

The Guide

for Tenants &
Residents
Groups

by Leeds Tenants Federation

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1. About this guide

This guide will help your tenants and residents group:

- Do an Action Plan
- Organise your committee so everyone knows their role
- Run useful meetings
- Sort out your finances
- Resolve conflict
- Get help from Leeds Tenants Federation

It gives you hints and tips on skills for Chairs, Secretaries and Treasurers and for the whole committee team.

It aims to help you draw up agendas, take minutes and keep financial records.

We hope it will be helpful to all tenants & residents groups – not just new ones.

If you find it helpful – then please let us know! Please also tell us of any other things that should be included in this Guide for Tenants & Residents Groups.

2. Getting things done

Do an Action Plan

An action plan will give you a clear idea of what you want to achieve in your neighbourhood.

Get the new committee together and talk about what improvements you want to see to:

- a) your homes
- b) the environment
- c) community safety
- d) the service you get from your landlord and council

If you want to check what the big issues are for everyone in the neighbourhood, do a door-to-door survey and ask people the same questions.

Once you've got a list of all the things that need doing, put them in priority order.

Divide the list into things you can do:

- a) Now
- b) Soon
- c) Later

Start with the Now and Soon list. Think about who can help you achieve these things.

For instance, you may need to talk to the local Housing Manager, or someone more senior at your ALMO or Housing Association, or the Council's Street Scene services, or the Police. Or you may be able to do some things all by yourself, if you just do some fundraising.

Put some names next to each item on your Action Plan.

Plan a campaign

Make sure people know what you want to achieve. Send a copy of your action plan to your local councillors and get their support.

Invite the ALMO / Housing Association or council officers to come to a meeting with your committee. Tell them what you want to achieve. These are the sort of questions you might ask them:

- How much will it cost?
- Who would make the decisions?
- When will the money be available
- When will decisions be made?
- When will they report back to you?

Many officers may not want to come to committee meetings. So why not invite them to meet you on the estate for a walkabout. Show them the problem so they can see for themselves.

Get things done

Send a written invitation to officers at least two weeks before the date of a meeting if you want them to attend. If you have trouble getting them to come and see you, write to their manager or contact your councillors.

Take notes from your meetings with officers – even on a walkabout. Write to them after the meeting repeating what you told them and what they told you.

Agree targets with them – like, when something will be done, or when more information will be available. Remind them of those targets and ask them back to report on progress.

Don't give up! Remember that the ALMO / Housing Association and the Council may have already made their plans for the year ahead so you may not see action straight away. Keep at it and you'll get there in the end!

Report back to your members

Make sure you keep all your members in touch with what you are doing. Let them know what you are trying to do.

Do a newsletter or just a simple leaflet. If you can't distribute it door-to-door, put it up in shop windows or somewhere people will see it. Come to Leeds Tenants Federation for help with publicity.

3. Team Work

The role of the Committee

The committee is the team who lead the tenants and residents group.

On the team you need people who can:

- Chair your meetings
- Prepare agendas and plan meetings
- Book a meeting place
- Take notes and keep a written record of decisions
- Manage a bank account and keep a record of income and payments
- Negotiate with officers of the ALMO / Housing Association and council
- Get information and pass it on
- Attend meetings or go on estate walkabouts
- Design leaflets and newsletters
- Send out invitations
- Make people feel welcome
- Help people work well together

Everyone on the committee is part of a team. Everyone has something to offer. You don't have to have a title like Chair or Secretary to help out. There are many jobs that can be shared.

The basic job of a committee member is to:

- Represent the views of their street or block
- Feedback what the committee is doing to people in their street or block
- Help the committee achieve its action plan – go to meetings and volunteer for tasks agreed by the committee.

