

REDLAND HOUSING ASSOCIATION

RESIDENTS ASSOCIATIONS INFORMATION BOOKLET

**A basic guide to the key elements of starting and
maintaining a resident or community group**

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INTRODUCTION

There are many reasons why people get together for the purpose of forming a tenants and residents group. You might want to set up a group for a number of reasons which could include for instance:

- Organising Activities
For all or part of the community, for example, parent and toddlers groups, or community fun days.
- Uniting residents and creating a sense of community
You may want to create the opportunity for people to get to know each other and promote a sense of community that means people feel safer and more secure and makes your neighbourhood a more pleasant place to live.
- Campaigning for Change
At times there may be certain issues which affect the community in which you live. By having a collective voice it may be more effective to campaign together for change on such issues as reducing crime on your estates etc. It is usually the case that there will be other people in the area who share these concerns. Ask friends or neighbours in the area about their concerns and by sharing worries and working together a group can be formed that is a collective voice to put forward important views.

WHAT IS A RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION?

What is a Residents' Association?

A Residents' Association is made up of people who get together to have their say on local issues, improving their area and organising social events.

How can they achieve this?

They can put pressure on their landlord and other official bodies to get things done. Everyone should have their say in what happens in their neighbourhood. By speaking with one voice through residents' groups you are more likely to achieve your aims.

What's in it for you?

You benefit because your views are heard and your neighbourhood can be improved to suit your needs. Residents groups organise meetings to which everyone is invited and local issues can be discussed.

How to be recognised

Redland will recognise groups that have an elected committee, hold a public annual general meeting, have an independent audit of their accounts every year, and that involve or benefit Redland residents.

GETTING STARTED

This may not be as difficult as you think. You need to start with a group of interested people and you should do this by talking to your neighbours and finding out what they think about starting a group.

Once a group has been formed then it will have to decide how the Association is going to begin and the best way to do this is by holding a public meeting. At the meeting you may want to discuss the following things:

- What is the Association going to do? People will have different ideas on what they want out of such a group and so a discussion can bring together all of those ideas.
- How are you going to get more people involved in the Association? You may have to persuade people that there are benefits in belonging to the group so you need to be prepared to explain what those benefits are.
- What skills already exist among the group? Is there someone who has been a Chairperson or a Secretary before? Is anyone particularly interested in a certain role within the group?
- What help will you need in setting up the Association and advertising it throughout the area?
- What resources are available? For example finance, photocopying, meeting rooms
- What happens next?

To help with the above issues one of the people to contact is Redland's Tenant Liaison Officer. She can give advice on setting up a group, roles of officers, agendas, constitutions etc. and can give assistance on organising publicity for the group such as printing leaflets. She will help with your first meetings to facilitate discussions and give guidance on adopting a constitution etc. and then will continue to support the group with advice, minutes and agendas etc. if necessary. If there are any major issues that need consultation, as the group progresses then the Tenant Liaison Officer can be invited to the meeting to assist with this. To get in touch with your Tenant Liaison Officer please give Redland a ring on 0117 938 2700 or write to her at Holly House, Corbet Close, Lawrence Weston, Bristol BS11 0TA.

Once it has been decided to form a group you will need to put forward proposals for a constitution (see page 11) and a committee. These would then be outlined and voted for at a general meeting to which all residents of the area that is to be covered by the Association would be invited.

Within a committee is the Chairperson, Vice Chair, Secretary and Treasurer. These are known as the Officers. There are also other committee members. There are no hard and fast rules about how many people should be on a committee but it is worth remembering that if the committee is too large it can become difficult to manage. If it is too small it means that there is a lot of responsibility put on a few people.

Pages 6 and 7 outline the roles and responsibilities of the officers within a committee.

KEEPING GOING

It is important to remember that as with most new groups things may not always run according to plan. A new group has to learn how to work together. People may be strangers and have to get to know each other and this cannot be rushed. The group also has to learn how to work in a democratic way.

People are often keen and enthusiastic at the start, it is when there are setbacks or less interesting issues that people often drift away or other problems occur. This is often unavoidable and part of the formation of groups but it is worth remembering the following points:

- Make sure everyone knows what is going on and that people are clear about the aims and objectives of the group
- Encourage the involvement of everyone in the group so certain people do not become too domineering and try to take over
- Respect everyone's views – you may not agree but people have a right to express their opinions
- Try not to argue amongst yourselves – it is no good blaming each other for things that go wrong
- Be clear about roles and responsibilities so people know what is expected of them
- Do not allow people to take on board more than they can manage

These are just some general points that are worth considering. The groups that tend to be most effective are those where everyone takes some sort of responsibility and are accountable to the Association as a whole.

