

Local groups are run by a management committee, sometimes known as a charity trustee board, and this committee is legally responsible for the group's overall management and for decision making. A well managed committee will lead to a happy and effective team with the potential to have a really positive impact on the lives of deaf children and their families.

How do I know who is on the committee?

Usually only people who are elected at an annual general meeting (AGM), and who are listed in the minutes of the meeting (a written record of everything that has been discussed), are counted as committee members. Other people can join the committee during the year, but the existing committee members have to formally vote to accept them, and record the vote in the minutes of the meeting.

Only committee members have the right to make decisions about how the group is run. All members should be asked to provide feedback and suggestions on what the group can do to support their family, but they can't take decisions on behalf of the group, or vote.

The following people are not committee members:

- ordinary members of your group who haven't been elected
- people who help out from time to time
- people that your group pays or employs (for example, youth workers or paid administrators).

You cannot be a committee member if you are:

- under 18 years of age (there are some situations where young people aged over 16 may be able to be involved with reduced responsibility). For further information see the website of the relevant charity regulator or charity commission.
- declared bankrupt or have been convicted of an offence involving deception or dishonesty, unless the conviction is spent
- are barred from working with children by the DBS, Access NI or the PVG Scheme or otherwise disqualified.

Liability

All members of a committee are equally responsible for the way their group is run. This applies to both legal and financial aspects of the group's work, for which they can be held liable. Some committees may think that it's the chair who is liable for the decisions of the committee, or that it's just the person who



proposed the decision who is responsible. But this isn't right. By law, all committee members are equally responsible. This means that the committee should be making decisions as a whole.

How many committee members do we need?

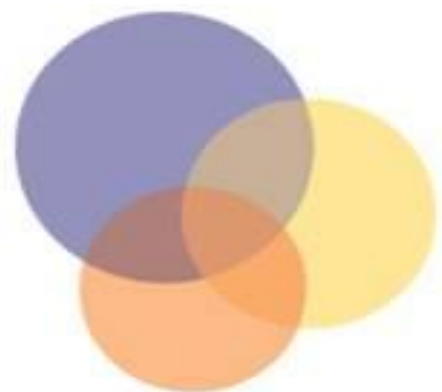
Your constitution may include the minimum and maximum number of people that can sit on your committee. Three is usually the minimum. A few groups have more than 10 members although you may find it to be easier and cheaper to manage meetings if the numbers are kept to between 6 to 10 committee members.

How long can a committee member stay in office?

The role is not usually permanent. Your constitution will likely include the number of years for which the committee will work, usually one calendar year, at the end of which they will need to stand for re-election or take a break from the role. Ideally committee members should consider re-election carefully to avoid burn out or the group becoming over reliant on one person.

Your role as a committee member

- It is important that committee members can come to meetings regularly and are willing to join in discussions.
- The committee must make sure that the group's funds are properly accounted for, by checking that they are banked safely, and that someone (usually the treasurer) keeps proper records of all income and spending.
- The committee needs to keep in mind the aims of the group when they are planning how to spend the group's funds. For example, a group's primary aim is to support deaf children and their families, so they shouldn't use the group's funds to support a project that does not meet this aim, no matter how worthy it is.
- Committee members also need to make plans for the long-term development of their group, so that it stays relevant to the needs of the people who use it. For example, if the committee notices that the group isn't attracting families with younger children, they might start planning how to involve these younger families.
- Committee members are responsible for the day-to-day management of the group. In most local groups, this means that they get involved in planning and organising their group's activities. In larger groups, committee members might supervise the work of other volunteers or paid staff who do the hands-on work.



Responsibilities of trustees

Trustees:

- have ultimate responsibility for the work of the charity
- ensure the charity is working within the law
- take decisions about the future of the charity
- ensure the organisation remains sustainable
- consider likely future challenges and prepare the charity to face them
- monitor if the charity is meeting its objectives
- must act in the best interests of the charity
- be accountable for the organisation – to the relevant charity regulator and the public
- support the head of staff – usually the chair of trustees will directly line manage this role
- ensure the board is working effectively and efficiently, and has trustees with the appropriate skills to govern the charity.

Thanks to Contact a Family for letting us reproduce the above information from their Group Action Pack guide *The Role of Trustees*.

Sharing the load

A common issue in local groups is that one or two people end up doing all the work. This is not only a burden for the people doing everything, it can also leave the group in a difficult position when those individuals step down.

