



Starting a Tenant and Resident Association



Welcome

Welcome to the South Lakes Housing (SLH) Tenant and Resident Association Start-up advice leaflet.

This leaflet provides you with all the necessary information to start your own group.



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Useful contacts

South Lakes Housing

Support and advice to residents associations; grants.

01539 717717

Email info@southlakeshousing.co.uk

www.southlakeshousing.co.uk

Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS)

Advice on tenant participation.

0161 868 3500

Email info@tpas.org

www.tpas.org.uk

National Communities Resource Centre, Trafford Hall.

01244 300246

www.traffordhall.com

Setting up a Tenant/Resident Association

Tenants get together and form associations for a number of reasons; it may be to campaign against something such as the closure of a local school or to have a representative voice with their landlord.

Whatever the reason, the benefits are great and you can really make a difference!

So, if you would like the opportunity to meet neighbours and new friends whilst making a valuable contribution to your community, why not start your own tenant and resident association?

Here are a few helpful hints to guide you on your journey to be a successful group:

- Work on issues which can unite rather than divide the community
- Involve everyone in all your decisions as far as you can
- Work out the best ways of keeping people in touch about what is happening
- Take on only as much work you can realistically do – broken commitments will get you a bad name
- Use the time and abilities which people offer rather than expecting too much.



Basic steps

Getting everyone's views

So, you have a clear idea why a group is needed, for example to campaign for better play facilities. What you now need to do is find out if other people feel the same. You need to talk to as many people as you can before doing anything else.

Chat to people in different places for example, over the fence, communal gardens, shops, pubs or community centres.

If you manage to meet and talk to people in a wide range of places you will discover a range of views and it will give you an idea of how much support there is for starting a new group.

Be prepared for any answer:

“Personally, I think there are more important issues”

“I’m interested, but don’t have the time”

“I’m not really interested in what goes on around here”

People have different views of what is important and this can be useful in your group. Most groups have a number of goals and your first task involves finding out all the issues that affect members of your community.

The “no time” excuse will be one you come across often and is either a polite way of saying “no thanks” or can genuinely indicate that people have other commitments which are more important.

Don't be disappointed if people hesitate, you are asking them to do things they have probably never done before. Ask them to come along to a meeting just to find out what it is all about and reassure them that it does not mean they will have to do anything. Or simply give them a name and address of someone to contact if they decide they want to find out more.

It's important that all residents get to know about your first meeting. Ideally a leaflet, giving details about the meeting, should be delivered to each home in the area (SLH can help you with photocopying). As a minimum posters should be put up in prominent positions to let people know what is happening.

The next step is planning the meeting. You can organise the meeting with the contacts you have already made or put an advert in your local post office/shop.

It is important to pay attention to a number of factors:

- **Date and time of the meeting** – try to arrange a date and time to suit everyone or when most people are likely to come;
- **Place of the meeting** – it should be easy for people to get to and not a long bus ride away ie someone's home, a room in a local community centre or school;
- **Reason for the meeting** – make sure you make your adverts for the meeting clear. Tell them what it is for but don't bombard them with too much information!
- **A contact point** – make sure people know who to contact if they are interested in getting involved.

So, you've done all the planning and the day of the meeting has arrived. Here are a couple of helpful hints to make sure the meeting runs smoothly:

- Be friendly and welcoming and make sure that people are introduced to one another, they may feel awkward otherwise!
- Try to keep the meeting short and concise. People will feel that the meeting has been worthwhile and achieved something if ideas have been discussed carefully and decisions have been made;

You could get the discussion going by asking everyone to say what interests them about starting a group and at the end of the meeting sum up the decisions taken, how you are going to proceed and who is going to do what.

You have come to the end of your first meeting; you may have decided to form a group straight away without any decisions about what issues to tackle or you may be very clear that there is one thing that everyone is concerned about.

Either way, your next step should be a public meeting where many more people will be able to come.

This is an important stage and if you miss it you may run the risk of assuming that your first, informal meeting represents everyone's views.

It's that simple and you can have some great fun!

Running a Tenant/Resident Association

There are no rules on how tenants' groups should be run, but you will need to make some decisions to ensure that your group works effectively and fairly.

What is a committee?

The committee is elected by the members to carry out the work of the organisation.

They will organise general meetings of all the members, the group's Annual General Meeting (AGM) and must carry out the decisions made at these meetings.

There is no set way of organising a committee but there are ways of working which are more common and useful than others.

Try to make sure that the committee represents all the people in your community – men, women, old, young, black, white, disabled people.

A committee usually comprises:

- Chairperson
- Secretary
- Treasurer



The Chairperson is responsible for guiding the association to achieve its aims and to chair the meetings of the association.

