

## Residents' Association Toolkit

This toolkit will help you set up a residents' association in your local area. Your residents' association will help you form a genuine partnership with One Housing so that you can improve your housing services and your local area.

One Housing aims to provide the best possible range of services for you, your family and community. Partnership working between residents and One Housing helps you to have more influence and enables you to get involved in the running of your homes.

This toolkit alongside the financial help we offer is the key to partnership working with One Housing, this document should act as a handy guide and will provide you with information about the following:

1. Resident Engagement Officers
2. What Residents Associations do
3. How One Housing will help with funding and practical help
4. Setting up a residents' association
5. Having a set of rules – your constitution
6. Positions of responsibility – Your Executive Committee
7. Running your residents' association
8. Your meetings
9. Getting people involved
10. Taking more control of your homes

## **Your Resident Engagement Officers**

One Housing employs specialist staff called Resident Engagement Officers who are there to help you. Their job involves giving advice and information about your home, your street and your local area.

Our Resident Engagement Officers will work with residents' association members to find suitable training opportunities for them to attend. We currently use Arlington in Camden and Phoenix Heights on the Isle of Dogs as training venues. Training for TRAs and all residents is available free; please check our website for further information.

Our Resident Engagement Officer will also work proactively with members of residents associations to find suitable conferences that will help expand your knowledge and help with practical skills. One Housing will aim to send residents to some of the following conferences and training opportunities: TPAS, CIH, NHF – attendance is based on costs, content and individual requirements.

Resident Engagement Officers have experience of working with residents and staff and can help you find solutions to problems.

Resident Engagement Officers are also knowledgeable about other services in your locality provided by the council and other statutory, voluntary and community sector providers. They can help with linking these services to the needs of your community.

Contact your Resident Engagement Officer for further help with any of the subjects covered in this pack or advice on the best way of starting up and association in your area.

To contact your Resident Engagement Officer, please email [residentengagements@onehousing.co.uk](mailto:residentengagements@onehousing.co.uk)

## **What Residents Associations do**

There is no simple answer to this, Residents set up Associations for a whole range of reasons – to get to know their neighbours or to discuss a particular concern. An association can become involved in all types of activities from running local community initiatives to supporting youth activity schemes and supporting local employment initiatives.

- Although all associations are different, they do share some common interests and goals:
- Identify problems which affect resident's quality of life
- Find solutions to these problems
- Put residents in touch with other organisations in the voluntary, private and public sectors
- Campaign for changes and improvements in your area

One Housing is fully committed to supporting its Residents Associations in whatever way it reasonably can and recognises Residents Associations in all the areas that it works in. Residents Associations provide a valuable link between One Housing and residents and can be instrumental in helping to curb anti-social behaviour or arranging activities for residents.

Each association has a number of volunteers who are responsible for its management (see 6). One Housing will support Residents Associations and their Executive Committees in their work with funding and training, helping them to develop the range of activities they can engage in, and to promote this to all residents. If you would like to become more involved with the association in your area email [residentengagements@onehousing.co.uk](mailto:residentengagements@onehousing.co.uk) they will put you in touch with your local committee members.

### **Getting a Residents Association Started**

You probably have a clear idea of why you want to set up a Residents Association in your local area. Before you really get started, you should talk to as many people as possible and find out if they feel the same way.

Talk to your Resident Engagement Officer, they will help you to look at any issues with you and agree the best way forward. It will be your Resident Engagement Officer that helps you with the practicalities of setting your Association up.