A further way to maintain interest is to try and make sure that meetings encourage people to attend – make the agenda interesting by putting in relevant local and wider issues and also invite guest speakers such as the police or a local councillor. You could also invite your Housing Officer or Technical Surveyor to meetings to update the Association on estate matters.

Finally, remember that this type of group can be enjoyable. It does not have to be all meetings and official business. Many groups organise social events and fundraising activities and it is a way of making new friends in the local area.

THE ELECTED COMMITTEE

The committee will be made up of people who are committed to the aims of the group and who are willing to move things forward. You will need people who can work well in a team.

Role of Chairperson

The Chair of a Residents Association is a key role. They provide leadership without dominating meetings or inhibiting other members. They make sure the group follows its aims and objectives.

The Chair should

- be aware of the various activities carried out in the name of the Association and familiarise themselves with the constitution
- liaise with the Secretary to arrange committee meetings and prepare agendas
- keep order in the meeting, following the agenda, ensuring that only one person speaks at a time, and that no private conversations take place in the meeting
- keep the discussion in the meeting relevant to the agenda and make sure that conclusions are reached and recorded.
- make sure everyone has an opportunity to speak and that they speak respectfully and observe the constitution
- let members know when they are given a task to carry out and when to do it
- clarify the date and time of the next meeting and close the meeting

The importance of this role means that the Chairperson should remember that they are there to represent the best interests of the group and must not to use their position to push forward only their views. A good Chairperson can make all the difference to a group as they often provide the motivation for the group to move forward.

Role of Secretary

The secretary is a strong administrator and their focus is on the records and correspondence of the association. They are also good at communicating, as they let people know when meetings are happening. Sometimes this work can be shared e.g. a separate minute secretary could take and keep the records of all meetings.

In general the Secretary should

- arrange meetings – time, date, venue etc.
- Consult with the Chairperson in selecting items for the agenda of the meeting and circulate the agenda

- prepare all papers for the meeting including minutes of the previous meeting and all correspondence dealt with since the last meeting
- make a note of those present and any apologies for absence
- take notes of the proceedings of the meeting, and all actions agreed and prepare the minutes ready for circulation before the next meeting
- receive and respond to correspondence in connection with the association – a report may be needed at each meeting of correspondence received and action taken since the previous meeting, following this up and writing letters as requested.

The Secretary is normally the first point of contact for members and people outside the organisation, and should therefore keep up to date records of members of the association, dates of meetings, and any useful contacts and addresses.

Role of Treasurer

The Treasurer makes sure that the money is properly managed. They look after the finances of the association and keep a record of all income and expenditure. They need to make sure the association is not spending money it does not have.

The Treasurer's responsibilities include

- opening a bank account and paying all money received into the account
- keeping a record of all money received and issuing receipts
- paying bills as agreed by the committee
- maintaining an account book detailing income and expenditure and preparing regular statements to the committee about its financial position
- arranging for the books to be audited every year before the Annual General Meeting. The auditor can be the bank manager, a member of staff at the bank or a retired professional person. They should have basic book keeping skills but it cannot be anyone from the committee.

At the Annual General Meeting the Treasurer will normally be asked to give a report to the Residents' Association about the year's finances – the income, expenditure and balance.

People are often unwilling to volunteer for the role of Treasurer as they think that it is too complicated. In reality, it is quite straightforward if the process is kept simple – using one book and keeping records up to date.

In addition to this the Treasurer may often be involved in fundraising for the association. This may include organising raffles, fetes, jumble sales etc. If a residents' association is unsure about whether a particular event or activity needs a licence it should contact the Gaming Board. Fundraising however should not just fall on the shoulders of the Treasurer as it should involve the whole association but the Treasurer may play a key role in putting forward ideas.

THE AGENDA

The agenda is a vital part of the meeting as it plans out both its structure and content.

The principles of setting an agenda should include

- when and where the meeting is being held and what it is about
- making sure people have the opportunity to add things to the agenda
- checking the minutes of the last meeting – is there anything outstanding that needs to be discussed or any updating to be done at this meeting
- putting agenda items in logical order
- allocating time for each item depending on its importance

Five reasons why an item should be on an agenda

- 1) To give information
- 2) To collect information
- 3) To create a discussion
- 4) To solve a problem / issue
- 5) To decide on a course of action

To get peoples attention you need to explain why an item is on the agenda e.g. "Treasurers report – for information only". This means that people who did not attend the last meeting will still have some knowledge of what the agenda items means. Giving more detail about each item may help to attract people to the meeting.

