



TENANT & RESIDENT
ASSOCIATION
INFORMATION PACK

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The Tower of Involvement

1. Introduction

Welcome

Encouraging community spirit and engagement is at the heart of Blackpool Coastal Housing's (BCH) customer involvement. To help develop this, we provide a wide variety of ways for all our customers to get involved with us. One way to get involved is by taking part in or setting up a local Tenants and Residents Association (TARA).

This pack is designed to help guide you through setting up and running a local TARA.

What is a Tenants and Residents Association (TARA)?

A TARA is made up of local residents who have come together to either help resolve a local community issue or would like to get their area improved in some way. They are often the key-stone of the community organising meetings and co-ordinating between residents, the local council, police and other agencies.

Why set up a group?

There are many reasons why people decide to set up a TARA. These can include:

- Helping to resolve a local problem.
- Raising funds to undertake local projects to improve your local area.
- Sharing the views of the community with your landlord or other agencies.
- Developing community spirit.
- Helping to improve living conditions, housing services or the environment.

Being part of a TARA means that you have a collective voice to take your issues forward.

What geographical area should the group cover?

Your group will need to think about the geographical area you wish to represent and draw up specific geographical boundaries. If you wish to be formally affiliated to BCH and the Council, the majority of the properties within your boundaries (at least 51%) will need to be owned by the Council.

2. So, who wants to be on the group?

It may be that there are people near you who share the same interests or concerns about your community and homes. To help identify other local residents who may wish to join the committee it is useful to hold a public meeting or carry out a survey. If you would like help to organise a public meeting please contact the Customer Involvement and Projects Team. Once you've identified people who would like to be part of a group you will need to meet together to discuss forming a committee.

Your group will also need to think of an appropriate name for the group. This usually reflects the area you live in. i.e if your area is called Park Road estate you may wish to be called Park Road Tenants and Residents Association, so people can identify the area you represent.

How much time will it take to set up and run the TARA?

This is very much up to each person and how much time you would like to give. An average committee meeting may take around 2 hours; this includes arranging and holding the meeting. An open meeting including preparing for it (i.e. sending out advertising leaflets/flyers, minutes etc) and holding it may take around 6 hours. If you need help or advice to arrange any of these BCH will work with you.

Does it cost money?

You should never be out of pocket for anything you undertake on behalf of the group. If you need any paperwork, such as minutes, flyers or leaflets, the Customer Involvement and Projects Team will be able to help you produce these. They also have access to community centres located throughout Blackpool which groups may use.

3. Roles of the committee – What does each member of the committee do?

This will give you a brief outline of what to expect if you take on a committee position. BCH can provide any training you will need to help you fulfil your role.

Chairperson

The role of the chairperson is to make sure that meetings are planned in advance, well organised, run smoothly and follow the agenda.

During a meeting the chairperson should:

- Welcome everyone.
- Offer apologies for any absences.
- Ensure the agenda is followed, decisions are properly understood and recorded.
- Be able to focus debates and keep control of the meeting.
- Allow others to contribute to discussions.

Some of the main skills and duties that a chairperson should possess are:

- To be the main representative of the group.
- To be well prepared for the meeting.
- To be able to chair and manage meetings.
- To provide leadership and stay neutral unless a deciding vote is needed on an issue.

The Secretary

The secretary is key to the smooth running of the group. They provide a link with residents, committee members, Blackpool Council, BCH and other agencies.

Duties include:

- Being the first point of contact for enquiries.
- Dealing with correspondence and inviting guests to meetings.
- Assisting with the organisation of the Annual General Meeting and other meetings.
- Taking and distributing minutes and meeting advertising leaflets.

Skills that a good secretary should have include:

- Having good organisational and planning skills.
- Being prompt in dealing with correspondence for the group.

The Treasurer

The treasurer is responsible for ensuring that the finances of the group are organised and managed. A Treasurer is only required if the group wish to have their own bank account.

The treasurer is responsible for:

- Depositing cash and cheques promptly into the groups' bank account.
- Keeping and filing receipts
- Paying any bills on time.
- Keeping records of all financial transactions up-to-date and accurate.
- Reporting to the committee and members on the group's financial status.
- Monitoring the budget and liaising with BCH if the group receive a support grant.

- Preparing the end of year financial report for the Annual General Meeting (AGM).
- Ensuring that funds are being spent in accordance with the group's objectives or that any grants received are spent correctly.
- Keeping an inventory of equipment which the group may have i.e. computer, printer.

It is good practice that the accounts are available at open meetings for everyone to see.

4. Why have committee meetings?

Team working

It is vitally important that your committee meet together on a regular basis to help organise your group's open meetings. You also need to know what each of you are doing and keep in touch with any projects the group may be undertaking.

