Developing policies and procedures

Some written policies and procedures will inevitably be required by most, if not all, voluntary groups, whatever their size. Written policies & procedures can help your group to:

- be consistent in the way you carry out your work;
- be fair to users, members, employees and volunteers;
- ensure that you comply with the law

Why you need written policies and procedures

The main reasons for having written policies and procedures are:

- **The law**: Some written policies are required by law for some groups (e.g. Health and Safety). In other cases, such as recruitment of staff or managing your finances, you will need to meet certain legal obligations. An equal opportunities policy and a financial policy can help ensure you meet these obligations. Your constitution will set out certain procedures for holding meetings, keeping accounts etc. which your group must follow.
- **Best practice**: Over time, most groups find ways of working which best suit them. Written procedures can help to ensure that these are not forgotten and that new people know what these are.
- **Fairness**: Most groups would want to ensure they are open to all potential users or members who might benefit from their services. A written equal opportunities policy can demonstrate your commitment to others and provide a useful basis for considering how best to provide services.
- **Resolving disputes**: If necessary, written policies and procedures can be referred to if disputes arise over the way a particular function is carried out or responsibility exercised.

How to go about developing policies and procedures

The easiest place to start is to get copies of other documents (such as MVSC models) and adapt them. You will then need to:

- go through these in some detail, amending them to ensure they suit your group's needs.
- ensure everyone in your group understands and agrees them and they are formally approved by the Trustees.
- keep the final documents simple and fairly short as this will make them easier to use.

Some larger groups may have a long list of written policies and procedures to cover all aspects of their work. However, many smaller groups may not have the time or resources to prepare a large number of policy documents, at least not all at once. A bare minimum might therefore be:

- A health and safety policy
- An equal opportunities policy

- A financial controls policy
- A complaints procedure

Health and safety

Organisations with five or more paid staff are required by law to have a health and safety policy, although it is good practice for all groups to have one. The policy sets out your responsibilities to staff, volunteers and service users. The contents of a policy will vary from group to group, depending on the type of work the group does and the potential risks involved.

Equal opportunities

Your equal opportunities policy should cover issues of fairness, whether to service users, members, employees, volunteers, or committee members. Key areas are:

- Employment: all aspects of recruitment and selection of paid workers to ensure the process is fair and complies with the law. You would also want these principles to apply to the recruitment of volunteers and committee members.
- Service provision: how you will publicise and provide services so that that all people who might benefit are able to do so.

Financial procedure

Your financial procedure will set out your policies regarding the financial controls you have in place to enable you to manage your money. It would usually cover:

- day to day issues such as banking arrangements, procedures for ordering and paying for goods and services, use of petty cash, etc.
- financial management issues such as preparing an annual budget and reporting to the committee on the group's financial position.

Complaints procedure

Complaints, whether justified or not, are bound to happen from time to time. It helps to have a standard procedure in use which is seen to be fair by all concerned. Typically this would include:

- how service users can make a complaint and to whom it should be addressed
- the procedure for looking into the complaint
- how the matter can be reviewed if the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome.

Once you have developed and approved your written policies and procedures, you need to make sure:

- you use them (don't file them away and forget about them);
- everyone who needs to know about them is aware of their existence;
- you monitor their relevance and effectiveness (if they are proving unworkable, change them);
- you review and update them on a regular basis (say every two or three years) to take account of changes in the way your group works, or changes in legislation, or new and more effective ways of working.