting. This is fine if you don't need a lot of structure or advance planning for the meeting.

#### **A basic Agenda:**

1. Apologies for absence.
2. Minutes of the last meeting – agree these are a correct record.
3. Matters arising from the minutes of the last meeting.
4. Correspondence.
5. Treasurers Report.
6. Any other business.
7. Date of next meeting.

- ★ It is useful to have a record of everyone who was at the meeting, so pass around a piece of paper for people's names and addresses.

#### **Who decides what's on the agenda?**

Often agenda items are just decided by the Chair and the Secretary. However, if you can it is useful to find ways of giving your members the opportunity to contribute. Some ways of doing this are:

- ★ Put up a suggestion sheet on a notice board.
- ★ At the meeting ask for items for the next meeting.
- ★ When you send out the notice of the meeting, ask for suggestions for the agenda. Remember to put a contact address and the date you need them by.

#### **Items for your agenda:**

- ★ The bulk of your agenda will simply be the items you need to discuss. Make each important matter a separate item.
- ★ Look through the minutes of your last meeting. Are there any things to report back on? Are there items that need to be discussed again? Put each issue down as a separate item.
- ★ Have you received any information – for example about meetings or other events – you need to tell everyone about?
- ★ Some groups always include an item 'minutes of the last meeting'. The purpose of this is to agree that the minutes of the last meeting are accurate and reflect what happened. If your group is very small and informal you may decide you don't need to do this.
- ★ Some groups have 'standing items' on their agenda's. These are items that are always on the agenda at every meeting. They are usually reports from officers such as the Treasurer, or reports from sub-groups.

- ★ 'Any Other Business' is a regular item at the end of most agendas. It allows people to raise issues that aren't already on the agenda.
- ★ Try to avoid 'Any Other Business' taking up the majority of the meeting. If you can, it's better to find out beforehand what people want on the agenda. This allows you to organise the meeting more efficiently.

#### ***How long will each item take?***

- ★ It is useful for the Chair and Secretary to look at the agenda before the meeting, and work out how long they think each item is going to take. This can really help with the chairing and general smooth running of the meeting.
- ★ Try to make sure the important discussions get all the time they need, and the minor issues don't expand to take over the whole meeting.
- ★ It's hard to estimate exact times, but you can get a rough idea. For example, if you have 6 items to discuss in an hour's meeting you could give each item 10 minutes, or one important item 35 minutes and the rest 5 minutes each.
- ★ If this looks impossible you need to have fewer items on the agenda, or a longer meeting!

#### ***What order do items go in?***

- ★ It is general practice to put the short, easy to deal with items at the start of the agenda. You get them out of the way quickly, and can concentrate on the important issues.
- ★ There are no hard and fast rules about this. It depends on what you think will work best at any particular meeting.

#### ***When do you prepare the agenda?***

- ★ The crucial thing is to think about the agenda in advance. It's a tool to help you plan the meeting.
- ★ The agenda for a large public meeting will need careful advance planning and thought, while a small committee meeting can be prepared the day before.
- ★ If you are having speakers at the meeting, or need background papers or information, remember to prepare the agenda enough in advance to give yourself time to organise these.

- ★ Think about whether you want to mail the agenda out in advance, or give it to people at the meeting.

#### ***Annual General Meeting***

- ★ The agenda for your Annual General Meeting will have to include specific items such as selections and yearly reports. Check your constitution to see what these are.

#### ***Some other things to think about***

- ★ Think about whether an item needs an introduction and if so who will do this. It doesn't necessarily have to be the Chair.
- ★ Make sure you have background papers prepared in advance if an item needs them and distribute them to the group if necessary.
- ★ Be informative: describe each item in sufficient detail so that members come prepared and interested.
- ★ Make sure you have a good idea what each item is about; you may need to refer to past minutes or discussions.

## **Bank Accounts for Voluntary and Community Organisations**

Some of the major banks and building societies offer special accounts for small voluntary and community organisations and give free banking as long as your account is in credit. The conditions and benefits vary slightly from bank to bank.

#### ***Opening an account***

To open an account you can go into the local branch or ring the contact number. They will give you forms to fill in. Once this has been done and the forms returned to the bank, they will send you an account number and a passbook /chequebook depending on the type of account. You can then start using the account.