The following guidelines should help, but please remember that you can only do so much and your time is limited especially if you have other commitments. Outlining why you want to set up an Association, setting clear aims and objectives at the beginning will give your Residents Association a focused start:

- Encourage people to talk to their neighbours and seek their support
- Tell them about the support and advice available from One Housing
- Be prepared to listen to other people's ideas
- Accept that will encounter some problems, ask people to come up with what they think are solutions
- Encourage residents that you have contact with to call a meeting and arrange for a room to be made available locally
- Establish the area and homes that your Association will cover. It is very important that as many people as possible living in the area is told about your plans and then invited to meetings.
- Make sure the purpose of the meeting is clear and that it relates to the issues of concern in your area. Do not call this first meeting to elect an Executive Committee (you can do this later) as this may put people off as they might think they will be landed with all the work! You should write a list of things that will be covered in this first meeting – this is called an agenda
- You could get in touch in touch with other associations in your area who have already formed a Residents Associations and invite them to your initial meeting to talk about their experiences
- Publicise your first meeting where you will elect officers to the Executive Committee. You will need to produce leaflets and posters telling people of the need to set up a Residents Association, our Resident Engagement Officers will be pleased to help with this

- Emphasise that forming a Residents Association is a good way to work in partnership with One Housing and other local organisations to improve the area and quality of life for residents
- Encourage your group of residents to be realistic; there is a fair amount of time that goes into forming and sustaining a Residents' Association but, remember, it should be a team effort amongst the Executive Committee and Members
- Set SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timed) goals and milestones for your Association – easy early quick wins will help build confidence and enable Members to ease into the roles, your Resident Engagement officer can provide support during these early stages until you are up and running and self sufficient

Once you have had your first meeting and agreed the above then you should have your first official meeting where you will elect the Executive Committee and agree the constitution. A constitution is a set of rules, aims and obligations that govern what the association can and cannot do, who can join, how decisions are made and how any money raised is accounted for.

### **Your Constitution**

A constitution is a set of rules which show:

- Who you represent
- Who can join your Residents Association
- How your association is run
- How decisions are made
- How the finances of the association are managed
- How often you meet
- The Associations Equality & Diversity statement
- What you can and cannot do as an Association

Your constitution will guarantee the rights of members to voice their views and vote on issues, which affect them and protect the interests of members if the Association runs into difficulties.

From One Housing's point of view, your constitution provides a kind of guarantee that a group is open, democratic and responsible for the actions of its members.

As One Housing is paying money to Associations, we need to ensure that it is being spent wisely and for the benefit of residents and the Association. Funds come from rents paid by residents so have to be accounted for and used reasonably. For these reasons the constitution will require Associations to keep proper accounts and have them approved each year before further funds are released.

The constitution also addresses issues of equality of diversity as One Housing must ensure access to the benefits are shared by everybody living within the Association's area.

### **The Model Constitution**

To help you along One Housing have a model constitution, this is intended as a guideline and you are not expected to adopt it word for word. You will however find that this is an effective constitution and based on nationally recognised best practice.

Once you have agreed a constitution and it has been adopted by your Residents Association (at the association's inaugural meeting, at the AGM or subsequent meeting) you will need to have it approved by the Resident Engagement and Housing Officers.

If you already have a constitution, you should present it to the Resident Engagement Officer for your area. They will compare it to One Housing's model constitution and, unless there are any specific and onerous areas of disagreement between the two, will seek adoption and approval of your existing constitution. They may ask you to make some changes if the two constitutions (One Housing model constitution and your existing one) are too inconsistent. We hope that we can work together through mutual understanding and support rather than imposing anything on you and that we can agree a good constitution that addresses issues of benefit to local residents and adheres to best practice.

### **Positions of Responsibility and your Committee Members**

Residents Associations have an Executive Committee; these are 'office bearers' or members of the association that have defined roles and responsibilities.

The following pages will outline what these Executive committee Members are expected to do. You should read these notes before applying for any of these positions. Discuss the roles with your Resident Engagement Officer for more information, they may put you in touch with other such members from other established associations or offer training.

All Executive Committees have a Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer. Some Executive committees also have a Vice-Chairperson who acts as deputy for the Chairperson. Other Members of the Association may also be given particular tasks. For example, someone, other than an office bearer, may be a key holder, social secretary or a person in charge of a sub-committee for young people for example. Each association decides for itself what other positions they need.