This involves being aware of all the activities carried out by the association and preparing agendas for meetings in conjunction with the Secretary.

In the meeting they should make sure each item on the agenda is discussed and a decision made and recorded and make sure everyone gets an opportunity to contribute to the discussion.

The Secretary is responsible for taking the minutes of the meetings, letting people know when and where the next meeting is and what it is about, keeping members informed of what correspondence has been sent out and received and keeping a record of membership, important phone numbers and so on.

The most important aspect of the job is taking the minutes. Take notes during the meeting, draft the minutes soon after the meeting, check them with the Chairperson then write them up properly.

They should not be a record of everything said at the meeting plus the Secretary's feelings!

Minutes should:

- State the name of your association, date, time and place of meeting
- Include a list of who was present at the meeting
- Follow the agenda
- Be clear, short, easy to read and understand
- Include all decisions made and the key arguments leading to that decision
- Have an action column stating who is responsible for carrying out decisions made
- State date, time, and place of next meeting.

The Treasurer is the person with overall responsibility for the association's finances.

The Treasurer should open a bank account, pay money received into a bank keeping a record of money received and issue receipts, pay bills keeping a record of money spent, keep petty cash and an account book for day-to-day expenditure and prepare statements to the committee and for the AGM.



Training

Taking on the responsibility of being the Chairman, Secretary or Treasurer of your group can be a worrying prospect for some people. The National Communities Resource Centre near Chester provides short courses to help develop the skills needed.

Contact the Tenant Participation team at South Lakes Housing (SLH) for further details of these and other training courses. SLH may also be able to assist with travel and carer's costs.

Meetings

So, you've decided to set up an association and you have elected your committee members. What you now need to do is decide how often you should meet and how you should run your meetings.

A successful meeting has:

- A clear agenda
- Good chairing person

The agenda

The agenda must be logical where quick items are dealt with first and items requiring discussion and decision-making later.

The inclusion of times helps people keep to the agenda, and lets people know they're going to be able to go home.

Good chairing

The chairperson introduces and summarises the purpose of the meeting, introduces each item on the agenda, encourages decision making, ensures everyone in the meeting gets a chance to participate, and that the meeting finishes on time.

Making sure people get involved and stay involved

Define your aims

Make sure your organisation is clear about what it is trying to do. This may take years to achieve so you also need short-term aims that you can work towards on a daily basis and have a good chance of achieving quite soon. People will see the point of staying involved and will enjoy things more if they know what they are working towards and can see results.

Share tasks

A lot of work is involved in running an association and jobs are best shared. Sharing all the workload and responsibility is a way of preventing members getting discouraged and ensuring all members feel involved. It will also mean your group gets more done and is more successful. The Secretary's and Treasurer role can also be done by more than one person.



Keep in touch

If people are to feel involved and encouraged to contribute, they must know what the group is doing and what decisions it has made. Send out regular newsletters and leaflets, and generally let people know what is going on.

Have fun

Being in a tenants' association is hard work but it is possible to get satisfaction from the social side and also pleasure from achieving your aims. Even if you just break for tea or coffee half way through, you are creating a friendly atmosphere where people can chat and get to know each other.

Constitution

Although not compulsory, in order for your group to be taken seriously by both tenants and by your landlord, a constitution is necessary. A constitution shows who you represent, what your group is about and how your group is run. South Lakes Housing can provide a draft constitution for you to adapt for your group.

Campaigning

Suppose you want to turn a bit of waste ground on your estate into a community space, or just get it tidied up

What do you do? You start a campaign

When you start you need to do two things:

- Get support and help from other people
- Find out the size of the problem

Getting support

One or two people starting the campaign may be fine, but if you really have a problem you're going to need all the help you can get.

The size of the problem

You have to analyse a problem to find out:

- how big it is
- what the causes are
- what needs to be done

You need evidence to support your argument. So you will need to find it.

You can:

- call a public meeting
- knock on people's doors and have a chat
- print a leaflet and distribute it – (SLH can help with photocopying)
- collect names on a petition
- do a survey
- call in people with expert knowledge to help you
- go to libraries, advice centres, community resource centres and tenants' and residents' federations to see if they have any information which might help you.

Be careful which method(s) you choose depending on the size and nature of the problem. For example, a public meeting is a good idea for getting an idea of how much support you can expect and who else will help, but it is not so good for collecting detailed information.

Once you have got the information and support you need to organise your campaign start acting! It must have the maximum impact on the people you need to influence for example, the Town/ District or County Council, or the Government.

Your campaign needs putting together in a form that attracts attention and persuades people of its importance and relevance.

If your campaign information is attractive and easy to understand it will help you persuade the people to make the changes you are asking for.

