

Training session 09

Running your residents' association

June 2025

These notes are part of a series of 10 training sessions

- 01 Know your social housing rights
- 02 The standards your landlord needs to meet
- 03 Your landlord and the law
- 04 Equality and diversity in social housing
- 05 Your landlord and your money
- 06 Awaab's Law – making your home safer, faster
- 07 Handling your complaints
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Introduction – what is a residents’ association?

A residents’ association (RA) is a group of people who live in a neighbourhood and decide that they want to get together to deal with issues that affect their local community. The group can include tenants, shared owners, leaseholders and homeowners. Forming an RA means coming together in a formal way, the group will have a set of simple rules, usually known as a constitution. A constitution is a list of rules for your RA. It sets out the aims of your group and how your group will work towards those aims. The constitution will cover at least the following key issues:

- 1 Membership shall be open to all residents in the community.
- 2 All members will have an equal vote.
- 3 All members should actively seek to represent the various needs of the area and must not discriminate on the grounds of nationality, political opinion, race, religious opinion, gender, age, sexuality or disability.
- 4 Members shall always conduct themselves in a reasonable manner when attending meetings or any functions linked to the RA.

Your landlord will have examples of ‘model’ constitutions for RAs which should clearly set out the objective that the RA exists to represent everyone living within the building, area or estate of the landlord and that it may request information about services from the landlord with the aim of making things better. Constitutions should also set out how conflict between residents and the landlord will be managed.

Why have a residents' association?

Groups of residents might start a RA for a variety of reasons, such as:

- campaigning for something positive (e.g. a better play area);
- campaigning against something, to get something changed or get services improved;
- giving the community a greater voice than individual voices would have;
- creating a better sense of community spirit and pride;
- organising social activities;
- keeping residents informed of what's happening in their neighbourhood;
- taking positive action to tackle local issues.

United, the residents have more power collectively than they would have as individuals. RAs therefore make it easier for residents to have a say in issues that pertain to the rights conferred to them under the terms of their tenancies or leases.

The RA acts as a representative body on behalf of residents in areas of common interest, such as repairs and maintenance, grounds maintenance, anti-social behaviour and nuisance and other services that are the landlord's responsibility to provide. RAs can also represent residents if they are being consulted on major works programmes and regeneration schemes or if they want to oppose development or planning applications.

How to set up a residents' association

There are several key things to consider when setting up a RA:

- what do you need to think through before starting;
- how to get started;
- some nuts and bolts of running an effective RA;
- understanding officer roles;
- agreeing how the RA will engage with your landlord;
- how to run effective meetings.

Before you start

It's worth asking yourself and your neighbours some straight questions:

- what are we trying to achieve?
- what do we have to do to get there?
- what will success look like?
- will people support setting up a RA?
- what will we do when we've achieved our aims?
- what will we do if our landlord is obstructive?
- what will we do if we don't achieve our aims?

Getting started

Here are some pointers to get you started:

- you will need to agree what area you are going to represent;
- make sure to speak with residents in that area to estimate their interest;
- talk to as many people as possible; in as many ways as possible;
- find out what the common concerns of residents are;
- don't get caught up on your own opinions or those of a particular group of residents;
- organise a public event or meeting to discuss setting up a RA;
- think about online activities, communications and how to be inclusive.

The nuts and bolts of running an effective association

The constitution will set out the framework for how a RA is run and supporting documents like officer role specifications, terms of reference and a code of conduct will provide additional detail. You will have to make some decisions about how to organise the group to ensure it works effectively and fairly. You could start with questions like:

The Committee

- Do we need one? If you decide to have a Committee, it is elected by the members of the RA at an open (or general) meeting. The Committee will be responsible for running the association, organising general meetings for all members and speaking on behalf of the association.
- How many people should be on our Committee and how will we ensure that no particular family or group becomes dominant?
- What will the role of the Committee and its members be? The Committee would usually consist of at least 4 officers - a Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary and Treasurer.

Meetings

- How often should we meet and where?
- How should we run our meetings?
- What topics should we discuss?

How to get and keep people involved

- How can we get people involved and how do we maintain their interest?

Constitution

- Do we need one? (yes, if you want your group to be formally recognised by your landlord).
- What should the rules be?
- What should our aims and objectives be?

