

***Tendring District Council
Housing Services***



Get involved!

How to run a residents association



1 Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to provide a range of useful information and guidance for any of our tenants or leaseholders that are interested in setting up or running a resident's association. However, no publication of this size can possibly answer all of your questions, so please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any queries or need any further advice or practical help. Details of how you can contact us are given on page 29.

What is a residents association?

A residents association is a group of people who join together to get more involved in the management of their homes and in issues affecting their community. This may come about for any one of the following reasons:

- ◆ to campaign for or against something;
- ◆ to have a representative voice with their landlord or another agency;
- ◆ to develop community spirit;
- ◆ to organise social events;
- ◆ to meet neighbours and make friends; or
- ◆ to build individual's confidence and increase their self esteem.

By joining together, you can share information and ideas and campaign more strongly on local issues that can make a big difference to your neighbourhood. Also, by improving communication with us, your landlord, we can work together to provide advice and services that meet your local community's needs and priorities.

Although residents associations are run for and by the community, we can offer practical help and advice to get them started and keep them running. Examples of the type of help that we can provide are given in italics throughout this guide.

Previous successes achieved by residents associations working in our district have included:

- ◆ replacement of play equipment;
- ◆ provision of upgraded and additional lighting;
- ◆ improved directional signs; and
- ◆ measures to prevent parking on grassed verges.

The type of group you decide to form can be either informal-where you meet occasionally to discuss issues of concern or interest in your neighbourhood-or it can be organised more formally with an agreed constitution, elected committee and regular meetings.

Whatever type of group you decide to set up, you must make sure that membership is open to everyone living within your catchment area so that the decisions made do represent the views of your community.

2 Getting started

The first thing to do if you are interested in setting up an association is to find out from your neighbours if there is enough support for your idea and to identify what the main issues of concern are. Although you may think you already know what the issues are in your neighbourhood, it is important that you get the views of as many people as possible to make sure that they feel the same. This is also a good opportunity to find out what would be the best time and place for those that are interested to attend any meetings that you may hold in the future.

There are a number of ways you can find out what your neighbours' views are. For example, you could try:

- ◆ knocking on people's doors;
- ◆ visiting local groups, for example playgroups;
- ◆ carrying out surveys or producing a newsletter; or
- ◆ making links with other individuals, groups or organisations, for example, local councillors or schools.

Remember while some people will be enthusiastic, others may be disinterested or even hostile. Don't let this put you off. It is possible that those who were not interested to start with may want to get involved once your association is up and running and they can see you getting results.

If you are not able to approach the people in your area or need some help to do this, please let us know and we will help you.

To become a successful association, you will need to think about the following:

◆ **What are the aims of your group?**

These should be realistic and achievable. If you set yourself aims that you have little chance of meeting, people will lose interest and support for your association.

◆ **What issues would bring your community together?**

For example, do you want to have more say in the services that we provide as your landlord, such as repairs or allocations, or develop the community spirit in your area by organising social activities?

◆ **How do you think that your group should be structured?**

Do you want to have a committee that deals with the day to day running of the association and then hold a few general public meetings each year to keep all members informed? Or, do you want all of your meetings to be public meetings and just elect a number of key representatives? The choice is yours, but if you only have a small membership, it is possible to have all your meetings in public and a committee may be unnecessary. However, if you

have a large membership, just holding public meetings may prove to be unproductive and you may find it quite difficult to get anything done.

Hopefully, from speaking to people in your neighbourhood, you will have gained some ideas about each of these issues.

3 Planning a meeting

If your initial contact with others in your neighbourhood showed that there was enough support to form a residents association in your area, the next step is to organise a public meeting.

It is important that all of the public meetings that you hold are open and accessible to everyone within the catchment area of your proposed association. In this way, you can make sure that you obtain views from as many of the people that you are aiming to represent as possible.

To make sure of this, you will need to think about each of the following when planning the meeting:

◆ Where are you going to hold the meeting?

It is important that you choose your venue carefully as some venues, for example pubs, might put people off if they have certain religious or other beliefs. It is also important that the venue is as near as possible to your neighbourhood so that you don't exclude those who do not have their own means of transport. If this is not possible, you could think about providing some means of transport. You should also think about whether your chosen venue is accessible, for example, does it have ramps to allow access for those in wheelchairs or with prams.

◆ What time are you going to hold the meeting?

You should arrange your meeting for a time to suit as many of those that you are going to invite as possible. This will mean arranging the time around people who work, parents who have to collect children from school and elderly residents who may not want to go out after dark. It is also important that the day and / or time of the meeting does not coincide with any major national, religious or other event (including the climax of major soap story lines!)

◆ How are you planning to advertise the meeting?

For any meeting to be successful, you need to make sure that everyone knows about it. As well as putting a leaflet through everyone's door, see if you can put notices in any local shops, libraries or other community buildings that your potential members might use. Leaflets and posters should be kept clear and simple – attract people's attention by using coloured paper and a large type face for the main points and make sure that the date, time and place of the meeting are clearly shown. The timing of your publicity is also important - the meeting needs to be advertised enough in advance so that people don't arrange other commitments, but not so much in advance that people forget about it.

◆ **Who will be the contact for those who are interested but unable to attend?**

However carefully you plan the date and time of your meeting it is inevitable that some people will still be unable to attend. To make sure that you don't exclude anyone who is unable to attend, let people know whom they can contact if they are interested in becoming involved in your group.

◆ **How are you going to meet the costs of the meeting?**

Most halls charge a small hire fee that often needs to be paid before the meeting. It is very likely that, at your first meeting, your group will not have its own funds and so this charge will have to be met from another source. As well as this, there will be other costs that you will have to meet, for example for printing your leaflets and providing refreshments.