The Chair, Secretary and Treasurer are very important appointments as they carry with them responsibility and more work than other members. Executive committee or office bearers should be chosen with care and with existing skills and aspirations kept in mind. For example, are there people in the association with existing skills in leadership, finance or administration? Or if there is anyone who wants to get a job in any of these skill sets then they too could gain valuable skills and experience by acting in one of these roles.

The following pages outline these roles in more detail:

#### Positions of Responsibility

##### The Chair

The Chair is responsible for:

- Planning the agenda with the help of the secretary for all meetings and preparing for all topics to be discussed
- Ensuring that meeting start and finish on time
- Conducting meetings effectively by leading and controlling discussions whilst encouraging people to have their say and generally keeping good order
- Helping meetings to run smoothly and answering any questions
- The Chair should summarise after a long debate making sure that everyone has understood what has been discussed and what decisions have been made
- Maintaining the respect of members through fair and efficient handling of meetings
- Representing the Association at meetings with One Housing and other partner organisation

### The Secretary

The Secretary is responsible for:

- Ensuring that the association works to further its aims as stated in the constitution
- Maintaining a list of active members and to let One Housing know of any changes
- Keep administrative records of information relating to the Association
- Writing agendas with the Chair and to bring matters requiring action to the attention of the committee
- Making sure people are aware of meeting times, dates and venues
- Organising and ensuring the venue is available and fit for purpose for the meeting
- Taking notes as to what is said and what decisions are made at meetings, turning these into minutes and circulating them to members and to One Housing
- Ensuring that the number of meetings and other commitments stated in the constitution take effect
- Replying to letters and queries with the Chair on behalf of the Association
- Helping the Chair with follow-up work between meetings

### The Treasurer

The Treasurer is responsible for looking after the Association's finances. Many people are worried about handing money as it is viewed as a considerable responsibility – and it is! You should not let this put you off though. Most people are capable of learning how to manage money for an Association. Common sense is key and if you can manage your own personal finances then, with a little support, you will be able to manage those of the Association.

Ideally, the Treasurer already has suitable experience or is willing to undertake training. A basic training course will cover bookkeeping, managing bank accounts and balancing the books. The main duties of the Treasurer are to:

- Keep a record of the associations' income and expenditure
- Set up and maintain the Association's bank account
- Keep invoices and receipts in good order
- Keep control over the petty cash

- Report on the Association's finances to both executive Committee and to general meetings
- Help the Association to plan its expenditure and make the most of the grant given by One Housing or other sources of income
- Keep accounts in good order and arrange for a statement to be given to the Resident Engagement Officer when asked for – usually after an AGM

Throughout the year, as the Treasurer, you will need to keep a track of income and expenditure whilst keeping the Association's account balanced on a quarterly basis. You will need to decide how often to provide financial reports to meetings and agree this with the Executive Committee

Each year the Treasurer must prepare annual accounts for the AGM. Ideally, these would be independently checked but it is understandable that many Associations will not be able to afford such a service. A full detailed Treasurers report to the AGM will be acceptable providing it has been signed off by the Resident Engagement Officer.

As stated above, if an Association is in receipt of One Housing grant, the annual accounts from the previous year must be approved by the Resident Engagement Officer before further funding is provided, this is usually done by providing a bank statement of the association's account.

### Preparing an Agenda

Having and sticking to a clear agenda is the key to a successful meeting – whether it is an Executive Committee meeting, a general meeting or AGM. The agenda should be prepared and sent out to members well in advance of meetings. You should make sure you let everyone know when and where the meeting is taking place. It is a good idea to keep a note of anything which comes up between meetings and enable people to approach you with ideas as to what they want to see on agendas.

