

Queen Edith's Community Forum Charitable status and constitution

For several months the Queen Edith's Community Forum (QECF) officers have been thinking and seeking advice about how to change our formal structure.

At present we are an unincorporated association. Under this structure, we have become a well-organised and successful group, active in several ways consistent with our object as laid out in our constitution "To stimulate and facilitate local community development in the Queen Edith's area of the city of Cambridge".

One of the achievements of which we are most proud is the creation of the Queen Edith's Community Food Hub, a joint undertaking with the parish churches of St James and St John the Evangelist. Local support for the Food Hub in the form of financial donations has underpinned our ability to do this work. However, because of the generosity of these donations, and the fact that they are passed through the QECF bank account, we have been advised by Cambridge Council for Voluntary Service that we must register with the Charity Commission. (Any charity with an income exceeding £5,000 per annum must be registered.)

Registering as a charity would also make additional opportunities available to us:

- If we had a formally recognised status, we could obtain more grants and external funding from trusts or donors who only give to charities
- We could claim back income tax on donations paid through Gift Aid
- Donations made via PayPal would be subject to reduced fees

We were advised that we could either register as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation or a Charitable Interest Company, but that the former was more appropriate to QECF's activities. Hence we have drafted a new constitution, using the model on the Charity Commission website. The constitution is a comprehensive document which covers the charity's powers, how to handle conflicts of interest, how decisions are taken, the rules for meetings, the role of trustees, and the annual report and accounts. It will be very helpful for the first trustees to have clear rules and procedures.

The most important part of the constitution is the definition of our object, which defines the purpose of the charity. This is our current draft:

"The object of the CIO is the promotion of **community capacity building** for the public benefit of the members of the community of Queen Edith's in such a way that they are better able to identify, and help meet, their needs and to participate more fully in society. This will be achieved in particular but not exclusively by:

- (a) promoting volunteering and the voluntary sector
- (b) increasing social inclusion by providing a local network group that encourages and enables financially and socially disadvantaged members of the community to participate more effectively within the wider community
- (c) fostering links to other community organisations"

In order to register with the Charity Commission, we have to use their model constitution. Our draft constitution is [here](#), and a Key Points Summary is [here](#). The left-hand column of the constitution provides guidance notes for each clause. Note that:

- We will keep our existing name
- Clause 3 details our charitable object
- In the event of a wind up, trustees will have no financial liability or personal responsibility.
- We must have at least three and at most 8 trustees. We propose that the existing officers of QECF, who were approved at the AGM, should be the charity's first trustees.

There is one important point in our existing constitution that is not included in the Charity Commission model, which is that all payments require two signatures. We will address this in a separate Policies and Procedures note, to be approved by the trustees.

The next step is to discuss the draft constitution and this briefing at an EGM of the Community Forum, to be held online on Thursday 10th February at 7pm.