4. The role of the Chair

The Chair usually has two main jobs:

- Chairing meetings of the tenants and residents group
- Giving leadership to the tenants and residents group

Chairing meetings

The role of the Chair is usually to:

- Make sure that meetings are useful, decisions are made and action is taken.
- Work with the Secretary to prepare the agenda for the meeting
- Welcome members and guests to the meeting
- Introduce each item on the agenda
- Make sure that everyone with something useful to contribute gets a chance to speak
- Make sure that people don't ramble on or interrupt
- Summarise discussions
- Ensure that decisions are made
- Close the meeting with thanks to everyone for coming

Giving leadership to the group

The role of the Chair is usually to:

- Encourage the committee to work as a team
- Make sure that the team knows what they want to achieve
- Along with other members of the team, work with the ALMO / Housing Association, council and other agencies to achieve the group's aims
- Represent the committee in a positive manner to outside organisations and at events

5. The role of the Secretary

The Secretary usually has two main jobs:

- Preparing an agenda and keeping a record of meetings
- Receiving and answering correspondence on behalf of the group

The Secretary is usually asked to:

- Book the meeting place
- Work with the chair to prepare an agenda before the meeting
- Inform all members of the date and time of the meeting
- Take notes during the meeting and minute decisions
- Make those minutes available to the committee

The Secretary is also usually the main contact person for the group.

The role of the Secretary is also usually to:

- Receive correspondence on behalf of the group and report them to the meeting
- Between meetings, keep other committee members informed of correspondence
- When asked by the committee - write letters and make phone calls on behalf of the group
- Work with the chair to make sure the group is achieving its aims

See page 11 for doing an Agenda and page 13 for Taking Minutes

6. The role of the Treasurer

The Treasurer usually has two main jobs

- Managing the group's money
- Paying expenses

Managing money

The role of the Treasurer is usually to:

- Open a bank account along with at least one other member of the group
- Keep safe the cheque books and paying-in books and any petty cash
- Make sure that the proper financial controls are in place
- Keep a written record of money going in and out of the account
- Keep and check bank statements
- Keep receipts for all items
- Report to the committee regularly on the finances of the group
- Prepare a statement of accounts and report it to the Annual General Meeting
- Have the accounts checked by an independent person

Paying expenses

The role of the Treasurer is usually to:

- Work with the committee to agree an expenses policy
- Sign cheques on behalf of the group – along with at least one other member of the committee
- Pay bills and keep a record of the payment
- Pay expenses to committee members on production of receipts

See page 16 for doing an Expenses Policy; page 18 for Simple Book-Keeping and page 20 for preparing a Statement of Accounts

7. Useful meetings

Most tenants and residents groups hold committee meetings and public meetings.

Committee meetings

Committee meetings are to plan actions, negotiate with the ALMO / Housing Association or council officers, and keep the whole committee in touch with what's going on

Public meetings

Public meetings let the committee report back to the people who elected them and give information to the public by inviting officers of the ALMO / Housing Association, council, or of other agencies and councillors to speak. Public meetings must be advertised to all members – either by a door-to-door leaflet, or by posters in public places.

The Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting is a public meeting where the committee reports back on the year, presents the independently checked accounts, and then stands down. A new committee is then elected for the coming year.

Special General Meeting

is a public meeting called to change the constitution or to sort out a particular issue or a meeting called by the membership if they have a problem with the committee

Most people won't come to meetings

- People don't come to boring meetings
- People don't come to meetings that drag on and never get anything done
- Most people won't come to meetings what ever you do.

So make sure that:

- your meeting place is accessible to all
- meetings start on time and finish on time
- people feel welcome
- decisions are made and people go away knowing what's happening

8. Doing an Agenda

The agenda is the list of things you want to talk about. It helps you keep the meeting focused and orderly.

Each item on the agenda should be either

- **For Information only** – so someone explains it and there is no need to discuss it
- **For Decision** – someone explains the item and people are invited to give their views, the Chair should sum up and a decision should be taken

Meeting of Somewhere Tenants & Residents Association on 1 May 2006 in the Community Centre, Somewhere Rd.

