



# How to start a residents' association

A quick-start guide



**watford**  
community  
housing

Watford Community Housing encourages and supports residents to work together to improve their community.

We've created this booklet to help you set up a residents' association.

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## What is a residents' association?

A residents' association is a group of people who want to get together to discuss local issues, improve their area and sometimes get involved in organising events. They work with others to make the community a better and friendlier place to live.

### How do they make an area better?

By engaging with the organisations that have an influence on the local area, such as the local council or the police, ensuring they are aware of local issues and the views of local residents.

Working with these organisations and other community groups helps to bring about positive changes for the local community.

### What's in it for Watford Community Housing?

We are committed to improving our communities. We also want to hear the views of residents and the wider community. Residents' associations are a direct link to the community and by working together we can make a really positive impact in a local area.

## I want to start a group - what happens now?

- Get in touch with the Community Engagement Team on **01923 209183** or [community@wcht.org.uk](mailto:community@wcht.org.uk).
- Meet with the team to talk through the next steps in more detail.
- Each group will be given ongoing support and advice, for example: how to elect committee members or advice on holding meetings.
- Publicise your group! This could be through leafleting, an event, noticeboard displays or social media. It is important that the whole community have the opportunity to become involved.
- Once your residents' association is up and running, the Community Engagement team can support you to access funding to help bring your ideas to life.

## Accountability

All members of a group must be fully accountable to those they represent.

You will have the opportunity to air your own views, but must also respectfully put across the views of the community you represent – even if you don't agree with them.

### You must:

- make sure you find out the views of the wider community
- report outcomes and decisions to the wider community
- make meeting minutes and group bank account information available for all to see upon request
- take steps to include every member of your community

As an elected representative, you must always bring forward the views of people in your area.

Sharing your thoughts and listening to the views of those around you is often the first step in the formation of a residents' association.

## Getting started

The first things to think about include:

- what are the aims of the group?
- which Watford Community Housing boundary area are you in?
- who are your relevant officers at Watford Community Housing?
- how are you going to get more people involved?
- what skills do group members have?
- does anyone have previous experience?

Remember that you will have support from us at every step of the journey.

## Training

Residents' association members are encouraged to attend training sessions in order to build on their knowledge, skills and confidence. You can speak to your Community Engagement Officer to find out more about the training opportunities that are available. We can help you access relevant training if it is needed.

## How to run a successful first meeting

You should advertise your first meeting thoroughly throughout your local area and try to capture as wide an audience as possible – giving at least seven days' notice.

You can publicise your meeting using posters in local shops, cafés or community centres, and through leafleting, email or social media.

The advert should say:

- what the meeting will be about
- why local residents should come along
- details of date, time and location
- any prospective roles people can nominate themselves for.

It is important to plan well in advance and be clear about what you hope to achieve. It is also worth considering the time and venue of meetings to make them as inclusive as possible.



## Agendas

Having a good agenda prepared in advance is vital, as this sets out what will be discussed and the meeting structure.

Preparation of the agenda is the responsibility of the Secretary and Chair, who should consider:

- what the key objectives of the meeting are
- what the most important items are

- if anything needs to be discussed under ‘matters arising’ from previous minutes
- allocating each agenda item a timeslot, as well as meeting start and finish times
- making sure agenda items are allocated enough time

The most important items should go at the beginning of your agenda, and it is better to have fewer items than too many.

## Sample agenda

The Street Residents’ Group  
 Monday 10<sup>th</sup> December 2018 at 6.30pm  
 26 The Street, Watford

Items		Time
1	Apologies	6.30 - 6.35
2	Minutes of last meeting	6.35 - 6.45
3	Matters arising and action progress	6.45 - 7.00
4	Correspondence	7.00 - 7.15
5	Summer fun day – progress update	7.15 - 7.30
6	Estate matters – fly-tipping by the shops	7.30 - 8.00
7	Reports from committee members	8.00 - 8.05
8	Treasurer’s report	8.05 - 8.10
9	Any other business	8.10 - 8.25
10	Date of next meeting	8.25 - 8.30



## Taking Minutes

### Why is taking minutes important?

The secretary is responsible for keeping a written record of items discussed at meetings.

This will ensure that action points are always followed up and that nothing is forgotten.

### Minuting meetings

There are a few guidelines to follow:

- Do not try to write down every single thing that is said.
- Always record a decision when made by the group.
- Avoid going into too much detail.
- Use neutral language and tone.
- Circulate finished meeting minutes promptly after the meeting.

