

Setting up a residents' group



What is a local residents' group?

A residents' group (sometimes called a residents' association) is made up of local residents who represent the interests of people who live in their area. By bringing residents together, the group can discuss local issues that people come up against and work together to find solutions. Groups can also arrange activities and social events for local people.

These local residents' groups are independent of the council and manage themselves. However, if the group operates on an estate or in a block that is managed by Croydon Council, then members can get advice, general support and training from the council's resident involvement team.

A local residents' group should have a formal structure and will need a committee, consisting of a chairperson, secretary, treasurer and a few other general committee members. The group will also need to develop a constitution (which will include the rules for the group).

The following pages explain how to start a local group in four easy steps, from finding out if your neighbours are interested, through to arranging the first formal meeting and beyond. It also provides some information about the roles of the committee and its members, as well as what a constitution is and why it is important. We have also included a number of links to further information if you need it.

If you are interested in setting up a residents' group in your area and you would like to know more, please email the resident involvement team at getinvolved@croydon.gov.uk or call on 020 8726 6100.

Why does the council encourage local residents' groups?



In short, the people who live on our estates and in our blocks are our customers. To deliver the services that best meet the needs of our customers we need to know what they want.

We want our residents to:

- share their views and ideas with us
- work in partnership with us to look for solutions to any issues
- monitor and review the services we provide and
- become more involved in making choices and decisions affecting their area.

Working with well run, local residents' groups is one way for us to find out what people think of the services we provide, or of any plans we may have for the future.

Where a residents' group is formed, it is important that it meets certain basic standards.

A group should:

- make efforts to ensure local people are kept informed about the group and what it is doing,
- ensure all local people are invited to join and that they are made to feel welcome at meetings and activities,
- ensure the general meetings are open to everyone in the area,
- aim to be democratic in everything it does, which means that everyone who takes part is able to do so equally and any decisions are made by the group, not one or two individuals and
- not discriminate against members of the community because of their ethnicity, age, sexuality, gender, disability, religious or cultural beliefs or marital status.

The council feels it is important for local residents' groups to hold regular meetings, to allow local people to come together and share their views. If a group can demonstrate that they meet the standards noted above, the council will provide support to the group when they arrange meetings, by helping with printing and paying reasonable costs for the hire of a local meeting room.

So, if there is not a residents' group or association already operating in your area and you think it might be a good way to improve things, why not start a group yourself. We know that starting and running a group is not easy and it can take up a lot of time. But where they work well, these groups can make a real difference to services and the general quality of life, so it is worth the effort!!

Four steps to starting a residents' group

The guidance below explains how to set up a local residents' group or association. If you choose to do things differently, that is fine – as long as the end result is the same. The group must be open to all, democratic and keep people in the area informed.

Step 1 Getting people interested



A residents' group will not work unless a reasonable number of people are interested in joining the group. So your first step will be to find out if other local people are interested in getting involved.

- Speak with a couple of friends or neighbours from the area and see if they think setting up a local residents' group is a good idea. Then ask if they would be willing to join you to form a 'steering group' to help out with the initial stages.
- You and the steering group should go out and 'door knock' in your area, to ask if other people are interested in the idea.
- Find out what your neighbours are concerned about, a group will work best where there are common issues.
- Find out if anyone else is interested in helping set up and run a group, one or two people can't do everything.
- Get an idea of what time of day most people would prefer to meet.

Step 2 Planning the first meeting

If you and your steering group decide to form a residents' group, the next step would be to have a meeting that is open to everyone from your area and discuss the idea with them.

It is really important to promote the first meeting properly, so that as many local people as possible know that you are planning to set up a local group. Try to ensure the meeting is convenient for everyone. Key things to think about include:

- **Date & time** - Arrange the meeting when most people are likely to be able to come along.
- **Venue** - Book a venue such as a local community centre, scout hut or school hall, which is near the area the group covers. The venue should be easy for people to get to and not be in a building that might put some people off attending. So, avoid holding it in a pub or a religious building. The venue should be accessible for those with disabilities.
- **Other needs** – Try to find out if there are a lot of people in the area who do not have English as their first language. If this is the case, speak to local community leaders or relatives who may be willing to act as interpreters. Also, ask if older or disabled people need additional support to get to and from the meeting and try to accommodate this.

