

# the effective community group

the effective community group

A Resource Pack  
for New and Developing Groups



Produced by:

Laurencekirk Business Club  
Aberdeenshire Voluntary Action  
Aberdeenshire Council Community Learning and Development Service



# the effective community group

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(Under development)

Additional "how to" supporting materials on:

- ◆ Press releases/publicity
- ◆ Petitions
- ◆ Fund raising and organising events
- ◆ Recruitment of new members
- ◆ Action planning and evaluation
- ◆ Risk Assessment and data protection
- ◆ Child protection

If you have found this pack useful or have some suggestions to make on it or what else could be included please contact either  
Mearns Community Centre Tel: 01561 378298  
CVSA Central & South 01561 668055 or email [mail@cvsa.co.uk](mailto:mail@cvsa.co.uk)

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## Introduction

Aberdeenshire Voluntary Action (AVA), Aberdeenshire Community Learning and Development (CLD) and Laurencekirk Business Club (LKBC) joined forces early in 2011 to create this resource pack.

The recent reformation of LKBC in January 2011 led to the questions: Where can I get help on setting up a community group? How do I write a constitution? What is the correct role of the treasurer?

After many hours of research and many dated leaflets later it was decided that there was a definite lack of support material available for new community groups. Although AVA has produced a series of three guides for voluntary groups including one on Governance it was still felt that there was a need to produce a complete resource pack which would help guide and inspire smaller new groups to thrive and grow. A good quality management package that is easy to follow, helpful, informative and workable was our inspiration for what is contained within this pack.

What it does:

- ◆ Gives straightforward information on starting up an unincorporated community group.
- ◆ Gives you a guide on each committee member's roles and responsibilities.
- ◆ Gives guidance on what should be included in your constitution.
- ◆ Creates clear information that can be used at meetings to encourage new committee members to join
- ◆ Includes essential contact details of organisations that may be of further help.

What it does not do:

- ◆ Give information on how to become a charity
- ◆ Give information on setting up a Limited Company or Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation

**If you require advice and support on any of these aspects the following contacts will be able to help...continued overleaf**

**Community Learning & Development** can provide support to groups and organisations along with advice and information on running your group.

Laurencekirk Community Centre	01561 378298
Stonehaven Community Centre	01569 762688
Portlethen Community Centre	01224 786198

Contact details for Community Centres throughout Aberdeenshire can be found at [www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/cld/centres/index.asp](http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/cld/centres/index.asp)

**Aberdeenshire Voluntary Action** supports voluntary and community groups by offering a range of services, information on starting up and running groups and provides funding advice. Website: [www.avashire.org.uk](http://www.avashire.org.uk).

Stonehaven Office	01569 668055
Banchory Office	01330 825027
Inverurie Office	01467 629072

### **AVA Training**

Provides information and training for community and voluntary organisations. Tel: 01771 624589. Email: [training@avashire.org.uk](mailto:training@avashire.org.uk)

### **Aberdeenshire Council Community Economic Development**

Staff can provide support to community business start up and signposting to relevant Rural Partnerships. Tel: 01569 768294.

### **Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO)**

Provides support for voluntary organisations and has a very useful website with lots of information on governance, model constitutions and policies. Website: [www.scvo.org.uk](http://www.scvo.org.uk).

### **The SCVO's Village Halls website**

Provides specific information aimed at groups running community facilities. Website: [www.villagehalls.org.uk](http://www.villagehalls.org.uk).

### **The Community Toolkit**

Online resource which is maintained by Skye & Lochalsh Council for Voluntary Organisations has useful information on running community groups divided into various subjects. Website: <http://toolkit.slcvo.org.uk/ctoolkit>

### **Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR)**

Has information and guidance on how to register as a charity in Scotland. Website: [www.oscr.org.uk](http://www.oscr.org.uk). Tel: 01382 220446.

### **Development Trusts Association Scotland (DTAS)**

Can support and advise communities wishing to form a development trust in their area. Website: [www.dtascot.org.uk](http://www.dtascot.org.uk).

