

## Responsibilities of bureau trustees, trustee boards and their officers

### Introduction

The term 'trustee board' refers to the governing body of the bureau. Trustees may also be known as 'directors' or 'management committee members' – they are the same people..

The board of trustees is collectively responsible for the governance of the bureau, including setting an overall vision. This can broadly be defined as:

- holding staff accountable, and being ultimately accountable for the activities of the bureau
- providing leadership to all in the bureau
- developing policy
- strategic management.

Each trustee is accountable for all the decisions taken by the trustee board, including those taken if they are absent. Once the trustee board has reached a decision, all individual members of the board are bound by it and must support it. No one member or group of members (e.g. a committee) has the authority to take decisions or decide policy unless the board has clearly delegated authority to them. The board should not rely on the advice of an individual trustee, such as the treasurer, as decisions are the collective responsibility of the whole board.

### Governance

The board is responsible for *governance*: taking a high-level overview of the bureau and its place in the community, and using that to make long-term decisions about strategic direction and values, and to safeguard the good name and ethos of the bureau and the CAB service. As the governing body, it has overall responsibility for the management of the bureau.

The board delegates the *operational management* of the bureau to the bureau manager - making sure it runs smoothly and effectively - and delivers the service agreed with the board. This essentially means that the board gives the manager duties and powers to represent them, and to manage the bureau on their behalf.

The board and the manager will work together on *strategic management* – taking decisions on how best to implement the values and strategic direction of the bureau.

### Strategic management

#### Strategy

For the purposes of the Citizens Advice service, strategy can be defined as both where you want to go and the broad direction you might take:

- looking ahead to a vision of where the bureau should be in the long term: being outward looking, identifying the key issues and opportunities and

- setting the broad direction the bureau should take, agreeing strategies for different aspects of the work.

The formulation of the vision and strategies need to have involvement from board members, management and bureau staff. The operational aspect of turning the strategy into a business plan and then into reality is the work of the manager and their team.

The formulation of the vision of the future and the strategies to realise it must be under constant review. In an ever-changing environment developing strategy is a continuing process.

The vision for the future and the strategies needed to achieve that future must be informed by strategic thinking.

### **Strategic thinking**

Setting strategy is not just about looking forward and thinking about the longer term. Strategic thinking includes:

- analysis of the external world, including the positions of competitors, partners and funders and the needs and desires of clients and potential clients
- reflection and analysis of past experiences and what has been learnt
- analysis of the current strengths and weaknesses of the bureau.

### **Activities that inform strategic thinking**

- monitoring and evaluation of bureau services against agreed performance indicators and success criteria
- a critical analysis of the bureau's internal strength and weaknesses which includes the role and development of the trustee board
- staff and volunteer involvement in analysis and future direction
- community profiles
- client profiles
- client satisfaction surveys
- user involvement
- awareness of changes and developments at bureau, Citizens Advice, local, national and European levels
- consideration of social, political, economic, environmental and technological developments.

### **Business planning / overseeing operational management**

The board sets the overall strategic direction of the bureau. This involves developing a vision of the service that the board would like the bureau to provide – the service that the

community needs – within a certain long-term time-frame (usually three to five years or longer). The board should consult with other community groups and community representatives, and with the bureau manager, to help it develop this vision. Then, in conjunction with the bureau staff, volunteers and manager, it will map out how this can be achieved by setting aims and objectives and agreeing a plan.

The board is responsible for ensuring that the plan is realistic, given the resources the bureau has available or can obtain in the future. The board will approve an annual budget (prepared by the manager and recommended by the treasurer). This approval signifies that it believes that resources have been allocated in such a way that the business plan for the year can be achieved and that the bureau will remain financially viable. It should also ensure that regular risk assessments are carried out and that contingency plans and a reserves policy are in place.

The plan must further the bureau's objects (its reason for existing), as set out in its governing document, and resources must not be spent on anything other than these objects. The plan should also take into account the requirements of funders so that funds are allocated to the activities for which they are given.

The board will establish financial controls and reporting procedures so that it can be sure that resources are being spent appropriately. It is then the board's responsibility to monitor both the progress of the plan, the achievement of grant and other income and the committing of expenditure against the budget to ensure that the bureau performs as expected, and it will agree corrective action with the manager if necessary.

The board is responsible for ensuring that the bureau has adequate resources to carry out its plan, and that it remains financially stable. It may be directly involved in securing funding for the bureau, or may delegate this function entirely to the manager or other staff. In addition, the board needs to ensure the effective and efficient administration of the bureau.

The board also has the opportunity to contribute to the strategic management of Citizens Advice nationally, by participating in the national policy- and decision-making process.

## **Accountability**

The board employs staff and involves volunteers to deliver the bureau service. The board will directly recruit, support and monitor the performance of the bureau manager, and will delegate the recruitment, support and supervision of other staff and volunteers to the manager. It must make sure that there are comprehensive, fair and legal employment procedures in place for paid staff, and that good practice is followed in the recruitment and management of volunteers.

While the manager is responsible for the day-to-day running of the bureau, the board members are accountable for the actions of the manager. Their role is to set a framework of values and policies within which the manager, staff and volunteers will operate. They should not get involved in the day-to-day management of the bureau, but rather should ensure that there are systems in place that will enable the bureau to operate effectively.

They should ensure that they remain informed about the business and activities of the bureau, through attendance at board meetings and regular reports from the manager. This will enable them to monitor and evaluate the performance of the bureau against the aims

that they, in conjunction with the manager, have set. Each member needs to be sufficiently well informed to understand the business, in order to hold the manager to account and therefore be able to justify their decisions. In this way they can be accountable for the management of the bureau without being directly involved in its running.

The board is accountable to the Charity Commission, Companies House, funders, the local community, Citizens Advice, and to itself. It is responsible for keeping its own house in order. It should do this by ensuring a suitable level of skills, experience, commitment and performance from the board, ensuring succession planning for key roles, such as chair, treasurer, sub-committee chairs and members, and ensuring that each member has sufficient knowledge of the bureau and the service it delivers.

### **Developing policy**

The board has ultimate policy-making responsibility. Policies need to ensure that the bureau complies with:

- all relevant legislation (for example, charity law, company law if the bureau is incorporated, employment and health and safety law)
- the Citizens Advice membership scheme
- the bureau's governing document (its Memorandum and Articles of Association).

These policies provide the framework within which decisions are made and the bureau operates. The policies must enable the bureau to pursue its objects (as set out in the governing document) and its strategic plan.

### **Board review**

The board must on a regular basis review its own operation. It is best practice to consider how the board is made up, which means looking at the diversity of its trustees, the skills it needs and the organisation of its work.

### **Trustee role descriptions and skills / qualities**

See Role descriptions for:

- descriptions of officers' roles (e.g. chair and treasurer)
- description of duties of all trustees
- a list of skills and qualities needed by all trustees.