Agree in advance what you are going to talk about at the first meeting – ideally you should put together an agenda to make sure the meeting has some order. Think about who else might be able to support the group and help answer some questions at the meeting. You could invite local councillors, housing officers, police, etc.



Your group should be democratic – giving everyone a chance to take part in making decisions about who runs the group and what it will do.

However, you and the steering group will need to agree in advance, who will chair the first meeting and who will take minutes or notes.

Step 3 Running your first open meeting

The main aim of your first meeting is to get as many local people as possible to come along to the meeting and talk with each other. Don't expect to achieve too much at this meeting. What is important is that you find out if people think setting up a group is a good idea and find out what they think the local issues are.

Make sure you have plenty of copies of the agenda, and any other useful paperwork. Set up an attendance sheet – which people who come along can complete, so you know who was at the meeting.

Think about asking people to sign up to become a member of the group at the first meeting – if so, make sure you have copies of individual application forms or a list that interested people can complete with their details.

At this first meeting, everyone present will have a chance to discuss what is being proposed and then be asked if they support the idea to set up a local residents' group. If it is agreed to set up a group, people at the meeting can then discuss how it will work and what issues the group should deal with.

It is important to decide who will have responsibility for various roles or jobs within the group – called the committee. The committee will manage the business of the group and need to be selected at an early stage, or the group may not work properly as there will be no-one to organise things. (See page 6 for more details on the committee). You will need a chair, a vice chair (optional), a secretary and a treasurer and if possible a few general committee members, who can help out with practical things like putting up posters, serving drinks at meetings etc. (See pages 7 - 9 for more details on committee roles.)

You may not have time to do everything in the first meeting but if there is time, people at the meeting can also begin to think about the constitution, which sets out the rules for the group. (See page 6 & 7 for more details on the constitution.)

First impressions are important, so make sure your first meeting is well run and properly organised, otherwise people may lose interest and be put off coming again.

There is a lot of information available on the internet and elsewhere, about how to run or chair good meetings and the resident involvement team can give you further advice. There are also short training sessions that you can attend to learn more about managing meetings. Some of the main points to think about when you are running a meeting are below:

- Start and finish on time and try to keep to the agenda
- Make sure people know what is being discussed and introduce any guests
- Do not let individuals take over the meeting
- Ask people to speak through the chair
- Ask people not to raise individual concerns at the meeting
- Stop people making offensive or personal remarks or using aggressive behaviour
- Discourage people from talking with one another when someone is already speaking
- Ensure everyone who has something to say is given an open opportunity to speak
- Encourage people to keep to the point and be brief.

Towards the end of the first meeting, it is a good idea to sum up what has been agreed and if possible, make arrangements for the next meeting.

By now, you will know if people support the idea of a local group, you should have a committee and an idea of what people are interested in. You may even have the beginning of a list of members. The committee can now set about planning the future meetings of the group and any other activities that the members are interested in.



Step 4

Arranging future general meetings

The committee (see below) is now responsible for providing direction to the group and making arrangements for meetings and other activities.

Two different types of meetings of the group should now take place:

- general meetings – details of these meetings will be promoted in the local area by flyers and posters and anyone who lives in the area can attend.
- committee meetings – these meetings are not normally promoted locally as they are primarily for members of the committee to attend.

Ideally, a committee meeting should be arranged at some point before each general meeting, in order for the committee to discuss any plans for the group and make arrangements for future general meetings.

The committee are responsible for producing an agenda for general meetings. The agenda should allow plenty of opportunity for members to discuss local issues with each other. There are a few standard items which should go on every agenda, such as taking apologies for absence, matters arising and any other business. An example of an agenda is [here](#) and in the appendix (1).

The agenda should reflect the interests of local people and members in particular. The committee should also try to invite guests to attend meetings to help the group deal with some of the issues and hopefully identify some solutions. Having different people to meetings to speak about various issues will help to make the meetings more interesting and more productive.

Don't forget to introduce the **'fun element'** – to entice people to meetings! For example, run a raffle, or a quick quiz. Make sure you provide refreshments – at least tea, coffee and cold drinks, perhaps there is a resident who can bake some cakes. You may also decide to set aside some time in the meeting for people to socialise and chat, or arrange a drop-in session where people can speak to council officers about their personal issues and concerns.

The committee



The committee is a small group of people who manage the work of the group. The committee are selected by the members at the first open meeting (see Step 3) and elections for a new committee are then held each year at the annual general meeting of the group.

