

## **ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION INFORMATION**

### **Some Terms and ROLE DESCRIPTIONS FOR THE COMMITTEE AND OFFICERS**

This information for ODFAA Allotment Associations was produced after ODFAA's research and consultation with an Allotment Liaison Meeting discussion group in 2016. Allotment sites in Oxford City allotments generally have long leases from Oxford City Council. New leases are due in 2021 and it is expected these will again be for 21 years. Allotment associations are responsible for managing their allotment sites.

Oxford and District Allotment sites are largely self-managed. Oxford City Council devolves responsibilities for almost all the day-to-day issues of site management to the Allotment Association trustees (and hence to the committee). The Allotment Association is made responsible for collecting the plot fee and retains some of the money collected to fund basic maintenance, management of vacancies and waiting lists and cultivation control. It pays a site rent to Oxford City Council and this with funds from other allotment land use forms OCCs Allotment Budget. The present lease does not clearly identify Oxford City Councils role or responsibilities are?

There is plenty of evidence (Thorpe Report 1998 and 'A Place to Grow' 2015) that, when successfully implemented, self-management schemes ensure greater control of a site by allotment holders and tend to work to the benefit of the site. Self-management fulfils the twin aims of ensuring greater control of a site by allotment holders and reducing a local authority's administrative responsibilities. With pressures on local authority funds and a new lease due in 2021 it is possible associations will have to fund more than previously and that there will need to be changes to the ODFAA structure and support.

In Oxford plot holders are members of an Allotment Association which requires them to an AGM to report to members and annually elect a committee with wide powers to run the Allotment Association and its allotment site in accordance with the constitution. Presently OCC leases have rules and associations can add to these but not detract.

#### **Some Legal structures of associations**

**Unincorporated** In 2018 Most of ODFAA associations are deemed to be unincorporated associations even if not formally known as such. It is not suitable for societies which wish to gain the additional protection for their committee members which incorporation brings. The principle reason for incorporation has been removed by the Council agreeing that any claims against a society under the new lease will be confined to the society's assets. This prevents it from pursuing individuals for restitution. Hence the additional responsibilities and associated risks of the wider management role are similar to those which societies are already used to managing.

**Incorporated Societies** which wish to be incorporated are recommended to use the model constitution for an Industrial and Provident Society produced by the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG). The principle advantage of incorporation is that it offers better protection to Committee Members who generally cannot be held personally liable for the debts of the society as they can in an unincorporated body. A disadvantage can be the requirement to send annual returns and accounts in specified formats to the regulator, and to make tax returns to HMRC.

**Plot holders are members** of the allotment association/society. This can be formed the association has owned or leased land and a constitution and rules which take account of requirements of the lease and allotment good practice. Annual General Meetings (AGMs) of the members of the association elect a committee with wide powers to run the society and its allotment site. ODFAA's members leases, constitutions and rules vary although most of those on OCC land are similar.

Every Allotment Association should have a chair and a person appointed to deputise for him/her when s/he is unavailable. Allotment Associations also need people to manage the money, the allotment site and its plot holders, and the Allotment Association's general business. Often these functions can be combined or broken down and

given to extra people, particularly the bigger tasks and in bigger Allotment Associations. There are advantages to spreading the work amongst many people instead of relying on one or two hard working folk. Firstly, when an officer leaves the size of the vacant job is not so daunting that a replacement cannot be found. Secondly, with a larger team the jobs can be rotated amongst the people so that several individuals have experience of each role and can easily step into any unexpected gap. Allotment Associations with a team of officers are more robust than one-person bands and can weather crises more easily.

The committee and any sub-committees and the officers appointed by the committee should have written terms of reference and / or clearly minuted instructions to avoid the misunderstandings which arise from differing expectations, and the disagreements and tensions which can result from such misunderstandings. They also enable proper accountability to be demonstrated.

Above all, the officers and others with Allotment Association responsibilities should operate as a team, serving the interests of the Allotment Association. Running an Allotment Association and looking after the allotment holders means egos or territorial disputes must be set aside and everyone should be taking responsibility and treat all members fairly. An Allotment Association's servants need not try to be model bureaucrats but a degree of formality, including written role descriptions, is needed if you are to be clear, consistent and effective. This paper is detailed for larger Allotment Associations and it may be simplified for smaller ones.

## **THE COMMITTEE**

The purpose of the committee is to fulfil the objects in the constitution on behalf of the members of the Allotment Association. The principle duties are:

**Purpose is to** Ensure that the Allotment Association achieves its objects including:

- **Strategy** – Give strategic direction to the Allotment Association in the achievement of its objects.
- **Officers** – Appoint and oversee the officers and other people who deliver the committee's intentions.
- **Accountability** - The committee must determine how it will hold itself accountable to the members.

