OnSide
Here for young people

TRUSTEE HANDBOOK

YOUR GUIDE TO BEING
A YOUTH ZONE TRUSTEE

WHAT WE'LL COVER

1. Organisational Purpose
2. Leadership
3. Integrity
4. Decision making, risk and control
5. Board effectiveness
6. Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
7. Openness and accountability

ORGANISATIONAL PURPOSE

Welcome to the Network

Congratulations on joining the OnSide Network. Your time, experience, and leadership as a trustee are vital to the success of your Youth Zone. Together, we're helping shape a generation of young people who are happier, healthier, and better equipped to meet life's challenges.

Purpose of this Handbook

This guide supports you in your trustee role, especially if charity governance is new to you. Many trustees bring boardroom experience from other sectors; this handbook bridges that gap with best practices tailored to the charity environment.

Each Youth Zone is an independent charity and company limited by guarantee, with its own governing document. While part of the wider OnSide Network, a federation, we maintain local accountability and governance through our own Board of Trustees.

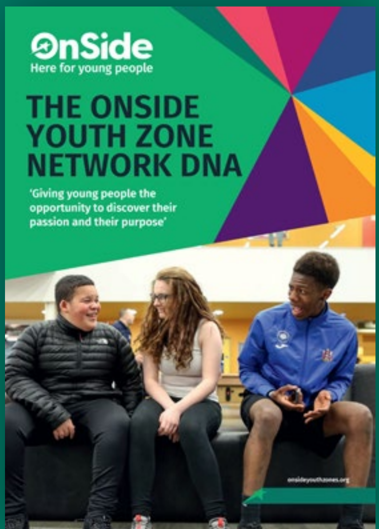
What Trustees Do

Trustees are ultimately responsible for ensuring the Youth Zone is well-run and delivers on its charitable aims. This includes appointing a Chief Executive, shaping strategy, and overseeing delivery with care, diligence, and transparency.

The OnSide Model

Inspired by Bolton Lads and Girls Club, OnSide has developed a growing network of Youth Zones. Each builds on the learning of those before it. Our shared 'DNA' provides the vision and values that guide us, balancing local needs with shared ambition.

