

Hartlepool Voluntary Development Agency

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CONSTITUTIONS

1. What is a constitution?

Many voluntary groups are relatively small in terms of the amounts of money and staff that they have. These organisations are called Unincorporated Associations. This is because they are not incorporated (they are not a registered company) they are a group of people working together to mutually agreed aims. This type of group has a particular kind of agreement governing how it is run - a Constitution. This is a set of agreed rules governing how an organisation will be run, how the members will work together and what they are working towards.

Some groups prefer to remain informal and not adopt a constitution. For others however, a constitution is not only an effective tool for running an organisation but actually a requirement because of the activities they are undertaking. For example a group that wishes to register as charity, or undertake to provide services in a community, or apply for funding will face problems if they do not have a constitution.

A constitution is also a way of ensuring that the public and funding bodies feel confident that a group is being run properly and it's money managed properly.

2. A constitution must have...

Name - choose your own. It might reflect the area or the field in which you work.

Objects

This section sets out what the group aims to do. If your group wants to register as a Charity then you will need to consider whether or not these objects will fit in with what the Charity Commission defines as Charitable. They have four general headings: The furtherance of Education, the Furtherance of Religion, the Relief of Poverty and anything else that is of benefit to a large proportion of the population.

Powers

This covers what a group can do to achieve its aims. These are things such as:

- Fundraising
- Networking
- Hiring equipment/premises
- Employing staff

Membership

A group's membership would be made up of people who were interested in working together to achieve the aims of the group. To become a member a person would have to sign a membership agreement and, if the group wished, pay a membership fee.

If a fee was payable then there would be rules about who could not be a member. This includes the following:

- People under 18.
- People who are bankrupt.
- People who have an unspent conviction.
- People who are unable to look after their own financial affairs.

would be excluded from membership if organisation was to be a charity.

Management Committee

This committee has responsibility for management of the group. It is up to the group how many members it has, although for most organisations the allowed minimum would be three. There is no maximum but it would make the group unwieldy and inefficient to have too many. There are different types of Committee member:

ELECTED - by and from the membership. Most Committee members will be appointed in this way.

NOMINATED - by another group.

CO-OPTED - by the Committee due to their skills/knowledge.

It is in the interests of the group to ensure that the Committee do not benefit financially from being a Committee member.

Officers

A Committee has officers who carry out it's main jobs. There are usually at least three:

- A Chair, who ensures meetings run smoothly and decisions are made.
- A Secretary, who informs everyone of meetings and takes minutes.
- A Treasurer, who oversees the money of the group and any payments it makes. The treasurer will report to the Committee regularly about this.

Committee Meetings

Meetings of the committee are held to share information and make decisions and should be governed by the constitution, which can specify the minimum number of Committee members needed to make a decision (quorum) and the minimum number of meetings to be held over a year. All members of the Committee must be given at least 21 days notice of a meeting.

General Meetings

Every year the group will need to have an Annual General Meeting. The first one being within 15 months of the group setting up. The AGM is a chance for the Committee to tell members what's going on and a chance for the members to hold the Committee accountable. It is also when the annual accounts are presented.

The constitution should also allow for other general meetings called special or extraordinary general meetings.

Finances

It is good practice to have a bank account with a minimum of two people who should sign the cheque book. These two people must not be related.

Closing down the Group.

There must be provision in the constitution to close down the group. A meeting of the membership should be called and a specific majority vote in favour needed. The group must pay all its bills and if there is any money left then it should be given to a group, which does similar work.

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