Finally people need to know how to get items on the agenda – who to contact etc. – so that it is not just the same people each time deciding what is to be discussed. This makes the meeting more varied and again may attract more people.

THE CONSTITUTION

The group needs a constitution which states the purpose of the group and the promises made between all the members of the Association.

The key issues that need to be covered in a constitution for a Residents' Association should include:

- What do we intend to do?
- How are we going to do it?
- Who needs to be involved?
- How will we organise the work?
- How will decisions be made?

A constitution should be written in plain language and avoid jargon. It should be available to all members who need to receive a copy when they join. It helps to have a reference system to help members use it easily. It also needs to be flexible to help the association operate efficiently.

Constitutions are generally made up of the following sections:

- 1) the name of the association
- 2) aims and objectives
- 3) powers
- 4) membership
- 5) meetings
- 6) committees
- 7) officers
- 8) finance
- 9) dissolution
- 10) amendments

The easiest way to draw up a constitution is to use a model. Have a look at the constitution of another group and ask them how they feel about it – is it workable etc. Your Tenant Liaison Officer can help with this.

When a draft constitution has been drawn up the members will vote to adopt it or reject it at a general meeting. All members (or at least committee members) should have a copy. Once the constitution has been agreed it should then be applied to the Residents' Association to make sure that it operates in accordance with its guidelines. If a constitution is right for an Association it will

- help the association to work well;
- ensure that it carries out its true purposes and aims; and
- help to resolve problems in times of difficulty and controversy.

EXAMPLE OF A RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION CONSTITUTION

THE CONSTITUTION

- 1 Name The Association will be called
- 2 Objects The objects of the Association shall be
 - i) to promote, support and encourage involvement by getting out into the community and promoting social events
 - ii) to improve the facilities of the estate / area
 - iii) to help build a good relationship between tenants and Redland Housing Association
 - iv) to consult with Redland on the social welfare or other matters affecting the interest of all members and residents of the area
 - v) to act in the interest of all residents and members at all times
 - vi) to foster a community spirit for the achievement of the objects of the Association
 - vii) to establish a commitment to equality and diversity
 - viii) to promote a multi-racial community to work towards the elimination of all forms of racism and discrimination
- 3 Members Membership shall be open, irrespective of political party, nationality, religion, race, colour, sex or ethnic origin.
 - i) membership shall be open to all tenants of Redland Housing Association living on the development who are 18 years of age and over
 - ii) the Associations Committee may suspend membership of any member whose conduct damages the reputation of the Association. This can be done at a special meeting.
 - iii) Membership will be monitored to ensure any targets set are achieved
- 4 Subscriptions A subscription fee will be decided by the Annual General Meeting and payment of that fee confers voting rights on that tenant.
- 5 Management of the Association The Management of the Association shall be handled by the Executive Committee
 - i) the Executive Committee shall be elected at the first full meeting of the Association and each Annual General Meeting. Candidates must be proposed and seconded by members of the Association and may be elected on a straight majority of members present at the meeting
 - ii) the Executive Committee shall have the following members
 - a) Chair; b) Secretary; c) Treasurer
 - iii) all Executive Committee meetings must comprise all members
 - iv) officers will be elected annually and allowed to serve for a maximum of 3 years

The Executive Committee shall arrange a minimum of four open meetings per year for the members of the Association, to discuss issues affecting the Residents Association. These meetings will be called by the Association, which will ensure that every Redland tenant in the area will have been notified of the meeting.

- 6 Annual General Meeting The Committee shall arrange an Annual General Meeting so that all the members can hear the Committee report on the year's activities, see how their money was used and elect a new Committee. This meeting will take place in July.
- 7 Special Meetings Special meetings must be arranged at the request of at least three members.
- 8 Duty of Officers The Chair shall conduct the meetings of the Association.
 - i) The Secretary will let the members know about meetings and keep minutes describing what happened at the Associations meetings. Such minutes shall be made available to any member on request. The Secretary will also keep a list of all the Associations members.
 - ii) The Treasurer will keep an account of income and money being spent by the Association and every year will have the books audited by Redlands Accountant.
 - iii) If the Association elects a representative to Redlands Tenant Liaison Committee, that representative should keep the Association informed of the proceedings of each meeting attended
- 9 Finance All the money granted to, or raised by, the Association shall be used for the benefit of the Associations members only in line with the objectives set out in the constitution.
 - i) the Treasurer will keep a proper account of the finances of the Association
 - ii) all expenditure must receive prior agreement from the Executive Committee. Expenditure other than petty cash should be formally approved by the Committee. A vote must be taken and the result recorded.
 - iii) the accounts must be audited once a year by Redland's Accountant
 - iv) the accounts shall be made available to members at the Annual General Meeting
- 10 Alterations to the Constitution Any change to the constitution must be discussed at a meeting. Members will be given at least fourteen days notice of when the meeting is and what it is about. Any change must be approved by at least 2/3 of the voting members present at that meeting.