Click here to read the full DNA document

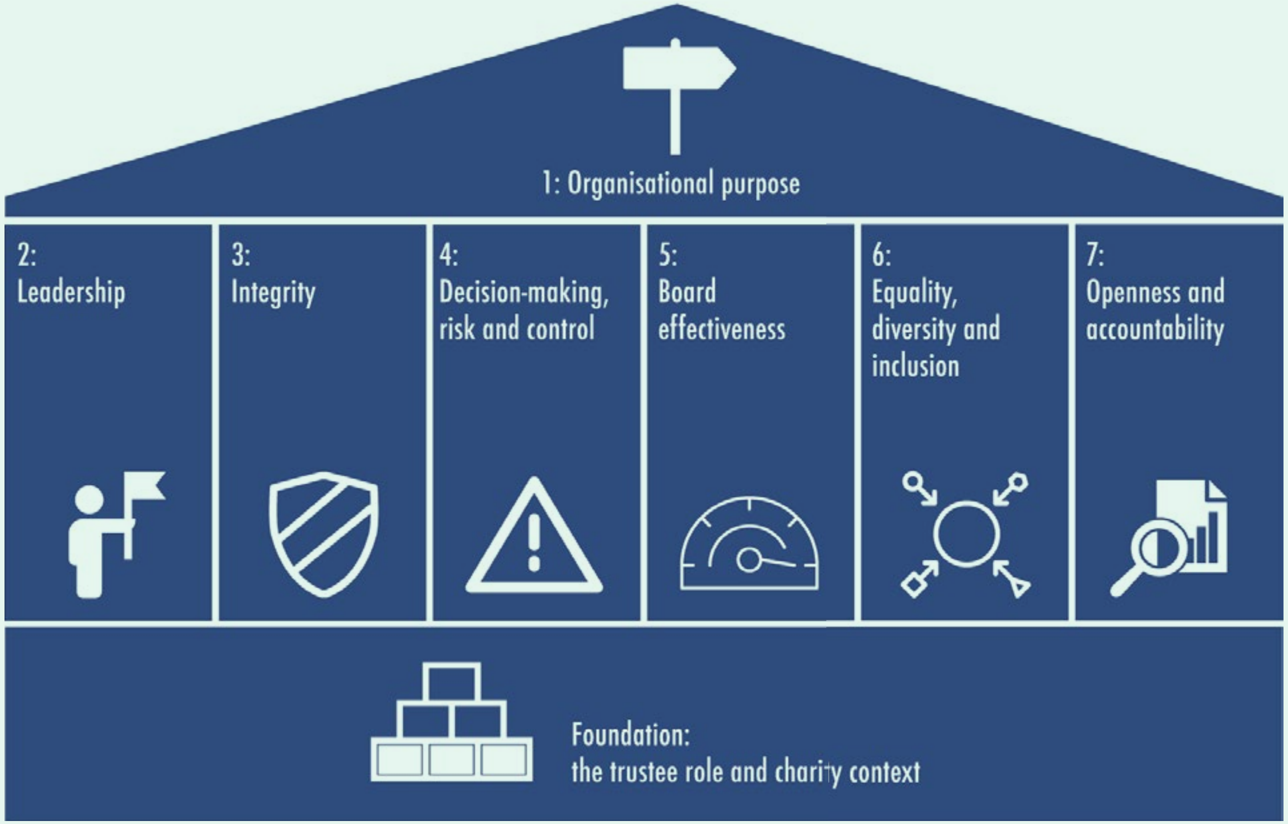


Charity Governance Code Principles

The Charity Governance Code (CGC) offers a framework for continuous improvement and creativity in governance. It goes beyond legal requirements to help charities strive for the highest standards of leadership and impact. This trustee handbook is organised against the CGC principles.

Key principles include:

- Organisational purpose
- Leadership
- Integrity
- Decision-making, risk and control
- Board effectiveness
- Equity, diversity and inclusion
- Openness and accountability

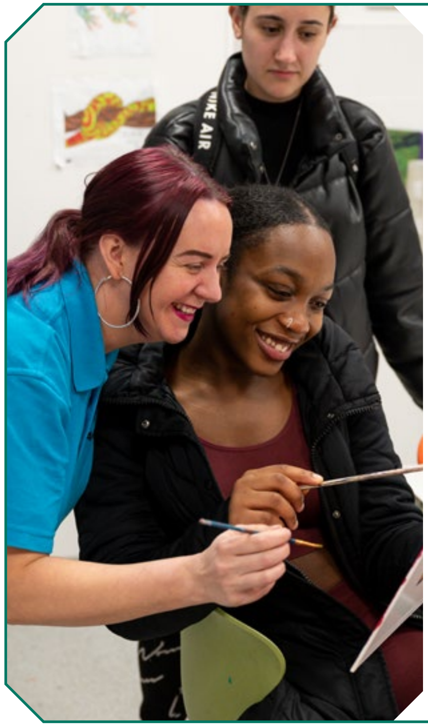


WHAT GUIDES OUR WORK

Charitable Purpose and Trustee Responsibility

Charities exist to deliver public benefit through their stated purpose. Trustees are responsible for ensuring this purpose is fulfilled effectively and responsibly. Failing to do so risks letting down the young people, funders, and supporters who place their trust in the Youth Zone. The Board's core role is to guide strategy, monitor performance, and provide assurance.

Trustees also have a duty to broader stakeholders, including communities and the environment. Every decision should reflect the Youth Zone's values and use resources responsibly.



Purpose with Impact

The Board must clearly understand the Youth Zone's purpose and ensure governance structures support both delivery and sustainability. Regular reviews help keep the purpose relevant and aligned with young people's evolving needs.

The Youth Zone's formal purpose is defined in its governing document. Its day-to-day mission is expressed as:

- **Providing a safe, fun space** for young people to build social networks and develop personally
- Supporting young people to live **healthier, happier lives**
- Enabling young people to **better face life's challenges**
- Supporting young people to **raise their aspirations** and **fulfil their potential**
- **Strengthen communities** by supporting young people to be **empowered, active, responsible citizens**

Strategic Planning and Delivery

The Board, led by the Chair, ensures a clear strategy is in place.

This includes:

A long-term Strategic Plan (typically 3–5 years) that sets direction, priorities, and desired impact.

An annual Business Plan that translates strategy into action, with measurable goals, a realistic budget, and alignment to local needs and Board ambition.

The Business Plan should not be constrained by current staff capacity; it must be supported by appropriate resources and partnerships. The Board approves the plan and monitors progress through regular meetings and staff reports. Key focus areas include results, resources, partnerships, communications, safeguarding, and health & safety.

*To help keep track, **this document** outlines a board forward plan for the year.*

Measuring and Evaluating Impact

Understanding and improving impact is central to the Youth Zone's mission. Trustees ensure performance is measured and insights are used to drive learning and improvement. Here is an **overview of impact measurement** at Youth Zones.

