

No. 65

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This Information Sheet names the different officers and other voluntary workers that a community association can have. It also outlines their tasks.

Officers of the Community Association and their Duties

1. The Essential Officers

As with any other organisation, the minimum number of officers for a Community Association is the usual three - Chair, Secretary and Treasurer. However, the work of the association can more efficiently be performed by sharing it out amongst a larger number of officers. Indeed, the model constitution for a Community Association latest (1995) version makes express provision for the appointment of further officers by the Annual General Meeting and, in some previous versions, by the community association's main committee.

One additional officer which all associations should appoint is a Vice-Chair to act in the Chair's absence or incapacity.

2. Additional Officers

2.1 Other Honorary Officers

These are appointed for two reasons: to share out the executive work of the association which would otherwise fall to the officers already mentioned, and/or to afford some recognition to people who have served, or are serving, the association in various ways.

Most associations have a President, and other officers which many associations find it useful to appoint are:- Assistant Secretary (or Minutes Secretary), Membership Secretary and, where the association has a Centre, a Lettings Officer or Bookings Secretary. This list assumes that the work of the association is carried out by honorary officers. (Just because 'honorary' officers are unpaid does not mean that they should be out-of-pocket as a result of their work for the association! Expenses should be recorded by the officer concerned and she/he should be reimbursed at suitable intervals.)

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2.2 Electing Additional Officers

The provisions of the model constitution for a community association have been altered from time to time, so do check your own constitution. This will tell you whether additional officers can be elected by your association's main committee as well as by the Annual General Meeting, and whether they are ex-officio members of the committee and/or any sub-committees. In the latest (1995) version of the model constitution the additional officers are elected by the Annual General Meeting.

3. Other Voluntary Workers

Even the above list of officers in no way covers the detailed responsibilities of a busy association. Sharing out this work may well involve appointing people to organise social activities, edit and distribute a news-sheet or magazine, and organise contacts with the housebound and with sick members. Such key-workers may be elected as honorary officers of the association if you so wish, but you need to bear in mind the question of how many people will thus become ex-officio members of your committee(s) -whether they want to be or not! In some instances it will be better to specify who does what for the community association without actually making the person concerned one of its officers. For example, the General Committee, in appointing a sub-committee, can designate one of the sub-committee members to be its organiser, secretary or chair. (e.g.: in the Minute appointing members to the Social Committee for the current year, Hilary Brown is named as the Social Secretary).

Where the detailed work of running a community association activity is entrusted to a Section of the association, it is usual for the members concerned to appoint their own Section leaders or officers, so this need not concern the main committee.

4. The Constitutional Provisions

The latest revised version (approved by the Charity Commission in 1995) of the model constitution states that the Annual General Meeting shall elect Treasurer and Secretary, who shall serve in that capacity as officers of the General Committee. The AGM may also elect such other honorary officers of the Association as it may from time to time decide. The model constitution also provides options for the election of Chair and Vice Chair: either at its first meeting after the Annual General Meeting by the General Committee, or by the Annual General Meeting. [Which of these options appears in a community association's constitution will have been decided at the general meeting at which it was adopted or amended.] The General Committee, in appointing sub-committees, decides which (if any) of the association officers shall be members.

Unless your constitution states otherwise, officers are elected annually. But how long they actually serve in practice will depend on the availability of suitable candidates and the attitude of the association itself. Some community associations have a Standing Order limiting the maximum number of years a member may serve as an officer, in order to let it be seen that the association is not run by a self-perpetuating group, and to introduce new blood. This is a matter for the association itself to decide.

5. The Officers - One by One!

The list of officers which follows may seem very long to associations finding it difficult to recruit volunteers. But it may be easier in the long run to ask more people to do *some* work, rather than overload two or three!

5.1 President

Often someone of standing in the town or neighbourhood who presides at the Annual General Meeting of the Community Association and is naturally invited to officiate at major special events as well as to attend all meetings of the community association Committee. The extent to which a President is able to take part in the day-to-day affairs of the association will obviously depend on his/her other commitments. On the whole, the more important a personality he or she is, the less time he/she will be able to devote to the affairs of any one association or society.

When the President (or Vice-President -see below) is asked to officiate at a function, meet important visitors, or lead a deputation, it is essential that he/she is properly briefed in advance - a job for the community association Secretary or Chair.

5.2 Vice-Presidents

Some associations elect Vice-Presidents as recognition for past services to the association, whether in the form of devoted hard work as a previous officer, or of financial contributions.