A useful tip is to introduce new roles into the group. Some parents may not feel able to take on a role such as secretary, but they might be prepared to write the newsletter for the group. Here are a few examples of roles that you may want to consider in addition to the chair, secretary, and treasurer:

- designated child protection person (each group should appoint this position and let the NDCS Local Groups team know their contact details)
- fundraiser
- campaigns contact
- event organiser / social secretary
- membership officer
- youth group worker

When going through the organisation of an event at a committee meeting the chair of the group should try to break it down into manageable chunks in order to share the load. For example:

- Who can book a venue?
- Who can design invitations?
- Who can help with the organisation of food and drink?



- Does anyone have skills in writing risk assessments?
- Who can arrive early and help out on the day?

Don't be afraid to ask for help

If there are any tasks not filled by the committee you may want to consider approaching your members. Many parents may be unable to provide a regular commitment but would be willing to help out at a one-off event. Use your group newsletter to encourage parents to come forward and stress the positive benefits of helping out. These might include:

- It gives everyone a sense of ownership and a stake in the group.
- Decisions can be shared.
- There is a wider pool of skills and experience.
- You can support each other.

Involving deaf children and young people

The deaf children and young people in your group have the right to be involved in decision-making that affects them, and your group should consider how to encourage and support their active involvement in your committee.

For support and advice on involving deaf children and young people in your group please contact the NDCS Local Groups team.

'We have now got some youth members on board (they are 18) to run events and make decisions for their age group. It's about tapping into people's strengths. Some people are also reluctant to put themselves forward but do not hesitate when (they are) asked so knowing your committee is very important.'

Effective meetings

Why do we hold meetings?

Committees should meet regularly to make decisions about the direction of the organisation. Most local group committees meet once a month.

It is the responsibility of all committee members to:

- attend the meetings, arrive on time and read the agenda and any supporting papers before the meeting
- say what you think and ask questions
- keep to the point
- volunteer to help
- put items on the agenda
- help to clear up



Problems with meetings and how to overcome them

One person dominates the meeting

The chair should try to draw out quieter members by saying “have you got anything to add to this”. Alternatively offer to discuss the person’s concerns individually after the meeting, or move the discussion onto the next topic.

Low attendance

Ensure all committee members have a chance to participate. Remind committee members that they are equally responsible and liable for any decisions taken so it is important they remain involved in the running of the group.

Meetings last too long

Agree a time limit for the meeting. Include this time limit in the agenda for the meeting as a whole and also for each agenda item. A sensible maximum length might be 1½ to 2 hours.

No conclusions are reached

Some groups think that it is the chair’s responsibility to make decisions. However committees are responsible for taking decisions jointly. First, it would be useful to agree as a committee whether you will make decisions by consensus or by taking a vote.

You may decide to make most decisions by consensus, and to take a vote in special circumstances or if there is disagreement within the committee. Decision-making is much more effective if the committee establishes what is to be done, how and when it will be done and by whom. This should all be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

Finding committee members

Many local groups will begin by asking their members to consider taking on roles within the committee. This is a great place to start. However committee members don’t have to be parents of a deaf child, they can be anyone who is interested in putting their skills to use for a good cause. It’s good to think widely and use a variety of methods when recruiting volunteers to help with the running of your group.

Tips on finding committee members:

- Write a role description for each committee member that you require so potential volunteers know what is expected.
- Contact your local volunteer centre to register your volunteer vacancies. Ask them to advertise your volunteer vacancies locally and put them onto the national volunteering website www.do-it.org.uk.



- Put an advertisement aimed at recruiting volunteers on your website and in your newsletter, both of which can be linked to the NDCS website.
- For groups based in England and Wales, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) operates a Trustee bank, a directory of organisations which match potential trustees with vacancies.
- Word of mouth, through your existing members and committee members can be a great way to recruit volunteers.
- Involve local professionals in your committee.
- Target colleges, particularly ones that do BSL courses. Volunteering with a local group could be an opportunity for them to practice their BSL and get experience that could help them on their way towards getting paid work.
- Contact local companies to ask if employees would like to volunteer e.g. people working in IT could help with IT roles, people working in finance could take on the treasurer role and people working in events could help with organising your group's events.
- Advertise in local libraries, newspapers, local websites, local authority magazines, local shops, community centres and GP surgeries.
- Offer to give talks on your local group and how volunteers can help local organisations such as Women's Institutes, Lions Clubs and retirement courses.

Induction of new committee members

Having an induction for new committee members to introduce them to their role and the charity is important.

An induction pack might include:

- a copy of your constitution
- financial accounts
- information sheet on the charity
- contact information for the committee

Tips from local group organisers on recruiting committee members:

“This is purely down to word of mouth. We talk about the activities and the benefits that children gain from being members and are very passionate about this. This tends to inspire people to join. Also, when speaking to parents about activities they would like for their children, we suggest they come on board and help us”

“It's about being honest and saying that if someone doesn't organise this it won't happen again. Also, we remember first and foremost that everyone is a volunteer so we are very appreciative of any time people give up to get involved. We make sure we thank them and celebrate this.”