Here are some helpful tips to make sure you get your point across:

- If you have written information like a report, make sure it is logical, sets out the problem and evidence clearly and is sent to everyone who you think should do something about the problem and those that can support you.
- If you are handing in a petition or holding a demonstration make sure you have got as many people as possible to come with you, that someone will receive your petition and invite the press suggesting people for them to talk to.

If, when you handed in your petition/report, somebody said they would do something, ask what, when and who and make notes of what they say.

If you were given a date for a reply, make sure you get it. If you don't, find out why, insist on a new date soon and don't take no for an answer.

- If somebody said they would do something about the problem, don't let them forget. Send letters regularly asking for details of progress. If you don't get any satisfactory replies, try telephoning or visiting.
- If you still don't get any satisfaction, maybe it is time to think about going to some authority higher up.

Remember, getting things changed takes time!

Newsletters

A newsletter can be anything from one side of a piece of paper to several pages folded or stapled together. It is a way of keeping your members informed and up to date on issues which affect them.

Producing a newsletter gives you a chance to:

- tell your members about the group and what it is doing;
- give them information about events;
- encourage people to join in your group's activities.

Newsletters are also a good way of highlighting your achievements so that people who do not attend meetings know what is happening and that you are getting things done.

- How often are you going to produce a newsletter?
- What will it look like?
- What will you call it?
- Who will write the articles?

These are just some of the things you need to consider when setting up a newsletter. Planning ahead will make it a lot easier.

Some items that you might like to include in your newsletter are:

- notifications or reminders about events you are holding;
- news about your estate;
- opinions on something that is happening locally;
- human interest stories.

You could also include information about your committee such as names and addresses. Always include at least one contact name and address for the group.

Producing a newsletter costs money. If you don't have enough money, here are a couple of ideas that can help you pay for it:

- sell advertising space to local businesses;
- run a small-ads page and charge people to advertise sale items;
- ask for donations from people.

Remember – SLH can help with photocopying and printing.

How SLH can help you

Financial assistance

Financial assistance is available to tenants who would like to set up a tenant and residents association.

The following two grants are available from South Lakes Housing:

- Start-up grant
- Maintenance grant

So, do you want to campaign for something such as better repairs or simply want to increase the sense of belonging in your community?

If so, a **start-up grant** of £50 can help in the cost of getting a group up and running and could pay towards items such as leaflets to publicise the new group.

To qualify for a start-up grant the following criteria need to be met:

- Any estate or scheme without an existing tenant and resident association can form a tenant and resident group to act as their representatives to consult with SLH on its services and estate issues.
- The Group should be willing to represent the views of all tenants and residents within the area.
- Willingness to support the Group could be determined by a tenant expressing their support at a public meeting or by the tenant signing to say the tenant/resident association represent them. Providing every tenant has the opportunity to express their view on this issue, SLH will assume that any tenant who has not been to a meeting or signed, and has not indicated otherwise, is willing to be represented by the group. You must represent all tenants and residents equally, recognising the diversity of your community.

Sounds easy? Well that's not all! Your group could also be eligible for a **maintenance grant** which ranges from £50-£200 depending on the number of SLH dwellings the group represents.

This grant is to help you with the annual running cost involved in sustaining the group and can pay towards items such as stationery, postage and travel costs.

To qualify for a maintenance grant we will make an annual evaluation of your group.

The following criteria need to be met in addition to the Startup grant requirements:

- You must have a written constitution.
- Your group must be open to all SLH tenants and leaseholders, with an open invitation to all residents to attend meetings and take part in the group.
- You must hold regular quorate committee meetings and a quorate AGM.

Your financial records must be kept up-to-date and available for inspection by residents and SLH.

Please contact SLH's local housing office if you would like to apply for a grant, or to find out more.

Other assistance

We are able to help with:

- Access to venues and equipment;
- Photocopying and printing;
- Officer support and information available upon request.

Fundraising

As a tenants' and residents' group you will need money to carry out the work you do.

There are two different ways of raising money for your group:

- **Fundraising** – raising money by holding events;
- **Grants** – applying to other organisations for money.

Whichever way you choose, it is important that you have a fundraising/financial plan for your group.

This will enable you to plan ahead, to decide how much money you will need to raise, what activities this will involve and whether you will need to raise money from elsewhere.

Fundraising

Your group could raise money for your association by holding events such as jumble sales and fetes. This will also:

- raise the profile of your group;
- involve other people;
- prove to other organisations that you are trying to help yourselves.

Some important questions that as a group you need to ask yourselves are:

- How much money do we need to raise?
- What resources or skills do we have in our group?
- Do we need to consider insurance cover for our events?
- Do we need permission or a licence to run our event?



Remember to plan well in advance and your event should run smoothly.

