



# information sheet

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## Running a Tenants' Association – Basic Steps

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# RUNNING A TENANTS

## ASSOCIATION

### Introduction

There are no particular rules on how tenants' groups should be run, but you will have to make some decisions on how to organise to ensure that your group works effectively and fairly.

### The committee

The committee is elected by the members to carry out the work of the organisation. The committee organises general meetings of all the members, and the group's Annual General Meeting, and must carry out the decisions made at these meetings.

Try and make sure that the committee represents all the people in your association - men, women, old, young, black, white, disabled people.

### Officers of the committee

The officers of any committee are:

- Chairperson
- Secretary
- Treasurer

#### Chairperson

There are two basic jobs the chairperson should do:

- Guide the association to achieve its aims
- Chair the meetings of the association

The chairperson is the person who makes sure things get done - not the person who does everything.

#### Secretary

The secretary's main duties include:

- Taking minutes of meetings
- Letting people know when and where the next meeting is and what it is about
- Helping to prepare agendas for meetings
- Writing and receiving letters on behalf of the association
- Keeping a record of membership

The secretary's job is to keep people informed - so that they feel involved and are able to join in what the group does.

#### Treasurer

The treasurer is the person with overall responsibility for the association's finances. The amount of work involved will vary according to the size of the organisation and amount of money you receive and spend - but the principles and duties are the same.

The treasurer should:

- Open a bank account
- Pay money received into the bank, keep a record of money received and issue receipts
- Pay bills and keep a record of money spent
- Keep an account book and petty cash book
- Prepare statements to the committee and for the AGM

#### Other jobs

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

**Fundraiser** - responsible for raising money

**Social Secretary** - responsible for organising social activities

**Press Officer** - responsible for approaching the press, radio, TV, to get publicity for the group

### The committee as a group of people

A committee is a group of people working together towards a common goal. It is a team of people with a mixture of skills. Sounds simple, but committees can and do run into problems. Differences of opinion are natural and necessary to make the group think about what it is doing. The best approach is to accept that conflicts or problems may emerge and try to face them as soon as they occur.

There are also people on committees who don't appear to be doing or saying much. This may be because they do not have the information they need, or they simply lack confidence. Information and encouragement is probably what they need. Always try to use people's strengths rather than criticise their weaknesses - everyone has something to offer.

## **Meetings**

The success of any meeting depends on:

- Having a clear agenda (that means knowing what you're there for)
- Good chairing (that means someone making sure the agenda is followed, decisions are made, and a good atmosphere is maintained)

Meetings should be interesting and enjoyable. Most importantly, people should feel comfortable. Knowing who everyone is helps, so make sure people introduce themselves. A comfortable room with comfortable chairs also helps. Rows of chairs can be off-putting - when

people sit in a circle the atmosphere is much less formal.

### The agenda

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

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

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

### Good chairing

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

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

Perhaps the best way of learning how to run meetings is to think about how successful your meetings are at present (if you are already holding meetings). Bad meetings are the sign of a poor organisation, and will put people off.

## **Involvement**

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

- Define your Aims - make sure your

organisation is clear what it is trying to do

- Share Tasks - if too few people are doing all the work they may get fed up and other people may feel excluded
- Keep in Touch - send out regular newsletters and leaflets, to let people who rarely attend meetings, know what is going on. There are many reasons why people may not attend meetings but it does not always mean they are not interested
- Have Fun - try to make the group enjoyable. "Tea breaks" during meetings help to create a social atmosphere. Running social events also helps people to get to know each other and be sociable

## The constitution

If you are an informal group you may not need a constitution. However, in order for your group to be taken seriously by both the tenants you want to represent and by your landlord, a constitution is necessary.

A constitution will also help you to clarify three things:

- (a) Who you represent
- (b) What your group is about
- (c) How your group is run

It is common for landlords to insist that groups have a constitution before they will give them any money, apart from small grants to get going. The constitution should be the basis of your organisation and be set out for everyone to see.

You should always tailor a constitution to meet the needs of your own group not just copy someone else's. By all means look at other groups' constitutions as a guide, but always write your own. The constitution should include these details:

- NAME OF THE ORGANISATION
- AIMS OF THE ORGANISATION

- MEMBERSHIP (i.e. who can join)
- MEMBERSHIP FEE/SUBSCRIPTION (if your group has decided to have one – this can be as little as £1 per person)
- FINANCE (i.e. how financial business will be carried out)
- THE COMMITTEE (i.e. how elected, how many, how often they should meet)
- ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (when and how it will be held and how members will be informed)
- OTHER GENERAL MEETINGS
- QUORUM (i.e. the number of members required for meetings to go ahead and make decisions)
- CHANGES TO THE CONSTITUTION
- DISSOLUTION (termination of the association)
- STANDING ORDERS (i.e. the set of rules to be followed at meetings)

As a final point - why not regularly sit back and think about how your group's going. Ask yourself:

- What are we trying to achieve?
- What are we doing to get there?
- What have we done in the last six months?
- When did we last send out a newsletter?
- Do people come to our meetings?
- Do members enjoy meetings?
- Do people say anything when they come to our meetings?
- Are as many people involved now as they were one year ago?

Asking questions like this at least helps you identify what your problems and successes are - then you can start to improve. Always keep in mind there are more important things than how many people attend your meetings. While you

want people to attend committee meetings, general meetings and AGMs, members can join in, in many other ways. Chatting to people regularly about what's going on and listening to what they have to say, is as important as getting them to attend meetings.

GOOD LUCK!

This is just a very basic guide. For more detailed information on what to do, read:

**Keynote 1 - Setting up a Tenants' Association** £5.00 (£2.50 to TPAS members)

**Keynote 2 - Running a Tenants' Association** (price as above)

**Keynote 8 – Fundraising**  
(price as above)

**Keynote 12 – Running Effective Meetings** (price as above)

Both publications are available from:

TPAS  
5th Floor  
Trafford House  
Chester Road  
Manchester M32 0RS

Tel: 0161 868 3500



**5<sup>th</sup> Floor, Trafford House  
Chester Road  
Manchester  
M32 0RS  
Tel: 0161 868 3500  
Fax: 0161 877 6256  
e-mail: [info@tpas.org.uk](mailto:info@tpas.org.uk)**

**For further information about TPAS,  
visit our website at: [www.tpas.org.uk](http://www.tpas.org.uk)**