We can meet expenses like these for your first meeting

◆ **Do you need to provide any special service or facilities?**

For example, do you need to provide a crèche for young children to encourage those with young families to attend or provide a translation service for those who have difficulty understanding English? It is important that you consider things like this, as it will help to make sure that your group is open and accessible to all. If you don't, you may be preventing certain individuals or groups from becoming involved.

We can meet the cost of providing any special services that may be needed for your first meeting.

◆ **What items are you going to include on the agenda?**

Whatever type of meeting you are holding, you should think carefully about the agenda beforehand and be clear about what you want to achieve. Preparing the agenda is normally the responsibility of the Chairperson and Secretary of any association. However, before your first meeting you will not have anyone elected to carry out these roles. In this case, if there is a group of you interested in setting up the association you should get together and agree the items that are to be included on the agenda. Otherwise, you can use the feedback that you got during your initial canvass to draw up the agenda or follow the example below and use your first meeting to draw up a list of the issues that are of concern or interest to your community.

**Proposed Residents Association for Anywhere
Meeting to be held on 20 May 2006 at 7.30pm
Anywhere Community Centre**

Agenda

1. Welcome and introductions
2. Apologies for absence
3. Reasons for forming a residents association and the type of group required
4. Choice of name
5. Election of officers and committee members
 - ◆ Chairperson
 - ◆ Secretary
 - ◆ Treasurer
 - ◆ Other committee members
6. Adoption of a constitution
7. Identification of issues of interest / concern
8. Any other business

◆ **How are you going to make the meeting enjoyable?**

The main secret of attracting people to your meetings is to make them enjoyable. This is important for any meeting, but particularly for your first when you are looking to encourage interest and support. Even if you just break for refreshments halfway through your meetings you're creating a friendly atmosphere where people can chat and get to know each other.

From this checklist, you can see how important it is to find out the requirements of your community **before** you start planning any meeting. By making sure that you cater for as many of these as possible you will maximise the number of people that are likely to attend and make sure that you are not excluding anyone. Remember the more time and effort that you spend preparing for a meeting the better it will be and the more chance you have of getting what you want from the meeting.

If you would like us to help organise your first meeting, please let us know.

Running the meeting

As we've already mentioned, it is important that your first meeting is seen by those attending as successful and enjoyable as this will encourage them to come again or become more involved in your association.

To help achieve this, you should make sure that:

- ◆ the seating is arranged in such a way that people feel welcome and involved, for example in a circle instead of in rows;
- ◆ the person chairing the meeting asks everyone to introduce themselves at the start of a meeting;
- ◆ the meeting is properly chaired;

- ◆ if it is not your first meeting, welcome any newcomers personally and take time to tell them what has happened in the past;
- ◆ provide some refreshments and a chance for people to chat and get to know each other;
- ◆ circulate an attendance form so that you can build on the interest shown
- ◆ there is a clear agenda that is followed;
- ◆ decisions are made (and recorded in minutes)

If it is your first meeting, you will not have elected anyone to be your Chairperson. However, it is important that someone takes this role to make sure that the meeting runs smoothly.

If you would like us to, we can chair your first meeting up until the point when you have elected your own Chairperson.

Whoever chairs the meeting, the most important thing is to make sure that everyone is given the opportunity to speak and to give his or her opinions. Remember that not everyone is used to meetings and some people may need encouragement to give their views. You should make sure everyone knows that his or her view is as important as the next person's.

At the first meeting of your group you will need to identify what type of group you want to set up.

If you all decide that you want to be an informal tenant association, it may well be that everyone is invited to all of your meetings and those on the committee will not hold a permanent position of responsibility. Tasks could then be shared equally among the committee.

However, as an informal association you could encounter problems if you are not seen as being 'official' amongst other agencies and within the community you represent. You might also find that you are not eligible for external funding.

If you decide that you wish to become a formal residents association with a constitution and recognised policies then you will need to start thinking about electing a committee.

There are a number of advantages in becoming a formally recognised association, including eligibility for financial and other support from us, as your landlord. This is outlined in section 11. However by far the biggest incentive to become a 'formal' association is to show your estate or neighbourhood just how serious you are about representing them.

Even if you and your neighbours decide that you would prefer things to operate on an informal basis, it might still be helpful to elect some representatives and agree some form of ground rules to make sure that

If your membership is very small, it may be unnecessary to elect a committee and able to hold all meetings as general meetings. But for most areas, holding

general meetings each time without the committees may be productive and make the group unable to Achieve

Setting up the Committee

Although all members of your association should be encouraged to become involved in the work of the group, you will find it helps to elect individuals to certain roles even if you want your group to remain quite informal. This will make sure that your group has some direction and does not fade away after the first wave of enthusiasm has died down.

A formal committee is usually made up of people who have been chosen or elected to be officers responsible for the day to day running of the association. These may include the Chair, Secretary, Treasurer and general members. The committee is elected by the resident association and is accountable to them.

The duties of each of these roles are as follows:

The Chairperson

Often whether any meeting is seen as successful will depend on how the meeting was chaired. When you are setting up your group, you may choose to have several members responsible for chairing a meeting or you may wish to take it in turns to be Chairperson. Until someone has been elected to this role.

The Chairperson should be seen to be in control over the meeting (whether you feel you are in control is a different matter!). This is because if certain individuals are allowed to dominate meetings and not let others speak, a meeting can seem daunting and unproductive for all concerned.