Youth Zones use Salesforce to record and analyse data across individual, project, organisational, and network levels. Trustees are encouraged to request a Salesforce briefing to understand how data informs decision-making.

Impact is measured across five areas:

- **Members:** Attendance data shows who attends, demand and quality - young people 'vote with their feet.'
- **Activity:** Participation and engagement levels help link involvement to progression.
- **Progression:** Personal development is tracked through five soft outcomes and relevant hard outcomes (e.g. qualifications, employment).
    - **Confidence** – Belief in self, a positive self-image, and a sense of control over one's life
    - **Relationships (social skills)** – Ability and willingness to build positive relationships and engage with others
    - **Emotional intelligence & resilience** – Understanding, expressing, and managing emotions, empathy for others, and coping with setbacks
    - **Health (physical & mental)** – Wellbeing, safety, and positive health behaviours
    - **Aspiration & achievement** – Goal setting, motivation, and taking action in education, training or work
- **Positive Lifestyle Changes:** Sustained engagement often leads to broader benefits like improved school attendance, academic outcomes and reduced antisocial behaviour.
- **Quality of Delivery:** Assessed using the **Excellence Framework**, which sets standards and guides improvement plans.

The Board is ultimately accountable for performance and transparency to stakeholders and funders.

LEADERSHIP

Setting Direction and Culture

An effective Board provides strategic direction and inspiring leadership aligned with the Youth Zone's purpose and values. Trustees play a vital role in shaping strategy, overseeing delivery, and fostering a positive culture and reputation.

Trustee Responsibilities

Trustees are responsible for governance and oversight – not day-to-day operations. Their legal duties include:

- Ensuring the charity pursues its purpose for public benefit
- Complying with the governing document and charity law including reporting serious incidents to the Charity Commission and filing annual returns
- Acting in the charity's best interests, making balanced and informed decisions and avoiding conflicts of interest
- Managing resources responsibly, including overseeing third-party providers. Avoiding exposing the charity's assets, beneficiaries or reputation to undue risk
- Acting with reasonable care and skill, giving time and attention to their role
- Ensuring the charity is accountable, including to funders, stakeholders, and regulators

Trustees must understand the Youth Zone's work and maintain open communication with staff, where they feel confident to share insights and feedback, to support informed decision-making.

BOARD ROLES AND PORTFOLIOS

Charitable Purpose and Trustee Responsibility

The Chair leads the Board, supports the Chief Executive, and fosters good governance. Trustees are encouraged to take on defined roles or portfolios to champion key areas and support staff leads.

Some trustees may hold multiple portfolios, but roles like Chair and Treasurer should remain distinct from Legal or Governance to maintain balance. Trustees are encouraged to build relationships with staff leads, offering strategic support while respecting accountability lines.

Although responsibilities are distributed, the Board shares collective responsibility. Lead roles enhance oversight and staff support, not replace shared accountability. Here is a list of recommended trustee roles with links to Role Profiles.

Recommended Trustee Roles

Chair	Leads the Board and supports the Chief Executive
Deputy Chair	Supports the Chair and acts as intermediary
Youth Zone Delivery Quality	Monitors delivery standards and Youth Voice
Network Champion	Ensures alignment with OnSide Network Agreement
Treasurer	Oversees financial health and regulatory reporting
Legal	Ensures compliance with charity law and the requirements of the Charity Commission, and supports legal matters
Governance	Oversees trustee appointments, governance policies and whistleblowing
Private Sector Fundraising	Supports patron cultivation and stewardship
Marketing & Communications	Provides brand and communications guidance
Local Engagement	Builds partnerships including with public bodies and inclusive community engagement
Safeguarding	Oversees safeguarding systems and supports complex cases
Facilities & Health & Safety	Ensures property is protected, maintained, insured and well presented. Ensures compliance with H&S law
Human Resources	Oversees HR practices and sits on the Appointments & Remuneration Committee
OnSide Nominated Trustee (ONT)	Provides high challenge and support, and helps access OnSide resources. Actively holds a portfolio

BECOMING A TRUSTEE

Term: 3 years (renewable)

Trustees pledge to:

- Act prudently and in the Youth Zone's best interests
- Make decisions collectively with the Board

Core Responsibilities:

- Act in the best interests of the Youth Zone and its young people
- Ensure compliance with charity and company law
- Uphold the mission, values and strategic aims of the Youth Zone and the wider OnSide Network
- Apply resources wisely and deliver best value
- Shape and review strategy with the CEO
- Safeguard the charity's reputation and financial health
- Contribute actively to Board meetings and wider Youth Zone life

Time Commitment:

- Induction with Chair and CEO, plus OnSide trustee training
- Attend bi-monthly Board meetings (approx. 2 hours)
- Potentially being part of a sub-committee, a further bi-monthly meeting
- Serve one 3-year term (renewable once)
- Prepare by reading Board and sub-committee papers in advance
- Visit the Youth Zone periodically
- Join governance training as needed

WORKING TOGETHER AND LIVING OUR VALUES

Trustee roles are interdependent. Collaboration is essential to:

- Provide strategic leadership across key areas
- Ensure expertise informs decisions
- Protect shared purpose and reputation
- Champion transparency and effectiveness

Trustees support and hold each other accountable, maintaining integrity and shared purpose.