## 1. Starting a New Group

Community Groups are formed for a variety of reasons and can take many different forms. For example a group of local people who meet regularly to take part in an interest or activity together such as painting or walking; a group who wish to run a community project such as composting; or a group who see a need in their locality and decide to start a community business such as an Out of School Club.

### Getting Started:

- ◆ The best start is to bring together a small number of people who share your interest and to talk through your ideas.
- ◆ You may need to find other interested people. To do this ask community workers or anyone else who meets with a lot of people in the community. Put up posters in post offices, supermarkets, libraries etc explaining what you want to do and ask people to contact you.
- ◆ Check if there are any other similar groups in the area. Can they already do what you want to do? Can you learn from the experiences of similar groups in other areas?
- ◆ Agree what the group wants to achieve. The group needs to get a clear idea of aims and objectives - this means full and open discussion between potential members. There may be different points of view but the more you understand each other's views, and respect them, the better you will work together.
- ◆ Be clear about what commitment from individuals the group needs. What commitment are they prepared to make - remember people will join the group for different reasons.
- ◆ Skills and experience - consider what your group may need and perhaps target people that you feel may be particularly useful.
- ◆ Public meetings are an opportunity to explain to others what your ideas are. This could be fairly informal but it is good to take a note from the meeting even if you do not have formal minutes.

## Forming the group

Once you have established that there is a need for the group and there are people willing to take it forward you need to make some decisions on how the group will run.

It is often useful for a small representative group, often referred to as a 'steering group' to meet, pull together ideas and draft the constitution.

- ◆ **Constitutions.** Never a favourite topic but you need to think about how the group will operate. If your needs are simple, you may be happy to keep a relatively informal structure. A constitution is a good idea as it will define the aims of the group and how it will achieve them and provides a mechanism for making decisions and resolving disputes (see the 'Constitutions' fact sheet for further information).
- ◆ **Decide on a name.** Think about what your group wants to do, where it is located and agree on an appropriate name. Think about acronyms ie what the initials may be shortened to. If you are wishing to become a charity you may need to check that there are no other organisations with the same name.
- ◆ **Funding.** Most groups will need funding of some kind, even it is to pay for meeting rooms or publicity. The best way to manage money is by opening a bank account and appointing a Treasurer (see 'Role of Treasurer' fact sheet). Banks will require a group to have a constitution before opening an account and it is good practice to have two signatories. If you wish to apply for money from grant-making bodies it is likely they will also insist on the same.
- ◆ **First formal meeting.** Once you have drafted your constitution you will need to hold a meeting where it will be formally adopted. Think about who you would like to attract to join the group and therefore where you will advertise the meeting as well as inviting specific people. This is when the group can elect committee members, agree on future meetings, activities and really get going!
- ◆ **Action Planning.** Once you are up and running it is time to draw up a simple working plan. This will tell your members, potential funders and other interested people what you are doing, why and how you will go about it.

## 2. Constitution

Each group should carefully consider the most appropriate constitution for its particular circumstances. The constitution is basically a set of formal rules which defines the group's aims and objectives, sets out how the group should be run and how decisions will be made. A constitution is generally required for opening a bank account, and would be an essential requirement for applying for funding or charitable status.

Constitution Template - below is only a guide to writing a constitution; it should be adapted and added to in order to reflect your individual group requirements.