Agenda

1. Welcome and introductions
2. Apologies for absence
3. Minutes of the last meeting
– to agree as a correct record
4. Matters arising from the minutes
- to note action taken as a result of last meeting
5. Correspondence
- to note the information received
- to make any relevant decisions
6. Treasurers report
- to note the report on payments and income
7. Main items - guest speaker, discussion of an issue
- to discuss and make decisions

8. Reports from outside meetings
- to note any useful meetings attended by committee members
9. Any other business
10. Date, time and place of next meeting

Beware of Any Other Business

Beware of ambushes! Some people try to raise big issues under Any Other Business when no one is prepared for them and everyone just wants to go home. The Chair does not need to take Any Other Business. The Chair can postpone an item if it is new business raised at the last minute. Any new business should either have been raised before the meeting and be on the agenda or it should be raised next time. Items for Any Other Business should be small items that do not require decision.

9. Taking Minutes

Every committee or public meeting should be minuted. Minutes are a written record of what was decided at the meeting.

Taking Minutes

- Ask everyone to sign an attendance sheet or signing-in book
- Record the decision or outcome rather than the discussion
- Write without using people's names if possible
- Write "it was noted that" and not "Jane and Fred said that.."
- Write "a discussion took place" rather than Jane said this but Fred said that and Stan said something else.
- If you do not have access to a word processor or typewriter, you can use a Minutes Book and write minutes by hand.
- Chair and Secretary should look at the minutes in advance of the next meeting to see if there are any matters arising that need to be dealt with

Agreeing Minutes

- Ideally, the minutes should be sent out with the agenda for the next meeting. One of the first agenda items at that meeting should be to "approve the minutes as a correct record".
- The Chair should ask the committee to agree that the minutes are correct. If there are any amendments they can be written by hand on the master copy of the minutes and signed by the Chair.
- Minutes should be kept on file. In most constitutions, any member of the association has the right to ask to inspect the minutes by request in writing to the Secretary. The Secretary should make an appointment at their convenience to allow the minutes to be inspected.

Sample Minutes

Minutes of Somewhere Tenants & Residents Association Committee meeting 25 May 2006 in the Community Centre, Somewhere Rd

Present (Names of all committee members who attended)
Jane Fondue, Omar Sheriff, Jenny Lopez, Clint Westwood, Angie Jolly, Will Smithy

Also in attendance (Names of officers, councillors – those people invited to come who are not members):

Clark Gable-Wall, Housing Manager, Cllr Erol Flint

Apologies

(Record all apologies received but if someone is absent and hasn't told you why, do not put them down)

1. Minutes of the Committee meeting on 20 April

The minutes were approved as a correct record

2. Matters arising (Include only matters that are not dealt with elsewhere on the agenda)

- 2.1 It was noted that the garage site on Somewhere Crescent has now been cleared

3. Summer Gala

It was agreed that the Gala will be held on 8 August on the Playing Fields. Action: Jane to approach Fire Brigade and Police displays; Omar to book Face Painting and Bouncy Castle; Clint to book Majorettes; Angie to prepare publicity posters for approval at next meeting.

4. Date of next meeting

20 June at 7.00pm at the Community Centre

10. Annual General Meeting (AGM)

- Once every 12 to 15 months, you must hold an Annual General Meeting.
- All members – everyone who lives in the area your group represents – must be invited to the Annual General Meeting. You must tell them that they have a right to vote and that they can stand for election.
- Before the AGM the committee must arrange for the accounts to be independently checked by someone who isn't on the committee. This could be someone from the local housing office, a councillor, a local charity worker, or a professional person – e.g. doctor, teacher.

