

Ryedale Voluntary Action

Factsheet

Management Committees

All voluntary organisations need a committee of people who will be responsible for the group and direct how the group is run. This is to ensure that decisions are made in a democratic way and that all committee members take collective responsibility.

The committee should meet as often as is stated in the constitution. This would normally be often enough so that the committee knows exactly what is going on with the organisation/group, but not so often that nothing happens except meetings! (For more about constitutions, see our factsheet)

If your constitution states that your organisation has a membership (this is usual for voluntary groups), then your committee members usually come from amongst the membership.

Your constitution should state how committee members are voted on to the committee, and for how long they serve. The committee as a whole has a responsibility to:

- meet! This sounds obvious but if the committee doesn't meet regularly then it can't manage the running of the group properly.
- ensure the group follows its aims and objectives
- carries out its aims in accordance with the law
- ensure the group manages its finances properly
- ensure that activities carried out and decisions made are in the best interest of the group and not any individual member of the committee
- if necessary, the committee can organise sub-committees to take on specific tasks such as finance or for organising an event.

It is important to note that even if a group employs staff, the ultimate responsibility lies with the management committee.

Having an induction process for new management committee members can help to involve them properly from the start. You could have a induction pack which includes your constitution, all your policies and recent accounts. Ensure that new members aren't bombarded with lots of jargon and make sure there is time put aside for new members to ask questions.

If your group is a registered charity, then everyone must abide by charity law. Officially your management committee members are known as charity trustees. The Charity Commission publishes a leaflet (CC3) called **Responsibility of Charity Trustees**. However, if you are not a registered charity it doesn't mean that you can be irresponsible and mismanage the organisation. Following charity law is good practice for all voluntary organisations. If you are a charity, you may refer to your management committee as the Board of Trustees. If your constitution is a Memorandum of Association and Articles of Association, your group is also a company limited by guarantee and your Trustees are also Company Directors.

Office Bearers

To be an office bearer might sound rather grand, but essentially it is (usually) three people who have specific responsibilities as well as being management committee members. These are: Chair, Secretary and Treasurer. Some organisations choose to have a vice-chair as well, or perhaps have some form of wording in the constitution that covers what happens if a deputy is needed.

The Chair

The Chair is often the spokesperson for the group particularly when a group has no paid staff. To Chair a meeting just means to keep the meeting to order and to make sure that the committee gets through the agenda. You must make sure that you keep to time, and indeed keep the peace at times! Other important points are:

- clarifying specific points, especially any names and acronyms that might be unclear, especially to new committee members
- encourage participation by everyone
- don't allow certain individuals to dominate the discussions
- keep a check on timewasting, interruptions, and any personal attacks
- remember to thank everyone for their time and effort. Committee members are volunteers and like to be valued.

It is not just the meetings that are important. It is just as vital to be prepared for meetings and to try to be aware of questions that may be raised by the committee.

It is important the chair is supported by the rest of the committee and doesn't take on too much of the work, as this can lead to burn-out.

The Secretary

Usually the main job of the secretary is to keep minutes (notes) of meetings and to distribute them to management committee members, and to be the main conduit for information about meeting dates and venues. Any other roles that the secretary should take on can be decided by the management committee as a whole - with the agreement of the secretary, of course! If your group is a company limited by guarantee, the Secretary may also be the company secretary.

The Treasurer

The duties of the treasurer can depend on the size of the group. In a large group with paid staff who undertake the day-to-day finance work, the treasurer has more of a planning and authorising role. In a smaller group, the treasurer is responsible for:

- keeping the petty cash book up-to-date
- authorising purchases
- keeping the books
- keeping the rest of the committee informed about the financial position of the organisation
- signing cheques

Contact RVA on 01653 600120 or email post@rva-cvs.org.uk for further information, help and advice and informal bespoke training for your committee or individuals who are new to being in an office position.