Suggested Headings	A guide to what you <i>could</i> include under each heading
Name	The group will be called <i>Name of Group</i>
Aims and Objectives	<p>This should be a statement of why your club exists, i.e.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ To promote the group within the local community</li> <li>◆ To provide all its services in a way that is fair to all.</li> </ul>
Powers	The activities which will or can take place in order to achieve the aims and objects.
Membership	<p>To ensure all present and future members receive fair and equal treatment, you must clearly state:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ who is eligible for membership.</li> <li>◆ if there is a fee and who will set it.</li> <li>◆ any other qualifications for membership.</li> <li>◆ how a member ceases to be a member.</li> <li>◆ any expulsion rules and procedures.</li> </ul>
Finance	<p>You should clearly state how your funds will be accounted for including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ All group monies will be banked in an account held in the name of the club.</li> <li>◆ Any cheques drawn against group funds should hold the signatures of the Treasurer plus up to two other appointed officers.</li> <li>◆ The Treasurer will be responsible for the financial records.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ The date the group's financial year will end on.</li> <li>◆ An externally examined statement of annual accounts will be presented by the Treasurer at the Annual General Meeting.</li> </ul>
Officers & Office Bearers	<p>Day to day running of a group is usually delegated to an elected number of members who form the 'Committee'.</p> <p>The officers of the group will be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Chair</li> <li>◆ Secretary</li> <li>◆ Treasurer</li> </ul> <p>You may wish to appoint additional officers according to need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Your constitution should state how the committee is elected [normally at the Annual General Meeting], for how long they can hold office and when they will be eligible for re-election.</li> <li>◆ The posts of Chair, Secretary and Treasurer should be covered to state how they are elected, how long they can hold office, and if they can be re-elected.</li> <li>◆ The quorum (minimum number of committee members) required for business to be agreed at Management Committee meetings, ie. percentage or number.</li> </ul>
Annual General Meeting (AGM)	<p>This should cover when the AGM is to be held, and what is to be dealt with at the AGM. You would normally include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Annual Report of the group.</li> <li>◆ Consideration of the Annual Statement of Accounts.</li> <li>◆ Election of office bearers and Committee.</li> </ul>
Amendments to constitution	<p>Once your group has adopted its constitution, it should only be altered at an AGM or EGM (Extraordinary General Meeting), and your constitution should state the proportion of members required to approve or make changes.</p>
Dissolution	<p>It is necessary to include a short statement in the event of the group coming to an end. A resolution to dissolve the group can only be passed at an AGM or EGM through a majority vote of the membership.</p> <p>Include what will happen to any assets of the group that remain.</p>
Declaration	<p><i>Name of group</i> hereby adopts and accepts this constitution</p> <p>Signed:</p> <p>Name: _____ Name: _____</p> <p>Position: Group Chair                      Position: Group Secretary</p>

## 3. Role of the Chairperson

The Chairperson is more than just the "Public Face" of the group but has an important role in ensuring the committee works effectively. They need to have an extensive knowledge of the group's governing documents (constitution). The Chairperson must be familiar with not only their own role but with the roles of each committee member so that they can encourage them to achieve their aims.

They are a member of the elected committee. Most community groups choose to elect the Chairperson each year; however a Chairperson can be elected for longer period of time. The Chairperson leads the meetings and committee meetings, remaining neutral during all discussions whilst keeping the discussion concise and orderly. They should be someone who can manage time well which will ensure that meetings are conducted efficiently.

*The role of the Chairperson in a meeting is to ensure all participants can contribute to structured discussion which leads to a clear decision at the end of the meeting.*

### Tasks before a meeting

- ◆ Ensure the venue is suitable and available.
- ◆ Draw up the agenda, in consultation with other office bearers.
- ◆ Be well prepared on the topics to be discussed.

### Tasks during the meeting

- ◆ Act as Chairperson - be decisive.
- ◆ Start the meeting on time, keep to the agenda and time limits whilst allowing for adequate discussion.
- ◆ Introduce and welcome members, new members, guests.
- ◆ Read the previous minutes and ask for confirmation as to their accuracy.
- ◆ Ensure previous decisions have been followed up and carried out.
- ◆ Re-iterate the outcome of any discussion and vote.
- ◆ Ensure any voting is properly conducted and that resolutions are competent.
- ◆ Bring unproductive discussions to a close.
- ◆ Ensure everyone has the opportunity to participate, and encourage them to do so.
- ◆ Handle disagreements and keep control.
- ◆ Guard against cliques - encourage a united club.
- ◆ Keep the meeting moving, and a focus on matters under discussion.

### **Between meetings the tasks may include**

- ◆ Be available for consultation as necessary.
- ◆ Liaise with office bearers, committee members, staff (as appropriate) over any action to be taken as a result of discussions at the previous meeting.
- ◆ Represent the organisation and act as spokesperson when required.
- ◆ Promote the organisation and welcome new members.
- ◆ Organise speakers for forthcoming events - speakers should be given the opportunity to talk before the meeting begins.

