

Voluntary and Community Action

MEMBERSHIP POLICY

1. General Policy Statement

Voluntary and Community Action South Bedfordshire places the needs of local voluntary organisations, community groups and volunteers at the heart of its activities. It provides a range of services that seek to increase the quality, quantity, contribution and accessibility of voluntary and community action throughout South Bedfordshire.

An important part of achieving this is providing the widest possible range of opportunities for local voluntary organisations, community groups, volunteers and others to be involved in the work of the organisation, including membership of Voluntary and Community Action. Membership offers a range of benefits, over and above those available to users of the organisation's services.

As a charitable company limited by guarantee, membership of the Voluntary and Community Action South Bedfordshire is governed by the organisation's governing document. Nothing in this policy shall over-ride anything set out in the Memorandum and Articles of Association or the Companies Acts 1985, 1989 and 2006. Under the governing document the trustees may establish classes of membership with different rights and obligations; the trustees have decided not to establish different classes of membership.

2. Purpose

This policy applies to local voluntary organisations, community groups and other organisations that wish to become members of Voluntary and Community Action South Bedfordshire. The purpose of this policy is to set out the criteria, rights and benefits of membership, and the procedures for dealing with membership applications, renewals and terminations.

3. Membership Criteria

Membership is open to organisations that operate within (all or part of) Bedfordshire and support the promotion and development of local voluntary and community action.

Membership is also open to individuals who live, work or volunteer in Bedfordshire and who support the promotion and development of local voluntary and community action.

The term *local voluntary and community action* includes voluntary and community activity, social enterprise, formal volunteering and informal community participation.

Voluntary and Community Action must also have regard to the total number and type of organisations in membership as it's governing document stipulates that the number of Individual and non-voluntary and community sector organisations in membership of the organisation shall not exceed one quarter of the total number of Members. Non-voluntary and community sector organisations shall include parish councils, public sector agencies, academic institutions, partnerships and businesses (excluding social enterprises).

4. Rights of Membership

Members' rights are to:

- appoint a named representative to attend, speak and vote at general meetings of the organisation;
- propose and second motions;
- stand for and nominate Members for appointment to the Trustee Board (if eligible to do so under the organisation's Memorandum and Articles of Association).

Membership is not transferable to anyone else or any other organisation.

5. Responsibilities of Membership

Members' responsibilities are to:

- meet the membership criteria;
- pay the annual Membership fee and any other fees charged for services;
- complete the annual user survey;
- complete the annual database pro-forma and keep Voluntary and Community Action informed of changes;
- inform Voluntary and Community Action of the named representative attending general meetings of the organisation.

As a charitable company limited by guarantee Members' liability for any debts the organisation may have, if it ceases to exist, shall not exceed £1.

6. Benefits of Membership

The benefits of Membership are:

- to receive a copy of the organisation's Memorandum and Articles of Association free of charge (upon request);
- to receive a Membership Certificate;
- to receive a copy of the Annual Report and Accounts;
- reduced fees for training workshops and courses, publications, photocopying and document services, equipment hire etc.;
- priority booking for training workshops, courses and development support;
- discounted fees for inserts in *Action!* newsletter and other mailings;

in addition to the benefits offered to all users through our usual services, which include:

- regular mailings and newsletters;
- an extensive programme of training workshops and events;
- free advice, guidance, information and consultancy;
- access to a substantial library of books, multi-media resources and other publications;
- assistance with the recruitment of volunteers;
- access to grants and funding advice.

7. Membership Fees

Membership fees will be set annually by the Finance and General Purposes sub-Committee at the time of agreeing the annual budget and confirmed by the Trustee Board in November each year. In setting Membership fees the Finance and General Purposes sub-Committee and Trustee Board will have regard to the needs of small voluntary organisations and community groups operating on

low incomes. A Membership Discount of around 20% will apply to those members that renew their membership by 15 January each year.

Membership fees are included in a separate Pricing Policy and different fees apply, dependant upon the type and size of organisation:

- Voluntary Organisation, Community Group, Club or Society [with income of under £5,000 pa];
- Voluntary Organisation, Community Group, Club or Society [with income of £5,000 or more pa];
- Social Enterprise;
- Parish Council;
- Public Sector Agency, Academic Institution or Partnership;
- Business (excluding social enterprises);
- Individual.

8. Membership Application Process

Organisations and individuals applying for membership must complete the relevant Membership Application Form and pay the required Membership Fee. Organisations are also asked to provide information on their activities or services and a copy of their governing document for information.

9. Approval of Membership

The Information Officer will assess each application; in doing so they will have regard to:

- the purpose and activities of the organisation;
- whether the purpose and activities of the organisation are consistent with the *Values Statement and Equality and Diversity Policy* of Voluntary and Community Action;
- the organisation's governing document and legal structure;
- whether or not it is located and/or delivers services in (all or part of) South Bedfordshire;

and, if necessary, request any additional information required. The information supplied will be checked against that already held on our own database and that of the Charity Commission (if a charity) to see if it meets the membership and approval criteria.

After each application has been considered and accepted the Information Officer will issue a letter confirming membership and setting out the services they are entitled to as Members. A Membership Certificate will also be issued following approval and annually after the renewal of membership.

Details of all new Members will added to the database and a Register of Members' names and addresses maintained.

Where a membership Application does not meet the criteria set out above, their application will be referred to the Trustee Board for consideration. The trustees may only refuse an application if, acting reasonably and properly, they consider it to be in the best interests of the Voluntary and Community Action to refuse the application.

If the trustees refuse an application for membership they must inform the applicant in writing of the reasons for the refusal within twenty one days of the decision and must consider any written representations the applicant may make about the decision. The Trustees' decision following any written representations must be notified to the applicant in writing but shall be final.

10. Membership Renewal

Membership runs from the 1 January to the 31 December each year. Organisations and individuals taking out membership any time during October to December will have their membership extended to 31 December of the following year.

Each November Members will receive the annual membership mailing, which will include a covering letter and the following:

- a Directory Update Form;
- a User Survey;
- a Membership Renewal Form;
- a Freepost envelope for the return of the above.

Organisations not in membership will also receive the annual membership mailing with an invitation to take out membership of Voluntary and Community Action (and a membership Application Form).

11. Termination of Membership

Membership is terminated if:

- the Member fails to renew their membership;
- the Member dies or, if it is an organisation, ceases to exist;
- the Member resigns by giving written notice to Voluntary and Community Action
- any sum due from the Member to the Voluntary and Community Action is not paid in full within six months of it falling due;
- the Member is removed from membership by a resolution of the trustees that it is in the best interests of Voluntary and Community Action that membership is terminated.

A resolution to remove a Member from membership may only be passed if:

- the Member has been given at least twenty-one days' notice in writing of the meeting of the trustees at which the resolution will be proposed and the reason why it is to be proposed;
- the Member or, at the option of the Member, the Member's representative (who need not be a Member of Voluntary and Community Action) has been allowed to make representations to the meeting.

12. Monitoring and Review

The effectiveness of this policy, and its procedures, will be monitored and amended as and when necessary by the Director. Significant changes will require the approval of the Trustee Board. The policy will also be reviewed every three years as part of a continuing review of organisational policies.