Banks and building societies generally require proof that your group is a voluntary, non-profit making organisation and not a private business. This could be one of the following:

- ★ Letter from the chair and secretary of your group.

- ★ Copy of resolution passed at the AGM authorising your group to open an account with the bank.
- ★ Copy of your group's constitution.
- ★ Charity Registration certificate/Trust deeds (if your group is a charity).

At least two people should sign each cheque that your group writes. You can have a pool of people who are named as 'signatories' for the account, any two of whom can sign the cheque. The bank/building society will require evidence of the identity of each person, and unless they have an account with that bank already it will be necessary for them to go down in person with:

- ★ Proof of identity – e.g. driving licence, passport, child benefit book.
- ★ Proof of address – e.g. utilities bill, benefit book, tax demand.

The signatories should be people with good credit ratings (i.e. no 'bad debts') as the banks will often refuse to accept people as signatories that they consider a high risk, however trustworthy.

Make sure you tell the bank that you are a NON PROFIT MAKING organisation. If you do not make this clear, you will be treated as a small business and you will pay more charges than you need to.

All the accounts listed offer 'free banking', i.e. no day-to-day charges, unless specified. You will still be charged for things like going overdrawn, stopping cheques, extra statements, etc.

When you are looking for information on the Internet remember that most banks refer to community and voluntary organisations as 'Clubs and Societies'. Accounts for these groups are usually classed as 'Business Banking'.

British Bankers produce comparative tables for 'charity' and 'club and society' accounts that are available online at:

[www.moneyfactsonline.co.uk/mfBAF/root.asp](http://www.moneyfactsonline.co.uk/mfBAF/root.asp)

## Organising your Annual General Meeting

### *What is the purpose of an AGM?*

- ★ To allow your membership to hear reports from the Committee on the achievements and work of your group over the year.

- ★ To elect the Committee for the next year.
- ★ To make any changes to the constitution.

Check your constitution for any regulations about your AGM, e.g.

- ★ How often do you have to hold AGM's?
- ★ How much notice are you required to give the meeting?
- ★ Who do you have to notify about the meeting?
- ★ Do you have to send the notice of the AGM to your member's homes?
- ★ How many people have to be at the meeting to make it official? (this is called the quorum).
- ★ Do the group's accounts have to be examined (audited) before the AGM?
- ★ Do nominations for new committee members have to be taken in advance or can you take them at the meeting? (It is usual to have a proposer and seconder for each nomination).
- ★ How much notice is required if anyone wants to propose an amendment to the constitution?

### **Venue, date and time**

- ★ Book meeting room and set date and time.
- ★ Notice of meeting.
- ★ Produce a notice giving details about the AGM and mail to everyone.
- ★ This should include date, time, venue and that elections will be held.
- ★ You may want to include the whole agenda or just highlight one or two items.

### **Sample agenda**

- ★ Your AGM agenda should include certain items – use this sample agenda as a starting point.

### *Annual General Meeting of the Clackuddersfax Community Association*

Thursday 9th September, 6.30pm  
Fred Grimshaw Community Centre

#### *Agenda:*

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Minutes of previous AGM
3. Chair's Report
4. Secretary's Report
5. Financial Report
6. Election of Committee

### Accounts

- ★ You will need to present a report on your finances for the year to your AGM.
- ★ Do you need your accounts examined by an independent person before the AGM or will you just have a report from your treasurer?

### Elections

- ★ Make sure the minutes show who was nominated, the proposer and seconder for each member, the number of votes each person received, and who was elected for each post.
- ★ Decide on your voting system in advance and make sure it is explained clearly at the meeting. For example: do you want to have a show of hands or a private ballot? Will it be a 'first past the post' election?
- ★ You may want to arrange a neutral person to count the votes.

### Minutes

- ★ Organise someone to take minutes of any decision made at the AGM. It is particularly important to have clear records of the elections and any changes to the constitution.
- ★ Take a list of people attending the meeting so you can contact them afterwards.