Annual General Meeting of Somewhere Tenants & Residents Association on 1 June 2006 in the Community Centre, Somewhere Rd

Agenda

1. Welcome and introductions
2. Apologies for absence
3. Minutes of last year's Annual General Meeting
4. Matters arising from the minutes
6. Report on the year's activities
– presented by the Chair or Secretary
7. Presentation of independently checked accounts –
report by the Treasurer
8. Committee stands down
9. Election of officers and committee
10. Date, time and place of next meeting

11. Code of Conduct

It's a good idea for the committee to agree a Code of Conduct. This can stop people falling out. If the worst happens, a Code of Conduct will help you deal with conflict.

Here is a sample Code of Conduct you can adapt to suit your needs.

Code of Conduct for the Somewhere Tenants & Residents Association

Responsibilities of Committee

- To work as a team with other committee members and to present a united front – accepting the committee's decisions even if they are not your own.
- Members should represent the Somewhere Tenants & Residents Association in a positive light and champion it's views to outside organisations.
- Members should actively seek to represent the views of the community without discrimination or prejudice.

Conduct of members

- No member should speak or write on behalf of the group without the prior agreement of the group.
- The committee must approve any press releases, TV/Radio interviews.
- All members must treat each other with respect, be courteous to each other and allow each other to speak.
- No member should fail to attend three Management Committee meetings in a row without apology or good reason

Conflicts of Interest

- Members should disclose any interest, whether personal or on behalf of any group they represent, that they consider may affect or influence their approach to the matter under discussion.

Political affiliation

- Individual members may be affiliated to/or be members of a political party and as residents of the area they are entitled to be on the Committee and have a vote. However, they may not represent a political party in their role as a Committee member.

Confidentiality

- Members should respect all individual tenants/residents confidentiality. Information about individual tenants and residents will not be discussed at meetings.

Breaches of Code of Conduct

- If a member of the committee or group does not abide by the Code of Conduct, they will be warned that if they break the Code again they may be asked to leave the meeting, or removed from office.
- The person concerned may be given two further warnings (a maximum of three warnings in any one meeting and/or three consecutive meetings.)
- If a person continues to ignore these rules and refuses to leave the meeting after being warned by the Chair, then the Chair has the power to close the meeting
- A Committee Member who continues to ignore these rules can be suspended, or removed from office or from the committee, subject to ratification at the next General Meeting.

Declaration

I have received and have read a copy of the Code of Conduct and I accept that any breach of the Code may result in my ceasing to be a Committee member of the Somewhere Tenants & Residents Association.

I agree to abide by this Code of Conduct

Signed.....

Date

12. Expenses Policy

An expenses policy is an agreement on how the committee will make financial decisions. Leeds Tenants Federation recommends that you agree an Expenses Policy.

The Policy also lets committee members know what expenses they are entitled to, how much they will be paid and how to go about claiming their money

A Sample Expenses Policy

Expenses Policy of Somewhere Tenants & Residents Association

- A Bank Account will be opened in the name of the Association
- Two members of the association must sign all cheques
- A Debit card will not be used
- No two signatories for cheques will live in the same household or be immediate family relations
- No blank cheques will be signed at any time
- Cheque stubs will always be filled out with details of the payment
- Petty cash will be kept in a secure cash box
- No more than £50 will be kept in Petty Cash
- All cash income will be banked as soon as possible
- All payments over £25 must be approved at a Committee Meeting
- The Treasurer will have authority to pay all expenses under £25 based on the following policy:

Travel costs

The Association will pay transport costs for members attending meetings and events on behalf of the group. Bus and train fares will be paid on production of tickets. Car use will be paid at 35p per mile on production of mileage records. Taxis will only be paid for in exceptional circumstances where disability or personal safety are an issue

Caring Costs

Babysitting or Care Costs will be paid at £2.50 an hour to enable members to attend a meeting or event as long as the sitter is not someone who normally lives with the family or normally takes on this role for free.

Telephone Costs

A nominated committee member should be responsible for making all telephone calls made on behalf of the association. Calls should be paid on production of an itemised bill.