OnSide Network Values:
The Board leads by example, upholding the values that guide the OnSide Network. These values were created by the Network and inform every decision and interaction within the Youth Zone:

Young People First: Young people are at the heart of everything we do, inspiring and challenging us to deliver services that exceed their needs and challenge them to be the best they can be.

Excellence: We encourage ourselves and each other to be the best we can be through continuous learning and improvement, and we have a focus on finding solutions.

Respect: We act with honesty and integrity, celebrating diversity across the whole organisation and caring about each other, our young people and the Youth Zone environment.

Collaborative: We will create and nurture strong, creative partnerships, working together to achieve better results and outcomes for young people.

Ambitious: We are passionate and driven in taking on new challenges, embracing new ideas, and exceeding our ambitions for young people, the Youth Zones and our local communities.

INTEGRITY

Leading with Integrity

Integrity is central to how trustees lead and operate within the Youth Zone.

Trustees must uphold the charity's purpose for public benefit, even when decisions are difficult or unpopular.

Everyone interacting with the Youth Zone; young people, staff, volunteers, partners, and supporters should feel welcomed, safe, and respected.

Creating a culture of integrity means:

- Leading with transparency
- Making ethical decisions
- Supporting behaviours and policies that reflect the Youth Zone's values
- Managing power dynamics responsibly
- Prioritising the interests of the Youth Zone and its beneficiaries above personal or professional loyalties

YOUTH ZONE TRUSTEE CODE OF CONDUCT

Adopting a Code of Conduct sets the tone for how trustees work together. Based on sector best practice, this code is recommended for Board adoption.

Key Principles:

Acting with Integrity

Trustees must act within the law and governing document, understand the Youth Zone's purpose, and prioritise its best interests. This includes upholding its reputation, acting collectively, and avoiding personal benefit unless expressly authorised.

Managing Responsibilities

Trustees should stay informed about the Youth Zone and its operating environment. This includes attending meetings (or sending apologies), reading papers in advance, and preparing thoughtfully. Constructive and respectful contributions ensure effective and inclusive meetings.

Working Together Respectfully

Discussions should be robust but respectful. Trustees are expected to listen, challenge ideas sensitively, and support collective decisions, even when they personally disagree.

Handling Conflicts and Confidentiality

Trustees must declare and manage conflicts of interest openly. Confidentiality must be maintained to protect sensitive information about the organisation, its people, and its partners.

A Culture of Respect

Trustees should foster an inclusive, collaborative environment where differing views are respected and everyone feels valued.

SAFEGUARDING RESPONSIBILITIES

Safeguarding Responsibilities

Safeguarding is a shared responsibility. Trustees must ensure:

- Safeguarding policies and procedures are in place, regularly reviewed, and followed
- They undergo relevant safeguarding training
- They collaborate with the Designated Safeguarding Lead to monitor performance against the Excellence Framework

OnSide provides a comprehensive Safeguarding Toolkit for your management team and supports safeguarding audits. To support trustees in fulfilling their safeguarding responsibilities, we have created a detailed guide which is available to view **here**.

Managing Power Imbalances

Good governance requires equal participation from all trustees. The Chair holds no greater decision-making power than other trustees. Boards should be aware of real or perceived power imbalances such as those stemming from local influence or professional background. It is important to take steps to create a culture where challenge and differing views are welcomed.

Trustee relationships with staff, young people, and partners should be managed with care to avoid undue influence.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Managing Conflicts of Interest

Trustees must identify and manage any conflicts of interest or loyalty that may arise from personal, professional, or organisational ties. Under the Companies Act 2006, trustees (as charity directors) must:

- Avoid conflicts of interest
- Not accept benefits from third parties
- Declare interests in transactions or arrangements
- Act within their powers
- Promote the charity's success and purpose
- Exercise independent judgment
- Use reasonable care, skill, and diligence

Even when a trustee's background provides valuable insight, if they are conflicted, they must not vote on related decisions and may need to step out during discussions.