### Getting people to the meeting and making it work

- ★ Try to make the meeting enjoyable – think about making the business brief followed by a social with wine or snacks.
- ★ Have a speaker on a burning issue.
- ★ Organise a raffle.
- ★ Have someone welcoming people at the door.
- ★ Introduce the present committee.
- ★ Think about providing a crèche or organising babysitters.
- ★ It may encourage people to come if you offer to pick them up or meet them outside.
- ★ Think about whether the room is accessible to all your members – could a wheelchair user attend the meeting?
- ★ Think about having a loud speaker system or an induction loop.

## Holding Public Meetings

### Why hold a public meeting?

A public meeting can be an effective tactic to launch or promote a campaign, generate media coverage, or raise public awareness and involvement. If you are sure that a public meeting is the best way of achieving what you want, you should first clarify its aims.

Draw a brief plan of action with dates / times even if you are planning something at very short notice. Any event should have some key elements:

- ★ Raising awareness of your organisation.
- ★ Highlighting local issues.
- ★ Recruiting members and volunteers.

### Planning the meeting

Get some help to run the meeting. A small team of three or four people with one person clearly taking overall responsibility will bring more ideas and share the workload. Draw up a brief plan of action with dates/ times even if you are planning something at very short notice.

### Date and time

Plan the meeting well in advance – ideally three months – allowing an absolute minimum of one month for publicity. Check deadlines of local newspapers and other means of publicity such as branch newsletters. If you have an evening meeting aim for Tuesday to Thursday. Check for clashes with other local meetings or a major event on TV. Aim for the 7-9.30pm slot.

### Venue

Assess possible venues using your local knowledge and checking with other groups. The venues should be accessible by public transport and with access for those with a disability, open late if necessary, easy to find and have a parking area. Always visit the venue before the event. Take a checklist with you of what you are going to need.

### Publicity

Ideas for publicising the meeting include:

- ★ A5 fliers to post or leave in community venues and on notice boards.
- ★ A poster using same text/design as above – A3 is fine but A4 is a more popular size for people to take to display (e.g. in shop windows).
- ★ Advertisements in local newspapers and magazines or your own newsletter.

- ★ Through the mailings or magazines of affiliated societies and parish councils.
- ★ Press release to local media well in advance of meeting, followed up immediately before the meeting.
- ★ Also consider printing it in a community language.

Publicity leaflets should include details of the date, time, place, sponsoring organisation(s), your logo, subject and format (e.g. guest speakers / panel / questions and answers). Avoid fancy designs and squiggly fonts. Make sure the important words stand out (on no more than one line). Do not overload the leaflets with information – empty space is a vital part of design. Choose colours to make it stand out – black on gold is a good combination. Try to include a map of the venue with publicity and suggestions for getting there by different modes of transport.

The title of the meeting should be short, catchy and be understandable to a wide audience.

#### **Theme and speakers**

The title of the meeting should be short, catchy and be understandable to a wide audience. Brief speakers on the format of the meeting and timing, prepare them for questions and check whether they need audio visual aids. Confirm arrangements in writing and phone shortly before to finalise details.

#### **Preparation for the meeting – practicalities**

- ★ Order materials you need at least one month in advance.
- ★ Prepare signs for finding and getting around the venue.
- ★ Take audio-visual equipment including slides or transparencies.
- ★ Organise a public address system if using a large hall.
- ★ Take recruitment and other materials but don't overload the meeting with paper.
- ★ Confirm any catering arrangements.
- ★ Take an attendance list (and pens) with plenty of space for full addresses.
- ★ Prepare display boards / tables – contact VAC if you need advice.
- ★ Ensure there is enough table space and volunteers on hand to sign up new members.
- ★ Take change for cash payments.

#### **On the night**

- ★ Arrive at least an hour before starting time.
- ★ Put out signs.
- ★ Brief volunteers on their role at the meeting.
- ★ Check projector, etc. is working.