The Constitution

What is a constitution?

When a group of people set up a charity, they have to adopt a set of rules that describe what the charity's aims are, and how it will be run. The document setting out these rules is the group's constitution.

A constitution describes, in a formal way:

- what the group's aims are
- how the group will achieve those aims
- who will run the group
- what happens if the group wants to change its constitution
- what happens if the group wants to end.

All local groups have a constitution. NDCS provides an easy to use model constitution that we strongly recommend that groups adopt. You can get a paper or electronic copy of the model constitution by contacting the Local Groups team at NDCS.

What is a constitution for?

Charities sometimes need to explain what their aims are, and what work they do. They are often asked to show their constitution to prove that they are working in a charitable way. For example, local groups will need to show a copy of their constitution before they can:

- open a bank account
- become a registered charity
- apply for grants

It's important that committees don't think of their constitution as something that they only need to use when they have to prove that they are working in a charitable way. A constitution is an instruction manual that explains how the group should be run, and what its aims should be. Committees need to look at their constitution regularly, to make sure that they are running their group in line with it. Having a shared statement of the aims of a group, and a set of formal rules about how the group should be run, is important because it helps to make sure that all committee members understand what the group should be doing.

Understanding the constitution

Understanding your constitution is important. Many constitutions are written in legal English, which can make them difficult to absorb. Go through the constitution as a committee, and talk through any parts that you don't understand.



Getting the most from your constitution

- Make sure that everyone on the committee has an up-to-date copy of your group's constitution. Every committee member should know what your group's aims are, and should understand the rules on how the group should be run. To do this properly, they need to have read the constitution and to have a copy to look back at.
- You can use the constitution to settle disputes about voting or procedures. If the committee can't agree on how something should be done (for example, how voting should be carried out), it is worth checking to see if your constitution can help. The rules in the constitution always take priority.
- Make sure that new people who join the committee are given a copy of the constitution.
- If your constitution is out of date, or seems to be out of touch with what your group is doing, think about changing it.

Common questions about constitutions

I don't think my group has a constitution – are you sure that we've got one?

Yes, you do have one somewhere! It's quite easy for a group's committee to lose track of their constitution, particularly if the people on the committee change regularly, or if the group was set up a long time ago.

Nobody on the committee knows where we can find a copy of our group's constitution. Can NDCS help us find a copy?

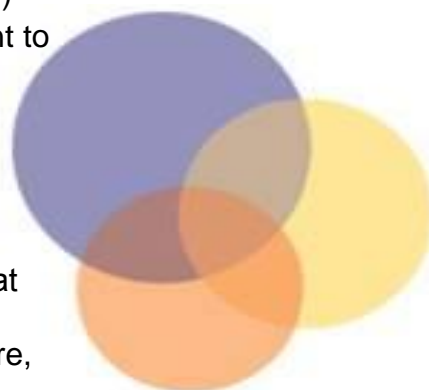
Yes. We have copies of many local groups' constitutions on file, and can send you a copy. The Charity Commission also hold copies of the constitutions of every registered charity in England and Wales. If your group is registered with a charity regulator, you can ask them to send you a copy.

Our constitution is out of date. Can we change it?

Yes, as long as there is a section in your current constitution that says you can. Most constitutions describe the procedure you need to follow to make changes. If your constitution doesn't describe a particular process, you should:

- wait until your next annual general meeting (AGM)
- tell the people at the AGM what changes you want to make and why
- ask people to vote on the changes that you want to make
- record these changes in the minutes of the AGM.

Once you've changed your constitution, it's important that you send a copy to NDCS and to your relevant charity regulator. You will need to include what the changes were,



evidence that the changes were properly made and the date that the special resolution was passed.

Charity regulators across the UK

All local groups affiliated to NDCS have charitable objects. In addition, depending on where you are based and your annual income, you may be required to register with a charity regulator.

Local groups in England and Wales

Charities in England and Wales are regulated by the Charity Commission. The Charity Commission is an independent, government-funded organisation. All organisations in England and Wales carrying out charitable activity are governed by charity law, whether or not they are registered with the charity commission.

The charity commission regulates charities in a number of ways, including:

- only granting charitable status to organisations that can demonstrate they meet the criteria for being a charity
- ensuring charities meet their legal requirement to provide information on their activities each year
- making searchable information about each registered charity widely available
- providing online services and guidance to help charities run as effectively as possible
- taking timely and decisive action when there is malpractice or misconduct.