At the meeting itself, circulate an attendance sheet for everyone to fill in.

A copy of the minutes should be sent to your Community Engagement Officer and any attending partner organisations. They must be stored securely in a location that the whole committee has access to.

## Don't forget!

All groups and committees should be politically neutral – it is fine to work with people in elected positions, but you should not give any party a platform to advertise themselves. Local councillors can be invited to meetings, but avoid discussing political issues between parties or councillors in your community.

While community groups and residents' associations are a place for issues to be raised, it is inappropriate for individual cases relating to specific individuals or properties to be discussed.

Housing-related problems, such as neighbourhood issues or repairs, should be resolved through the usual Watford Community Housing channels.

**At the beginning of every meeting, the minutes of the previous meeting should be approved. This can be proposed and seconded by attendees from the previous meeting who can confirm the minutes are accurate.**



## Sample Minutes

### Minutes of The Street Residents' Group

Monday 10<sup>th</sup> January 2018

#### Present

Adam Allen – Chair

Bethany Beale – Secretary

Charlotte Coulson – Treasurer

Dennis Davies

Edward Eaves

#### Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Frank Fowler and Gordon Greene.

#### Approval of minutes from previous meeting

Minutes of the previous meeting, held on Monday 5<sup>th</sup> November 2018 were approved.

#### Matters Arising

DD confirmed that faulty communal light at Gateway Place has been repaired and is now functional following it being reported to Watford Community Housing.

#### Summer Fun Day

CC confirmed that Event Grant Application for £500.00 towards the summer fun day has been completed and submitted to Watford Community Housing. EE advised that he is still awaiting a response from children's entertainer in regards to availability for fun day. AA has signed off on promotional leaflets to be distributed by committee in advance of the fun day.

#### Any Other Business

There was no other business discussed. The meeting closed on time at 8:30PM.

#### Date of next meeting

The date of the next meeting has been confirmed as Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2018 at 6:30PM.

## The role of the Chair

The Chair is often seen as the 'figurehead' and provides leadership and guidance without dominating meetings. It is also important that the Chair keeps the group focused on following its aims and objectives. It can be easy to become distracted from these.

The Chair is the one who makes sure things get done – not the person who does everything!

During meetings, the Chair should:

- introduce the meeting
- approve the minutes from the previous meeting
- introduce agenda items and ensure group decisions are reached when required
- give equal opportunity to contribute and ensure that no one person dominates the discussion
- maintain control of the meeting and ensure it runs smoothly
- close the meeting and confirm the date of the next meeting

The Chair is also the person who is responsible for the work that is done outside of meetings and for organising

people to do this. They call meetings to order and it is their role to ensure everyone has the opportunity to express their view and opinions. In the absence of the Chair, the Vice-Chair will usually undertake these duties.

## The role of Treasurer

The role of the Treasurer is to make sure that money belonging to the group is properly managed and correctly accounted for. They keep detailed records of all income and expenditure.

Their duties typically include:

- opening a bank account and ensuring all monies received are paid into this account
- keeping a record of all monies received and issuing receipts
- paying bills as agreed by the group and keeping a record of all expenditure
- maintaining an account book detailing all income and expenditure
- preparing regular statements and reports for the group
- arranging for the group account to be independently examined yearly (only if the group's turnover is above £10,000)

## How to open a bank account

Obtain an application form to open a current bank account. Each bank will offer slightly different community accounts so it is worth looking at a few before making your decision.

The Treasurer completes an application form, usually with up to four signatories (who must be unrelated and not in the same household) to draw money out of the bank.

## How do you keep accurate accounts?

The group's financial transactions will be broken down into three types.

- Cash received
- Cash paid
- Petty cash receipts and payments

If you require any support with how to keep accurate accounts or write up the books from your account, please contact your Community Engagement Officer.

It is recommended that you write up the books for the group at least once a month. When doing this, check the group's bank statements against the entries in your book.

## Cash received

Money received by the group must be recorded under 'incomings'. It should show:

- the date the money was received
- the amount
- who it was received from
- whether it was received in the form of cash

Each transaction should be numbered with the receipt number given to the payee. Copy receipts should be filed in the correct order so that you can quickly check that all monies received have been recorded. Receipts that are cancelled must be kept so that every number is accounted for. Standard receipt books are available from most stationery shops.

You should also make a note of when you bank money so that this can be checked against the monthly bank statement. At the end of the month you should total up the columns, check for discrepancies and start a new page for the following month.