At meetings, the Chairperson has a variety of roles:

- ◆ he/she should help the secretary to draw up the agenda for each meeting;
- ◆ he / she should introduce the meeting and outline the agenda;
- ◆ ensure that members have enough background information on each agenda item;
- ◆ indicate who can speak next and make sure they are not interrupted;
- ◆ make sure each item on the agenda is discussed and a decision made and recorded; and
- ◆ summarise the main decisions of meetings and draw the meeting to a close.

Outside of meetings, the Chairperson main role is to guide the association so that it achieves its aims. This is done by overseeing the running of the association and being aware of all the activities being carried out. The Chairperson should also make sure that other committee members are able to carry out any tasks that they are asked to do.

Initially the role of the Chairperson can seem quite daunting. But if you take it slowly and are able to prepare background information on the agenda beforehand this will help. Remember people will be sympathetic to your plight and you'll soon find your confidence will grow. It really is a case of practice makes perfect!

To help you develop the skill needed for this role, we can arrange training in 'Chairing meetings' if you need it.

The Vice Chairperson

Depending on the size of your group, you may think it necessary to appoint a Vice-Chairperson who will take over the running of your meetings in the absence of the Chairperson.

The Secretary

The secretary's role can be seen as that of informer!

It is their duty to:

- ◆ arrange meetings and venues;
- ◆ prepare agendas with the chairperson;
- ◆ let everyone know when and where the meeting is going to be held;
- ◆ distribute the agenda and minutes of your last meeting;
- ◆ take minutes of all committee and general meetings that are held;
- ◆ receive and write any letters on behalf of the association; and
- ◆ keep records and make sure that the association keeps to its constitution.

The Treasurer

The treasurer is the person with the overall responsibility for your association's finances. The amount of work involved will vary depending on the size of your group and the amount of money that you have, but essentially the duties remain the same.

These are

- ◆ opening a bank account in the name of the association;
- ◆ paying all money received into the account;
- ◆ making sure all receipts are kept for any money spent;
- ◆ paying bills, and keeping a record of all money spent;
- ◆ keeping a record book detailing all transactions;
- ◆ preparing statements for the committee and the AGM; and
- ◆ making sure the accounts are audited once a year.

The Treasurer will also be one of the two people able to sign all cheques and financial forms on behalf of the association. The other person or signatory will normally be chosen by the committee. If two or more people on the committee

are from the same household, it is usual practice for the other signatory not to be from the same household.

The treasurer will need to keep the committee fully informed about your association's finances, as this will allow them to make informed decisions on spending. At public meetings the treasurer should also give a short report on the associations finances explaining what has been received and paid out since the last meeting and giving details of any future expenses.

Other Roles

You may also want to have other people on your committee. This is a good way of spreading the work needed to run the association and involving a number of people.

Other committee positions that you may want to think about including on your committee are:

Fundraiser– responsible for raising money for your association or other causes chosen by the committee.

Social Secretary- responsible for organising and co-ordinating social events and activities.

Press Officer- responsible for publicising your association and its activities or events.

You may also want to appoint a number of committee members who do not have a specific function to help with the running of your group. Besides simply attending committee meetings, these people can help by:

- ◆ preparing the meeting venue after checking the layout wanted with the Chairperson or Secretary;
- ◆ organising refreshments;
- ◆ welcoming visitors and new members;
- ◆ reading the information sent to them before the meeting;
- ◆ carrying out any tasks they are asked to do;
- ◆ letting the Chair know if they want to raise any issues under Any Other Business
- ◆ encouraging others to speak; and
- ◆ offering to take on any other tasks without being asked.

They can also help to promote your group and its activities by talking to others in the community and encouraging their support.

All committees are made up of a number of people who are working towards a common goal. However, it is inevitable that differences of opinion will occur amongst your group. This is only natural and in many instances, it will help your group to reach an informed decision. If differences of opinion do occur, you should accept that this is normal and try to resolve them as soon as

possible to prevent them having an adverse effect on the running of your association.

At or before your first meeting, it is important to make sure that everyone has the chance to volunteer for a position on the committee. If this does not happen, your association might be seen as a 'closed shop' and this will deter others from getting involved.

After the election of the committee at your first meeting, you will need to decide

- ◆ how the committee is to be elected (normally at the Annual General Meeting)
- ◆ how often you will meet
- ◆ how to appoint new members
- ◆ how to distribute minutes of your meetings

You should consider each of these points carefully as, once agreed they will form part of your constitution.

The Constitution

If you decide that you just want to be an informal group, you may not feel that you need to have a formal constitution. However, as we have said before, it is still a good idea for any group to agree a set of basic ground rules.

For us to recognise your association, and provide the practical and financial help outlined in section 11, your association will need to meet a number of criteria – one of which is the adoption of a formal constitution. The other criteria that you need to meet are detailed in section 11.

A constitution sounds very grand and binding. In fact, all it contains is a number of rules stating how your association will operate. Once you start looking at a constitution most of the clauses will probably seem quite straightforward.

Below is our standard constitution that can be adapted to meet the needs of your association, but should still include most of the main clauses. As a guide, the items that are written in italics are those that your group should look at in details and change, if necessary.

CONSTITUTION OF ANYWHERE RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

Name:

The name of the association shall be *Anywhere Residents Association*

Aims

The aims of the association are:

- ◆ to represent and promote the interests of all residents within the association's catchment area;
- ◆ *to promote social and educational activities for the benefit of members of the association;*
- ◆ to actively encourage all residents to become involved;
- ◆ to provide help and assistance to all residents who want to get more involved;
- ◆ to encourage community spirit within the catchment area of the association;
- ◆ to campaign for or provide facilities or resources required by the community;
- ◆ to make representations to any public body whose function may at any time have an affect on the welfare of the members of the association;
- ◆ to affiliate to any other organisation which has the same or similar aims to this association whose objectives will benefit the members of this association;
- ◆ to promote equal opportunities within the community.