The only practical limitation to the number of Vice-Presidents is that, as already mentioned, they will probably be ex-officio members of the community association's main committee, and possibly of all its sub-committees. It may, therefore, be better to give recognition by offering an honorary life membership instead.

Where Vice-Presidents *are* appointed their interest should be retained by using them in the capacity their title indicates -in other words, to officiate at a function in the absence of the President.

5.3 Chair

Fuller details of the Chair's tasks will be found in Information Sheet No. 72, *Work of the Chair*. The duties of the Chair are well-known to Committee members. He/she is in control at meetings of the Committee, to ensure that all are heard and that a decision is made on all business brought before the meeting. To do this diplomatically and tactfully, and to achieve acceptable compromises where necessary requires somebody of quite exceptional capabilities. So, whilst we all know what the Chair does, the choice of a suitable person can sometimes be a most difficult task.

5.4 Vice-Chair

This officer has already been referred to; he/she needs at least some of the qualities of the Chair for whom he/she will have to deputise from time to time. The Vice-Chair may be regarded as a useful training ground for a potential future Chair, either of the association or of some important Section or sub-committee. For this reason some associations appoint more than one Vice-Chair, and others elect new persons to the post quite frequently.

5.5 Secretary

The Secretary is the main executive officer of the association. The entire work of the association will therefore depend to a large degree on the Secretary's efficiency.

He/she is the person who writes and receives letters on behalf of the association, and is frequently the first to make contact with those outside it. Together with the Chair, he/she can do a great deal to create and maintain a team spirit amongst the members of the Committee, and, because he/she knows all that goes on in the association, can make sure that the committee is kept informed, particularly where its help and guidance is needed.

Whatever the size of the committee, the Secretary should establish good personal relations with all its members, and particularly with the Chair, Treasurer and other officers. Consultation with the Chair of the committee should be as frequent as possible, and all matters affecting the finance of the association should also be discussed with the Treasurer.

Fuller details of the Secretary's duties are contained in Information Sheet No. 60, *The Secretary's Work and Relations with the Main Committee*. It goes without saying that the association must use the person best suited for the job and do all it can to lighten his/her load by delegating certain duties to other officers.

5.6 Assistant or Minutes Secretary

It is almost impossible for the Secretary to keep a committee meeting informed as to progress, listen to what others are saying and, simultaneously, attempt to take notes of proceedings. The Association (or the committee concerned) should, therefore, try to find an assistant, less involved in the actual administration of its affairs, who will be able to take concise notes to form the basis of the Minutes. This person may also be able to assist the Secretary in other ways, such as their duplication and distribution.

5.7 Treasurer

The Treasurer is elected by the Annual General Meeting, as he/she is responsible to the members for the safe-keeping of the association's funds. It is essential that the membership realises that this is a responsible job, involving the keeping of accounts; presenting reports to committees at agreed intervals; passing on books to, and co-operating with, the auditors or independent examiner; presenting the balance sheet and financial report at the Annual General Meeting; submitting budgets to the community association committee; and operating agreed procedures with Sections and Sub-

committees which are themselves accumulating and spending money on the association's behalf. This summary of the Treasurer's duties only touches on the complexities of his/her work; more detail for the guidance of community association Treasurers, or intending Treasurers, is contained in Information Sheet No. 73, *The Treasurer's Duties*. See also Information Sheet No. 10, *Accounting by Charities - The New Regulations*.

5.8 Publicity/Public Relations Officer

Every association should attempt to enlist the services of someone responsible for this important part of its work. Ideally a person with some contacts with the local press and/or radio station, or with some experience in preparing news items, is required. The person concerned will have to consult with the other community association officers as to what aspects of the association's work require publicity, and prepare suitable press releases, news items, statements and advertisements. 'Letters to the Editor' should not be overlooked, though these should be signed by the Secretary or Chair.

Relations with other organisations must not be forgotten. An important public relations task is the creation of a mailing list divided into different sections for the different groups of people and organisations the association will need to contact at different times depending on the occasion.

Where an association issues a magazine or news-sheet, its contents can form a valuable part of the community association's publicity. Even if there is a separate editor, he/she will have to work very closely with the Publicity/Public Relations Officer.

5.9 Membership Secretary

The membership secretary keeps a register of current members - this need not

necessarily be in the form of a book; many associations find it more convenient to use an alphabetical card index, or if they have a computer, record the details on their membership database.

