

Tell me more about.....Governance?

Governance is the process by which a governing body (the Board, Managing Committee, Council of Management or whatever it maybe called), ensures than an organisation is effectively and properly run. It involves ensuring the organisation:

- Is working with staff, volunteers, service users, the organisation's members & other stakeholders to develop, maintain and keep under review, the organisation's vision or mission, & has an ethical or values framework for the organisation's activities/services;
- Has clear goals & priorities for its work and clear policies & procedures for doing the work, and that these are consistent with the organisation's values;
- That all staff (paid & unpaid) and board members are aware of these values, goals, priorities, policies and procedures;
- That decisions about the organisation and its work are properly & sensibly made; effectively implemented;
- The organisation has adequate resources (people, expertise, money, time, space, equipment, materials and energy) to carry out its work;
- Develops and maintains appropriate relationships internally (with its members, users of its activities & services, paid & voluntary staff, board members and others within the organisation) and externally (with its supporters, donors, funders, other agencies, the media, policy-makers, Charity Commission etc);
- That the work of the organisation is done effectively & efficiently, and that the people who do the work are properly managed & supported;
- That the organisation's money, equipment, property and other assets are safeguarded & are properly used, and that the organisation & its assets are not exposed to unnecessary or unacceptable risk;
- That the organisation complies with the law, with the conditions of contracts & other agreements, and with the requirements of its governing document (Constitution, Rules, Trust Deed or Memorandum and Articles of Association);
- That appropriate accountability to funders, supporters, members, service users, regulatory bodies and other stakeholders.

Governance is not necessarily about doing; it's about ensuring things are done. In a small organisation, it is almost inevitable that Board members will be involved not only in making decisions and monitoring work, but in doing some (or all) of that work.

As an organisation grows, the Board becomes less involved in its day-to-day activities, delegating to staff the responsibility for most tasks. Decision making may also be delegated to staff or other individuals, or to sub-committees, but this should always be on condition that all decisions are within policy frameworks agreed by the Board.

In many organisations, this process of delegation can cause confusion. Where are the boundaries between the responsibilities of the Board as a whole; sub-committees; the organisations or Board's officers; individual Board members; or between Board members, the Chief Executive and Senior Managers? Whose job is it to draw up the strategic plan and budgets; or agree to start a new service or undertake specific fundraising campaigns; decide what to say to the media when someone makes public allegations against the organisation; decide whether to start disciplinary proceedings against an employee; decide whether to dismiss an employee? There are no right answers to these questions, each organisation must decide for itself what the Board as a whole takes on; what is delegated to the Chair, Treasurer or other Board members or sub-committees and what is delegated to the Chief Executive or to other staff through the Chief Executive.