## Cash paid out

Money spent by the group must be recorded under 'outgoings'. It should show:

- the date of each payment
- details of who it was paid to
- the total amount spent

If applicable, the cheque number must be recorded.

It is important to keep any cancelled cheque stubs for reconciliation purposes.

Periodically, you will need to draw out some petty cash. These transactions must also be recorded.

## Comparing your accounts books with bank statements

Once a month, you will need to reconcile the accounts books with the bank statements that should have been sent to you at the end of each month.

It can take several days for a cheque to go through the banking system so there will be instances where items are not shown on your most recent bank statement.

Your bank statement may also show some items that are not included in your books, such as bank charges. These should be recorded in your 'cash paid' sheet prior to attempting to complete the balance sheet.

By comparing the total for cash IN and cash OUT, you can prepare a monthly balance sheet to report at each meeting.

## Out-of-pocket expenses

As part of the budget, it is important to set money aside to cover things such as travel expenses or caring costs for group meetings.

An example of an expenses claim form can be obtained from the Community Engagement team.

## Childcare/caring for adults

In some cases, Watford Community Housing will pay for childcare. Please ask for a copy of the expenses claim form.

## The role of the Secretary

The Secretary deals with all paperwork relating to the group. It is their responsibility to keep other members informed of what is going on. However, they should make sure they are not taking on too much, as an effective group should share out the work equally.

The Secretary and Chair must work closely together to ensure that things run smoothly and that the group stays focused, even if other members of the group are not present.

Their duties usually include:

- arranging meetings – e.g. booking a venue
- consulting with the Chair to create and circulate the agenda in advance of the meeting
- keeping records of attendance
- preparing and circulating the minutes in a timely manner following meetings
- being aware of quorum – the constitution requires a minimum number of members for certain types of meeting

## The role of a group or committee member

All members of the community group should be encouraged to become involved in its work.

The duties of a group or committee member usually include:

- electing a Chairperson and other officers where required
- identifying ways in which the local community could be improved
- where appropriate, responding to proposed changes to Watford Community Housing's procedures
- receiving and responding to performance information given by us
- making a commitment to attending meetings, whilst being mindful of sending apologies when this isn't possible
- providing their own objective opinions whilst remaining representative of the local community
- helping with events and community activities



## Elections

At the first official meeting you should hold elections to select a Chair, Secretary, Treasurer and any general committee members as necessary.

Usually any person over the age of 16 can stand and all nominees should be present at the meeting. If they are not, someone can read a statement on their behalf.

All Annual General Meetings (AGMs) require an independent observer to be present. This could be:

- a Watford Community Housing staff member
- an elected Councillor
- a committee representative from another residents' association

At each AGM, the existing committee should all step down and hand over proceedings to the independent

observer (such as a Community Engagement Officer) who will then begin the process of electing new committee members.

If there is only one person standing for a position, someone must propose that person, and the appointment must be seconded by someone else.

If there is more than one person standing, each candidate should be given a brief window to explain why they are suited to the role, what relevant experience they have etc. Voting will then commence via a ballot.

Once the results have been confirmed, the meeting will be handed over to the new Chair.

## Constitution

After the elections have taken place and the new committee has been formed, Watford Community Housing will supply a constitution for the committee to sign. This constitution is a set of rules and principles which outlines how the committee operates, what their aims are, and the code of conduct they should adhere to.

The code of conduct sets out how all members of the group should behave, for example, all residents should be treated as equal, and all group members should attend meetings regularly where possible.

Your group will need to have an approved constitution before it can be recognised as an official residents' association, and apply for funding.

## Funding

After your constitution is signed, your residents' associations can apply for funding. You can apply for:

- a one-off start-up grant of £150
- an annual grant, which is set at £1 per tenanted property and 50p per associate member in your area

You can apply for both types of grant at the same time, as well as applying for event grants. The annual grant can be applied for once each year.

If you need funding but have not yet finalised your community bank account, please speak to your Community Engagement Officer. We can also support you with some of the costs of setting up and promoting your group.

All funding applications are reviewed by a panel of tenants and staff at the end of each month.

Please ensure you submit your funding bid well in advance of your event as it will take time to process.



## Planning an event

A good way to involve more people is to arrange an event that appeals to the local community. This could be:

- a community fun day
- a coffee morning
- a themed event, e.g. Christmas or Eid

Watford Community Housing has funding available to support you in organising an event or to help with printing costs. Please speak to your Community Engagement Officer for more information.

