

A brief guide to committee papers

This help sheet will give you a background to some of the papers committees come into contact with.

Constitution

All organisations are governed by a constitution. This document contains the rules and laws under which the organisation has to be run. The document has different names depending on the structure of your organisation: unincorporated associations (constitution), incorporated association (memorandum and articles of association) and charitable trust (trust deed). It is important that all committee members have read and understood these documents.

The constitution will include a definition of the organisation's purposes and details of who is entitled to be a member. It will also include items setting out how often the committee has to meet, how the committee should handle voting, how and under what circumstances a special meeting can be held, minimum attendance requirements for members etc.

The Annual Report

This outlines the activities the organisation has undertaken in the previous year and provides an idea of what the organisation hopes to do in the future. Annual reports not only fulfil an organisation's duty to be accountable and open about its work, but also offer the chance to showcase the organisation to potential partners and funders. There is no set format for an annual reports - some organisations produce a single, photocopied sheet, others produce glossy and professionally designed documents. The style which suits you will depend on the size of your group and your income! Try to include:

- Information about the organisation's mission and main roles, why and when it was formed
- A Chairperson's report.
- A report from the Manager or head person
- Details of key activities and their outcomes in the past year
- A look forward to future work
- Reports and statements showing the finances of the organisation.

Policies

Organisations have policy documents to help guide activities, conduct and decision-making. The number and type of policies will differ from group to group. All committee members should have access to a copy of each of these policies and should ensure they are familiar with their content.

Meeting agenda

This is a list or outline of things to be considered and discussed during the course of a meeting. Different organisations use different styles of agenda. The agenda and any supporting papers should be posted to members about a week before the meeting to allow members time to consider them. It is important that all members do read and understand the agenda and any supporting documents before any meetings take place.

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