## **Delegation**

The constitution and rules should set out how the association delegates the management of the Allotment Association to the officers, committee members and others, and specified governance matters to named committee members, but clearly define the limits of the delegated authority and monitor the use of delegated authority and observance of the stated limits. The committee's monitoring should include:

- **Assets**–Ensure the protection of the assets, including its reputation.
- **Resources**–Ensure that there are enough resources to deliver its role.
- **Administration**–Ensure effective and efficient administration including its finances.
- **Risk Management**–Ensure the risks to which it is exposed are managed.
- **Compliance**–Ensure it complies with its constitution, its lease and law.

## **GOVERNANCE**

Control the way the committee does its work, sets and observe standards for itself, and manage its own development including:

- **Constitution** – Review the constitution to keep it appropriate as the organisation develops.
- **The Committee Process** – Control the processes of governance by the committee including, for example, these job descriptions, a code of conduct, policy on the use of sub-committees and the management of general meetings of the members.

- **Committee Development** – Control the quality of the committee by considering what skills are needed and try to ensure these skills are available or can be adapted to fit the skills available.
- **The Committee Members** – Ensure that committee members are appropriately recruited, inducted, developed, and informed about the work of the association and its operating environment.

## COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The purpose of a committee member is to make decisions collectively within the committee meetings to achieve the objects of the Allotment Association. Hence it follows that much of the role description of a committee member is about achieving the role of the committee. Not all committee members need be skilled in all the matters dealt with by the committee. Indeed, having committees of several people enables a wider range of skills to be present than one person can bring. But all committee members must know that all necessary skills are present on the committee.

**Qualities.** All committee members require

- **Commitment**—they must be committed to their Allotment Association and its objects and must be able to set aside their personal feelings and concerns to concentrate on the best for the Allotment Association.
- **Competence** – Committee members must bring relevant skills to the committee.
- **Responsibility**— Committee members must have the strength to speak up for what they consider is right.

Committee members are responsible for all aspects of the Allotment Association but are not expected to make every decision or have in depth knowledge about every aspect of the Allotment Association 's work. Many matters are delegated to the officers and other individuals, and larger Allotment Associations may have sub-committees. Except where delegated, all decisions are made collectively by the committee. The committee and its members are responsible for recognising and dealing with conflicts of interest and making all decisions solely in the interests of the Allotment Association. Committee members who accept officer and other roles must organise a proper handover of all records and property to their successor when their role ends. All committee members are non-executive except for the specific executive roles which the constitution may have delegated to them. Hence no committee member has any authority outside a committee meeting except as delegated.

### Duties

Not all committee members need be expert in all matters, but all committee members must:

- **Meetings** – Attend committee meetings, contribute to debate, take a share of the workload.
- **Delegation** – Deal promptly and effectively with any matters which the committee delegates to them and report back promptly.
- **Information** – Give time to keep themselves informed about the activities of the Allotment Association and the environment in which it operates.
- **Integrity** – Behave in a way which retains the confidence of the committee and its members.

In most Allotment Associations most or all Committee Members undertake specific duties in connection with running the Allotment Association or its allotments.

## CHAIR

The role of the Chair is to deliver a first-class committee to the Allotment Association. This can only be done with the support of the other committee members and this reveals the dual nature of the Chair's role. It is to act as both servant to and leader of the committee. Without ever losing sight of his/her accountability to the committee, it is essential that the Chair ensures that leadership is provided to the committee to successfully accomplish its role.

**Chairing** – Chair the meetings to a high standard, striking an appropriate balance between the inclinations of the individuals present and the needs of the Allotment Association.

**Housekeeping**—Ensure that the committee has agreed a programme of meetings, that clear papers are produced and distributed in enough time, and that meetings are held in a convenient and comfortable place without distraction.

**Agenda and Papers** – Ensure that the agenda of the committee, includes all matters arising from the site and other committee members without allowing the agenda to be cluttered with trivial or irrelevant issues. Ensure that the any necessary papers are written and circulated in advance.

**Minutes** – Ensure that clear minutes are produced and circulated promptly.

**Committee members** – Ensure that all committee members fulfil their roles as part of a team.

**Identifying** – Ensure that missing skills in the committee are identified and that suitable new members are found and recruited.

**Development** – Ensure that all committee members are appropriately inducted and developed, and that the **committee has opportunities to learn to improve its performance.**

**Team Building and Co-ordination** – Ensure that committee members in their executive roles work together effectively and efficiently as a team without unnecessary gaps or overlap and without friction.

**Monitoring** – Monitor the performance of committee members and lead the process of improving or removing failing committee members.

**Executive Authority** - The Chair has no executive authority except as delegated by the committee.

**Emergency Action** – In addition to the routine Chair matters specified above, the committee authorises the Chair to act on its behalf in an emergency, which action must, if possible, be with the knowledge and support of the other officers.