Running effective residents' association meetings

RA meetings should be held on a regular basis, whether it is monthly, bi-monthly or quarterly. Some meetings could be held online, if all members have access to the internet. Some RAs hold separate meetings just for the Committee, as well as general meetings for all members; others prefer to hold all their meetings as open meetings for anyone to attend – it's up to you and your group.

It is important to publicise the meetings in the neighbourhood so that everyone can attend and have their say. Meetings are a way of giving and getting information, discussing and sharing ideas and making decisions. The success of a meeting depends on four core issues:

1. People being clear about the reasons for the meeting – an agenda with a list of topics to be discussed;
2. The venue and time of the meeting being suitable for all;
3. The meeting being well run and effectively managed;
4. People being clear if the meeting is:
 - a. about only information and discussion or/and
 - b. if decisions on the way forward will be made.

Meetings should be interesting and enjoyable and, most importantly, people should feel comfortable.

Feeding back to the community

It is important for any RA to feedback discussions and decisions to the wider community in the neighbourhood. This can be done at general meetings or by producing a newsletter. Again, your landlord should be able to help with this. It's important to feedback in a variety of ways and think about the needs of people in the area, for example, some people may have difficulty reading printed material, some people may not have English as their first language, some people may not have access to the internet. Have a think about the best ways that will work in your area, it may be a combination of a number of ways.

Finance

You may not need finance to run your group, but you may need it to print and distribute minutes, newsletters and updates for the community. Finance to run your group may be available from your landlord, so get in touch with them.

You may also want to run some community social events. Finance can be very important to groups and can also cause the most concern.

If detailed clauses are included in the constitution this will help the group run smoothly and help the Treasurer in their role. Here are some finance ground rules:

1. All money raised by or on behalf of the RA is to be used only to further the aims of the RA.
2. The Treasurer shall open a bank account in the name of the RA.
3. The Committee shall agree members to authorise payments (one should be the Treasurer); there should be at least three such members and they should not be from the same household or family.
4. All payment instructions to the RA's bank shall require two members to authorise them.
5. The Treasurer shall reconcile the accounts and ensure that annually they are checked by an independent person with adequate financial experience (e.g. an accountant, independent financial advisor or qualified finance professional).
6. The accounts shall be available to all members at the AGM.

Landlords will require that recognised groups should be able to demonstrate responsible accounting methods.

Officer roles

Role of the Chair

- prepare meeting agendas;
- ensure meetings run to time and keep people on topic;
- encourage productive discussions at meetings;
- always ensure terms of the code of conduct in operation;
- manage/communicate decision-making;
- encourage effective working relationships with/between other RA Officers;
- represent the RA internally/externally.

Role of the Secretary

- work with the Chair to prepare and distribute meeting agendas;
- coordinate the production and distribution of leaflets, notices and newsletters;
- write and distribute meeting minutes
- manage the receipt of and sending out of emails and social media contacts;
- maintain and update Committee records.

Role of the Treasurer

- maintain and reconcile financial records;
- manage the RA bank account and ensure that all income is promptly banked;
- manage petty cash and RA expenditure;
- present regular financial reports to the Committee;
- present financial information to the AGM.

Effective chairing of residents' association meetings

The effective Chair does not manage meetings by presenting their opinion and seeking to persuade everyone to agree with them; the effective Chair sees themselves as a facilitator of meetings. Some points that help to ensure effective meetings are:

- make sure to start and finish meetings on time;
- welcome everyone and introduce new people/guests;
- state purpose of the meeting and remind those presents about the code of conduct;
- introduce the agenda items but don't simply present your opinions or give the floor to those who agree with you;
- ensure understanding and encourage participation and input into discussions;
- encourage people to 'speak through the Chair';
- manage speakers and ensure that individuals don't dominate;
- sum-up decisions after each item, if relevant.

Dealing with difficult situations at meetings

- be polite but firm;
- challenge the behaviour, never the person;
- remind them of the aim of the discussion, the agenda item and the code of conduct;
- ask them to summarise the point they are making;
- ask them to suggest a solution, if applicable;
- adjourn the meeting if necessary;
- refer the matter to the landlord (e.g. resident involvement team) for assistance/support/or for action.