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CHARITY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

(https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission)

Guidance

Charity trustee welcome pack

Published 30 April 2018

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1. Get to know your charity

The first thing that you should do is to get to know your charity well.

1.1 Understand the charity's purposes

You should know all about what makes it a charity and why it exists:

- its purposes
- how it is trying to achieve them
- who it helps – the beneficiaries

Clarity on these is essential to making a successful contribution to the charity as a trustee. They're also at the heart of how the charity promotes itself and accounts to the public.

1.2 Read your charity's governing document and understand the rules

You will find your charity's purposes and the rules for how it must operate in its governing document. Make sure you know and understand yours, as it's one of the most important bits of information you will need.

1.3 Meet your fellow trustees

Get to know them, because you are all collectively responsible and accountable for the overall management of the charity, including areas where you may not be directly involved. This relationship will be key to the charity's success; even in times of challenge, encourage and respect each other and the time and effort you are all prepared to give.

1.4 Find out how it operates

Pay particular attention to the charity's finances:

- how much money does it have?
- where is it held?
- where does it come from and what plans are in place for spending it?

It is also important that you get to:

- know what savings, property or investments it holds
- know what commitments, contracts or debts it may have
- visit premises and talk to beneficiaries, volunteers and staff
- ask for copies of any strategies, plans and policies

Make sure you are well informed about any key policies on areas such as risk, safeguarding and fundraising. Safeguarding is a priority for all charities, not just those working with groups traditionally considered at risk. As a new trustee you should take the time to read your safeguarding duties (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/strategy-for-dealing-with-safeguarding-issues-in-charities/annex-1-trustee-safeguarding-duties-explained).

2. Expect to do these things soon

2.1 Attend trustee meetings

Meetings will be a necessary and consistent call on your time as a trustee. It's important to prepare for them and use them to contribute your views and ideas. Use these occasions to make sure that the charity is on track, and expect to be able to monitor its performance against plans and any key risks.

Be prepared to ask questions, particularly on things you are unclear about to increase your knowledge.

Find out more about trustee meetings (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/charity-meetings-making-decisions-and-voting).

2.2 Make decisions

This is such an important part of your role. Some decisions will be straightforward, others more complex. Use our guidance to help you make sure your decisions are properly made, particularly when you are taking those more difficult strategic decisions, such as those affecting the charity's beneficiaries, assets or future direction.

You should ensure that you have the information you need and that decisions are considered as a group. While some trustees may have specialist knowledge that you will want to rely on, be careful not to let any one individual dominate the actual decision making process.

Find out more about decision making (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/its-your-decision-charity-trustees-and-decision-making/its-your-decision-charity-trustees-and-decision-making).

2.3 Put your charity's interests first

At meetings and when making decisions – and in everything else you do for the charity – you must always put the charity's interests first. Be alert to those matters affecting the charity in which you personally may also have an interest – this could be a direct financial interest but also be more broadly a loyalty or commitment to another organisation or person.

Where such conflicts of interest exist, they can be relatively straightforward to manage. Good awareness and having a system in place to handle them are crucial.

You will need to:

- identify conflicts of interest when they arise
- prevent them from affecting any decision
- record how they are handled

Find out more about conflicts of interests (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/manage-a-conflict-of-interest-in-your-charity)

Getting this right is not just a matter of meeting legal requirements, it also shows integrity, honesty and openness about what your charity does and how it does it. These values influence the public's willingness to support charities, and their trust and confidence that charities are run for public benefit, not private interests.

3. Get to know your 6 main trustee duties

It's important that you know these. In almost any trustee activity or decision at least one of the 6 main duties will be relevant. We've summarised these in our infographic (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/544220/Jigsaw.pdf) and in our short guide CC3a charity trustee: what's involved (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/charity-trustee-whats-involved)

Here's practical action you can take, for each of the 6 duties, in your day to day role as a trustee.

Always:

1. be clear that what your charity does supports its purposes and benefits the public
2. check that decisions you make are within the rules for your charity
3. ask yourself what's best for the charity and who it helps
4. satisfy yourself that the charity's funds, people and reputation are used sensibly and are protected from undue risk
5. be prepared. Have the information you need, in the format you need, and set aside time to read it prior to meetings
6. get your charity's accounts and reports to us on time. Make sure they are to the standard required, and clear about the charity's achievements

We expect all trustees to read our detailed guide on trustee duties (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-essential-trustee-what-you-need-to-know-cc3/the-essential-trustee-what-you-need-to-know-what-you-need-to-do) and if, at any stage, you are unsure of how to act this is the guidance that you should come back to.

Understanding the 6 duties is essential to your role, they set out the main responsibilities that you have. The Charity Governance Code (https://www.charitygovernancecode.org/en) can help you put these into practice - it will help you understand what you can do to meet your main duties on a daily basis and what good governance looks like.

4. What you need to send us

All registered charities must by law keep their register entry up-to-date. Many charities also have to send us financial information each year. You and the other trustees are all responsible for getting this right, so you'll need to know what your charity has to send us, when and how it needs to be sent, and that its records are accurate.

To start, check your charity's income level and type (is it a charitable incorporated organisation (CIO), company, trust or other structure?). The charity details on our register entry (https://www.gov.uk/find-charity-information) will help with this, as should your fellow trustees.

