

ROLE DESCRIPTIONS FOR THE COMMITTEE AND OFFICERS OF AN ALLOTMENT SOCIETY

This model constitution for allotment societies has been produced by the Barnet Federation of Allotment and Horticultural Societies. Like our sites the plot holders are members of the society and elect a committee with wide powers to run the society and its allotment site. Their constitution empowers the committee “to appoint and remove a Chairman, a Deputy Chairman and other officers from among their number, and to appoint and remove other individuals with specific duties (including representing the Society) on such terms as the Committee from time to time decide.”

Every society should have a chairman and a person appointed to deputise for him when he is unavailable. Societies will also need people to manage the money, the allotment site and its plot holders, and the society’s general business. Some of these functions could be combined or else unpacked further and given to extra people, particularly the bigger tasks and in bigger societies. 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. Societies with a team of officers are more robust than one man bands and can weather crises more easily.

The committee, any sub-committees and the officers appointed by the committee should have written terms of reference 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 society responsibilities should operate as a team, serving the interests of the society. Running a society and looking after the allotment holders is too important to let egos or territorial disputes get in the way. A society’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 model is deliberately detailed for a larger and more complex society and it may be simplified for smaller and simpler societies. Text in *italics* is not part of the model role descriptions but comments to help you adapt this model to your society’s circumstances and traditions.

THE COMMITTEE

The purpose of the committee is to fulfil the objects in the constitution on behalf of the members of the society. The duties of the committee are many but most can be dealt with by delegation and monitoring. The principle duties are:

Purpose

Ensure that the society achieves its objects including:

- ◆ **Strategy** – Give strategic direction to the society 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

Delegate the management of the society 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 of the society including its reputation.
- ◆ *Resources* – Ensure that the society has sufficient resources to deliver its role.
- ◆ *Administration* – Ensure the effective and efficient administration of the society including its finances.
- ◆ *Risk Management* – Ensure the wise management of the risks to which the society is exposed.
- ◆ *Compliance* – Ensure that the society complies with its constitution, its lease and general law.

Governance Process

Control the way the committee does its work, set 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 checking what skills are needed and ensuring they are all available within the committee.
- ◆ *The Committee Members* – Ensure that committee members are appropriately recruited, inducted, developed, and informed about the work of the society and the environment within which it is operating.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The purpose of a committee member is to make decisions collectively within the committee meetings to achieve the objects of the society. 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 three qualities

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

Responsibility

Committee members are responsible for all aspects of the society but are not expected to make every decision or have in depth knowledge about every aspect of the society's work. Most matters are delegated to the officers and other individuals, and in larger societies to 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 society. 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.

Authority

All committee members are non-executive (like non-executive directors in a company) except for the specific executive roles which the Board 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 dealt with by the committee but all committee members must do the following:

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

In most societies it is traditional that most or all Committee Members undertake specific duties in connection with running the society or its allotments.

CHAIRMAN

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

The Board - Ensure that the committee fulfils its role.

- ◆ **Housekeeping** – Ensure that the committee has agreed a programme of meetings, that papers are produced to a professional standard and distributed in sufficient time, and that meetings are held in a convenient and comfortable place without distraction.
- ◆ **Agenda and Papers** – Write the agenda of the committee, being sensitive to the wishes of other committee members without allowing the agenda to be cluttered with trivial or irrelevant issues. Ensure that the papers are written and circulated in advance.
- ◆ **Chairing** – Chair the meetings to a high standard, striking an appropriate balance between the inclinations of the individuals present and the needs of the society.
- ◆ **Minutes** – Ensure that minutes are produced to a professional standard 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 Board are identified and that suitable committee members are found and recruited.
- ◆ **Development** – Ensure that all committee members are appropriately inducted and developed, and that the committee as a whole 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 Chairman has no executive authority except as delegated by the committee.

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

DEPUTY CHAIRMAN

The role of the Deputy Chairman is to stand in for the Chairman in an emergency or when the Chairman is unavailable for a Board meeting.

Obviously this is a minimal role which makes little or no demand on the officer unless the Chairman is unreliable. Whilst the core role of the Deputy Chairman is essential in every society, it is not an onerous job and, especially in larger societies, it can be combined with another officership or expanded with additional duties depending on the needs of the society. These additional responsibilities can be taken from the Chairman's role or agreed between the Chairman and his Deputy Chairman, or can be taken from the roles of other officers.

SOCIETY SECRETARY

The role of the Society Secretary is to deal with the routine affairs of the society and its committee.

- ◆ **Society Administration** – Deal with the routine administration of the society including general enquiries and correspondence, drafting the annual report, making annual returns to any regulator and local authority, administering general meetings and maintaining the society's records.
- ◆ **Committee Administration** – Assist the Chairman 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.

ALLOTMENTS SECRETARY

The role of the Allotments Secretary is to deal with tenants and manage the allotment site.

- ◆ **Plot Letting** - Deal with enquiries for plots, maintain the waiting list, sign up new tenants, issue keys and take deposits (*cash to Treasurer*)
- ◆ **Rents** – Issue rent invoices and ensure the rents are collected.
- ◆ **Liaison** – Liaise with tenants, deal with complaints and, when necessary, terminate tenancies when authorised by the committee.
- ◆ **Site Rules** – Take the lead in monitoring the relevance of the site rules for tenants and revising them when necessary.
- ◆ **Records** – Keep up-to-date records of enquiries, waiting lists, tenants' contact details and keys issued (*to enable the annual report and the annual return to the local authority to be quickly produced*).

- ◆ **Site and Plot Inspections** – Organise regular site and plot inspections and report to the Committee.
- ◆ **Site Maintenance** – Manage the site maintenance (*or can be given to a dedicated site manager*).

COMMUNICATIONS

Many societies 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 Chairman or Vice Chairman) 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 societies. Different officers can make their contributions to the overall communication package. For example, an Editor may write the newsletters, the Chairman 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.

As well as the members there are some other key external relationships for which one of the committee members should be responsible. These include the London Borough of Barnet (as landlord) and the Barnet Federation of Allotment and Horticultural Societies. It should be part of this person's role to see that relevant information from such bodies is disseminated to the society's members as well as the Committee.

TREASURER

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

- ◆ **Income and Expenditure** - 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. Oversee the collection of rents and other charges.
- ◆ **Annual Accounts** – Prepare the annual accounts, arrange for their independent inspection or audit if required 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 this impacts on annual budgets.

The Treasurer role could be split in large societies into a Book Keeper with responsibility for the first five items and a Treasurer with responsibility for the last two items.

TRADING MANAGER

The role of the Trading Manager is to manage the sales activity where the society has a shop.

- ◆ **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.

OTHER ROLES

Other roles can be developed as necessary. For example, societies which run plant sales or competitions may need a manager to take charge of each activity. Or societies which run events on or off the allotment site may need managers for these activities. Those societies which produce a newsletter will need an editor with a budget. Societies with satellite sites may need Assistant Allotment Secretaries for each of them. In larger and more complex societies the number of people helping run the site and the society can easily run into double figures, not all of whom need sit on the committee, and the formal role of the Chairman, Deputy Chairman or Allotments Secretary may need to be lightened if they spend much time liaising between the various people who run these activities.

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