Declarations of Interest

Trustees must complete a **Declaration of Interest** form to disclose any actual or potential conflicts, including other trustee or director roles. Declarations are required:

- Before appointment
- Annually after the AGM
- Whenever roles or circumstances change
- Verbally at meetings when relevant items arise

Uncertainty about potential conflicts can be discussed confidentially with the Chair or Governance portfolio holder. All declarations are recorded in a Register of Interests, Gifts, and Hospitality, and shared with stakeholders according to the agreed disclosure policy.

ETHICAL FUNDRAISING

Ethical Fundraising

The Board is responsible for ensuring fundraising activities reflect the Youth Zone's values and are conducted with transparency and respect. Youth Zones should follow the **Fundraising Regulator's Code of Fundraising Practice**, which outlines standards for legal, open, honest, and respectful fundraising.

Key Principles:

- Assess opportunities to ensure alignment with values and capacity
- Use funds for their intended purpose
- Treat donors fairly and make it easy to donate – and stop if they wish
- Be transparent about income sources, how it spends the money received, and what activities it undertakes
- Comply with data protection regulations

Fundraising Practices Must Never:

- Contact individuals who have opted out
- Exploit vulnerable beneficiaries
- Use intrusive or persistent tactics
- Sell donor data
- Accept funds that compromise Youth Zone independence, create conflicts, or damage reputation

DECISION MAKING, RISK AND CONTROL

Board Oversight and Delegation

The Board holds ultimate responsibility for the Youth Zone's operations and outcomes. However, it should not manage every detail.

Trustees must balance oversight with empowering the executive team to act effectively. This requires clarity on which decisions are reserved for the Board, and which can be delegated.

Even when authority is delegated, trustees remain legally accountable. Robust processes, such as financial controls and performance reporting, are essential for sound governance. Boards must actively identify and manage risks and opportunities, assessing whether each is acceptable, mitigatable, or avoidable.

EFFECTIVE DECISION MAKING

Board decisions should be:

Collective – Built on constructive challenge, diverse perspectives, and shared ownership

Informed – Based on timely, accurate information aligned with strategy

Rigorous – Supported by trusted governance frameworks

Responsive – Agile without compromising due process

This approach helps manage operational, reputational, governance, and financial risks while enabling the Youth Zone to thrive.

Delegation and Control

Delegation supports efficient operations when the Board:

- Sets clear authority levels for the CEO, senior staff, and committees
- Reviews which responsibilities remain with the Board, and which are delegated
- Maintains accountability for standards, even when tasks are delegated

The Delegated Authority Template outlines areas the Board retains, including:

- Strategy, business planning, and budget-setting
- Financial management and approval of major transactions
- HR decisions (appointments, remuneration, terminations)
- Operational delivery models and resource allocation
- Risk management policies
- Communications strategy and key publications

Additionally, the Board:

- Authorises spending limits for senior staff
- Defines approval thresholds for partnerships or contracts
- Stipulates reporting procedures for significant risks or incidents

Delegation may be to management, committees, or nominated trustees. Delegates must operate within clear boundaries and report effectively.

Committees as Support Structures

The Board determines which committees are needed - commonly:

- Finance
- Nomination & Remuneration
- Development
- Delivery

Committees:

- Serve as expertise zones or "pre-filters"
- Require clear terms of reference and strong governance
- Should have periodically refreshed membership
- Are accountable to and report regularly to the Board

Committees enhance effectiveness without distancing the Board from accountability.

Draft Terms of Reference (ToR's) for the most common Youth Zone committees can be found on the **Trustee Resources page,** though your Youth Zone will already have its own ToR's for those currently in operation.

Reviewing Policies and Procedures

Strong policy frameworks build consistency and confidence. The Board should:

- Periodically review and update key policies
- Delegate review responsibility to the relevant trustee portfolio holder
- Undertake final sign-off collectively

Major policy areas include:

- Human Resources
- Finance
- Safeguarding
- Health & Safety
- Data Protection
- Volunteer Management
- Fundraising

The Nomination & Remuneration Committee advises on:

- Pay frameworks, awards, and benefits
- Redundancy and severance arrangements—ensuring fairness and alignment with charity values

FINANCIAL OVERSIGHT

Trustees play a vital role in safeguarding the charity's financial integrity. They must:

- Commission and monitor robust financial regulations and internal controls
- Ensure funds are used efficiently and appropriately
- Oversee restricted fund usage and provide transparent reporting
- Review short- and long-term financial forecasts
- Support the building of unrestricted reserves (typically 3–6 months of operating costs)
- Critically assess major expenditures
- Ensure compliance with charity and company reporting requirements

A strong relationship between the Treasurer and Finance Manager supports clarity and responsiveness in financial oversight.