As far as possible, the committee should reflect the make up of the people in the local area, in terms of tenure, ethnicity, age, etc. They also need to be in touch with local people and aware of local needs and issues.

The committee hold their own meetings in advance of general meetings, where they discuss plans and proposals in a bit more detail and agree what will be discussed at the general meetings. The committee will report any key outcomes from their meetings back to members at the general meetings. Any member can attend a committee meeting but they can only speak at the meeting with the chair's permission.

The committee organise the general meetings and the group's annual general meetings and make sure everyone who is entitled to attend is invited and that the meetings are properly promoted in the local area.

The committee can make suggestions or propose ideas to the group but should not make any major decisions without discussing the matter with members at a general meeting. For example, the committee might agree that the group needs to raise some money and will draw

up a list of suggestions. The matter will then be discussed at the next general meeting, where members will agree to hold a table top sale in the local hall on a Saturday morning.

The committee should ensure that whatever members decide at a meeting is put into action and that any events or activities are properly promoted and run. The committee should not be expected to do all the work – that is the idea of having a group - so members should be asked to support the group, by helping out with large events and activities.

In brief, the committee come up with ideas and suggestions but the whole group should make final decisions. The committee should make sure things happen as agreed, but the whole group should help to get things done.

The constitution

The constitution will outline the aims and the rules for the group. It will detail how the group will work, such as how often it meets, who can be a member, how meetings will be run and who is responsible for doing what.

The group should agree their constitution at an early stage. This can be straightforward, as a 'model' constitution is available for your group to use [here](#) or in the appendix (2). It covers all the main points that the average residents' group would need but the model can be adapted to suit the particular needs of your group if necessary.

The committee should discuss what they feel should be included and draft the constitution for the association, which can be presented to members at the next general meeting. Members may suggest changes at the meeting which can be agreed and written in to the final version.

The final version of the constitution must be agreed by the whole group (not just the committee) and ideally a copy of the final version should be signed and dated at a general meeting and kept as part of the association's records.

Then what?

At the beginning of this guide, it was noted that residents' associations are independent from the council, so as long as the group remains democratic and represents the needs of those living in the area - there is no real limit to what a group can achieve. It is up to you and your members to agree the future direction of the group.



For example, there may be plans to carry out some large scale works on the estate, or a proposal to change the bus routes in the area. The group could invite representatives from the relevant organisations to attend meetings to speak about the plans with people, to let them know exactly what is going on and dispel any rumours. If the proposal is not popular with local people, the group could become involved in negotiating with the organisation to try to find a better way forward.

Once the group has been going for a short while, it might be agreed to arrange a trip, or a social event for the local community. You might want to raise some money to help subsidise the cost of activities for those who are less well off.

Outline of committee roles

The chair

A common misconception is that the chair does everything. They do not – in fact they cannot. However, being a chair can take up a lot of time, as they become the focal point of the group and they do have final responsibility for ensuring that everything gets done!

The main responsibilities for the chair are:

- Setting agendas in partnership with the rest of the committee and in particular, the secretary.
- Ensuring that the group gets through all of its business at meetings in the time available.
- Keeping meetings in order – ensuring that everyone has an opportunity to be heard and stopping inappropriate language or behaviour.
- Making sure everyone is clear about what decisions have been taken.
- Ensuring that everyone knows what they are expected to do.



It is also important to note that the chair does not have any special powers within the group. The chair only has one vote and they should not make decisions on behalf of the group.

Outside of meetings, the chair is also responsible for guiding the group to achieve its aims, being aware of all activities carried out by the group and ensuring other members of the committee carry out their tasks as agreed.

The vice chair

The role of the vice chair is very similar to that of the chair. The main difference is that he or she will not expect to carry out much of the role, unless the chair is unwell or otherwise unavailable. Like an understudy in a play, he needs to be able to follow what is going on and be aware of current activities and future plans, in order to be able to step in at the last minute to manage the meeting, or take charge of an event.

The vice chair will need to work quite closely with the chair and other committee members to make sure they are aware of what is happening. Taking on the role of vice chair is also a great way to learn what is involved in being a chair. And they can provide valuable support to the chair, particularly with bigger projects.