Whatever the system used, there should be a clear indication as to each member's address, whether he/she has paid the current subscription and, if possible, a note of the Section(s) and interest(s) he/she regularly supports. This is particularly valuable where Sections are asked to collect the association membership fees from the Section members at the beginning of a new membership period. As some members belong to more than one Section, the Membership Secretary can then inform the Section leader which of his/her members have already paid through another Section.

5.10 Lettings Officer

Sometimes known as the Bookings Secretary - must be readily available to enquirers by attending the Centre regularly at known times and/or by being able to answer enquiries by telephone. He/she must maintain a diary of bookings and will be responsible for the collection of deposits and hiring charges, which must be passed on to the Treasurer at regular intervals.

The work of the Lettings Officer is greatly eased when the association committee issues clear-cut rules regarding the use of the Centre, and where copies of lettings agreements/booking forms are available for his/her use. Information Sheet No. 61, *Rules and Hiring Agreement for a Community Centre*, gives examples. Some associations appoint a small Programme or Lettings Sub-committee, which not only makes periodic allocations of centre rooms, but can also be convened as required to adjudicate between two or more conflicting applications for the use of centre facilities, which is obviously a great help to the Lettings Officer.

5.11 Information Officer

This is not the same as a Publicity or Public Relations Officer. It is someone who is willing to receive, digest and present to the committee appropriate portions of the written material every association receives - circulars from the Local Authority or Community Matters, for example. In addition, he/she should draw the attention of the committee to items of relevance culled from the press and radio/TV. Despite the title, this person need not be an officer of the association; perhaps just a committee member who has volunteered to make the Secretary's life a little easier!

5.12 Voluntary Caretaker/Manager and Duty Stewards

Associations with buildings but no paid Manager or Caretaker will try and ensure that a responsible person is in charge of the centre. A voluntary Manager/Caretaker would have overall responsibility, although he/she could not be expected to be on the premises all the time. The person concerned would be an officer of the association, or appointed by its main committee.

Arrangements for a rota of duty stewards are made by many busy associations. Some of the members on the rota may well be officers of the association - e.g.: the Hon Treasurer or Secretary, but this is not essential - indeed, the idea is to spread the administrative load. A steward on duty sees that the equipment is readily available for the evening's activities, takes bookings and deals with other enquiries, receives money and locks it safely away for the Treasurer, checks that heating appliances and lights are switched off after use, and that the building is securely locked at the end of the session.

6. Paid Employees

Associations fortunate enough to have the services of a paid Manager/Secretary/

Administrators usually ask the person concerned to undertake some duties which would otherwise fall to honorary officers. Indeed, this may be written into the Contract of Employment. Good working relationships between the officers (paid or voluntary) can only be enhanced if all are quite clear as to what is expected of them and what their colleagues will undertake.

It should be noted by associations that paid employees are not eligible to be a member of the General Committee, any Section committee or any sub-committees of the Association. However, they may be invited to attend such committees as a non-voting adviser. In common-sense terms this should be every committee with whose work the paid worker is involved. Paid employees should be allowed to contribute to proceedings of meetings to which they are invited, but as stated, do not have voting rights.

7. Still More Officers?

The officers so far described in this Information Sheet are those who relate directly to the main committee(s) of the community association. There are usually other voluntary officers who undertake specific tasks, but who are not necessarily officers of the community association. For example, there may well be a Catering Officer, or a Social or Sports Secretary. The appointment of such officers may be delegated to the appropriate sub-committee. In community organisations using the model constitution for a Community Association the work may be undertaken by Section leaders - e.g.: the sports activities may be organised through football, table-tennis and badminton sections, making the appointment of an overall Sports Secretary unnecessary.

8. The Provision of Training

Suitable training courses can help officers and volunteers learn new skills, build on

their experience or acquire up to date information on the law as it affects their responsibilities. The allocation of funds for this purpose is therefore a worthwhile investment for the association, and training needs should be a regular agenda item at committee meetings.

9. Other relevant Information Sheets/Publications

Available from Community Matters:

- 18 *Committees and Committee Procedure.*
- 13 *Community Organisation Sub-Committees.*
- 60 *Secretary's Work and Relations with the Main Committee.*
- 2 *Standing Orders for a Community Organisation - guidance and examples.*
- 36 *Need for Training in Community Organisations.*
- 73 *Treasurer's Duties.*
- 72 *Work of the Chair.*
- 61 *Rules and Hiring Agreement for a Community Centre.*
- 10 *Accounting by Charities - The new Regulations.*

Model Constitution for a Community Association, £5 with explanatory Information Sheet.