Here are a few tips for writing a clear agenda:

- Include the last meeting's minutes as an early item for discussion
- Under 'matters arising from previous minutes' only deal with small issues, larger issues should be a separate agenda item
- Try not to include too many items on the agenda as this risk making the meeting too long
- 'Any other business' should not take long either – if it does then some of those items could go on the next agenda

### Sample Agenda

#### Agenda

SWS Residents association

20<sup>th</sup> January 2010

19.00hrs, Flower & Dean community Centre

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of the last meeting (are they a correct record?)
3. Matters arising (from the previous minutes, unless on this agenda this should only require a brief update)
4. Youth club
5. Graffiti and ASB
6. Newsletter
7. AOB (any other urgent matters that arose after the agenda was issued)
8. Date, time and venue of next meeting

## Minutes

Minutes should show what went on at a particular meeting and what decisions were made. They need to be an accurate record of the meeting and include:

- The name of the Association, the date, time and place of the meeting
- A list of who was present and who apologised for their absence
- The key points discussed and the decisions reached on each item
- A note as to who will carry out any actions arising from decisions taken
- The date, time and venue for the next meeting

Write/type up the minutes as soon as you can after the meeting. Agree whether members want the minutes sent to them as soon as possible after the meeting or just before the next meeting. If there are a lot of action points that need to be addressed before the next meeting then it may be necessary to send the minutes out as soon as possible so that people can get on with their respective actions.

Ensure your Resident Engagement Officer has a copy of your minutes.

## Financial and Practical help

One Housing has put together a financial package which provides Residents Associations the support to get started and to keep going throughout the year.

Following democratic elections of the Executive Committee at either an AGM or the beginning of a new Association, One Housing will provide a grant of up to £500 to cover administration and associated costs for running the association. Residents of the Isle of Dogs region are entitled to up to £800, this reflects the density of homes we have on The Island and long term commitments relating to the transfer agreements.

This funding can be used for hall hire, printing posters to advertise your meetings, any provisions that you may provide at your meetings and general administration costs.

To be eligible for the funding you must have the following in place:



- Decided on a name for your Residents Association
- Agreed a constitution for your Residents Association
- Opened a bank account in the association's name
- Have a Chair and Treasurer who can sign cheques in the Association's name
- Provide a list of your Executive Committee members to you Resident Engagement Officer
- Provided information about where, when and how regularly your Association will meet

### **Continuation Grant**

Before your Residents Association can obtain continuation grant, that is grant after your first year grant, it must have and comply with the following:

- Adopted a constitution based on the One Housing model constitution and have it agreed by your resident Engagement Officer
- Having held at least two general meetings with 14 days' notice given to members
- Having held an AGM with 21 days' notice given to members with an election of a Resident Association Executive Committee – Chair, Vice Chair, Treasurer and Secretary
- Give a copy of the AGM minutes and minutes for general meetings to the Resident Engagement and Housing Officers
- Provide a bank statement showing records of income and expenditure
- Ensure that the Residents Association reflects the diversity of your area

If you live in an area with other residents of other housing associations and owner occupiers, you will be able to form a residents association together. One Housing can help provide funding where at least 50% of our residents show an interest.

### **Training**

Funding will be provided to pay for training courses or for places at conferences for your Residents Association members. All training should be relevant to the development of the Association or One Housing, for example a book keeping course for the Treasurer. Please speak to your Resident Engagement Officer if you think you have a good case for attending training, the first port of call will be One Housing courses provided internally for all staff and residents at Arlington, Phoenix Heights or SWS.

### **Practical Help**

For those Residents Associations that comply One Housing will assist with printing and delivery of posters and invitations to TRA meetings.

Your Resident Engagement Officer can also help you in the design of flyers and posters or photocopying leaflets for your Association. You should however give as much notice as possible so that they can find the time to help.

