

# Quick Guide to.....The Constitution

## What is a Constitution?

A 'Constitution' is basically a written agreement between an association and its members. It can sometimes be referred to as the 'rules' of the association.

It will outline a number of things including how new members can join the association and who is eligible, how the Management Committee is elected, and what happens with the finances of the association.

In simple terms the Constitution will :

- highlight the overall purpose or vision of the association (in other words its reason for existing in the first place)
- describe how the association will be managed and controlled
- state what the association, its members, and its Management Committee, can and cannot do.

## Point to remember!!

It's important to keep the Constitution as flexible as possible as you can't change or add anything without first getting the consent of the membership. For instance, employing staff may be a long term goal however, it makes more sense to include this 'power' at an early stage rather than having to add it in later.

## Common references (or 'clauses') found in a Constitution

- ☞ The **aims** and **objectives** of the group - this is the overall purpose of the group and information about the services or activities the group will provide for its members. If the association intends to apply for charitable status then the wording of this clause needs to meet certain standards. Refer to the 'Quick Guide to Charitable Status' for further information.
- ☞ The **powers** of the Management Committee - what they are allowed to do on behalf of the members e.g. employ staff, rent accommodation etc.
- ☞ Who **membership** is open to and how to join the association - details about who is eligible to join e.g. anyone over 18 from the area etc. and how to apply for membership e.g. complete a membership application form.
- ☞ Information on the **Management Committee** including how it will be set up - how the committee is made up e.g. chairperson, secretary, treasurer, and how they are elected e.g. someone nominates, someone else seconds, the membership votes etc.
- ☞ The **quorum** - this is the minimum number of members that must be present at a meeting in order for it to go ahead. It's important to ensure that the number is reasonably representative of the membership.
- ☞ A **dissolution** clause - what will happen with anything belonging to the association if it were to finish. This includes any money left in the bank account and any equipment or resources. They must be transferred to another charitable association with similar aims and objectives.
- ☞ **Adoption** - The constitution needs to be dated and signed as 'accurate' by two committee members e.g. the chairperson and secretary.

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