

How to form a committee for your group

The following information is intended to help you in the process of forming an association, to understand the functions of the committee and its members. Committees help spread the workload. At its simplest, a committee is simply a group of motivated people who meet regularly, at least one of whom acts as a convenor.

What is a committee?

A committee is elected by the members of a community association to continue the work of the association between general meetings. It is the committee members' responsibility to make sure that decisions taken at its association's general meeting are acted on during their year in office.

- 1) Find a location** for regular meetings. Community or neighbourhood centres are usually free and good to work with.
- 2) Call a public meeting on the issue** and, at the conclusion, ask for individuals to nominate to form a committee to carry forward the issue. This is the most effective method, as people are often highly focused and motivated at public meetings.
- 3) Do the rounds.** Talk to people or groups with similar interests, let them know about the new group, and let them know you're looking for people who really want to make a difference for children and parents.
- 4) Personally ask individuals** who you think have the skills you need. (Be persuasive: First say you've been looking for individuals who are recognized as having extraordinary skills and commitment in this area (or similar words), *then* ask them to join!)

5) At the first committee meeting, elect the following positions:

Chair, deputy chair, secretary, and treasurer. You may also want to have other positions, like a publicity officer, an entertainment officer, a membership officer, or a fundraising officer.

What size should a committee be?

Most committees have between 12 and 15 members. Committees with more than 15 members tend to be unwieldy and difficult to operate. Committees with less than 6 people tend to be unrepresentative.

Who and what are the office bearers or honorary officers?

Every member of a committee has an important role to play and contribution to make. However, there are 3 posts or offices which need to be filled in order that the committee can operate effectively.

- The chairperson, whose role is chairing committee meetings and acting as spokesperson on behalf of the community association when necessary.
- The treasurer, whose role is looking after the association's income and expenditure.
- The secretary, whose role is dealing with the association's organisation, including arranging meetings and taking minutes.

The Chairperson's role and responsibilities

The chairperson of a committee is responsible for the smooth running of meetings, allowing all members to have their say, and for guiding the committee's work towards the aims set by the community association. This is a vital position in any community association and a good chairperson will do the following:

At committee meetings

- Conduct business in the order set out in the agenda
- Keep discussion focused on the item as set by the agenda
- Make sure that a decision has been reached before going onto the next item on the agenda
- Allow everyone to speak and be heard
- Make sure a record of all decisions is kept.

- Between committee meetings
- Know of all work that the community association is doing so that he/she is well informed about all matters that may arise at committee meetings
- Keep in touch with other committee members and how their work is coming along, which means supporting people, not ordering them about
- Meet with the secretary to arrange and draw up the agenda to be discussed at meetings and ensure minutes are properly drafted and issued prior to the next meeting.

The deputy chair roles and responsibilities

Stands in if the chair is absent.

The Treasurer's role and responsibilities

Your treasurer should be happy to handle petty cash and pay bills

It is most important that a community association is not spending money that it does not have, and that good records are kept of its income and expenditure.

A treasurer should

- Open a bank account for the community association. This can be easily done and bank staff can explain how to do so.
- Pay all money coming into the community association into the bank account, apart from a small sum of cash, say about £5, which should be kept at hand as 'petty cash'
- A record must also be kept of the petty cash and what it is. Any remaining petty cash at the end of the year should be added to the present balance in the accounts for the Annual General Meeting.
- Make a regular statement to the committee on how much money the community association has spent and still has in its account.
- Pay bills for the community association.
- Give out receipts for money given to the community association.

The secretary's role and responsibilities

Your secretary should be well organised and good at maintaining records. The secretary is the community association's point of contact with its members and the wider public in line with the direction given by the committee and its chairperson. The work involves writing letters on the association's behalf, and organising and keeping records of committee meetings.

A secretary is expected to do the following

- Before committee meetings
- Find a room for the meeting.
- Meet the chairperson and agree an agenda.
- Send out a notice to committee members of where and when the meeting will take place and the agreed agenda.
- Prepare all papers needed for the meeting at least a week beforehand. The papers should include correspondence since the last meeting and minutes, which are a record of the last meeting.

During committee meetings

- Take a note of everyone present at the meeting and everyone who could not be there but has sent an apology.
- Circulate or read out the minutes of the previous meeting, take questions about the minutes and change the minutes if necessary.
- Take notes of what members say when they are reporting on action taken and of the decisions that are taken by the committee.
- Report to the committee any letters written by the secretary and any replies that have been received so that action can be taken on them.

After committee meetings

- Write up formal minutes from the notes taken during the meeting in time for issue to the next committee meeting.
- Write and send off any letter that the committee has asked to be dealt with.

The secretary should maintain up-to-date records of Committee members' names, addresses and telephone numbers.