Working as a team will strengthen your group and also gives you direction and focus. It also helps you to get to know each other and develop as a team knowing each other's strengths and weaknesses.

Encouraging involvement

It is important to make sure that you are running the group in an open and democratic way so that you can encourage involvement from all members of your community. If you are seeing the same group of people at every meeting check through this list and see whether you can make changes to encourage more people to attend:

- Is the place where you meet easily accessible?
- Are there reasons why people would feel uncomfortable at the meeting, i.e. disruptive members being allowed to take over meeting, meetings going on for too long?
- How are your meetings run; does everyone feel welcome?
- Is there a clear agenda, can everyone follow the meeting?
- Is the meeting friendly and informative?
- Is conflict, bad language, threatening behaviour challenged?
- Do you make facility for people who are hearing impaired or need translation to attend and take part?

The aim of a meeting is for people to understand what is going on, for everyone to feel involved and can participate, and hopefully leave wanting to come back again.

5. Where to hold committee and open meetings?

Best Venue?

BCH have numerous community centres throughout the borough so please check with the Customer Involvement and Projects Team to see if there is one near you. If not, think about using a local school hall or library, as they often let community groups use them free of charge or for a small fee.

Best time and day?

There is really no best time or day; it's entirely up to your group when you hold your open meetings. However, it's a good idea to ask your members when they can attend so that you get the best possible attendance. Your committee meeting times will be dictated probably around when most of you are free. Don't forget those members who work; take their needs into consideration too.

Who should we tell about our meetings?

Apart from your local community, it's good practice to let the Customer Involvement & Projects Team know when you're holding a meeting and also your local Councillors who can help get issues resolved with you. To help attract people to attend, find out if there are any local issues or concerns which can be addressed. If this is the case you can contact the appropriate agency and invite them to come along. Plan out your meeting dates so that you can arrange to have a guest speaker for each one; the more notice you give people the better chance they will have of being able to attend.

It is good practice to give a week to 10 days notice to your members of forthcoming meetings. To help people remember put flyers out with the time, date and venue on and possibly who will be there, i.e. Councillors, police, NHS, etc.

How long should meetings be?

Open meetings should really take no longer than an hour and a half. This will help keep the meeting focused and encourage people to come back again.

At the start of the meeting, let your members know how long it should last. This stops people from being distracted and wondering when the meeting will end. Why not put a time slot for each part of your meeting, i.e. guest speaker has 15 minutes. This will help you keep track of the meeting and prevent one person from dominating it.

6. Who organises what?

Publicity

It is the sign of a good group if everyone works together to help organise an event or meeting. Generally the committee as a whole will contribute to developing the agenda for an open meeting. From this the secretary can design any flyers advertising the meeting. If you are organising a community event each individual task should be allocated equally throughout the committee then the work is not left to just one person.

Agenda – what is the purpose of the meeting?

To help your meeting flow and keep everyone interested you may like to consider giving your meetings a theme, i.e. guest speaker from the Repairs section. It also shows that your group is organised and you are aware of what is happening locally.

Taking minutes and who should get a copy

This is the job of the secretary. Minutes should only reflect the following:

- Time, date and place of meeting.
- List of people attending and any absent members (also know as apologies).
- Approval of the previous minutes and matters (if any) arising out of these.
- For each item on the agenda a record of the main point should be noted and any decisions taken at the meeting.
- Time, date and place of next meeting should be noted.
- Name of the person taking the minutes.

Here is a brief outline of who should receive a copy of your minutes:

- Your committee (they need to check these to make sure they are accurate and reflect the open meeting. This is usually done at the next committee meeting after the open one).
- Your members/residents who live within your groups' geographical area.

- BCH's Customer Involvement and Projects Team.
- Local Councillor(s).
- Local Police representatives. (Many groups have their local police officers attended meetings as regular guests).
- Any guest speakers who attended.

7. Law and Order – running an open meeting

To help your meeting go smoothly use some basic ground rules. Everyone present will know what is expected from them and how to behave. These should be highlighted at the start of the meeting and all present asked to adhere to them.

Here is an example of some ground rules:

- Please do not talk over somebody.
- Please listen to others.
- Please wait until someone has finished talking before speaking (speak one at a time)
- Please make sure everyone gets a say (the chairperson will notice when someone has something to say and invite them to speak).
- Please work together and help each other.
- Please respect each other and have good manners.
- Please respect each others point of view.

Quick guide to making your meetings work

Make sure that you begin your meeting on time. To provide direction give an overview of the agenda items. Keep the meeting on track, be aware if the discussion is changing subject and bring it back onto the subject in hand. Include short comfort breaks. At the end of the meeting review the action items to ensure everyone knows who is responsible for following them up and when they need completing by. Make sure you finish the meeting on time.

