

Council Housing Services

*Tenants' and
Residents'
Associations
How to get one
started*



LANCASTER CITY COUNCIL
Promoting City, Coast & Countryside



Problems on your estate?
Want to improve where you live?
Want to get involved with making decisions that
affect you?
Want to meet new friends?

Opportunities for Involvement

www.lancaster.gov.uk

Why not start your own Tenants and Residents Association?

Tenants get together and form associations for a number of reasons. It may be to campaign for something, such as improved youth facilities on your estate, or to have more street cleaning. It may be that you want to have your say in the decisions made by the Council. 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 Tenants and Residents Associations?

What do you do now?

What you now need to do is find out if other people feel the same. You need to get out and about and talk to as many people as you can before doing anything else.

Start talking to other people on your estate. This could be your neighbours over the fence or while waiting at the bus stop. 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.



Finding out how much support there is and what people's views are takes a long time and you may not feel comfortable starting a conversation with someone you don't know. You might prefer to get together a few people you already know in an informal way and then organise door-knocking and chatting to people together.

You may find that opinions vary greatly, some residents will think it's a great idea and others couldn't care less. Most people will be fairly cautious or non-committal. So, be prepared for any answer and don't get disheartened:

- "I'm just too busy."
- "I'm not really interested in what goes on around here."

The "no-time" excuse will be one you come across most often. Some people will genuinely have no spare time and others may find this is the easiest and politest way of saying "No thanks."

Ask them to come along to a meeting just to find out that 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 or someone to contact if they want to find out more.

Planning your first meeting

If there is support then get together with the people who have shown the most interest. There are a number of factors you need to consider.

When will it be?

- Try to arrange a date and time to suit as many people as possible

Where will it be?

- Choose somewhere that is easy to get to, especially for people who may find it hard walking or travelling a long distance. It could be at someone's house or at the community centre.
- Try to choose somewhere, where people with disabilities can access.

Why are you having the meeting?

- Make sure that local residents are aware why you are having this meeting.

Who do people contact if they want to find out more?

- You need to provide details of someone who people can talk to if they are interested.

Advertise your meeting

- Place posters where local residents are likely to see them – the Post Office, Housing Office, Schools etc.
- Create a leaflet to distribute to the local residents who you wish to invite.
- Speak to the local newspaper

There is a computer and printing facilities available for tenants to use at the Cable Street Office. The Tenant Participation Officer will be happy to help you.

Your first meeting

So you've done all the planning and the day of the meeting has arrived. Here are some tips for a successful meeting:

- Smile and be friendly! Make sure that everyone is introduced and welcomed as they come in. If people don't know anyone and no-one speaks to them, they will be unlikely to come again.
- Try to keep the meeting short and to the point. People will feel that it will have been worth coming if decisions have been made and ideas discussed carefully.
- Get someone to take a few notes about what was discussed and decided
- Get everyone's names and address, so you know how to contact people in the future.

By the end of the first meeting a commitment should have been given to hold a public meeting in order to make the group formal.



The Public Meeting

Planning the Public Meeting

When planning the public meeting you will need to use the same principles that you used when you organised your first meeting. You may also wish to invite a representative from Council Housing.

At the public meeting the officers of the committee should be elected and the members agree a constitution.

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 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 association – men, women, old, young, black, white, disabled people.

What are the various Committee roles?

Chairperson

- Guides the Association to achieve its aims
- Chairs the meetings of the association
- Makes sure everything gets done –does not do everything

Treasurer

- Overall responsibility for the association's finances
- Opens a bank account
- Pays money received into the bank, keeps a record of money received & issues receipts
- Pays bills & keep a record of money spent
- Prepares statements to the Committee and for the Annual General Meeting.

Secretary

- Takes minutes of meetings
- Lets people know where and when the next meeting is and what its about
- Helps to prepare agendas for meetings
- Writes and receiving letters on behalf of the association
- Keeps a record of membership
- Keeps people informed – so that they feel involved and are able to join in what the group does.

You may want to have more people on your committee. It all depends on what you're trying to achieve, and who can do what.

Other officers you may choose to have are:

- Fundraiser – responsible for raising money
- Social Secretary – responsible for organising social activities
- Press Officer – responsible for approaching the press, radio, TV to get publicity for the group.

Training on all these roles is available. Contact the Tenant participation Officer to find out more.

The Constitution

If you want your group to be taken seriously by local residents, the Council and funding organisations you will need a constitution.

A constitution will also help you clarify three things:

- Who you represent
- What your group is about
- How your group is run

The constitution should be the basis of your organisation and be set out for everyone to see. It will be very hard for your Group to obtain funding from other organisations if you do not have a Constitution.

You should also tailor a constitution to meet the needs of your own group not just copy someone else's.

The Tenant Participation Officer can help you to create your own Constitution.



Running a tenants and residents association

Running an association well involves not only running the meetings well but also keeping everyone involved and well informed.