Membership

Membership of the association is open regardless of class, colour, culture, ethnic origin, race, religion, disability, sexuality, gender or marital status to:

- i) All tenants and leaseholders over 18 years of age living in the catchment area, who shall be called FULL MEMBERS
- ii) All other residents over 18 years of age living in the catchment area, who shall be called ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

Note: Where members are voting or being consulted on housing issues, only Council tenants and leaseholders may vote or have their views taken into account.

It is a condition of membership that members, at all times conduct themselves in a reasonable manner at meetings or in premises used by the association. Any member may be excluded for breach of this condition or for any other conduct that contravenes the objectives of the association, by a majority of those present and voting at any committee or general meeting. Any member so excluded shall have a right of appeal to the following meeting

Membership Fee

There is ***no membership fee*** to join the association.

Committee

A committee will be elected to carry out the business of the association.

The committee will consist of a Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer and ***at least two other committee members.***

The committee will be elected at the Annual General Meeting.

The committee shall meet at least ***once a month*** and no less than ***ten times each yea.***

Any member of the association can be co-opted onto the committee by the committee for the purpose of filling a vacancy or vacancies arising from the resignation of a committee member.

Posts will only be filled in this way until the next General Meeting or Annual General Meeting whichever is the sooner to be held.

Minutes of the committee meetings will be made available to any members of the association on request.

Annual General Meeting

The association will hold an Annual General Meeting once in each calendar year. Not more than fifteen months will pass between the date of one Annual General Meeting and the next.

The main business of the Annual General Meeting will be to:

- ◆ agree the statement of accounts for the previous year and reports of the Chairperson and Secretary;
- ◆ accept the resignation of the committee for the previous year;
- ◆ elect a new committee for the coming year; and
- ◆ vote on any recommendations or alterations to the constitution.

The secretary will give all members of the association at least ***twenty-one days*** notice of the Annual General Meeting. This notice will state the purpose, date, time and place of the meeting.

General Meeting

The committee may call a general meeting at anytime, but will call no less than ***two each year.***

The purpose of this meeting will be to:

- ◆ update members on any outstanding issues; and
- ◆ to fill any vacancies on the Committee which may have arisen since the Annual General Meeting.

The secretary will give all members of the association at least **fourteen days** written notice of a General Meeting. This notice will state the purpose, date, time and place of the meeting.

Special General Meeting

A Special General Meeting can be called if **ten or more** members of the association submit a request, giving the reasons for such a meeting, in writing, to the secretary. The request will state the purpose for which the meeting is being called.

The secretary will give all members at least **fourteen days** notice, in writing, of any Special General Meeting. The notice will state the purpose, date, time and place of the meeting.

Quorum

The Annual General Meeting, General Meetings and Special General Meetings will only be deemed to be quorate if at least **five members** of the association are present and voting.

If a quorum is not present within thirty minutes of the time appointed for holding the meeting then:

- ◆ if the meeting was convened at the request of the members, it shall be dissolved
- ◆ if the committee convened the meeting, it will be adjourned and an alternative date agreed. If a quorum is not present at the adjourned meeting within thirty minutes from the time appointed for holding the meeting, the members present will be deemed to be quorate

Committee meetings will be deemed to be quorate, if at **least four** committee members are present and voting.

If a committee meeting is not quorate, the meeting can still take place, but no decisions should be made.

Voting

A resolution that is put to the vote of the meeting will be decided on show of hands, unless a ballot is demanded by:

- ◆ the meeting's Chairperson; or
- ◆ at least **five** members present and entitled to vote.

Unless a ballot is demanded, a declaration by the Chairperson of the result of the show of hands shall be proof of the fact.

In case of an equal number of votes being cast, whether on show of hands or by ballot, the chairperson of the meeting will be entitled to a casting vote (providing the occupant of this post has the right to vote on the issue in question).

Finances

All money raised for or on behalf of the association will only be used for the benefit of members of the association.

No member of the association will receive payment or benefit from the association with the exception of incurred expenses.

The association's accounts should include records of all of the sums of money received and spent by the association and details of the transactions involved, together with all sales and purchased by the association.

The treasurer will arrange for the accounts to be audited by a suitably qualified organisation, not represented on the association.

The treasurer will open a bank account in the name of the association.

Cheque signatories will be nominated by the committee (one to be the treasurer). No two members of the same household may be cheque signatories.

All cheques and instructions to the association's bankers will require two of the agreed signatures.

Changes to the Constitution

The constitution can be altered at an Annual General Meeting.

Any request for changes must be submitted to the secretary in writing at least **fourteen days** before the date of the Annual General Meeting.

Changes to this constitution must be agreed by a majority of members present and voting at an Annual General Meeting.

Duties of the Officers

The Chairperson (or in his/her absence another committee member) will conduct the meetings of the association.

The Treasurer will open and maintain a bank account in the name of the association. The Treasurer and one of the other committee members nominated as signatories will sign all cheques. The Treasurer will keep proper accounts of income and expenditure and report on them or provide them up as required by the committee of the Council. A suitably qualified person who is not a member of the association should check these accounts.

The Secretary will be responsible for convening all meetings and giving the required notice to members. He/she will ensure that a proper record is kept of all meetings and will produce these as required by either the committee or the Council. The secretary will also produce records of committee and general meetings and make these available to members on request.

Dissolution of the Association

Any decision to dissolve the association can only be taken at a Special General meeting called for the purpose of voting on such a decision.