What if the unexpected occurs?

This could be a wide range of issues, from a guest speaker not turning up to someone trying to use the meeting for their own agenda. If anything out of the ordinary occurs you will need to ensure that you stick to your agenda and ground rules. If a guest speaker unexpectedly does not arrive, make sure that you keep everyone present informed noting that the group will re-invite them to the next meeting.

Never promise anything you know that the group cannot deliver. If you are asked a question you are not sure about, tell that person you will find out the answer and get back to them. Make sure that it's noted in the minutes so that you can chase up any action points needed.

Your Customer Involvement and Projects Officer should attend all open meetings to support the group and will help defuse any issues or potential disruption.

Agreeing to disagree – conflict management?

From time to time conflict can occur within a group. It can happen when people have different values/beliefs or when your personal values/beliefs are threatened or challenged. Conflict can also occur when people are fearful of something new or change.

Remember that you are a diverse group of people, all with different opinions and views and, when managed well, disagreeing on something is not necessarily a bad thing. It is when conflict is poorly managed the problems can begin.

Conflict is a problem when it:

- Stops people being productive or effective.
- Lowers morale.
- Is never resolved and more conflicts occur or is continued over a long period of time.
- Causes inappropriate behaviour; rudeness towards others, bad language, shouting etc.

There are many things that can cause conflict, some of these include:

- Poor communication or lack of information.
- People feel excluded from or are not involved in making decisions.
- Reasons for decisions are not fully explained.
- People do not respect other's views and opinions.
- Disagreements about who does what within the group.
- People have too many tasks and others not many.
- Leadership is too strong or too weak.

Ways People Deal With Conflict

We all deal with conflict differently. Some of the ways people deal with conflict can be:

- Avoid it or ignore it.

This usually tends to make the conflict worse, especially when it is unresolved over a long period of time.

- Work to get your own way.

This does not truly resolve the problem, as the other party may feel 'bullied' into taking your point of view.

- Compromise.

This is the best way to resolve an issue and leaves everyone happy.

- Collaboration

This is often a good way of avoiding conflict in the first place. Everyone has the opportunity to get involved, feels valued and results in mutual agreement.

Managing conflict with another person

Here are a few things to bear in mind if you are asked to help resolve conflict within your group.

- Be aware of your own "personal traits". Try to stay calm – even if the other person is angry.
- Avoid blaming the other person. This will lead to them being unwilling to resolve the dispute and not wish to continue the discussion.
- Try going to a private place to discuss the problem. No one wants to air their issues in front of others.
- Don't interrupt. Give the other person the respect and time to express their side of the issue. Encourage them to tell you how it makes them feel and how they think things need to be resolved.
- Identify at least one action that can be done by both of you to help move forward.
- Have a cooling off period if the conflict remains heated. Once someone starts to shout it is often not practical to carry on with the discussion.
- If you feel that you cannot handle the situation, ask someone who is independent to mediate. Your Customer Involvement & Projects Officer will be able to help in the first instance.

8. Formalising your group

Having a constitution or not?

Your association can be either informal or formal. You can formalise your group by adopting a constitution. It is a good idea to formalise your group if you want to apply for funding or engage with other organisations (e.g. Police, NHS, etc). This will set out your aims and objectives and give the group greater empowerment. If your group wish to apply for funding, you will need to open a bank account in the group's name.

To be formally affiliated to the Council and BCH you will need to have the following in place:

- The group should adopt a formal written constitution. A sample constitution is available from the Customer Involvement and Projects Team, including an Equal Opportunities Policy.
- The group should have a defined geographical boundary.
- The group must provide the following information on an annual basis to the Customer Involvement and Projects Team in order to qualify for payment of future grants, or other support: -
 1. A copy of the Constitution.
 2. Minutes of the last AGM and copies of all meetings.
 3. Dates of future meetings.
 4. A list of Committee members.
 5. Other information as may be reasonably required.
- Members and Committee Members must live within the geographical boundary of the Association/Group.
- The group should not exclude anyone who lives in the area from joining the group.
- The group must have at least 51% of properties being tenants or leaseholders of the Council within their geographical area.
- At least one third of your committee should be tenants or leaseholders of the Council
- The group should be able to show that it has the support of the people it aims to represent.
- The group should actively represent the views of its members whenever and wherever it can.
- The group should be run by a committee elected annually at an Annual General Meeting.
- The group should have meetings at least quarterly and an Annual General Meeting, open to the public, where accounts are presented and officers elected democratically.
- The group should be able to show it is responsible in the way it is run e.g. keeping regular account of any money it has, if this is applicable. Where BCH provides an annual grant to groups, they are expected to present their books to the Customer Involvement and Projects Team on an annual basis for auditing.
- The group, once affiliated to BCH and complying with all of the criteria, will be eligible for an Annual Grant and may send two representatives to the Tenant Liaison Forum. If a group does not wish to receive funding they will be eligible to receive funding in kind from the Customer Involvement and Projects Team.