## Step-by-step guide

### 1. Build an event committee

The event committee can be formed of people from your main committee, people from the wider community, or a mixture of both. The event committee meets regularly in the months leading up to the event. It is never too early to start planning!

### 2. Get organised

It is a good idea to assign specific roles in order to share the workload and to draw on people's individual strengths.

Remember – you are all volunteers so please help and support each other.

Roles could include:

- meeting Chair – oversees the event committee and ensures everything runs smoothly
- stall booking – promotes the opportunity to local organisations and processes bookings
- refreshments – organises the food and drink on offer at the event
- publicity – produces promotional flyers, liaises with printers etc.

### 3. Investigate what funding is available

Set a budget for your event and ensure everyone on the event committee is aware of this. You may need to seek sources of funding if there is not enough in the group account.

Potential sources of funding include:

- Watford Borough Council
- Watford & Three Rivers Trust (W3RT)
- Borough, District, Parish and County Councillors

#### 4. Confirm date, venue and event type

Agree on a date and venue for the event. You should contact local schools, churches and other community groups to ensure your event does not clash with anything else happening locally. You also need to think about who your target audience is.

#### 5. Discuss and agree on activities

You will need to discuss as a group what activities you will be offering, who will facilitate these and what equipment you need.

#### 6. Building up to the day of the event

- Finalise what is on offer on the day of the event
- Promote the event using a variety of methods, such as social media – make sure you do this well in advance of the event
- Ensure you have enough volunteers for the event and assign roles

#### 7. On the day

- Arrive at the venue in good time to set up
- Put up signage at the venue
- Ensure everyone understands their roles
- Keep hydrated, take regular breaks and don't forget it is a team effort!

Have a clear plan agreed to clear up at the end of the event.

#### 8. Review the event

Hold a meeting with the event committee and any volunteers in the weeks following the event in order to debrief.

Identify what went well and what could be done differently next time. Work as a group to produce a report of the event and include this in your newsletters.

Newsletters are a great way to celebrate the success of your group!

Here is a sample event plan – in this instance for a coach trip to Southend.

Planning	Consideration
Decide a date	When would most people be free? Consider weather and give plenty of time to organise.
Decide coach pick-up and drop-off points	Where will people meet to get on the coach? E.g. a church or community centre?
Calculate cost and bid for funding	Ensure you bid for funding well in advance. You could secure funding from local councillors and/or Watford Community Housing.
Decide timings – when will the coach leave and come back?	Consider all ages and young families.
Book the coach	Call a few coach companies before booking to find the best price. Consider things such as whether the coach will have a toilet.
Consider how much you will charge for the trip	Ensure it as accessible as possible by considering what would be affordable and what people may be willing to pay.
Promote your event	Examples include flyers, posters, as well as word-of-mouth and social media.
Organise bookings	Keep a record of who has booked and a reserve list in case people drop out. This can be quite a demanding task.
Photo consent	Arrange for someone to take photos. These are helpful for your funders as well as raising the profile of your group. Ensure you have consent to use the pictures.
Participant feedback	On the way back, ask for anonymous and honest feedback. Collect responses before people get off the coach, as it will be fresh in their minds.
After the event, make sure you meet to review it	What went well? What could have been improved? Promote the successes and feedback to anyone who provided funding for the trip.

## The role of the Community Engagement team

The Community Engagement team is here to facilitate and support resident involvement.

Our main duties regarding local resident/community groups include:

- providing administrative and professional support/advice to committees
- supporting the training needs of a group, and ensuring relevant training is made available
- arranging for staff from specific teams, or external agencies, to attend meetings when requested by the committee
- offering support and advice across a wide range of topics

The Community Engagement team will not provide responses to specific issues, but will ensure that meeting minutes are passed to the relevant colleagues at Watford Community Housing.

To contact the Community Engagement team call **01923 209183** or email [community@wcht.org.uk](mailto:community@wcht.org.uk)

## The role of the Neighbourhoods team

The Neighbourhoods team are your main contacts for matters relating to:

- tenancy agreements
- household audits
- starting and ending of tenancies
- mutual exchanges
- successions
- assignments
- applications for alterations
- low-level anti-social behaviour (including neighbour disputes)
- lettings and viewings
- estate management and estate inspections, including parking and permits/fobs

Neighbourhood Officers can attend meetings for their patch.

To contact the Neighbourhoods team call **01923 209227** or email [neighbourhoodserviceteam@wcht.org.uk](mailto:neighbourhoodserviceteam@wcht.org.uk)



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