

The Role of a Committee

What does the committee do?

Management committees are elected or appointed by the members of the community group to be responsible for the day-to-day management of the group and its activities. You will find details of the powers delegated to the management committee outlined in your group's constitution or set of rules. Most community groups also elect a number of named officers to carry out particular key roles – the Chair, the Secretary and the Treasurer are the most common named positions, although some groups also appoint Vice-chairs, Publicity Officers, and Membership Secretaries amongst others.

General issues:

All of the management committee members need to be actively involved in running your group, not just these key people with named roles. It is crucial that the overall workload is shared and evenly distributed. Try not to become over-reliant on too few members as difficulties can occur when one or two people do most of the work with a risk of them becoming overloaded and carrying too much responsibility. This may result in the group taking on more than it is realistically able to manage. These members can often burnout fairly quickly leading them to resign, leaving the rest of the committee to pick up the pieces. There can be a real loss of credibility for your group where this situation is allowed to happen.

The “too few people doing too much of the work and becoming overloaded” scenario can also affect your ability as a group to recruit new committee members. Other people who are potentially interested in getting involved may be put off from doing so because it can appear to be “cliquey” and also distorts the time commitment that is expected of members.

It's worth remembering that individuals bring a range of different skills to community groups including:

- contacts and information
- social skills
- practical skills
- ideas
- organisational skills.

It is often much easier to recruit interested people into getting involved with your group's practical activities, rather than pushing them into serving on the management committee from the outset. Many people can lack the time, interest or confidence to become involved in a more formal and responsible capacity. They can however, have a valuable input in a different way, for example as members of time limited sub groups working on particular topics.

Be aware that people have different and diverse contributions to make, which can be developed over time. The most successful community groups have involvement from a wide range of people in a variety of roles.

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Ideally you also want the committee to be representative of different views and interest groups from the overall membership. Management committees often find it useful to do a skills' audit to find out what experience, knowledge and expertise current members have. This can help to identify the gaps you have on your committee and you can then actively recruit new members to bring in the necessary skills.

Offer potential committee members the opportunity to come and see what happens at a typical meeting, how it works and what is involved. You also need to be clear from the outset what would be expected of them in terms of attendance, other involvement etc.

Many people also welcome the opportunity to develop their skills through involvement in committees. You might want to explore what management committee training programmes are offered by your local council for voluntary service or other agency and whether all your committee members would be interested in taking part in some training. There is definite value in all the committee being trained on key issues about roles and responsibilities at the same time. It can lead to lively debate and discussion about why and how you do things in a certain way and what benefits change might bring. It also helps you to follow action through as a whole group rather than it just falling to one or two committee members to take the initiative.

Groups are often unclear about the duties covered by the various named officers on the committee. Some suggestions are covered below:

What does the Chairperson do?

The Chairperson leads the management committee, calls and runs meetings with the group's active support, and acts as spokesperson for the group, representing their views at events and external meetings.

A Chair should spend time at meetings listening, moving the discussions on, and summarising where the discussion is up to at regular intervals.

Practical tasks:

- planning and preparing with the Secretary for a meeting
- asking for apologies for absence
- welcoming and involving any new members
- welcoming and introducing guests/observers to the meeting and explaining what their contribution will be
- agreeing a finishing time for the meeting and ensuring that this is kept to, as much as possible!
- introducing each agenda item with a brief summary
- running the meeting so everyone present can have an input
- encouraging the group to reach clear decisions
- clarifying action to be taken and who is responsible for taking the action forward
- fixing a date for the next meeting
- closing the meeting and thanking people for their contributions

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A good Chairperson will probably have some or all of the skills from the list below:

- leadership skills
- experience of committee work
- tact and diplomacy
- good “people” skills
- impartiality, fairness and ability to respect confidences

What does a Secretary do?

The Secretary is responsible for the general administration of the group and its meetings.

Practical tasks carried out by the Secretary will probably include:

- making arrangements for meetings i.e. booking the room, arranging for equipment and refreshments when necessary
- setting the agenda for each meeting with the Chair
- photocopying the agenda and making it available by the start of the meeting
- ensuring all members know the procedure for adding items to the agenda
- checking that the meeting is quorate (i.e. that enough management committee members are present in order for the business dealt with at the meeting to be valid. The quorum for meetings should be set out in your constitution).
- taking the minutes of the meeting and recording any decisions made
- sending out copies of the previous minutes in good time
- sending out reminders of meetings to group members
- writing letters for the group
- keeping copies of letters written and received
- reading our correspondence at meetings as appropriate
- keeping members informed about what is happening between meetings
- circulating agendas and minutes of the Annual General Meeting and any special or extraordinary general meetings
- keeping records of general members and management committee members up-to-date and ensuring that the group is complying with the Data Protection Act in holding such records.

A good Secretary will most likely:

- be organised and be able to set up basic filing systems
- have knowledge or experience of committee procedures
- have some experience of minute taking.

Please refer to the guide on **Running Effective Meetings** for suggestions on what agendas and minutes for meetings should cover.

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Another important position in the committee is the Treasurer's role. Please refer to the **Managing your Group's Money** guide for further details.

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