Please do not be put off from becoming an affiliated group as you will find that your group has most of the above already in place. Please contact the Customer Involvement and Projects Team who will work with your group to help you become a formally affiliated group.

9. Funding

Does your group need a bank account?

Your group can choose if you wish to have a bank account. If you would like to receive financial support from BCH in the form of an annual grant then you need to have one. You can contact any local bank and they will help you set up a group bank account. Usually this will mean that 3 committee members (including the treasurer) will be required to act as signatories for any cheques you write. You will be asked to keep monthly accounts and hand your books in on an annual basis to your supporting Customer Involvement and Projects Officer.

Help – I'm not an accountant!

Your treasurer does not have to be an accountant to do your books. These are a very basic method book keeping. Throughout the year your supporting officer will help the treasurer to update the books as needed and give advice and training where required.

10. Working Together

They say it's not what you know it's who you know. Well this is very true and through working with other agencies, the local Council and BCH, your group will be able to successfully undertake local projects and help resolve issues.

Here is a useful list of people who may help your group alongside BCH:

- Local Councillor(s).
- Local Police.
- Other Council Officers.
- Outside local agencies i.e. Age UK, Department for Work and Pensions, Advice Link amongst many others.

If you're a new group why not ask an existing Residents Association to attend your meetings to help you get up and running. It's a good point of contact to keep your supporting Customer Involvement and Projects Officer informed of your group's activities as they will be able to help put you in contact with relevant agencies.

11. Training

To help your individual members carry out their committee duties and work together as a team, we will offer a wide range of training. This may include inviting members to participate in our Academy which runs over several weeks looking at the different aspects of social housing i.e. repairs, rent, leasehold, anti social behaviour, sheltered needs etc.

12. One things leads to another ... getting more involved

The Tower of Involvement

If you would like to become more involved in improving and developing services, BCH provide a wide range of methods to suit your interest and time. These include:

Tenant Board Member: BCH has 5 tenants on its board who are elected by our tenants. Elections for members may vary each year. When a position is available all our tenants will be notified and are able to nominate themselves.

Service improvement Panels: The panels provide an opportunity for you to be involved with specific sections within BCH i.e. rents, lettings and repairs etc. Meetings are held on a quarterly basis and usually last no longer than 2 hours.

BCH Academy: The Academy has been designed to provide BCH's involved customers with a greater knowledge and understanding of social housing and the various services we provide. The Academy consists of 8 weekly 2 hour sessions.

Green Warden Scheme: Help to monitor the grounds maintenance contract and your local environment by completing a monthly score sheet and reporting on aspects such as grass cutting, litter and maintenance of paths etc.

Tenant Empty Homes and Decent Homes Inspectors: Both decent homes and tenant inspectors help monitor the standard and the quality of workmanship in empty homes and improvement work under the decent homes program. Inspectors assess and monitor standards and complete score sheets on their findings. Inspections take place on a monthly basis.

Mystery Shopping: The Mystery Shopping Scheme helps to ensure that the housing service you receive is being delivered to a high standard. Tenant volunteers 'test' certain aspects of the service so that they are continually improved and meet your needs.

Reading Panel: Ensure the information BCH provides is relevant and easy to read by joining the Reading Panel. Before any new documents are published they're sent to the Panel who read through the documents and advise of any necessary changes to be made. The document is then published with the 'Tenant Friendly' logo to demonstrate it has been 'tenant tested'.

Disability Forum: The Forum is open to tenants and leaseholders who class themselves as having a disability or who care for someone with a disability. The Forum meets to discuss relevant issues and works to improve the services BCH provides, helping to ensure these remain fully accessible.

Walkabout Volunteers: Help to improve your neighbourhood by participating in a local estate walkabout with a member of BCH staff. The walkabout highlights any problems or concerns in the area i.e. rubbish dumped, broken paving etc.

enGAYge: This is the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual and Transgender (LGBT) focus group which meet on a monthly basis. The group was formed to support LGBT members and involves you in the housing service and community issues.

Newsletter Contribution: Viewpoint Magazine is published on a quarterly basis and is sent to all tenants and leaseholders. If you have a good news story or would like to include an article, please contact us.

Survey Group: Complete a short survey taking up no more than 15 minutes of your time once every 3 months. The surveys will help to develop and improve the housing services you receive.