### **General advice**

- ◆ Coordinate - your committee, your group, your events.
- ◆ Communicate - Motivate - Listen - Coach - Be prepared.
- ◆ Say 'Thank You'.
- ◆ Think logically.



## 4. Role of the Secretary

The Secretary in a community group or organisation is a member of the elected management committee. Office bearers need to work in partnership with each other for the smooth running of the group/organisation. It is said that the Secretary is the most important person in any community group or organisation. The Secretary deals with the nuts and bolts of the organisation on a regular basis and usually makes sure that the goals are met as far as the constitution states. It can be a demanding but fulfilling role with duties described below:

### Tasks may include:

- ◆ Keeping minutes of meetings (some groups have a minute secretary for this specific role).
- ◆ Recording attendance at meetings.
- ◆ Receiving and answering correspondence.
- ◆ Preparing the agenda with the Chairperson and other office bearers as required.
- ◆ Sending out the agenda, minutes and notices of meetings to members.
- ◆ Booking rooms for meetings.
- ◆ Keeping up to date records of members (email, telephone and addresses).
- ◆ Arranging press and publicity (some groups have someone for this specific role).
- ◆ Keeping general records for the group/organisation.
- ◆ Overseeing the production of the Annual Report.
- ◆ Making arrangements for the Annual General Meeting.
- ◆ Organising speakers if necessary (speakers to be scheduled at start of meeting wherever possible).



## Sample Minutes

### **Date:**

Always date the minutes.

### **Present:**

List everyone present, name the Chairperson and who took the minutes.

### **Apologies:**

List everyone who gave their apologies.

### **Previous minutes:**

Briefly summarise any points from the last meeting.

### **Correspondence:**

Highlight any correspondence and note any related actions .

### **Main Business:**

List each item for discussion - numbering them may make the minute easier to read. For each item discussed, write a brief summary and record any decisions and action to be taken.

### **Any other business (AOB):**

Note any extra items discussed at the end of the meeting.

### **Date of next meeting (DONM):**

Write down the agreed date time and place of the next meeting.

### **Note:**

Circulate the minutes to all members in good time for the following meeting.

Use email where those contacts exist - this helps to cut down on paper.



## 5. Role of the Treasurer

The Treasurer in a community group or organisation is more than simply a bookkeeper. They are a member of the elected management committee. They make sure that the group spends its money correctly, protect the financial interests of the group and submit regular financial reports to the committee. The Treasurer holds considerable responsibility yet has no absolute power over the way in which financial resources are used. These decisions are taken by the Management Committee as a whole.

### Tasks may include:

- ◆ Organising the group/organisation bank account.
- ◆ Keeping accurate records of all financial transactions (which means getting receipts, invoices, written records of expenses etc).
- ◆ Collecting membership fees/subscriptions.
- ◆ Paying bills.
- ◆ Keeping petty cash.
- ◆ Keeping and signing cheques (there should always be a minimum of two cheque signatories).
- ◆ Informing the group regularly about it's financial position.
- ◆ Possibly preparing estimates and budget forecasts.
- ◆ Preparing accounts for auditing and for the Annual General Meeting.
- ◆ Be conversant with the group/organisation constitution and rules.

## Handling money

When handling money on behalf of a community group or organisation, stick to a few basic rules to keep everyone right.

- ◆ Always get and retain receipts.
- ◆ Make payments with cheques wherever possible rather than cash.
- ◆ Give receipts for money received.
- ◆ Pay surplus cash into the bank - don't leave money around.
- ◆ Always have more than one person counting cash at an event.
- ◆ Have accounts externally examined/audited each year as stated in the organisation's constitution.
- ◆ Accounts should give a clear picture of how much money has come in and gone out with indications of source (membership subscriptions etc).
- ◆ Accounts should show how much money is in the current account, in deposit accounts, petty cash etc.