### **Residents Rooms**

One Housing can (if practicably possible at its own discretion) make available resident rooms to established Associations where the Association agrees to abide by the following:

- The Resident Rooms must run for the benefit of the association's Members, and not just the Executive Committee.
- Associations of less than 100 residential units must be willing to share the Rooms with other associations
- The Residents Room must be open to association members to use
- Members of the association should be able to book and arrange for use of the room
- All decisions regarding the use of the room must be made at general meetings and agreed with the Resident Engagement Officer and Housing Officer.
- The resident rooms, and any other community facility, remains the property of One Housing and maybe reclaimed by 28 days' notice in writing, unless there is a lease or other written agreement to be abided by

### **Running Your Residents Association**

Once established a Residents Association is run by an Executive Committee. The members of your Executive Committee are elected by all the members of the Residents association at your annual general meeting.

This section gives you information on how to run your executive Committee and the Association effectively and how to be an effective committee member. The rules governing how your Executive Committee is elected and managed need to be written into your constitution and this should act as a reference point.

### **The Executive Committee**

Some of the main roles are:

- Carry out the work of the Association on behalf of all the members
- Manage the association according to the rules set in your constitution
- Organise general meetings for all members of the Association including the Annual General Meeting
- Act on the decisions of members at general meetings
- Consult members and report back to them on decisions
- Represent the views and interests of all members between general meetings
- Work constructively with One Housing to improve service delivery
- Act as a conduit between One Housing and the Association membership
- Arrange activities and events for members

### **Running an effective Executive Committee**

There are some basic points which can help the executive Committee remain effective:

Make your aims clear. You will need to set these aims with all members of your association. The Executive committee will then need to decide which are achievable and to set short, medium and long term objectives.

Share the work. Involve as many people as possible and allow for different levels of involvement. Assess people's skills before giving out roles to members of the Committee or Association. For example somebody with existing book keeping skills may make the ideal Treasurer, it is also important to let people learn new skills and take advantage of funding for training courses.

Keep everyone informed about what the executive Committee is doing. Use newsletters, leaflets, public meetings and door knocking to involve your members in what is happening. Also target non active members as this may encourage them to become involved.

Enjoy and gain achievements through the process, a good way to spread news and gain greater involvement of members is to organise social events.

Even with clear goals and objectives in mind, any committee is as good as its members. You should be enthusiastic and attend meetings regularly. Working out a timetable for meetings in advance will help keep things running smoothly. Try to choose a time and day in the week that is convenient for everyone. Have the meetings, dates and venues mapped out for the year if possible then everyone knows when and where they will be.

Before taking on the role of Executive committee member, it is important that you think about how much time you can realistically give.

### **Making the most of meetings**

Be prepared and organised. Read the agenda and any accompanying papers well before the meeting making notes of any key discussion points

Be willing to listen to what other people have to say. Give other members a chance to have their say. In this way others will gain confidence to make their points and discussion will be encouraged. If one or two people are allowed to dominate then others may become discouraged to attend

Make yourself heard. Raise your own points in a clear, polite and concise manner. Preparing your points and comments before the meeting will help. If you feel unable to make your points or feel that you have not been heard then bring this to the Chairs attention.

Back up your Chair. If the meeting is becoming difficult help the Chair by adhering to the rules, listening and making helpful contributions.

If you say you will do something, do it. Try not to agree to do things at a meeting that you are not prepared to follow through. If you want to help but feel that you do not have the time, try and get another member of the association to help you.

Support your committee decisions, remember the decisions were taken democratically and should be supported even though you may not necessarily agree with them entirely.