Do we need to register with the Charity Commission?

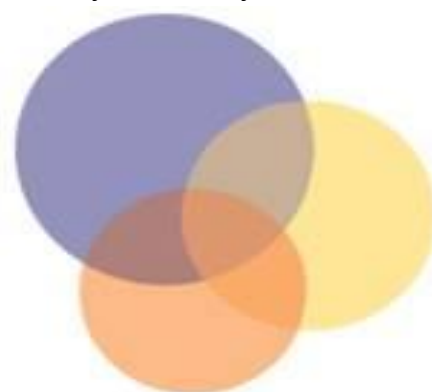
Charities in England and Wales must register with the Charity Commission once you have an income of over £5,000 per year.

What contact does the Charity Commission require each year?

If your group is a registered charity, the Charity Commission will require you to complete an annual return within 10 months of the end of each financial reporting period. The form will explain what information you need to send to them. It's important that you fill in the form and return it. If you fail to meet this legal requirement your charity's details will be marked 'overdue' and the charity commission may consider whether further action is required, such as de-registering the charity.

Local groups in Scotland

Scottish charities are regulated by the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR). OSCR was set



up in 2003 as an independent part of the Scottish Executive.

The main aims of OSCR are to:

- determine whether an organisation should be registered as a charity
- keep a public register of charities
- encourage, facilitate and monitor compliance by charities with the provisions of the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005
- identify and investigate apparent misconduct in the administration of charities and to take remedial or protective action in relation to such misconduct
- give information or advice, or make proposals to Scottish Ministers on matters relating to OSCR's functions

Do we need to register with OSCR?

There is no requirement to register with OSCR. However it is against the law to describe yourself as a charity unless you are on the Scottish Charity Register. An organisation can become a charity if it meets the 'charity test', meaning that it must show it has only charitable purposes and benefits the public.

What contact does OSCR require each year?

All Scottish charities must submit an annual return and accounts to OSCR every year.

You can find out more about the work of OSCR by visiting www.oscr.org.uk.

Local groups in Northern Ireland

Charities in Northern Ireland are regulated by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland. The Commission is a non-department public body, established in 2009.

What does the Commission do?

'The Commission has a crucial role to play in the development of charities, enabling them to meet modern expectations and obligations. It is essential that the Commission enables charities to operate in a climate of trust and respect by providing firm and fair regulation in which the public can have confidence.

The Commission therefore aims to develop a regulatory framework which is not only about intervention and strong governance, but which over the longer term establishes standards and promotes good practice across the sector.' Charity Commission Northern Ireland (www.charitycommissionni.org.uk)



Do we need to register with the Commission?

All organisations, no matter how large or small, constituted in Northern Ireland for a charitable aim or purpose need to register with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland.

What contact does the Commission require each year?

All Northern Ireland charities must submit an annual return and accounts to the Commission every year.

Affiliation to NDCS

Local groups affiliated to NDCS have signed up to an affiliation agreement. This is a partnership agreement that describes our mutual rights and responsibilities, and sets out the support your group can expect from NDCS.

Through the NDCS affiliation agreement all groups have agreed to:

- adopt and abide by an equality and diversity policy in a form acceptable to NDCS
- adopt and abide by a complaint policy and procedure in a form acceptable to NDCS
- put into practice the NDCS Child Protection Policy for local groups.

For an up-to-date copy of the affiliation, or any information about the policies listed above, please contact the NDCS Local Groups team.

Further information

Publications

- *The Role of Trustees*, Contact a Family
http://www.cafamily.org.uk/media/533721/group_action_pack_the_role_of_trustees.pdf
- *The Good Trustee Guide*, NCVO
<https://www.ncvo.org.uk/component/redshop/themes/9-charity-law/P16-good-trustee-guide>
- *Good Governance Guide for Small Organisations*, NCVO



<https://www.ncvo.org.uk/component/redshop/1-publications/P42-good-governance>

Websites

- NDCS local groups pages
www.ndcs.org.uk/localgroups
Area on NDCS website for affiliated local groups. To read guides, policies and information written for groups click on the 'Local Group Kit'.
You can contact the NDCS local groups team by emailing localgroups@ndcs.org.uk
- www.smallcharities.org.uk/resources
The small Charities Coalition is an umbrella organisation which aims to empower small charities across the UK by helping trustees access the skills, tools and information that they need.
- England and Wales Charity Commission
www.charity-commission.gov.uk
- Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR)
www.oscr.org.uk
- Charity Commission for Northern Ireland
www.charitycommissionni.org.uk



