

Healthy Fenland – briefing sheet 1

Setting up voluntary and community groups



There are many different reasons why people set up voluntary and community groups. However, they are usually set up because someone or a small group of people see that there is a need for a particular activity or service in their area. Whatever kind of group you would like to start there are some things you need to consider.

Below are few questions to think about when forming a new community group:

- Are you clear about what you want to start?
- How do you aim to have a positive effect on people's physical, mental or emotional health?
- What type of group will it be: e.g. self-help, social or support group, cultural society or sports club?
- Who will be involved in the new group and will there be a membership?
- Have you researched to find out whether there are other organisations that already offer what you want to provide?
- How will you become self-sustaining?
- Do you have the time, energy, skills and commitment to do the work?

Managing the community group.

Community groups are initially set up with two or three key people working informally together.

However to apply for funding, a management committee needs to be formed and a constitution adapted (see sheet 2). The people who started the group often become the first committee and adopt the constitution. Other people the join then group as members and the committee hold meetings following what the constitution states about how often, when to hold the Annual General Meeting (AGM) and the election of new committees.

The committee's responsibilities for decision making, coordinating activities and ensuring that funding/resources are shared between the whole committee. But groups normally have three key roles.

- The Chairperson who leads meetings and is the public face of the group
- The Secretary who organises and take minutes of meetings
- The Treasurer to keep and report to the committee on the accounts

Usually the minimum number of committee members required is three and maximum is twelve but there are no hard and fast rules. Some model constitution templates

may stipulate numbers of committee members so look carefully to ensure it meets your groups needs before you adopt it.

Committee responsibilities include:

- Sets the aims and objectives and plans for the future
- Holds regular meetings where members can express their ideas and opinions
- Works to ensure that the best interests of the people you are supporting are always at the forefront of any decision making
- Has enough resources including volunteers and funding to carry out all the work
- Is well managed and organised

The committee should meet at least 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 onto the committee and for how long they serve.

Opening a bank account

In order to receive funding for your group you will need to open a bank account. Having a bank account is the best and safest way to look after the group's money. The account should be opened in the name of the group and you will need at least two members of the group to act as signatories. Therefore, it might be a good idea to have more than two people who can sign cheques so as there is always someone available. Most banks and building societies offer special accounts for small voluntary and community organisations. They also usually offer free banking as long as your account is in credit.

For more information on management committees see our Committee Skills information sheet or view The Resource Centre Information Leaflets at:

http://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/information/committee_members/index.asp



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