- 11 Code of Conduct All members shall agree to abide by the Associations code of conduct and failure to do so will result in the member being asked to resign.
- 12 Dissolution
- i) the Association may only be dissolved at a Special General Meeting called for that purpose and must be advertised fourteen days before the meeting
 - ii) a proposal to dissolve the Association shall take effect only if agreed by two thirds of the members present at the meeting
 - iii) funds remaining in the Association budget will become the property of Redland Housing Association

STANDING ORDERS

The constitution for a resident or community group sets out the aims and objectives of the Association and how it will run. Standing Orders are a simple set of rules that give guidance to running meetings in an orderly way. This is important to get the best out of the meeting discussions.

A well planned agenda and a Chairperson who ensures a fair discussion should mean that most meetings run smoothly. Most meetings will lead to a decision being made through a consensus of opinion (i.e. a majority or the entire group agreeing on the issue). However if there is a strong difference of opinion amongst the group or voting has to occur, it is important that the 'rules of debate' are known and followed.

Below is an example of standing orders which include the rules of debate:-

Standing Orders

These rules shall apply to all the meetings and Committees of the Association of

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- 1) Calling a meeting
The meeting shall not take place unless it has been called in accordance with the stated procedure in the constitution.
- 2) Quorum
The meeting can only take place and its decisions be valid if a quorum of members is present as defined in the constitution.
- 3) Chairperson
The Chairperson at all times when present shall occupy the Chair but if still absent five minutes after the time appointed to start the Vice-chair or any member of the Association elected by those present shall take their place.
- 4) Minutes
Minutes shall be kept in a book or file and read to the meeting in full unless they have been previously circulated to all members. The minutes shall contain a record of the names of those attending the meeting.
 - a) The minutes of the previous meeting shall be signed in ink by the Chairperson at the commencement of the meeting after the meeting has confirmed their accuracy. If any alterations are necessary a record of all these alterations shall be included in the minutes of the current meeting. After confirmation of the minutes any member may ask questions about any matter arising out of the minutes for the purpose of information, providing that this matter is not to be dealt with at a later place on the agenda.

5) Rules of debate

- a) All remarks must be addressed to the Chairperson.
- b) Business shall normally be dealt with in the order in which it appears on the agenda. The Chairperson of the meeting may however with the consent of the meeting give precedence to any item or introduce an extra item if there is a good reason for doing so.
- c) The Chairperson shall have the discretion to limit the length of discussion on any subject and to impose a time limit on speakers.
- d) No motion or amendment shall be discussed until it has been moved and seconded. The Chairperson of the meeting may require any motion or amendment to be put in writing.
- e) A speaker to a motion will not normally be allowed to speak twice on that motion except at the conclusion of the debate at which point the speaker will have a right to reply. The speaker may however be called upon to answer a point of information or to give further explanation to a point if this is seen to be necessary by the Chairperson. The speaker to a motion shall be allowed to speak to an amendment and to reply at the end of the debate on the amendment.
- f) All remarks shall be confined strictly to the matter which is under discussion
- g) No-one shall be allowed to make any discriminatory remarks or comments
- h) Only one person shall be allowed to speak at a time and the Chairperson shall decide who shall be allowed to speak and when
- i) If the Chairperson rises to call a member or the meeting to order or in order to direct the course of the proceedings of the meeting any member may be ordered to leave the meeting.
- j) If after repeated rulings by the Chairperson a member refuses to obey that member may be ordered to leave the meeting.
- k) When an amendment is moved and seconded no other amendment shall be taken into consideration until the first amendment has been disposed of.
- l) If an amendment is carried it becomes the substantive motion and further amendments may be moved providing these are consistent with the terms of the amendment which has become the substantive motion.
- m) Voting shall be according to the procedure stated in the constitution.
- n) No resolution or decision of any previous meeting shall be rescinded unless notice shall have been given on the agenda and this motion shall not be discussed without consent of the meeting.
- o) The meeting may at any time suspend one or more of the Standing Orders if such a proposal is agreed by the meeting.
- p) Standing Orders may only be revoked or altered by decision of the Annual General Meeting.