Stationery and Postage

A nominated committee member (usually the Secretary) will be responsible for buying stationery as required and expenses will be paid on production of receipts.

This Expenses Policy was adopted by the Somewhere Tenants & Residents Association on 1 May 2006

13. Simple Book-keeping

An important role for the Treasurer is keeping a record of what money the group has, what it spends and what it receives.

Keep a Bank Book

The Treasurer should enter each payment and each receipt in a Bank Book and check the entries monthly against bank statements.

You can buy a ready-made Bank (or Cash) Book with columns from a stationers or you can make one yourself out of an exercise book. Rule out a double facing page yourself with columns and lines – like this:

On one side of the page

Income		
<u>Date</u>	<u>Details</u>	<u>Amount</u>
1/6/07	Grant from Leeds Tenants Federation	£300
2/7/07	Raffle	£42.75

On the facing page

Payments			
<u>Date</u>	<u>Cheque number</u>	<u>Details</u>	<u>Amount</u>
1/6/07	001	Room Hire	£20
3/6/07	002	Stamps	£12.36
30/6/07	003	Petty Cash	£25

Making Payments

Make every payment by cheque whenever you can. If you receive payments in cash, always pay them into the bank.

Petty Cash

If you need a petty cash float – and make sure it is a small float – you need a separate Petty Cash book.

In your Petty Cash Book, on a double page rule out columns for Income and Payments.

Income		Payments			
Date	From Bank	Date	Receipt	Details	Amount
30/6/07	£25	1/7/07	01	Tea & Coffee	£6.25

Keep all receipts – bus tickets, till receipts etc. Number each one and enter the number in your Petty Cash book. A good way to keep these receipts is to stick them in a Scrap Book in numbered order.

Remember - do not pay cash (from raffles or tombola etc) into your Petty Cash box – otherwise your accounts will get completely confused. Pay it into the bank!

14. Preparing a Statement of Accounts

To receive a grant from Leeds Tenants Federation and from other funders you will need to present an independently checked Statement of Accounts.

This sets out clearly all the money paid out and paid in over the year.

This Statement of Accounts must be presented at the Annual General Meeting.

Here is a sample Statement of Accounts.

Statement of Accounts for Somewhere Tenants & Residents Association 2006/07

Income		Payments	
Balance in Bank	£52.66		
Grants	£300	Telephone	£42.20
Bank Interest	£1.30	Postage	£6.70
		Stationery	£53.20
		Room Hire	£60
		Travel to meetings	£19.85
		Coach Hire	£82
		Refreshments	£16.70
		Total payments	£280.65
		Petty Cash	£12.92
		Cash in Bank	£60.39
	<u>£353.96</u>		<u>£353.96</u>

Getting the accounts checked

You must ask a professional person who is not on the committee to check the accounts. You could ask your local Housing Officer, a Councillor, a Community Worker, or a retired teacher, doctor, solicitor who lives nearby.

You will need to give them this Statement of Accounts, plus the Cheque Book, Bank Statements, the Bank Book, Petty Cash Book and your file of receipts.

Once they have checked the Statement of Accounts, ask them to sign and print their name and date at the bottom. Get the Statement photocopied, send it to Leeds Tenants Federation and your other funders and hand it out at your Annual General Meeting.

15. Help from Leeds Tenants Federation

As a member of Leeds Tenants Federation you are entitled to:

- Support and advice from our experienced staff and Management Committee
- Access to grants and funding
- Free photocopying for newsletters and leaflets and help with layout and design
- Invitations to learning opportunities and training sessions
- Regular information mailings
- Invitations to at least four general meetings a year
- Opportunities to take part in major consultation events
- The right to vote and the right to nominate a candidate for election to Leeds Tenants Federation Management Committee

Leeds Tenants Federation has a membership of over 110 tenants and residents groups representing council tenants, housing association tenants and private residents. Over 55,000 households in Leeds are members.

To contact us:

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