These are the 3 filing requirements that you have with us:

- charity register details must be up-to-date at all times. These include details of trustees, the charity name and the contact. If there are inaccuracies your charity contact must let us know. This information is public and can be a valuable tool for presenting information about the charity. Use our charity details service (https://www.gov.uk/change-your-charitys-details) to update your information
- annual return (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/prepare-a-charity-annual-return) - all CIOs must send us an annual return. All other charities must do so if their income is over £10,000; below this figure charities should use the annual return to update their income and expenditure details on the register
- accounts - does your charity need to file its accounts with us every year? (https://www.gov.uk/prepare-charitys-annual-accounts) There are different requirements for different types of charities. All CIOs must send us their accounts and trustees' annual report. Any other charity must do so if its yearly income is over £25,000 and all other registered charities must have their accounts available to send to us or anyone else on request.

You will also need to know how to send information to us (https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission/about-our-services). You can send information, update details and access our online forms here. To do this your charity will need an online password. This password is important; it is sent to the registered contact for your charity. Check who has the password; if your charity doesn't have one, the charity contact can request a new or replacement one (https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission/about-our-

services#change-password-for-online-services-request-new-or-replacement). You don't need to know the password unless you are responsible for submitting information to us, but you should know whether the charity has one and who has it.

5. How we can help you

We're here to help you understand your role and duties as a trustee; how to avoid mistakes and get it right. Use our website to:

- look through our guidance (https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission/about/publication-scheme) - you'll find here our extensive library of advice and guidance to match the many queries that can arise, including shorter 'how to' guides covering topics such as fundraising, managing your charity, and staff and volunteers
- help you if you need to change your charity's name or rules (https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission/about-our-services) - you should use our online services to make these changes or to get our permission for other actions
- keep yourself informed (https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/charity-commission-news) - we will send you a quarterly newsletter (CC News) with information for trustees on key matters for your role. So, please keep your email details up to date

You can also keep up-to-date by following us on Twitter (https://twitter.com/chtycommission) and by reading our Blogs (https://charitycommission.blog.gov.uk/).

6. If things go wrong

As a trustee you are not expected to be perfect; we know things can go wrong. While it is rare for trustees to be held personally liable, understanding your potential liabilities will help you protect yourself. This is explained in more detail in our guidance the essential trustee (CC3) (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-essential-trustee-what-you-need-to-know-cc3/the-essential-trustee-what-you-need-to-know-what-you-need-to-do). If something goes wrong make sure that you and the other trustees:

- act quickly to prevent further loss or damage
- communicate and plan what you want to say
- review the situation and learn how to stop it happening again
- let the right people know, for example contact the police if there's been a crime

You will need to let us know when there has been a serious incident. Find out more about reporting serious incidents (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/how-to-report-a-serious-incident-in-your-charity).

So, over to you….

We've outlined the basics for you here, so that you can check your understanding of the role and the responsibilities that you have. Getting to know your duties from the outset will help you run an effective charity that will have a positive impact for the good of others.

Keep this guide handy, there is more information and help available from our website if you need it. There are also many other advisory and support organisations that can help and we have listed some of these in our contact book.

We hope that you can use this opportunity to play an active part in helping your charity, using your life skills and experience. Your commitment and the time and effort you are prepared to give are part of what makes charities so valued by the public.

We wish you success in your role.

7. Contact book

There are a number of organisations that can provide information or assistance to trustees. These include:

Charity Commission for England and Wales (https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission) the regulator of charities in England and Wales

Association of Chairs (AoC) (https://www.associationofchairs.org.uk/) – offers resources and support to chairs and vice-chairs of charities and non-profit organisations

Charity Finance Group (CFG) (http://cfg.org.uk/about-us.aspx) – champions best practice in finance management in the voluntary sector

Directory of Social Change (DSC) (https://www.dsc.org.uk/) - provides trustee training courses, publications and several free resources

Ethical Property Foundation (EPA) (http://www.ethicalproperty.org.uk/) UK charity which offers voluntary organisations free property guidance, advice and workshops and a wide range of expert advice on legal issues and premises management

The Foundation for Social Improvement (FSI) (http://www.thefsi.org/) - provides strategic support for small charities

Fundraising Regulator (https://www.fundraisingregulator.org.uk/) the independent regulator of charitable fundraising

ICSA: the Governance Institute (https://www.icsa.org.uk/) – trains, informs and represents the interests of governance professionals across all sectors and offers free to access guidance notes specific to the charity sector

Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) (https://ico.org.uk/) UK's independent body set up to uphold information rights

National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA) (https://www.navca.org.uk/) - England's largest network of local charities and community groups

National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) (https://www.ncvo.org.uk/) – champions the voluntary sector and volunteering. Connects, represents and supports voluntary organisations, from the smallest community groups to the largest charities

Reach Volunteering (https://reachvolunteering.org.uk/) – provides a trustee recruitment service and useful resources for charities and people interested in joining trustee boards

Small Charities Coalition (SCC) (http://www.smallcharities.org.uk/home/) – helps trustees, staff and volunteers of small charities (those with an income of less than £1 million) access the skills, tools and information they may need

Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) (https://www.wcva.org.uk/home) – supporting and representing the third sector and volunteering across Wales