The secretary

The role of secretary will vary from one group to another but tasks generally include:

- Taking the minutes in meetings
- Keeping the records of past minutes and meetings
- Setting the agenda in partnership with the chair and the rest of the committee



- Making arrangements for meetings, booking venues etc.
- Letting the committee and members know when and where the next meetings will be held
- Setting up and maintaining the membership records
- Sending and receiving letters on behalf of the group and keeping a record of all correspondence.

Taking notes at the meetings and producing minutes is the main focus of the role and many people worry that producing detailed minutes will take up lots of time and be quite challenging. However, for small groups the minutes don't need to be that detailed, as long as they record the decisions made, what actions were agreed and who by. The minutes can be handwritten but many prefer to use a computer to ensure they are clear and neat.

We have developed a training guide 'Administer your meetings in minutes' which you might want to have a look at. It contains information and advice about taking notes and how to produce minutes quickly and easily. This is available separately on the council website [here](#) or you can ask the resident involvement team for a hard copy.

The treasurer

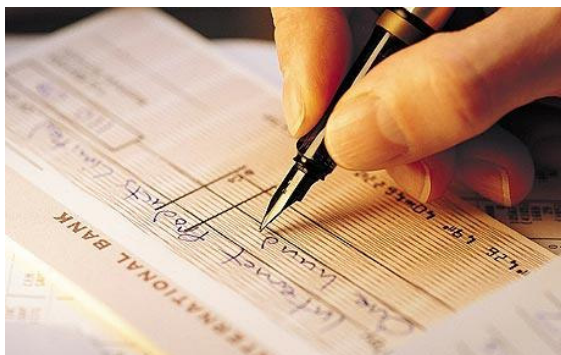
The treasurer is the person who has day-to-day responsibility for the groups money and for keeping accurate financial records. However, it is the group who has responsibility for deciding on how larger amounts of money are spent.

The group should set up a bank or building society account which requires at least two signatories for any withdrawals, one of whom will normally be the treasurer.

The main roles of a treasurer should include:

- Opening or maintaining a bank account in the name of the group and for paying money into the bank
- Keeping accurate records of all money received and issuing receipts
- Paying bills and keeping accurate records of all money paid out
- Setting up and maintaining accurate accounts for the group
- Keeping petty cash and a petty cash account book for day-to-day expenditure
- Preparing financial briefings for the committee and general meetings.

Handling someone else's money is a big responsibility and can often put people off volunteering for the role but following a few simple rules should reduce the worry:



- Be methodical and ensure your record-keeping is accurate
- Keep a record of all money received or paid – no matter how small
- Keep the association's money separate from your own
- Do not keep large amounts of cash at home – put it in the bank
- Check the bank statements carefully and regularly.

General committee members

As well as the four main committee roles above, all groups should have a few general committee members who will be available to help out with some of the practical aspects of running a residents' association as well as sharing the decision-making.

This will include:

- Attending meetings and taking part in decision-making
- Taking on specific responsibilities that arise from time to time (such as helping at an event)
- Helping promote meetings or distributing leaflets
- Organising refreshments
- Helping to arrange social activities
- Sharing personal experience, knowledge and skills with the group.

Do you need further help?

Please use the relevant links on the councils' website at www.croydon.gov.uk to take you to useful documents such as the model constitution and the code of conduct relating to those engaged in resident involvement – which details the way we would expect people to behave when they are taking part.

The council's resident involvement team have produced a training guide for anyone interested or involved in local resident groups or associations. The team can also provide lots of general advice and support residents in setting up a local group.

You can email the resident involvement team at hsg-residentparticipation@croydon.gov.uk or call us on 020 8726 6100.

Other organisations that provide general support and training to people who are setting up or running a local group:

- Tenant Participation Advisory Service

TPAS Ltd
Suite 4b Trafford Plaza
73 Seymour Grove
Manchester
M16 0LD

e-mail: info@tpas.org.uk
Tel: 0161 868 3500
Fax: 0161 877 6256



- You may find some general information from the website of Resident Associations in the UK (RAUK) – their address is www.residentsassociations.co.uk
- Other housing organisations and councils have information on their websites about setting up a resident's group or association which you may find helpful.

