

Committee Guide

A practical guide for community and voluntary groups

1. Purpose of this Guide

This guide is designed to help community and voluntary groups understand how committees work in practice.

It supports groups to:

1. Set up a committee
2. Review how their committee is working
3. Clarify roles and responsibilities

The focus is on keeping things simple, clear and workable, recognising that every group is different.

2. What is a Committee

A committee is a group of people who work together to guide and manage an organisation.

At its core, a committee exists to:

1. Make decisions
2. Share responsibility
3. Support the organisation to run effectively

Most committees meet regularly to discuss priorities, make decisions and agree actions.

Committees may be known by different names, such as a Management Committee, Board or Steering Group, but their role is broadly the same.

3. Different Ways a Committee Can Be Structured

Not all committees look the same. The structure should reflect the size and needs of the organisation.

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Most groups will have a main committee, which is responsible for overall direction and decision-making.

As organisations grow, they may also introduce:

Sub-committees

These are smaller groups that focus on specific areas, such as finance, events or governance. They allow more detailed work to take place and report back to the main committee.

Working groups

These are usually short-term and focused on a specific task, such as organising an event or delivering a project. Once the work is complete, the group usually finishes.

The key is to keep structures proportionate and manageable.

4. Roles Within a Committee

Clear roles help a committee to function effectively, but they do not need to be overly formal.

Most committees include a Chair (or Facilitator), Secretary and Treasurer, along with other members.

The Chair supports the meeting process, helping to keep discussions focused and ensuring that everyone has an opportunity to contribute.

The Secretary supports organisation and record-keeping, making sure that agendas are prepared, decisions are recorded and information is shared.

The Treasurer supports financial oversight, helping the committee understand income, expenditure and budgeting.

While these roles have specific functions, it is important to remember that responsibility is shared across the whole committee.

Committee members play an active role by contributing to discussions, supporting decisions and taking on tasks where needed.

5. What a Committee is Responsible For

Regardless of how a committee is structured, its core role is to ensure that the organisation is well run.

This includes setting direction, making decisions and ensuring that resources are used responsibly.

Committees should act in the best interests of the organisation at all times. This means focusing on its purpose, managing conflicts of interest and making decisions in good faith.

Working as a team is essential. Strong committees are built on collaboration, respect and shared responsibility.

Committees are also accountable for how they operate. This involves keeping clear records, being transparent in decision-making and communicating openly.

Finally, committees must operate within their governing document and follow agreed policies and procedures.

6. How Committees Work in Practice

Having the right structure is important, but how a committee works day-to-day is what makes the real difference.

Effective committees:

- Meet regularly
- Have clear agendas
- Focus on key issues
- Agree actions

Meetings should support discussion and decision-making, while also respecting people's time.

After each meeting, it is good practice to record what was discussed, what was decided and what actions were agreed.

Sharing responsibility is also key. When work is distributed across the committee, it reduces pressure on individuals and supports long-term sustainability.

7. Supporting New Members

As new members join, it is important to help them understand how the committee works.

This can be done by:

- Explaining roles and processes
- Sharing key documents
- Providing an opportunity to ask questions

A supportive approach helps new members feel confident and able to contribute.

8. Common Challenges

Most committees experience challenges at some stage.

These may include unclear roles, low participation, poor attendance or difficulty following through on actions.

These challenges are usually a sign that something needs to be adjusted, rather than a failure of the group.

Simple steps such as clarifying roles, improving meeting structure or sharing workload can make a significant difference.

9. Keeping Your Committee Working Well

Committees benefit from taking time to reflect on how they are working.

This might involve asking:

- Are we clear about our roles
- Are meetings effective
- Are decisions and actions being followed through
- Are we working well as a team

Being open to change helps ensure the committee remains effective as the organisation develops.

10. A Note on Executive Committees

Some organisations may choose to establish an Executive Committee to support work between meetings.

This is usually a smaller group drawn from the main committee that deals with routine or urgent matters.

For most community and voluntary groups, a full Committee structure is sufficient.

Further guidance is available in the Executive Committee Guide.

11. Key Message

Committees do not need to be complex to be effective.

Keeping structures simple, sharing responsibility and working collaboratively will support strong and sustainable organisations.

A Practical Next Step

If your group is setting up a new committee or reviewing how it operates, you may find it helpful to refer to our **How to Set Up and Run a Committee Guide**.

This provides a step-by-step approach to:

- Getting started
- Agreeing roles
- Running meetings
- Supporting effective working