



T3SC Factsheet

Committees

Any voluntary organisation needs a committee of people who will organise how the group is run. This is to ensure that the decisions that are made in a democratic way and so all committee members take collective responsibility.

Meeting

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, but not so often that nothing happens except meetings!

If your constitution states that your organisation has a membership (this is usual for voluntary organisations), 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 is 'where the buck stops' in a organisation. It is important to note that even if an organisation employs staff, the ultimate responsibility lies with the management committee. It 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 organisation properly
- ♦ ensure the organisation follows its aims and objectives
- ♦ carries out its aims in accordance with the law
- ♦ ensure the organisation manages its finances properly
- ♦ ensure that activities and decisions made are in the best interest of the organisation 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.

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

If your organisation is a registered charity, then your organisation must abide by charity law. Officially your management committee members are known as 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.

Some common management committee behaviour:

Power—You need to avoid the danger of having one person wanting to control the organisation and everything it does. This is often the person who first had the idea for the organisation and finds it difficult to let go.

Laziness— There will inevitably be someone who does not pull their weight, and will leave everything to someone else.

The Quiet One— Being a committee member can be quite daunting for some people. Make sure new members are not overwhelmed by what they've taken on, and are given as much support as possible.

Honorary officers might sound rather grand, but essentially it is (usually) three people who have specific responsibilities as well as being management committee members. These roles are Chair, Secretary, 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 organisation, particularly when an organisation 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 time wasting, 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 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. 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!

The Treasurer

The duties of the treasurer can depend on the size of the organisation. In a large organisation with paid staff who undertake the day-to-day work, the treasurer has more of a planning and authorising role. In a smaller organisation, 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 group's financial position
- ♦ signing cheques

Successful Committees

A successful committee follows the four C's

Constitution - this is your governing document and makes clear what you can do

Commitment - it's hard going sometimes, but remember the difference you hope to make

Communication - keep in touch with each other, your group and the wider community

Curiosity - keep asking questions and look for ways to improve and support your group.

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