

Setting up a constituted residents' group

Having a constituted residents' group is a must if you are applying for community funding. It also gives the message to your council and other partners that you are working with that you are serious about your DIY Streets project. In addition it provides a good focal point for residents and can help to co-ordinate activities in your street. You may already have a residents' group that you want to constitute or you may be starting from scratch but either way it is a simple process.

If a group has been working together for a while many of the criteria may already be in place but this is a way of formalising it. The main requirements of a constituted group are that:

- It has a name and clear general aims and objectives (the details will develop).
- It has a chairperson, secretary and treasurer, elected at the Annual General Meeting (AGM).
- It holds an AGM with reports from the secretary, treasurer and chairperson.
- It has a bank account with 3 designated people who can sign cheques.
- It has a simple constitution detailing the points listed above (see below for an example).
- **Roles**
The chair person will usually run meetings and be the key contact for the council or funders
- The secretary will usually let people know about meetings, take the minutes of meeting and feedback information to people.
- The treasurer will keep the bank be in charge of paying bills and keeping records of money in and money spent.
- No one needs to have had experience of these roles beforehand. They just need enthusiasm and a willingness to be a key contributor to the project.

Opening a bank account

Ask at the local branch of your bank about opening an account for a community group – they should be familiar with this and will help you to fill in the forms. It is a good idea if the chair treasurer and secretary all nominated cheque signatories (although only 2 at will need to sign cheques at any one time). Each of the 3 will need to take some ID into the bank and sign the appropriate forms. You will receive a cheque book and debit card if you wish to have one. This process can take 2 or 3 months so sort it out well in advance of any activities such as applying to community funds.

The group's constitution

This can be a simple document and there is an example below.

Sample constitution

Name of the Organisation: Great Street residents' group.

Aims and Objectives: The Great Street residents' group will: promote and protect the interests of the residents of Great Street; bring residents together to discuss and debate views on a wide range of issues affecting the area; represent decisions of the residents group to various agencies / bodies delivering services in the area; and facilitate residents' participation in the decision-making processes that affects them.

Membership: Any Great Street resident can become a member of the group by notifying the secretary. There is no subscription for joining. The secretary or treasurer will keep a record of members.

Members meetings and events will be held as necessary to decide the objectives of the DIY Street Improvement Group and to direct its work. Decisions will normally be taken by consensus but, if considered necessary by the meeting, by majority vote.

Annual General Meeting (AGM): An AGM will be held once a year in October or after the accounts for the previous financial year are available. The secretary will advertise the meeting at least two weeks before it takes place to all members, and in the community to attract new members. Three members will form a quorum (the minimum number of people needed at the meeting in order to make decisions). The chair of the organisation or a member authorised by the chair will conduct the meeting.

Special General Meeting (SGM): A special general meeting may be called at the request of any member with the agreement of an officer. A special general meeting can perform the same functions as an AGM. The secretary will inform all members of a special general meeting at least *one week before it takes place*.

General functions of the AGM: The AGM will review the group's finances, authorise the scope of proposed activities, elect officers, and address any other issue brought forward by a member. Any member may put forward a motion or resolution by giving it to the secretary before the meeting.

Winding up: A decision to wind up the group can be taken by an AGM or an SGM. The members will transfer any assets of the organisation to an organisation with similar objectives.

Changing the constitution: The constitution may be changed at a special or annual general meeting. A proposal for changing the constitution will be circulated by the secretary at least one week before the meeting. The decision will normally be taken by consensus, unless the members decide that a majority vote should be used. Any changes to the constitution must not lead to designated funds contributed for one purpose being diverted to some quite different purpose. A draft of the new constitution will be placed on the local notice board and sent out via e-mail for viewing by members. Comments can then be made by a date decided at the meeting.

Officers of the organisation: The officers of the group will be a chairperson, secretary, and treasurer. Officers will be elected at an annual general meeting for one year, with no limit on the number of times that they can be re-elected. Officers will not be paid. Officers may be removed by a decision taken by a special general meeting or AGM if they do not attend meetings or carry out their duties for four months. Officers may leave at any time by notifying a members' meeting and the vacancies will be filled at a special general meeting or AGM. Officers' powers and responsibilities will be defined by members at an AGM.

Finance: The Treasurer will keep the group's financial accounts and records, prepare annual accounts, and control expenditure. The Treasurer will be responsible for setting up and managing the group's bank accounts, and will approve signature of cheques (two signatures from among three specified officers, who will normally be the chairperson, the secretary and the treasurer).

Members may through a decision at an annual general meeting or a special general meeting, make provision for the accounts to be independently examined or audited, and to appoint a person authorised to do this and may decide to dismiss that person. Officers and members of the group may not act as the independent examiner.

For more information on writing your constitution, see sections on **Support and training opportunities** and **Running a meeting**.