Annual Accounts and Audits

- The Board approves the Annual Report and Accounts based on Finance Committee recommendations
- The Finance Committee oversees auditor appointment and performance
- The Board or Finance Committee meets annually with auditors without staff present to ensure independent scrutiny

MONITORING PERFORMANCE

Running a Youth Zone requires a wide range of skills and capabilities. The Board must strike the right balance between challenge and support to foster healthy governance and avoid undue pressure on senior staff.

Drawing on Julia Unwin's framework, trustees operate in five key modes:

Strategy – Setting long-term direction

Support – Empowering the CEO and executive team

Stretch – Encouraging innovation and challenging norms

Scrutiny – Reviewing performance against Business Plans, the Excellence Framework, the OnSide DNA, and broader standards

Stewardship – Protecting people, funds, assets, and reputation

Trustees maintain oversight through regular reporting on:

- Progress against objectives and budgets
- Key performance indicators (KPIs)
- Delivery and quality data from senior staff
- OnSide Network comparisons to contextualise performance

Trustee portfolio relationships strengthen oversight and keep trustees connected to frontline delivery.

Learning from the Network

The OnSide Network provides a powerful resource for benchmarking and shared learning. Performance data and exemplars from Youth Zones nationwide can help trustees understand success factors and emerging trends. Accessing this data fosters informed challenge and reveals opportunities for peer-led improvements and support. OnSide shares monthly benchmark data which enhances the Board's insight into strengths, areas for development, and emerging sector trends.

Provision of Information to Trustees

Trustees need high quality reporting to govern effectively. Reports should be:

- Issued at least one week before Board meetings
- Structured using the **Board Report template**
- Clear, concise, and focused on what matters
- Data-rich and tied to KPIs and Business Plan milestones
- Supportive of decision making (differentiating updates from action items)
- Color-coded or visually "lean" where appropriate

To deepen understanding, trustees should visit the Youth Zone in person and engage directly with staff and young people to bring reporting to life.

MANAGEMENT

Managing Risk

Risk management is essential to safeguarding young people and ensuring the Youth Zone's sustainability. The Board oversees risks across four key areas:

- Operational
- Strategic
- Reputational
- Financial

Trustees should:

- Regularly review risk registers and mitigation strategies
- Define the organisation's risk appetite and tolerance
- Understand how risks interconnect
- Conduct an annual review of risk management to inform the Annual Report and meet regulatory expectations

An **example risk register** is available to support this process.

Operational Risk in Youth Zones

Youth Zones naturally involve risk, particularly around physical activity and safeguarding. Trustees must ensure:

- Staff maintain safe environments and practices
- Health & Safety systems are in place and monitored
- Incidents are logged, reviewed, and addressed appropriately
- Annual reviews and audits of safeguarding and H&S policies are conducted

Trustees with **safeguarding** and **H&S** portfolios play a leading role in identifying trends and supporting the CEO in maintaining standards.

Managing Serious Incidents

In the event of a serious incident (e.g. major injury, safeguarding breach, financial loss), the Board must ensure:

- Immediate action is taken to prevent further harm
- Coordinated communications are planned with staff, young people, public bodies, OnSide, and the media (OnSide offers crisis communications support)
- Procedures are reviewed and improved to prevent recurrence

Trustees must determine whether incidents should be reported to the Charity Commission. This includes financial loss, harm, or reputational damage. Borderline cases should be escalated for transparency.

Whistleblowing Arrangements

The Board is responsible for ensuring a confidential, safe, and independent whistleblowing process. Staff and volunteers must feel empowered to report concerns.

The Board must:

- Ensure proper investigation
- Respond fairly and discreetly
- Use findings to improve systems and culture

A **model whistleblowing policy** is available for adaptation and implementation.

BOARD EFFECTIVENESS

Strong Foundations for Governance

A confident, collaborative, and values-led Board inspires excellence throughout the organisation. Trustees should feel empowered to challenge, question, and explore complex topics in a constructive and supportive environment.

Under the Chair's leadership, trustees govern in partnership with the Chief Executive. To support effective governance, the Board may seek professional advice; legal, financial, or other, at the charity's expense.

Each Board operates under a **Terms of Reference (ToR)** that clearly defines roles, responsibilities, authority, and procedures.

Getting the Right People Around the Table

A well-composed Board is essential. Typically comprising 8 –12 members, it should balance continuity with renewal, combining experienced trustees with fresh perspectives. Boards often include private sector representatives alongside those with youth and voluntary sector experience.