The decision to dissolve the association can only be made by the majority of those present and voting at such a meeting.

All assets of the association remaining once the debts have been cleared will be passed to any successor body or organisation with similar objectives or failing that to any charitable organisation. A decision regarding this will be made at the meeting to dissolve the association.

This constitution was adopted by:

Signed.....
Chairperson

Date.....

An important thing to remember is that your constitution is not set in stone. It is possible to change it at an Annual General Meeting - an important part of the constitution and something that we go into more detail about in section 9.

Agendas and minutes

Agendas

We have already mentioned the importance of having a clear agenda for each meeting that you hold and given an example of an agenda for your first meeting.

When planning all agendas you should consider each item that you thinking of including in terms of its importance and estimate how long it will take to discuss.

It is normal practice to put the most important items first, after the standard initial items, such as apologies for absence and the minutes of the last meeting. You may find it useful to set a time limit for discussing each item as well as one for the meeting as a whole. This can be a good idea to highlight the importance of each matter and make sure that everything gets discussed, but the Chair will need to make sure that the set time limits are kept to.

An example agenda showing the standard layout is shown below:

<p>Anywhere Residents Association Meeting to be held on 20 May 2006 at 7.30pm Anywhere Community Centre</p> <p>Agenda</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Welcome and introduction2. Apologies for absence3. Minutes of the last meeting (to confirm that these are accurate)4. Matters arising (developments from the last minutes)5. Major agenda item number 16. Major agenda items number 27. Any other business8. Date and time of the next meeting
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In any public or large meetings, under 'Welcome and introductions' you should also include housekeeping issues so that everyone knows, for example, where the fire exits are, whether smoking is permitted and where the toilets are.

It also worthwhile taking some time before your meetings to decide how you are going to deal with any items raised under 'Any other business'. For example, will you accept literally any other issues that anyone wants to raise or will you need to draw up some guidelines about what matters should be deferred to another meeting?

Minutes

The secretary is responsible for keeping a record of what is discussed at all of your meetings, however informal they may be. By doing this, you will make sure that all items are followed up and nothing is forgotten about. But, what do you leave in and what can you leave out?

Firstly, it is important to record who is at the meeting. A good idea is to pass round an attendance sheet similar to the one illustrated on the next page for people to sign.

<p>Anywhere Residents Association Meeting held on 20 May 2006 at 7.30pm Anywhere Community Centre</p> <p>Attendance sheet</p>	
Name	Address

Once the Chair has welcomed and introduced everyone to the meeting, any apologies for absence should then be recorded.

Sometimes the minutes from the last meeting are then read out in full for people present to comment on and often the Chairperson is asked to sign them as a true and accurate record. It is entirely up to your association as to how you want to do this, but any alterations to the previous meetings minutes raised should be recorded in the new minutes. Matters arising from these minutes should then be noted to record all progress made and any new developments. For each of the major agenda items, you will need to note what each item was about, any major issues or points arising from the discussion, what decisions were made and who is responsible for carrying any actions out by what date.

When writing minutes it may help to bear these points in mind:

- ◆ write notes to yourself at the meeting rather than what is said word for word as otherwise you will find it difficult to keep up.
- ◆ if the minutes are going to be written up by someone else, make sure that your notes can be understood. Particularly that little squiggle which means something to you but not to anyone else!
- ◆ make sure that you have written down accurately what has been said and keep to the agenda. Any miscellaneous items can be addressed in 'Any other business'.
- ◆ key arguments need to be stated clearly, also key decisions made.
- ◆ try not to impose your own viewpoint on the minutes.
- ◆ include the date, time and venue of the next meeting at the end of the minutes. But don't rely on this as your only means of telling people when and where this will be held.

You should try and write the minutes as soon as you can after the meeting. It's amazing how foggy things become the later you leave it. It may also help to try and send out the minutes as soon as you can while everything is still fresh in residents minds as this shows efficiency on behalf of the association and also aids enthusiasm for help! It may help to include an action column.

One last thing! Try not to make the minutes too long or repetitive. Starting the sentence Mrs 'X' said this and Mr 'Y' said that soon gets tiring to read and you want residents to read the minutes right to the end and not give up halfway through!

**Anywhere Residents Association
Minutes of meeting held on 20 May 2006 at 7.30pm
Anywhere Community Centre**

Attended by: Give a full list of all members and guest speakers who attend

Welcome / Introductions

Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were noted for Susan Smith and Frank Bloggs

Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record and signed by the Chair

Matters arising

John Smith confirmed that the car parking area had now been cleared of rubbish and rubble. Mary Sadler advised that she was still waiting for a reply from the Highways Department regarding the condition of the road.

Neighbourhood watch

Sgt Black outlined how a neighbourhood watch scheme would operate and explained the possible benefits. It was agreed that all households would be given an explanatory booklet and nominations for the role of Co-ordinator invited through the Chair

Improvement Works

Work to improve the flats is nearing completion and residents expressed a generally high level of satisfaction with the improvements carried out. Details of any outstanding or remedial works to be forwarded to the Chair for follow up action with the Council.

Any other business

No further issues were raised and the meeting closed at 8.45pm

Date and time of next meeting

Wednesday 21 August 2006 at 7.30pm

Managing the money

The first job of your treasurer will be to open a bank account in the name of your association. The bank will need to see a list of your committee member's names, a copy of your constitution and details of the named cheque signatories. They will then give you a paying-in book and a chequebook and you should ask them to provide you with monthly statements.

The most important thing to remember is to pay all money received into the bank. Keep a breakdown of how the money was paid in, for example by cheque or in cash, on the paying in book counterfoil and give each counterfoil a reference number. In the same way, keep a record on the cheque counterfoil of all money being paid out; including details of what it was for.