Meetings:

- Should be held regularly
- Should start and finish on time
- Should stick to their agenda, so that people don't get fed up with time wasting
- Should be enjoyable and interesting
- Should be in a comfortable room with comfortable chairs

The agenda

The agenda must be logical, When planning the agenda think about the time, scale and importance of each item. "Matters arising" (things occurring from the last minutes) should not take up most of the meeting and each important matter should appear on the agenda as a separate item.

The inclusion of times in agendas, helps people to keep to the agenda, and lets people know when they're going to be able to go home. It's up to the Chair to stick to these timings, or get agreement from the meeting if they're going to be changed.

If the agenda is planned well, meetings should run smoothly.

Good Chairing

Good chairing is very often the key to making meetings work.

The main aim is to make sure the meeting achieves what it sets out to achieve in as fair and friendly a way as possible.

Perhaps the best way of learning how to run meetings is to think about how to run meetings is to think about meetings you have been to, that have been well-run. Bad meetings are the sign of a poor organisation, and will put people off coming again.



Keeping people interested

People are the most important resource your group has. The biggest task is to get and keep people involved. This doesn't happen just by chance. You don't want your group to be a clique of activists, nor a "one-man band". Here are some ways of preventing these things from happening.

- Define your aims – make sure your organisation is clear what it is trying to do
- Share Jobs – if too few people are doing all the work they may get fed up and other people may feel excluded
- Keep in Touch – send out regular newsletters and leaflets, to let people who rarely attend meetings, know what is going on, There are many reasons why people may not attend meetings but it does not always mean they are not interested
- Publicise your successes – This will help to keep people interested, for example a photo in the local people about the disco for young people you organised.
- Have Fun – try to make the group enjoyable. "Tea breaks" during meetings help to create a social atmosphere. Running social events also helps people to get to know each other and be sociable.



Producing 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 that can 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 will 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 your group.

Finally, you will need to deliver your newsletter. To do this you will need volunteers and this is a good way of encouraging people to get involved. It is a good idea to send a copy to your local housing office, schools and your local Councillor.

Campaigning

Suppose you have damp in your house, and so has your neighbour and, so it turns out, has half the street. Or your neighbours are fed up with not being able to park their car outside their house and you are fed up with it being parked outside yours.

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
- 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 that might help you.

Be careful which method(s) you chose 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 no good for collecting detailed information.

Once you have got the information and support you need to organise your campaign and start acting. It must have the maximum impact on the people you need to influence for example, your Landlord, the Council, and 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 its logical, sets out the problem and evidence clearly and is sent to everyone 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 incite the press suggesting people for them to take to

- If when you handed in your petitions/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 its time to think about going to some authority higher up.

Remember, getting things changed takes time!



Where do we get the money from?

Financial assistance is available to tenants who would like to set up a Tenant and Residents Association. The amount available depends upon the number of tenants you represent.

Fundraising

As a tenants' or residents' association you will need money to carry out your work. The sources and amounts of money available for you will be different depending on where you are, what sort of group you are and what you want to 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 will 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 organisation like yours for different types of projects. If you contact Juliet Grant, she will be able to help you apply for grants.



Equal Opportunities

What does it actually mean?

- Taking action to ensure that discrimination does not occur
- Acknowledging that prejudice and discrimination does exist but showing you are taking steps to sort this out
- Acknowledging that different people have differing needs and that you are taking action to ensure these different needs are met.

Equal opportunities in your tenants groups means access to your group is open to all, and that the views of all those you represent are heard and taken into account.

Because of past experiences of discrimination, many people, will assume that they will meet discrimination or unfriendly treatment and not be welcomed in your group. Groups of people who may be discriminated against include; Black and minority ethnic people, Lesbians and gay men, People with disabilities, ex-offenders etc. This means that your group will have to make positive efforts to provide for them and to encourage them to believe that you actually welcome their involvement.

It is no good just saying this, you have to make sure you do it.

Your group will need to talk about equal opportunities, how it affects your group and what policies and practices you need. There are some steps you can take:-

- Adopt an equal opportunities statement

- Draw up an equal opportunities policy
- Avoid stereotyping
- Involve everyone in your community
- Fight discrimination

The first step to combat discrimination is the adoption of an equal opportunities statement, which should be included in your constitution.

Improving Access

- Try to improve accessibility into your meeting rooms for those who can not easily use stairs, such as wheelchair users, parents with pushchairs and elderly people. If you can not improve it, offer genuine help. Advertise the disabled access in your publicity material.
- Consider laying on transport to encourage people to come who would otherwise find it too difficult. Perhaps someone in your groups has a car, or there are people willing to walk with an elderly person.
- Consider whether you can run a babysitting rota or crèche or whether someone is needed to play with children or care for a dependent relative while a meeting is in progress.
- Contrary to popular myths, disabled people do not want to sit all together at the front or back at meetings. Allow space so that wheelchair users can move around easily.