

Differences between a Committee and a Working Party

Committees

A local council is empowered to appoint one or more committees for the purpose of discharging any of its functions; and unless the local council otherwise directs, a committee may itself arrange for the discharge of its functions by a sub-committee.

Some committees are permanent or standing committees, but others are set up for a short-term project.

Some committees are advisory, they make recommendations to the full council, which then makes the decisions. There are also executive committees where the full council delegates responsibility for certain decision to the committee. The committee then reports its decisions to the full council.

The number of members of a committee or sub-committee is determined by the appointing council or committee, as the case may be.

A committee or a sub-committee may include persons who are not elected councillors – often known as co-opted committee members – but they have no voting rights, but if a co-opted member is appointed to chair a meeting, he/she has neither an original nor a casting vote.

A committee appointed by a local council is subject in most cases to the same rules in relation to meetings as apply to the Council itself – agendas are issued at least three clear days before the meeting and minutes are recorded, meetings are held in a public place and are open to the public and the press. The Clerk also is required to attend.

All questions arising at a meeting of a committee are to be decided by a majority of the members present and voting thereon.

A committee without the power to decide a particular matter must send its decision as a recommendation up to the full council. Where the committee does have the power to make a decision, the council does not need to ratify it at all.

Working Parties

Working Parties are not constituted as committees, therefore legally they do not have the power to make decisions or spend money, instead they work in a purely advisory role.

A working party can explore options and present these to the council for a decision.

They are not subject to the strict rules that apply to formal council meetings and do not need to be held in public.

Working group meetings are relatively informal.