All financial transactions relating to the association should be recorded in a cashbook in the following way:

Income

On the left-hand side of the page you should enter all receipts (that is, all money you received). You will need to enter the date that it is paid into the bank, who it was received from, the amount and the reference number that you gave it on the paying in book counterfoil.

It is good idea to also include columns showing categories as to what the money was received for, for e.g. subscriptions, donations, grants etc. Enter the amount in one of these columns also. This helps you to see at a glance why the money was received.

Any letters, invoices or other paperwork relating to the payments should be kept in a receipt file with the relevant allocated counterfoil reference number written on them.

An example of a page showing money received is given below

Date	Received From:	Counterfoil Ref:	Grants	Subs	Donations	Total
10.5.05	TDC	1a	100			100
01.6.05	J. Bloggs	2a		5	10	15
05.6.05	K. Brown	3a		5		5
20.6.05	Fete	4a			45	45
		Totals	100	10	55	165

Expenditure

On the right hand side of the page, enter the date, payee, and cheque number of all payments that have been made. Then enter the amount into one the correct category columns. All invoices relating to payments out should be filed with the cheque number written on them.

An example of a page showing payments made is also given below:

Date	Payee	Cheque No:	Stationary	Rent	Heating / Lighting	Total
05.6.05	Wix hall	612988		15	2	17
15.6.05	AB print	612989	40			40
29.6.05	B. Smith	612990		50		50
		Totals	40	65	2	107

Balancing the Books

At the end of the month, your treasurer should total up all the receipts and payments made. The receipts less the payments = the cash book balance.

If there are any cheques which are not yet cleared these should be taken into account when calculating the balance, as illustrated below:

Bank Reconciliation at 30.06.05	
Bank balance at 30.06.05	108.00
Less:	Chq no: 612990
Cheques not yet cleared through the bank	Amount 50.00
Balance as per bank book 30.06.05	58.00

The balance as of 30.06.05 should be carried forward as the opening receipt in the next month's figures.

Cash transactions

You will probably find it necessary to pay out small amounts of cash sometimes and you will need to keep a 'petty cash' book for this purpose.

On the receipts side you will have your 'float', (the amount you have paid into the petty cash box) and then for payments out, petty cash vouchers need to be completed showing the amount taken, date and the reason for payment. The receipt for the item you have paid for should be attached to the petty cash voucher and filed with the petty cash box.

If you keep a petty cash box it will be necessary for you to add this as one of your categories in the payments side of your cash book showing the petty cash 'float' amount in the column

End of year accounts.

Once you have the twelve monthly bank balances, you then have the information needed to prepare the annual accounts. This is simply a case of adding all the figures from the twelve balances together and completing breakdowns for the categories listed.

Based on the example that we have already used our end of year accounts might look something like this if we had not paid out or received any more monies:

Income and expenditure for the period (date – date)		
	£	Total
Income		
Grants	100	
Subscriptions	10	
Donations	10	

Fete	45	165
Expenditure		
Stationary	40	
Heating / lighting	02	
Rent	65	107
Balance at year end		58

Remember, as with anything if you are new to accounts, bookkeeping may take a bit of getting used to. The best thing to remember is not to panic if the books don't add up, as there is sure to be a simple reason. Why not ask someone else to go through the books with you, a fresh pair of eyes may be able to spot the reason.

Annual General Meetings

This is a meeting held once each year to review the progress made by your association in the last year. This meeting should be arranged and advertised to make sure that it is open to all the residents you are representing.

The main business of the Annual General Meeting will be to:

- ◆ agree the minutes of your last AGM and deal with any matters arising
- ◆ agree the statement of accounts for the previous year and reports of the Chairperson and Secretary;
- ◆ accept the resignation of the committee for the previous year;
- ◆ elect a new committee for the coming year; and
- ◆ vote on any recommendations or alterations to the constitution.

It is important to make sure that every member of your association has the opportunity to stand for election to make sure that the committee is not seen as a closed shop.

Your constitution will set out some basic rules about how your AGM should be organised. For example, this should detail how much notice you have to give to your members, how changes to your constitution can be made and how many people need to be present at the meeting (quorum).

Before holding your AGM, you will need to decide how you want the elections to be held for the committee positions. For example:

- ◆ are you going to invite nominations in advance of the meeting or can these be made at the meeting itself? and
- ◆ are you going to hand out ballot papers or will a show of hands be enough?
- ◆ are you going to ask those nominated to make a short speech before the vote takes place?

An example agenda for an AGM is given below:

**Anywhere Residents Association
Meeting to be held on 19 September 2005
Anywhere Community Centre**

Agenda

1. Welcome and introductions
2. Apologies for absence
3. Minutes of the AGM held on (date)
4. Matters arising
5. Committee / Chairpersons Report
6. Treasurers Report
7. Election of Officers
 - Chairperson
 - Vice Chairperson
 - Secretary
 - Treasurer
8. Election of other committee members
9. Any other business
 - For example, any proposed changes to the constitution

The retiring Chair of your association will normally chair the AGM up until a new Chair is elected.

Special meetings

It may occasionally be necessary to call a special meeting to deal with unexpected issues that come up and your constitution should detail the requirements for calling one of these.

How we can help you

For us to formally recognise your group there are a number of criteria that you have to meet. If you can show that your group meets these, you will be eligible for practical help and financial support from us. To meet these, your group must:

1. elect its officers and committee at a public meeting or by some other democratic election.
2. adopt a written constitution, equal opportunities policy and a code of conduct for meetings.
3. have a bank account, keep proper financial records and submit audited accounts to us at the end of each financial year.
4. hold at least one public meeting a year and arrange ad hoc special meetings if a sufficient number of members request it.