Easy Street Residents' Group

General Meeting Agenda

Old School Hall, Croydon. 14th September 2014

	Item	Time
1	Welcome, introductions and apologies	7.00
2	Approval of minutes of last meeting (15th June 2014)	7.05
3	Matters arising from last meeting	7.10
4	Bus timetable changes	7.30
5	Tenancy matters (George Smith - Tenancy officer)	7.50
6	Estate refurbishment project	8.15
7	Planning family activities for school holidays	8.35
8	Report from local police (PCSO Sue Taylor)	8.45
9	Any other business	8.50
10	Date and agenda items for next meeting	8.55

Meeting should close at 9.00

You don't have to, but you might want to put a reminder on your agenda about how members of your group should behave at the meeting.

Rules for this meeting

- Respect and support the Chair
- Please put your hand up if you want to talk, and then speak through the Chair
- Let people have their say and don't talk across people.
- Please be brief and keep to the point
- Don't use offensive language
- One meeting only. Only one person to speak at a time
- Switch off mobile phones
- Please don't discuss individual issues

DRAFT CONSTITUTION OF [enter agreed name here] RESIDENT'S GROUP / ASSOCIATION

1. The Group / Association is known as [enter agreed name here] **Resident's Group / Association**

The area covered by the Group / Association is [detail geographic area here]

AIMS

2. The aims of the Group / Association are:
 - To represent the views of members to Croydon Council and other relevant partners and to work towards ensuring that the best interests of members are served.
 - To ensure that all members are consulted regularly and that all residents entitled to membership are encouraged to join.
 - To improve local housing conditions and the environment.
 - To encourage a greater sense of community.

[the group may choose to add further aims here]

MEMBERSHIP

3. Membership is open to all persons 16 years or over living in the area who accept the aims of the Group / Association, (including all tenants, leaseholders and freeholders), irrespective of age, race, gender, sexuality, disability, political or religious beliefs, or marital status. As far as possible, the membership should reflect the make-up of the local population.
4. Members shall at all times conduct themselves in a reasonable manner at meetings of or in premises used by the Group / Association. A member may be suspended from the Group / Association for failure to observe this, or for any other conduct not in line with the aims of the Group / Association. Any member so suspended has the right of appeal to the following General Meeting, before permanent suspension from the Group / Association takes place.
5. Membership ends when a member moves out from the area.
6. Every member shall sign an annual written consent to become a member.
7. Racist or sexist behaviour will not be tolerated and will be grounds for suspension.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

8. An annual subscription shall be set at the Annual General Meeting of the Group / Association, and shall be kept as low as possible. Only those who have paid the agreed subscription will be deemed to be members.

[OR – if the group agrees not to charge a subscription, use the alternative wording below]

8. The Group / Association has agreed not to charge an annual subscription or other form of membership fees.
9. Subscriptions or other money raised by or on behalf of the Group / Association may be used only to further the aims of the Group / Association.

CONDUCT OF BUSINESS

10. The business of the Group / Association will be conducted by a committee normally elected at the Annual General Meeting, which shall consist of a Chair, Vice Chair, Treasurer, Secretary and **not less than two other** members. As far as possible, the composition of the committee shall reflect the local population of the area.
11. Councillors or employees of the council shall not represent the Group / Association in its dealings with the council or be members of the committee.
12. The election or removal of officers or committee members may take place only at a General Meeting of the Group / Association. The committee may temporarily fill any vacancy arising among the officers of the Group / Association from its other members until the next General Meeting. The committee has the power to suspend a member or committee member by a simple majority vote until the next general meeting.
13. An officer or committee member must declare any relevant personal interest in a matter under discussion. The committee shall have the right to determine whether that member should withdraw, or be allowed to speak but not vote, or be allowed to speak and vote.

COMMITTEE MEETINGS

14. The committee shall meet not less than three times a year and shall be open to any members of the Group / Association wishing to attend, who may speak at the discretion of the Chair but not vote.
15. The committee shall monitor the work, finances and membership of the Group / Association.
16. The committee shall report to each General Meeting on its activities since the last General Meeting.

GENERAL MEETINGS

17. General Meetings of the Group / Association, open to all members to speak and vote, shall be held not less than twice a year. Decisions taken at these meetings shall be binding on the committee. Decisions shall be taken by a simple majority of members present and voting. All members shall be given not less than 14 days notice of any General Meeting.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

18. The committee shall call an Annual General Meeting of the Group / Association each [insert month]. Not less than 21 days notice shall be given of the AGM to all members and to all those eligible for membership. A formal application for membership shall also be distributed at this time. A representative of the council shall also be invited to attend.
19. At this meeting:
 - The committee shall present their annual report.
 - The Treasurer shall present the audited accounts of the Group / Association for the past year.
 - An independent person or body to audit / check the financial records of the Group / Association for the forthcoming year, shall be appointed.
 - The officers and committee for the next year shall be elected.
 - Any proposals submitted to the Secretary in writing not less than 14 days in advance of the meeting shall be considered.
20. The minutes of the AGM and the audited accounts should be submitted to the council, together with the names and addresses of the officers and committee members of the Group / Association.