Each trustee holds a defined role or portfolio, allowing them to contribute meaningfully and support staff leads. The Board regularly reviews its composition to ensure a diverse mix of skills, knowledge, and lived experience that reflects the community served.

Recruiting Trustees with Purpose

Trustee recruitment is a collective Board responsibility, often supported by the **Nominations & Remuneration Committee**. New appointments should:

- Align with current Board needs (based on skills audits and self-appraisals)
- Reflect a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Be merit-based and values-driven

Vetting Requirements Include:

- References
- DBS checks
- Bank checks (for signatories)
- Eligibility declarations
- Declaration of Interests form

These steps protect the charity and ensure governance compliance.

SUPPORTING NEW TRUSTEES

Strong Foundations for Governance

A comprehensive induction helps new trustees understand their responsibilities and connect with the Youth Zone's mission. Activities include:

- One-on-one meetings with the Chief Executive and key staff
- Guided tours of the Youth Zone
- Participation in Youth Zone sessions to see impact first hand

Induction Materials Include:

- Governing documents
- Board and Subcommittee Terms of Reference
- Strategic and business plans
- Annual Board forward plan
- Financial reports and latest Board papers
- Contact details for trustees and key staff
- **Summary of the OnSide Network Agreement**

Generic examples of the Terms of Reference and Board forward plan are **here**, though you will need to seek out the ones specific to your Youth Zone.

Trustees should complete Level 1 Safeguarding training within four weeks of joining. OnSide's Talent Academy offers quarterly trustee training, contact to book: **talent.academy@onsideyouthzones.org**.

Learning and Growing as a Board

Board effectiveness is sustained through regular reflection and review. Trustees should assess their contributions and development needs annually with the Chair. This supports personal growth and informs future training and succession planning.

To support best practice in governance, in line with the Charity Governance Code, OnSide recommends that Boards undertake a formal annual review of their effectiveness against their Terms of Reference. OnSide is available to assist with this process through a structured trustee self-assessment.

MAKING MEETINGS COUNT

Trustees typically meet every two months. While remote attendance is possible, regular in-person meetings are important for maintaining strong relationships and staying connected to the Youth Zone's environment and team.

Effective Board Meetings Include:

- Clear, focused board papers shared at least one week in advance
- Review of key performance indicators (KPIs) and network benchmarks
- Contributions from staff leading relevant areas
- Opportunities for young people to inform decisions
- Space for respectful discussion and differing views
- Dedicated 'trustee-only' time at each meeting

The Chair and Chief Executive jointly plan agendas, ensuring time is allocated for financial oversight, strategic discussions, and trustee portfolio updates. The financial report, presented by the Treasurer, should be a central agenda item, setting the context for many board decisions.

The Chair may call an Extraordinary General Meeting or unscheduled meeting with 21 days' notice, in line with the Memorandum and Articles of Association. A shorter notice period may be used if agreed by a majority of voting members.

Trustees should:

- Be prepared by reviewing board packs in advance
- Engage in discussions, ask questions, and scrutinise proposals thoughtfully
- Act with integrity, in the Youth Zone's best interest, declaring conflicts of interest promptly and abstaining from related decisions
- Approve minutes and action summaries after each meeting

The Power of the Chair and Chief Executive Partnership

This relationship is foundational to the Youth Zone's success. It should be built on:

- Mutual trust
- Regular communication
- Shared vision

The Chair supports the Chief Executive as a sounding board and source of wise counsel, offering both encouragement and challenge. This partnership is strengthened through:

- Regular one-on-one meetings
- Joint reviews of financial and performance data
- Collaboration on senior appointments

The Chair also plays an ambassadorial role with external partners, including the local authority, and should attend sessions and events to stay connected with the Youth Zone's impact.

Empowering the Chief Executive

The Board appoints and delegates responsibility for daily leadership. The Chief Executive is empowered to:

- Align resources to the charitable objectives
- Lead strategy development, planning, budgeting, and reporting
- Execute the OnSide Network Agreement and funder conditions
- Implement a clear management structure and delegation model
- Manage volunteers, staff, and any youth-facing services
- Oversee financial commitments within agreed limits
- Review income, procurement, inclusion, staff performance, stakeholder engagement, health and safety, safeguarding, marketing, communications, and facility maintenance

Regular updates on these areas are expected in board meetings, ensuring transparency and accountability.