5. make sure that membership is open to all tenants and residents living in your defined catchment area.
6. be able to produce evidence to show that you meet the minimum level of active membership agreed with us.
7. have procedures, which make sure that information on the group is made widely available, and that all tenants and residents in your area are encouraged to become involved.
8. report to and receive feedback from its members through newsletters, meetings and informal contact.

If you can show that your association meets these criteria, we can offer the following support to your group:

a) Financial help

This currently includes:

- ◆ start up grant of £250 – payable once a formal constitution has been adopted;
- ◆ an annual grant of £250 to help with running expenses - payable after each AGM;
- ◆ eligibility for a locally determined environmental improvement budgets. This is an amount of money that we allocate for you to decide how you want to spend it on improving the area that you live in. Examples of how this has been used in other areas include: installing additional lighting, fencing, signs and bollards to stop people parking on grass verges.
- ◆ funding of membership of the Tenant Participation Advisory Service.

b) Other help

- ◆ free loan of equipment, such as flip charts, display boards, TV & VCR, overhead projector & screen.
- ◆ administrative support, for example photocopying and printing
- ◆ in house and external training courses to help you run your association

More detail about the help that we can provide is included in our Tenant Participation Compact-copies of which are available on request from our Tenant Relations Section at the Town Hall – Telephone 01255 686490.

Involving your members

If you have been successful in setting up an association, it is important that everyone in your catchment area knows about it. A good way of 'spreading the word' about your association is through circulating a newsletter. This can give you the chance to:

- ◆ tell your members about what your association has achieved and is planning to do in the future;
- ◆ give them information about events; and
- ◆ inform them of any local news that is useful or may be of interest to them.

Before you start to produce a newsletter, take a few minutes with the other members of your committee to decide a few basics:

Who is going to be responsible for producing the newsletter?

If possible, you should try to share this task.

What skills do you have within your association?

For example, is there anyone who has access to desktop publishing facilities, or someone who is good at writing articles?

Do you have someone or a group of people who would be willing to hand deliver your newsletter?

If possible, you should try to share this task and look to involve people that aren't already a committee member.

How often are you thinking of producing a newsletter?

This is entirely up to you and will depend on how much news you think you are likely to have. However frequently you decide to produce your newsletter, make sure that you stick to this so those people who haven't previously got involved are reminded of your existence.

What are you going to call it and what do you want it to look like?

Again, this is entirely up to you. You could call it by the name of your road or estate or you could think about holding a competition and asking people to think of a name and design a logo.

There is no set format for a newsletter but it is useful to bear in mind who the newsletter is going to be read by. For example, if mainly older people live in your area, it would be best to include articles, which are of more relevance to this age group. If it is a mixed age neighbourhood, try and include articles that will be of interest to everyone.

What you include in the newsletter is entirely up to you, it could be a community forum to allow residents to express their views, it could include surveys or it could simply be a way to keep residents informed of developments. Whatever you do decide to include, you should try to make sure that it's interesting, informative and easy to read.

When thinking about a newsletter for the first time it will be important to think about cost as the size and quality of your newsletter will depend on your association's finances.

You might also like to think about whether there are any other organisations that work in your community that also send out newsletters that you could contribute to.

A newsletter is a highly effective way to generate interest and advertise the successes of your association. Although it takes a lot of effort you may just find that the advantages of creating a community spirit and making those residents who feel isolated a little less alone is well worth the time and effort spent.

Questionnaires

It might also be worth incorporating a questionnaire into your newsletter to find out about issues that your neighbours would like their association to become involved in. Alternatively, a questionnaire can be a good way of finding out what residents think is lacking in their area, for example clubs or social activities, and how an association could help in addressing this.

When designing any questionnaires, you should make sure that it is easy to understand and fill in. A good idea is to include boxes for respondents to tick. However, a questionnaire should also give people an opportunity to write longer answers if they wish and add extra comments of their own. It should also give people the option of remaining anonymous and give them details about how to contact your association.

Once you have received all your responses, you should make sure that the results you get are included in the next edition of your newsletter, together with details of any plans you have for dealing with any of the issues raised. This way, your members will know that you took their comments into account and are working to represent their views.

Social Activities

A residents association does not have to be solely about campaigning for or against things. It can also be about having fun. Social events and activities help people to get to know each other, which can help develop community spirit. They can also provide an opportunity to get more people interested in your association.

If you decide to organise any social events, you should think about:

- ◆ whether you can for everyone? For example, by providing food and drink suitable for all tastes.
- ◆ what type of event would attract interest?
- ◆ where could you hold this?

- ◆ do you need to get permission from the owner for the use of any land if you are holding an outdoor event?
- ◆ do you have adequate insurance cover?
- ◆ do you need a music or any other type of licence?
- ◆ how are you going to advertise the event?
- ◆ will you be able to cover your costs?
- ◆ should you aim to raise funds for your association?

As an alternative, you could find out what other organisations hold social events or clubs in your area and make links with these.

Word of mouth

Sometimes word of mouth is the best possible publicity. If your association is seen to be involved in visible action, your members will want to and should be encouraged to spread the news. You could also think about using the local press to advertise to a wider audience.

And finally...

Although all of the following points have been mentioned elsewhere in this guidance, it is worth summarising them here to act as a final checklist.