Applying for grants

There are various organisations both in your local area and nationally who have money available to give to community organisations like yours for different types of projects.

Here are just a few examples:

- **Town, District or County Council**
- **Charitable Trusts**

Independent Trusts – often founded by families or individuals at the turn of the century, for example, the Joseph Rowntree Trust. Company Trusts – companies who give through a trust for tax advantages, for example, the Scott Trusts (for the Kendal area) or the Sir John Fisher Trust (for the Ulverston area).

- **Banks/Building Societies**

A number of banks and building societies run schemes aimed at local community projects, for example, the Royal Bank of Scotland (Community Investment). They will often have a theme.

- **Businesses**

It is always worth contacting local businesses that may give small donations or prizes for events/projects you organise. In return you can publicise their involvement in your project.

Equal opportunities

Practising equal opportunities within a tenants' group means that you work to ensure that everyone and anyone who may face discrimination is included fully in everything that you do. Discrimination generally means treating someone less favourably than others.

There are many groups of people in society that experience discrimination: women, ethnic minorities, disabled people, lesbians/gay men, ex-offenders and so on.

What we need to do is combat this discrimination in housing and you can help by making sure your association is open to everyone.

Remember, developing and maintaining equal opportunities practices isn't something that you do once and then move on onto other things – you need to keep doing it.

Further help and guidance can be obtained from:
Equality and Human Rights Commission
Arndale House
The Arndale Centre
Manchester
M4 3AQ
Tel: 0161 829 8100
Fax: 0161 829 8110
Email: info@qualityhumanrights.com
Web: www.equalityhumanrights.com

Annual General Meetings

An Annual general meeting (AGM) is important. This is the time when all members of the Association may review the activities of the past year and elect the committee for the coming year.

Notice of the AGM

All members should be given advance notice of the AGM (usually at least 14 days). You can do this either by:

- delivering an individual notice to each association member;
- advertising the meeting on a series of posters in local places and put notices in the local press.

It is the Secretary's job to send out advance notice of the meeting and to prepare an agenda for the meeting and produce enough copies for everyone likely to attend. It is also usually the Secretary's responsibility to make sure that arrangements for the hall, seating and refreshments are in hand.

How the AGM should operate

The retiring Chair normally chairs the meeting and they will welcome people to the meeting. The Chair will report on the work of the group over the year and the Treasurer will present the annual accounts to the meeting making sure that copies are available to everyone.

At the AGM, the Treasurer will explain the accounts as clearly as possible and they should be formally accepted by the AGM.

At the AGM some or all of the committee members should stand down to be re-elected or elect new members..

Your constitution will say how long each member is on the committee before they must resign or stand for re-election.

The committee need to think about how to encourage new people to become committee members. There needs to be a fair procedure so everyone knows how to put a name forward.

These can be:

- Deliver nomination papers to each house when you deliver the notice for your meeting. Give an address for papers to be returned (usually the secretary) and a closing date (usually 7 days before the meeting);
- Ask for nominations "from the floor" at your AGM.

Who can vote?

It is important to tell people clearly who is entitled to vote. This is usually only members who have paid the membership fee, or everyone named on a tenancy agreement etc.

What needs to be in the constitution?

This information will give you an idea of what your constitution should say in order for any AGM to run smoothly.



The constitution needs to cover

- **That an AGM will be held each year at which the committee will report on its work and presents the accounts.**
- **That all members must be given notice of the date of the AGM and how long in advance.**
- **The number of members who need to be present.**
- **The business which should be carried out at the AGM.**
- **That all members have voting rights at an AGM.**
- **The majority needed for a vote. This is usually more than half voting in favour at the AGM. The Chairperson may have second or casting vote in the event of a tie and sometimes two-thirds or three-quarters in favour are needed to change the constitution.**
- **Whether votes from members not present are allowed (ie proxy votes) and how they are made.**
- **The voting method e.g. by a show of hands or by a secret ballot.**

Your constitution may also cover

- **How long committee members may serve for.**
- **Whether existing committee members can be re-elected.**
- **If so, how long this can continue before they have to be replaced by a new member.**
- **If membership is per household or per individual.**

Further information

If you require further information please contact a housing officer at one of our offices – contact details are on the next page. **Office hours are Monday – Friday, 8.45 am – 5.00 pm.**



Further information

0300 303 8540

Registered office address:

Bridge Mills Business Centre, Stramongate, KENDAL LA9 4BD

Tel: 0300 303 8540 • **Fax:** (01539) 717 716 **Email:**
info@southlakeshousing.co.uk • **Text:** 07920 593 487

Area office address:

Town Hall, Queen Street, ULVERSTON Cumbria LA12 7AR

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