



Starting a New Community Group

If you are interested in setting up a new voluntary or community organisation there can be a mind-boggling number of things to consider. There are decisions to be made, information to be gathered, and jobs to do. If you tackle this process with a good plan of action and identify the right help and support at each stage then the whole process will be far less daunting

The following is a summary of the main steps to take in setting up a group:

What do you want to do?

You need to have a specific idea about exactly what the group you are setting up is going to do. Will it offer a service to a community or will it be of benefit solely to its members? What are the aims of this group? What do you want to achieve?

Where do you want to do it?

What area are you going to cover? For example are you going only to cover a neighbourhood, Crawley or are you going to cover the whole of West Sussex? Be realistic about this: If you only have the resources to cover a small area resist the temptation to overstretch yourself and try to focus on what is most achievable.

Who do you want to do it with?

If you are providing a service then you may want to identify a specific group of people with whom you are going to work, for example people affected by a specific issue or living in a defined area. Also, if you are going to work with several groups, then you need to think carefully about any possible conflicts of interest.

Are you duplicating any existing services/activities locally?

Once you have made these decisions, you need to do a bit of research and find out if there is already a group doing the same kind of things you want to do in the same area. Duplicating what other groups are doing won't help you when it comes to trying to get support, funding or volunteers so it is a good idea to ensure that what you want to do is new and/or unique in some way before you start.

Could you work in partnership with any other groups or organisations?

If there are groups already doing something similar perhaps you could make your idea an addition to their already successful organisation, or perhaps you could work together

to develop something new. If you are in a similar geographical area then you could perhaps share premises and work together for the benefit of both groups.

Getting support

Start by thinking about who might be interested in getting involved in the group. Then you can start advertising your intentions to start up a group by using posters or leaflets etc. in areas where this target group might go, for example a local community centre, doctor's surgery or school. Make contact with the Community Development Team at Crawley Borough Council and identify other potential supporters for your project.

Developing an action plan

If you are going to make sure that you don't drown under a pile of information, ideas and bureaucracy then it is a good idea to spend time as a group identifying goals, thinking about how you can achieve them and sharing out tasks. This way everybody gets involved, everyone knows what they're working towards, and no one person has all the work piled on them. It will also make it easier to get funding and support if you have a clear and agreed vision of what you're trying to do and where you want to get to.

Adopting a constitution

If you are going to set yourselves up as a group then you really need to have a set of rules that will determine exactly what your group does, how it does it and how you all work together. This is what a constitution does. One of your first tasks therefore is to write a constitution and officially adopt it. Crawley CVS has a simple model template which you can adapt if necessary to structure your constitution. The important part of a constitution is that it reflects what you want to do now and how you want to do it and also allows you room for expansion and diversification in the future.

Forming a committee

There is usually a group of people from within the membership of your group who will be responsible for the day to day running of the group. The constitution might call them the Management Committee or the Executive Committee. The Committee are elected by the membership.

The Committee will need a varied skill set of committee members that will run the organisation. The key roles are:

Chair: As leader of the committee, the chair will oversee the group's overall direction, work with the secretary to prepare meeting agendas, lead meetings, ensure actions from previous meetings are completed and manage recruitment and training of the committee's members.

Secretary: The secretary's role is wide ranging and includes preparing meeting minutes, taking notes, distributing actions and keeping an up to date member database. They are also likely to have responsibility for arranging insurance, marketing and booking events.

Treasurer: The treasurer looks after the financial operations of the group. They have a responsibility to ensure accounting is undertaken correctly, as well as budgeting for the future. The treasurer should also be aware of what should be submitted to the Charity

Commission, and when. Further details are available on the Charity Commission website.

Holding your first General Meeting

The General Meetings are usually the overall decision-making body for the group as it is made up of the whole membership. It is at the first meeting that you will need to vote to officially adopt your Constitution and to elect the Committee.

Opening a Bank Account

Once you have a group set up you will need both a constitution and a means of managing your finances. For this reason it is important that you open up a bank account. The account should be opened in the name of the group and should have 2 signatories for all cheques. It is often a good idea for groups to have at least 3 signatories on an account of whom any 2 can sign cheques to cover when committee members are on holiday or unable to sign cheques for the group.

Arranging insurance

All community groups that deal with members of the public should consider taking out public liability insurance. It is a relatively inexpensive cover and protects against allegations of injury caused to a third party. This could be, for example, if someone was to trip over a loose wire at an event, or a kettle was knocked over and scalded a visitor.

Public Liability Insurance protects community group members from allegations and occurrences of third party injury and also covers against damage caused to third party property. For example, this could be if carpets were irreparably damaged or walls badly marked after your group hired a venue. Most landlords or local authorities will require your group to have public liability insurance before allowing you to rent somewhere or hold an event.