To become and remain a successful residents association, you should:

- ◆ make sure that the aims of your group are clear and realistic
- ◆ share the tasks and responsibilities of running your group to help members feel involved and to prevent too few people doing too much
- ◆ keep in touch with your members by sending out regular newsletters, organising events and meetings or just through knocking on people's doors
- ◆ arrange meetings to suit as many people as possible
- ◆ develop an equal opportunities policy to show that you are serious about trying to involve everyone
- ◆ encourage people to speak at meetings
- ◆ provide child minding or crèche facilities, transport and refreshments to maximise attendance at meetings
- ◆ translate information if there are people in your area who do not understand English
- ◆ involve other organisations that work in your area, such as the community centre,

- ◆ make it enjoyable

Even if you have considered all of these things, don't despair if people still don't come to your meetings.

You will never get everyone sufficiently motivated to attend meetings – most people will prefer to stay at home. This is a fact of life and you shouldn't let it deter you. Just because people don't come to your meetings doesn't mean that they don't support you. If people stop you in the street to complain or ask you about things in your area, then they support you. This shows that you are in touch with your community and they trust you to get things done.

Finally, once your association is up and running, you should regularly take the time to regularly review how well you are getting on. You can do this by asking the following questions:

- ◆ what are we trying to achieve?
- ◆ what have we done to reach this goal?
- ◆ what have we achieved in the last 6 months?
- ◆ how often have we been sending out newsletters?
- ◆ how many people normally come to our meetings?
- ◆ do they enjoy them?
- ◆ are more people involved now than there were last year?

Running a residents association is not easy. However, when you manage to achieve your aims it can also be very rewarding. It can be a good way of meeting people and of giving something back to your community. At its worst being involved in a residents association can seem like a thankless task but getting involved can be fun and sometimes the smile on that little child's face at a social event you helped organise can make it all worthwhile.

Other opportunities for you to become involved

As a council tenant or leaseholder, there are also a number of other ways that you can become involved in our housing service. Some take only a few minutes, others need more time and effort, so you can choose the way that suits you best.

Set out below you will find a summary of the current opportunities that exist for your involvement. Each one of these has been given a star rating that indicates the level of involvement required, with one star being the lowest and three stars the highest.

Tenants Panel

Star rating ***

Members of our district-wide Tenants Panel aim to represent and promote tenant opinion and to make sure it becomes central to our delivery of all services. They meet on a regular basis and provide direction on housing policy, management and maintenance, and they act as both a consultative and decision-making body.

Tenants Panel Elected Representatives **Star rating *****

The Tenants Panel have a number of members who have been elected to have greater involvement in specific areas of housing. For example, three representatives have a monitoring role in relation to our planned maintenance and improvement programme and meet with us every month to review our progress. There are also representatives elected to have more detailed involvement in our Anti Social Behaviour Strategy and in monitoring how well we perform against the targets included in our compact.

Consultative Group **Star rating***

This is another district-wide group made up of tenants and leaseholders. We ask its members to complete periodic postal questionnaires about a particular housing service or topic. The Consultative Group aims to meet the needs of people who cannot spare the time for other forms of involvement but would still like to put forward their views.

Volunteer to be an area representative **Star rating ****

In areas where the setting up of a residents association is inappropriate or unwanted, individual tenants and leaseholders can volunteer to become street or area representatives. A street or area representative is usually an individual who lives in a particular street or area and who represents the views of this area to us, as their landlord. We will also consult with these individuals about issues that affect their local area.

Join any focus groups we set up **Star rating ***

A focus group normally brings together a few people to discuss specific issues, such as repairs or consultation. It aims to gather views about a particular subject that we can use alongside opinions we get from other methods. Focus group meetings are normally one-offs or held over a short period of time. They don't need your long-term commitment.

Attend any public meetings we organise **Star rating ***

We use public meetings to discuss a certain topic or an issue affecting a specific area. They will normally be open to all residents who have an interest in or will be affected by a particular plan or policy. They provide an opportunity to share information with a wide range of people and get their views. The meetings are normally one-off events.

Sheltered housing residents meetings **Star rating ***

We have a number of sheltered housing schemes that generally provide accommodation for people over the state retirement age. At each of these, we hold a quarterly meeting to give residents an opportunity to discuss issues about their homes and our services, and to consult them on new ideas. These

groups can also become formal residents associations if they want, and we can help them do this.

Volunteer to join any Improvement Panels Star rating **

In areas that are not represented by a residents association, we give residents the opportunity to form an Improvement Panel to work with us in designing and implementing major planned environmental improvement schemes. These groups meet with us on a regular basis whilst these schemes are carried out.

Complete any surveys or questionnaires Star rating *

We often use surveys to obtain information about different issues. These normally involve a series of structured questions that may be asked in a face-to-face or telephone interview or a postal questionnaire.

Read our newsletters Star rating *

Our quarterly newsletter, Tendring Reports, provides information for tenants and asks for feedback about housing issues. We also an annual newsletter for our leaseholders as well as other newsletters from time to time, for example where an improvement scheme is taking place over a long period of time. That way, we can keep residents informed of the scheme's progress.

Visit our website Star rating *

Tendring District Council's website – www.tendringdc.gov.uk – includes a range of information about Housing Services and provides an additional way for you to contact us.

We will make sure that these opportunities are regularly publicised so that all of our existing and new tenants are aware of them and we will look to develop these opportunities each year.

Contacting us

If you would like more information about getting involved in our housing service or have any queries about setting up or running a residents association, please contact our Tenant Relations section by:

- ◆ telephoning 01255 686490 or 01255 686491

- ◆ writing to the Tenant Relations Manager,
Housing Services,
FREEPOST (CL3764),
CLACTON ON SEA,
Essex,
CO15 1YT, or

- ◆ emailing housing.services@tendringdc.gov.uk