SPECIAL GENERAL MEETING

21. The Secretary shall call a Special General Meeting at the request of a majority of the committee, or on receipt of a written request by at least one third of the membership of the Group / Association. The Secretary must give at least 7 days notice of the Special General Meeting to all members, which shall take place within 21 days of the request.

QUORUM

(The minimum number of members who must be present before a meeting may proceed)

22. The quorum for committee meetings of the Group / Association shall **be four members** or one third of committee members (whichever is greater). The quorum for all General Meetings shall be one fifth of the membership.

VOTING

23. Those attending a meeting where members of the committee are selected, will be informed that any member may stand for any position on the committee. Any member may nominate individuals or volunteer themselves for any such positions.
24. Where there is a contest for officers of the Committee, or where the Group / Association are unable to reach agreement on an issue, voting will be carried out by a written ballot.

25. Each household will have one vote only. The Chair will have only one vote, they will not have an additional or casting vote.
26. Where voting is required and a council officer is in attendance, they may be asked to administer and supervise the voting process.

NOTICE OF MEETINGS

27. Notice of all General Meetings and the Annual General Meeting will be sent to each member's home address and will include the date, time and place of the meeting and the agenda of matters to be discussed.

In addition, notices or flyers will be used to ensure all those entitled to participate are made aware of the details of these meetings.

DUTIES OF THE OFFICERS

28. The officers of the Group / Association have a duty to further the aims of the Group / Association.
29. The Chair shall guide the meetings of the Group / Association and its committee. If the Chair is absent, the Vice Chair will take over.
30. The Treasurer shall open and/or maintain a bank or building society account in the name of the Group / Association. All cheques must be signed by the Treasurer and at least one other nominated committee member who is from a different household and not related. Unless there are exceptional circumstances, there will be only one bank account for the Group / Association, into which all monies are paid.
31. The Treasurer shall keep proper accounts of income and expenditure and details of subscriptions paid. He/she will also report on them as required by the committee, at General Meetings. The accounts should be available for inspection by any member of the Group / Association.
32. The Secretary is responsible for arranging meetings and giving the relevant notice to members. The Secretary shall ensure that a proper record is kept of all meetings of the Group / Association and its committee in the form of minutes, and make them available as required by the committee. A register of members' names and addresses will also be kept by the Secretary.
33. A member appointed to represent the Group / Association in discussions or communication with any other body (including the media) shall act on the instructions of the committee and shall report back to the following committee meeting or General Meeting, whichever is the sooner. No member of the Group / Association will speak on behalf of the Group / Association without the prior approval of the committee or members.

ALTERATION TO THE CONSTITUTION

34. Any proposal to change this Constitution must be given to the Secretary not less than 28 days before the General Meeting at which it is to be discussed. Any change

requires the agreement of two thirds of those present and voting at the meeting. Such changes made to this Constitution must be notified to the Council within three weeks.

- 35. The committee or, if a committee no longer exists, a majority of the remaining members of the Group / Association, can propose that the Group / Association should be wound up. They must give to all those eligible for membership at least 14 days notice of the meeting at which the matter is to be discussed.
- 36. For the sole purpose of dissolution a quorum need not apply, and the Group / Association may be dissolved by a two thirds majority of those present. Any assets remaining when the Group / Association has paid all debts shall be applied for such purposes of benefit to the community as the meeting shall decide. The Council must be notified of the decision.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITMENT

- 37. The Group / Association shall positively promote equal opportunities and diversity within the community and within its membership, and work for the elimination of discrimination against persons on the basis of race, gender, marital status, age, sexuality, disability, political and religious beliefs.

The above constitution was discussed, approved and supported by the Group / Association at the meeting which took place on

.....(*Date of meeting*)

at which the three members below were present:

Chair or Vice chair:

Print Name

Signature.....Date.....

Member:

Print Name

Signature.....Date.....

Member:

Print Name

Signature.....Date.....