## Sample balance sheet for a community group

### Income

Item	Amount	Date
Balance from 2011/12		
Membership fees		
Fundraising		
Donations		
Total		

### Expenditure

Item	Amount	Date
Secretary's expenses		
Leaflets and publicity		
Fundraising expenditure		
Travel costs		
Petty cash held		
Total		

We have read these accounts and find them correct

Treasurer:

Date:

External examiner / Auditor:

Date:

## 6. Meetings

Community groups hold meetings for various reasons

**Annual General Meetings (AGM)** - held once a year to review the work of the organisation and elect the committee (further information can be found on the Annual General meeting sheet)

**Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) / Special General Meeting (SGM)** - meetings other than the annual general meeting held to consider business that requires approval by the members. For example, to make alterations to its governing document. An EGM is usually called at short notice and deals with an urgent matter. Members can ask the committee to call an EGM if they feel that they are not fulfilling the organisation's aims and objectives, or where they feel the organisation is not being administered effectively.

**Committee Meetings** - involve the Management Committee to manage the day to day running of the organisation. The constitution of the group (further information can be found on the 'Constitution' sheet) gives information on how these meetings should be run but of course for them to operate smoothly everyone must play their appropriate role and certain standard procedures should be followed.

For individual office bearer's roles at meetings please refer to the appropriate sheet. This sheet will look in more detail at the actual structure of a standard committee meeting.

Remember:

- ◆ Select the meeting date well enough in advance to allow everyone time to make arrangements to attend
- ◆ Only meet when there is a reason to - pointless meetings just irritate people and make them less likely to attend in the future

### The Agenda

The Agenda is the structure for the meeting stating what will be discussed, in what order and sometimes giving a time for each item. It is good practice that the Chairperson consults with at least the Secretary when preparing the agenda. Take time to prepare for the group meeting and by doing so, they will run more smoothly and a lot more will be achieved.

## Sample Agenda

1. Welcome and apologies

All members must be given the opportunity to read the minutes. It is good practice to circulate these as soon as possible after the meeting so that any actions required can be achieved.
2. Minutes of the last meeting

The Chairperson must ask if there are any amendments or additions, and if not, if everyone is happy to accept the minutes as a true record of the meeting concerned.
3. Matters arising from minutes

This is where people report back anything from the previous minutes that will not be covered on the agenda. It may be about a particular task someone has said they would do.
4. Treasurers report

It is good practice for the Treasurer to report on the current finances at every meeting.
5. Main Business items

These are items that need to be discussed at the meeting and may be about fundraisers, publicity, particular projects etc. Sometimes next to the business item is the name of the person who will introduce it.
6. Correspondence

The Secretary will bring any correspondence made to the organisation that is relevant to the committee - this may be for information only.
7. Any other business (AOB)

This is a chance to discuss anything important that has not already been talked about during the meeting. The Chairperson may go round everyone asking if they have anything to add to the meeting at this point.
8. Date and venue of next meeting (DONM)

## 7. Annual General Meeting - AGM

The AGM is a meeting, held once a year, open to all members of your community group to attend. It is an opportunity for members to hear about the activities, assess the achievements of your organisation over the past year, and to be part of the planning for the coming year. This includes looking at the group's finances and electing a new committee.

### **Organising the AGM:**

The various jobs involved in this should be shared by all the office bearers as appropriate.

- ◆ Check your constitution to see what it says about when you should hold an AGM, how much notice should be given, how it should be given, the quorum for an AGM, and what should be covered by an AGM and voting procedures.
- ◆ Book the venue, making sure it is accessible and appropriate. Will you be offering refreshments? Sometimes groups arrange to have a speaker of interest to attract a larger audience.
- ◆ Give notice of the AGM, according to your governing document. To ensure a good attendance the meeting must be well publicised so remember to invite all existing members - well placed advertising may also attract new members.
- ◆ Prepare the Annual Report on the work of your group over the last year - this is a task for the whole committee to share, although the Chairperson will normally write a summary. It is the opportunity to promote your group's aims and activities and give feedback to members. Include information on membership, group activities, successes and social events - think about using photos and illustrations.
- ◆ The annual Statement of Accounts should be prepared by the Treasurer who should ensure that it is properly audited or externally examined according to your constitution.
- ◆ Prepare all paperwork including an agenda and minutes of the previous AGM. It is good to circulate to members in advance but if not make sure copies are available at the AGM along with the Accounts and Annual Report.
- ◆ Check procedures for voting as there may be people attending that have an interest in your group but are not members and not entitled to vote.