#### **Format of meeting – general guidelines**

- ★ Start off an attendance list with 3-4 names clearly-written addresses and post codes.
- ★ Open the meeting with a welcome, briefly say what your organisation is, outline the programme for the meeting and the intended finish time and remind people to sign the attendance list.
- ★ State the aim / purpose of meeting.
- ★ Introduce the speaker(s) or panel.
- ★ Move to the substantive issue of the meeting.
- ★ Go to questions, comment, discussion, (the opportunity to ask questions is vital for people to feel that they have participated in the meeting).
- ★ Thank the speakers and audience.
- ★ Clarify what is going to happen next and how you are going to follow it up - and give dates of any future events.
- ★ Remind people to sign the attendance list and appeal for members.
- ★ Pack up, remove notices within and outside the venue and tidy the room.
- ★ If possible have a refreshment break before the meeting, after or both. This gives an opportunity for informality, networking and signing up support.
- ★ Have a strong chairperson to deal with troublemakers and stick to your agenda.

#### **Follow-up**

- ★ Do a follow-up press release immediately.
- ★ Process membership forms.
- ★ Keep those who attended informed about the campaign.
- ★ Write to thank speakers.
- ★ Write to welcome new members.
- ★ Prepare a plan of action for further meetings, action, etc.

#### **Potential pitfalls**

Public meetings can be a risky tactic and while you can never eliminate the risk that something

will go wrong, you can at least be alert to the following possibilities:

- ★ Others may try to hijack your meeting: have a strong chairperson to deal with troublemakers and stick to your agenda. Prime your own supporters to ask questions and ensure that the chairperson knows who to call on.
- ★ The audience may misunderstand your role and think that you are in some way responsible for 'the problem': clarity in your initial presentations should reduce this risk, but if the meeting revolves around sensitive or

complicated issues, a panel format may help in making clear who is responsible for what.

Don't let yourself get put in a position of, for example, defending a local authority if they decline the opportunity to be there to defend themselves.

- ★ You may underestimate or over-estimate demand to attend your meeting: selecting venues with flexible sized meeting rooms (e.g. where partitions can be added or removed) will help but better book a slightly larger room with some standing room than to turn people away.

**Holding public meetings - typical schedule:**

	<i>12 or less</i>	<i>8 weeks</i>	<i>4 weeks</i>	<i>2 weeks</i>	<i>1 week</i>	<i>On the day</i>
<b>Venue</b>	Compare cost / suitability of 3-4 venue options, book preferred option in writing			Confirm that venue has all necessary audio-visual facilities, stationery, refreshments		Arrive early. Erect signs. Set up exhibition. Check layout. Check audio-visual facilities.
<b>Speakers</b>	Contact speakers with dates Confirm logistics and agenda in writing, enclosing background briefing	If necessary meet for a fuller briefing (cover aims, targets, length of speech, content, presentation, publicity, logistics)		Phone to confirm arrangements Discuss and agree quotes from speakers for press work if needed		Arrange transport to and from venue for speakers
<b>Publicity</b>	Give advance notice to press Design posters, leaflets	Print posters, leaflets Inform allies	Distribute leaflets	Draft press release Put up posters Leaflet drop	Send press release and make follow-up calls	Speak to journalists on the day and at the event
<b>General</b>	Consult Bradford & Keighley CVS if required to Check dates for possible local clashes	Decide what publications, displays, merchandise and recruitment materials you need		Mock up display materials	Check you have all the materials you need for the day	



## CNet, Bradford and District Community Empowerment Network

### *What we do:*

#### **CNet**

CNet is a Community Empowerment Network. We work with agencies across Bradford to ensure that the views of voluntary and community groups and individual advocates are heard on key decision-making partnerships.

#### **Partners**

We work with a number of partners across the District to help plan and improve the delivery of services.

#### **Individuals**

- ★ We offer support and training for individuals who want to engage in community advocacy and public decision making.
- ★ We promote the benefits of getting involved in groups and networks.

#### **Groups**

- ★ We support groups by providing small grants to enable them to fund an idea or project which will benefit the community.
- ★ We link groups to networks and encourage them to share information and good practice.

#### **Networks**

- ★ We work with existing networks and get actively involved in the development of new ones.
- ★ We distribute a wide range of information for networks to share with their members.
- ★ We provide meeting facilitate and resources.

#### **How to find us**

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You can also download a copy of this booklet and others in the series by going on our website.



**CNet**  
EMPOWERING  
COMMUNITIES

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