## Your Meetings

General meetings give all members the chance to come together and discuss issues of common concern. It is important for members to get as much notice as possible so that they can add to the agenda any items they would like discussed. Advertising the meeting throughout the local area is essential. It might even persuade a few non-active members to come along. As with Executive Committee meetings, a few general guidelines will help make things run more smoothly:

- Meetings should start on time, not be too long and finish on time
- Have a clear agenda, so that everyone knows what is going to be discussed
- Make sure everyone knows who everyone else is, especially with new members
- Think about the layout of the room – choose a comfortable room and arrange the chairs so that nobody is left out of the discussion
- Do not be too strict – if people want to discuss something not on the agenda allow them to briefly do so under AOB – if it turns out to be significant then find agreement that it should be an agenda item at the next meeting or hold a special meeting if it needs to be addressed sooner
- Make decisions. Members do not meet together often so make the most of this opportunity to get things done
- Everyone should have their say, however maintain control and direction of the meeting by establishing protocols – review the conduct and behaviour in meetings information provided in this toolkit

## The constitution and requirements about meetings

Your Association's constitution sets out a number of rules about meetings, which the association must comply with.

The association must hold a minimum number of meetings per year, some of which must be general meetings

The secretary must give a minimum number of days notice for an Executive Committee meeting, general meeting or AGM – these are set out in your agreed constitution

At meetings, votes will be carried out by a majority of the members present. In order to expel a member a 2/3rds majority of those present is required.

For a decision to be valid, a minimum number of committee members (the quorum) must be present

An AGM must be held every year at which the annual report and accounts must be agreed and the members of the Executive Committee elected. A representative of One Housing should be invited; the minutes and a statement of accounts should be passed on to your Resident Engagement Officer

To tackle urgent issues, emergency meetings can be called by the Executive Committee

All meetings should be led by the Chair. In their absence the Vice Chair can deputise or delegate to another if it is a sub-committee meeting

Members of the Executive Committee can only be removed from office for misconduct at a general meeting with a 2/3<sup>rd</sup> majority vote

### Standing Orders

Your Residents Association can choose to have other rules; these are known as standing orders. Standing orders set out how meetings should be conducted. If you want to have Standing Orders you may wish to include rules such as:

- Keeping a register of attendance at meetings
- Limiting the amount of time members can speak at meetings
- Voting will be by a show of hands unless three or more people ask for a secret ballot
- Using racist, sexist or offensive language at meetings is banned and a repeat offender will be required to leave the meeting and banned from the following meeting

### Getting People Involved

Getting people involved can be very challenging. However it is worth spending time on as people are the most important part of a successful Association. Here are some useful tips;

#### Use a variety of methods to contact people

Remember that personal contact is the best. Take a little time to talk to people when you deliver leaflets or collect surveys or questionnaires. People will have the opportunity to ask questions and understand more. Consider using:

- Door knocking
- Newsletters, leaflets and posters
- Surveys and petitions
- Meetings

#### Break down barriers

What stops people from becoming involved? Here are just a couple of the many reasons people give

- Language and cultural difficulties
- Access to meeting places
- Poorly located meeting places
- The times of meetings
- Fear of joining in
- Fear of going out at night
- Lack of childcare

Try to minimise the effect of these by:

- Providing crèche facilities if possible
- Encourage residents who can translate and interpret to play an active role and translate for residents where appropriate. One Housing may also be able to help with this

- Using a venue which is local, wheelchair accessible and well lit, try schools, community centres, faith buildings, local libraries etc.
- Varying the times of meetings and arranging them so they do not clash with major events

### **Publicise small successes**

Let local people know about the achievements of your Association. People are more likely to join a group that is successful and doing something positive. Decide on a logo that local people will quickly recognise and use it at every opportunity so that your group is known to everyone in the community.

### **Local Service Agreements**

These are written undertakings between residents and One Housing that give details of the services delivered, expected standards of work, timescales and costs. They are not, however legally binding. These types of arrangements tend to be more suitable for estates; however, any group of residents which receives services from One Housing can have this relationship outlined in a local service agreement.

Agreements can be a good way of developing a better working relationship between residents and One Housing, and they can provide a real opportunity to set and monitor levels of service.

- Guidelines on how neighbour disputes will be resolved
- Action to be taken on 'anti-social behaviour'
- Priorities for improvements for the local area
- Local policies for allocating properties
- Details of legal rights given to residents and One housing over and above the agreement