## **DEPUTY /Vice CHAIR**

The role of the Deputy Chair is to stand in for the Chair in an emergency or when the Chair is unavailable. Obviously, this is a minimal role which makes little or no demand on the officer unless the Chair is unreliable. Whilst the core role of the Deputy Chair is essential in every Allotment Association, it is not an onerous job and, especially in larger Allotment Associations, it is usual for it to be combined with another main role or expanded with additional duties depending on the needs of the Allotment Association. These additional responsibilities can be taken from the Chair's role or agreed between the Chair and his Deputy Chair or can be taken from the roles of other officers.

## **TREASURER**

The role of the Treasurer is to protect the Allotment Association 's financial integrity and assets, monitoring the financial affairs of the Allotment Association and reporting these to the committee.

Receive and record new plot subscriptions and issue annual invoices and ensure monies are collected, recorded and available to other officers.

**Income and Expenditure** - Oversee the collection of fees and other charges. Receive all income and pay it into the bank, hold the cheque books and make all payments.

**Book Keeping** – Write up the income and expenditure, reconcile this with the bank statements, store these records and report financial performance to the committee.

**Budgets** – Prepare an annual budget for the committee's approval.

**Operational Oversight** – Oversee the finances of trading operations, site maintenance and capital works where these are managed by other people.

**Annual Accounts** – Prepare the annual accounts, arrange for their independent inspection and present them to the committee for their approval.

**Financial Systems** – Advise the committee on rules for spending money and monitor that these are observed to minimise the opportunity for negligence, abuse, theft or fraud.

**Financial Strategy** – Advise the committee on its long-term financial strategy and planning, and how these impacts on annual budgets.

## **ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION SECRETARY**

The role of the Allotment Association Secretary is to deal with the routine affairs of the Allotment Association and its committee.

**Allotment Association Administration** – Deal with the routine administration of the Allotment Association including general enquiries and correspondence, drafting the annual report, making annual returns to any regulator and local authority, administering general meetings and maintaining the Allotment Association's records.

**Committee Administration** – Assist the Chair in the administration of the Committee including arranging the meeting dates and venues, circulate the agenda and papers in advance of the meeting, and take the minutes and circulate and file them within a few days of the meeting.

**Records** – keep membership contact details and keys issued (to enable the annual report and the annual return to the local authority to be quickly produced). Issue keys. Keep up-to-date records of enquiries, waiting lists,

**Liaison** – Liaise with tenants, deal with complaints and, when necessary, terminate tenancies when authorised by the committee.

[Depending on the size of the site there may be other secretaries](#)

## **Membership SECRETARY**

The role of the Membership Secretary is to deal with enquiries for plots, maintain the waiting list, do tours of the site, if necessary and organise the allocation of plots informing the allotment secretary and treasurer who will deal with money and keys.

**Site Manager/Field Secretary/Audit manager. These may be separate or joined but need to work together**

**Site Rules** – Take the lead in monitoring the relevance of the site rules for tenants and revising them when necessary based on plot and site inspections and Maintenance –

**Site inspections and site maintenance.** Manage working parties. Keep Health and Safety documentation and machinery maintenance up to date. Plot Inspections – Organise regular and plot inspections and report to the Committee. Manage audit procedures.

## **Trading Manager**

The role of the Trading Manager is to manage the sales activity.

**Policy** – Advise the committee on opening times and dates, what should be stocked and sales margins.

**Stock** – Monitor and purchase stock and reconcile with regular stock checks.

**Sales Volunteers** – Organise a rota of volunteers to work in the shop.

**Records** – Maintain income, expenditure and profit records and report to the committee.

There are some other key external relationships for which one of the committee members should be responsible. These include:

**Representing the allotment association at OCC/ODFAA Allotment Liaison Meetings.** It should be part of this person's role to see that relevant information from such bodies is disseminated to the Allotment Association's members as well as the Committee.

## **COMMUNICATIONS**

Many smaller Allotment Associations manage with only one Secretary and this is usually the person who has most contact with the members. The sole Secretary or one of the above two Secretaries (or the Chair or Vice Chair) should also be charged with taking the lead in managing the communications with the members. This is a crucial

area for the Committee to get right as a failure to keep members informed and consulted is a common precursor to resentment, loss of confidence and destructive disputes in Allotment Associations. Different officers can make their contributions to the overall communication package.

For example, there maybe a web site, which requires a **Web Site Manager** to write /update material as directed by the Chair. This may include involvement in social media. An **Editor** may write the **newsletters**, the Chair may write the annual report and the Allotments Secretary may place notices in the notice board. But all committee members must monitor the package of communications and the Committee must oversee the relationship with members and plot holders. These are the people to whom the Committee and its members are accountable.

## **OTHER ROLES**

Other roles can be developed as necessary. For example, Allotment Associations that run plant sales, events on or off the allotment site or competitions may have a committee member take charge of each activity. Those Allotment Associations which produce a newsletter may need an editor. In larger and more complex Allotment Associations the number of people helping run the site and the Allotment Association can easily run into double figures, not all of whom need sit on the committee. In such instances the formal role of the Chair, Deputy Chair or Allotments Secretary may need to be lightened if they spend time liaising between the various people who run these activities.