Accountability to Stakeholders

Trustees serve not only the organisation but also its beneficiaries, supporters, staff, volunteers, and the wider community. They maintain trust by:

- Publishing the annual report, minutes, and trustees' registers as appropriate
- Engaging with young people, families, funders, and partners through two-way dialogue
- Ensuring good governance and ethical fundraising through stringent oversight

EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Building Inclusive Boards That Reflect Our Communities

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (ED&I) is essential to delivering the Youth Zone's mission and increasing its impact. By embracing a wide range of experiences, perspectives, and voices, Boards are better equipped to make decisions that reflect and support the young people and communities they serve.

Diversity is sought across:

- Skills and professional background
- Age and generational representation
- Gender, ethnicity, and cultural background
- Socioeconomic status and lived experience
- Disability and neurodiversity
- Sexual orientation and gender identity
- Political or ideological perspectives

Embedding ED&I at every level, from trustee recruitment to board culture promotes innovation, strengthens legitimacy, and ensures relevance. Inclusive Boards foster environments where all trustees can contribute equally and confidently.

Our Commitment to EDI

The OnSide Network strives to champion ED&I across governance, staffing, and volunteering. We aim to reflect the diversity of our communities and centre young people's voices in decision-making.

Each Board is encouraged to develop and embed a practical ED&I approach through four key stages:

Understanding – Define why ED&I matters and assess current awareness and practices

Direction – Create an ED&I strategy aligned with values and goals

Leadership – Drive implementation, track progress, and measure impact

Transparency – Publish outcomes to remain accountable to stakeholders

SUPPORTING BOARD DIVERSITY

Diverse boards make better decisions and build stronger trust with stakeholders.
To support diversity, Boards should:

- Use inclusive recruitment practices that value lived experience
- Provide ongoing ED&I training for all trustees
- Include young people's perspectives in discussions
- Conduct regular audits of board skills and diversity
- Remove barriers to participation (e.g. meeting formats, accessibility)
- Foster inclusive culture where all voices are heard
- Offer mentorship for first-time trustees
- Create feedback loops to improve accessibility and inclusion

The Chair plays a key role in shaping board culture—encouraging openness, challenging exclusive behaviours, and facilitating constructive dialogue.

Boards are encouraged to publish annual summaries of their diversity efforts and progress. This promotes transparency and demonstrates a commitment to continuous learning.

Recruitment should never be a tick-box exercise. Diversity must be valued alongside capability. Done well, inclusive recruitment brings energy, credibility, and insight and shows young people that their communities are represented, and their futures are being shaped.

Promoting Diversity Through Trustee Recruitment

Trustee recruitment is a direct way to improve board diversity. The goal is to attract skilled individuals with fresh perspectives and lived experience.

Effective Practices Include:

- Clear role descriptions with expectations and time commitments
- Defined selection criteria focused on competencies, not just qualifications
- Open-mindedness toward personal attributes like curiosity and empathy
- Tailored messaging that resonates with underrepresented groups
- Accessible recruitment materials and pre-application briefings
- Wide promotion through community networks and social media
- Bias-aware processes (e.g. anonymised shortlisting)
- Representative selection panels

OPENNESS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Public trust in a charity's ability to deliver public benefit is fundamental to its reputation and long-term success. A culture of openness, honesty, and responsiveness helps build that trust, reinforcing the charity's relevance and standing in the community.

Staying Connected to Our Community

The Board has a key responsibility to maintain regular, transparent communication with stakeholders—young people, staff, volunteers, funders, local partners, and the wider community. This includes clearly articulating the Youth Zone's purpose, values, funding sources, governance structure, and the impact of its work. Openness fosters trust and demonstrates accountability to those the charity exists to serve.

Supporting and Challenging the Executive Team

The Board serves as both a supportive partner and a critical friend to the Chief Executive and senior leadership team. This involves holding the executive to account for effective use of resources and progress against agreed objectives, while also offering encouragement and guidance. The relationship is one of mutual respect, characterised by both high support and high challenge, and rooted in a shared commitment to the charity's mission.

Involving Others in Decisions That Matter

Transparency means more than reporting—it requires meaningful engagement. The Board must ensure that young people have genuine opportunities to influence and shape the services they use. Clear, effective feedback mechanisms should be in place to ensure their voices lead to tangible improvements. Local partners, especially those with expertise in youth services, also play a vital role in informing strategic decisions through their insight and experience.

Listening, Learning, and Responding

Complaints are a critical part of good governance and accountability. The Board must ensure there is a fair, accessible, and well-publicised complaints process, and that all feedback—both positive and negative—is reviewed regularly. Reports on trends and key issues should be used constructively to improve service quality and strengthen stakeholder confidence.

OnSide
Here for young people

TRUSTEE HANDBOOK

YOUR GUIDE TO BEING
A YOUTH ZONE TRUSTEE

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