## Sample Agenda for AGM

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. Welcome and apologies                       | Chairperson will welcome members and ask for any apologies.   |
| 2. Minutes of previous AGM                     | Secretary will refer to the minutes and Chairperson will ask for them to be approved.   |
| 3. Matters Arising                             | Chairperson will ask for any matters arising and go through them as appropriate.  |
| 4. Annual Report                               | Chairperson will give a report on the year's activities or a brief summary of the main points from Annual Report. After answering any questions on it the Chairperson will then ask for this to be formally adopted.  |
| 5. Presentation of Annual Accounts             | Treasurer should present the annual accounts, explain them and answer any questions. If full and final accounts these can then be formally adopted.   |
| 6. Appointment of auditor or external examiner | Your constitution will say if you require an auditor or external examiner to verify your annual accounts.   |
| 7. Election of new committee/office bearers.   | <p>This will depend on your constitution.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ How long can someone sit on the committee for?</li><li>◆ Can members be re-elected?</li><li>◆ How many of the committee should stand down?</li><li>◆ How do you nominate the new committee - is it before the AGM or on the day?</li><li>◆ Sometimes the Chairperson will ask someone from the floor to take over the voting proceedings for the committee (remember to ask prior to the AGM)</li><li>◆ Will Office Bearers be elected at the AGM or at the first General Meeting following an AGM?</li></ul> |
| 8. Motions to be put at AGM                    | This may include changes to the constitution.   |
| 9. Speaker                                     | Have you decided to invite one?   |
| 10. Vote of thanks                             | Chairperson will normally conclude meeting with a vote of thanks  |

Voting at the AGM - many methods of voting procedures and adopting reports exist - the most common and straightforward method is 'every motion to the AGM must be moved (proposed) and seconded'. Before any vote is taken the Chairperson should remind everyone who is eligible to vote and what the procedure is. It is important that an organisation decides on a definite voting procedure to avoid confusion at an AGM.

## 8. How to be an effective Committee Member

- ◆ Be committed to attend most if not all meetings.
- ◆ Arrive ahead of the meeting with agenda and other relevant paperwork.
- ◆ Keep yourself well informed about the various items on the agenda for discussion.
- ◆ Be prepared to take the lead occasionally on certain items on the agenda.
- ◆ Be an active and interested participant on the committee.
- ◆ Be prepared to listen to members.
- ◆ Be positively assertive if and when necessary but not aggressive or confrontational.
- ◆ Try to remain as impartial as possible so as not to sway members one way or another.
- ◆ In a committee situation be prepared to state your opinion without being domineering.
- ◆ Be supportive to the other committee members - particularly the Chairperson.
- ◆ Listen to all discussions during the meeting and be attentive to all items on the agenda.



## 9. Sub-committees or Working Groups

In order to spread the load and make a group work more efficiently, small working groups working on behalf of a club/organisation can be useful. These are usually called sub-committees or working groups. Often the main committee does not have time to undertake all the business, particularly for detailed discussions and smaller groups can deal with this efficiently and effectively.

A sub-committee/working group can be made up of those members most interested in a subject and may include, at times, representatives from other relevant bodies or organisations. This can be a good opportunity to involve people not usually represented in your club/organisation such as young people.

To avoid any duplication or confusion it is important to be clear on the following when setting up the sub-committee/working group:

- ◆ what authority has been given to the group?
- ◆ what is to be presented back for information purposes?
- ◆ what is the lifespan of the group?
- ◆ what is the timescale for reporting?
- ◆ what will be presented for decision making by the overall committee if this is to be the case?

It is normal practice for a main committee to receive reports and recommendations from any sub-committee/working group. It is important to distinguish between what is information and what are recommendations.

If power is delegated to the sub-committee/working group, the main committee must observe and abide by any decisions that result.

