



**Wrexham County Borough Council Housing
Department**

**Tenant and Leaseholder
Participation Strategy**

Introduction

This is the first Tenant and Leaseholder Participation Strategy produced by Wrexham County Borough Council in co-operation with tenants, tenants groups, leaseholders, staff and elected members and reflects our commitment to developing effective consultation and participation.

It spells out the respective rights and responsibilities of tenants and leaseholders (you/your) and landlords (we/us) on things such as:

- provision of information.
- effective and meaningful tenant and leaseholder consultation and involvement.
- provision of support and training for tenants, leaseholders staff and members.
- encouragement and support for different types of tenant empowerment
- monitoring and review of the strategy.

Background

As a result of the Welsh Assembly Government's commitment to encourage effective participation in Wales the National Participation Strategy was drawn up by a Task and Finish group which was set up to take forward the recommendations of the report "Evaluating Tenant Participation in Housing Management and Design".

The National Strategy sets out the Assembly Government's aim to develop quality tenant participation services across Wales by promoting participation:-

- as a vehicle for improving services;
- through setting out what it expects of social landlord participation activities;
- through setting out what it will do to engage social housing partners when developing housing policy;
- and how it will monitor and review the effectiveness of its approach to tenant engagement.

We are already committed to working with and engaging with you, seeking and supporting your involvement in housing issues prior to the introduction of policies and procedures. The National Strategy provides a framework for social landlords to develop participation strategies that are relevant to the needs of tenants and other community members as appropriate.

With this in mind we set about drafting our Tenant and Leaseholders Participation Strategy. Meetings were held with the Tenants Assembly and subsequent Strategy Review group, Tenants and Resident Associations, the Leaseholders Assembly, staff and Members.

A full consultation exercise took place in August/September 2008. The draft document and an accompanying questionnaire were sent to all members of our "consultation database". Details of the consultation and how to obtain a copy of the draft document were provided in the August edition of the "Housing Hotline" tenant newsletter which was delivered to all tenants.

Following the consultation exercise it was agreed that the document reflected on the comments made and therefore no alterations were required.

Aims and Objectives

2.1 Aims

Our overall aim is to enable tenants, leaseholders and stakeholders to have real opportunities both individually and collectively, to contribute to and influence all decisions relating to their homes and living conditions.

2.2 Our specific aims

Our specific aims are to:-

1. Offer a range of options for tenants, leaseholders and stakeholders to participate both collectively through tenants and residents groups and on an individual basis.
2. Ensure tenants and leaseholders are adequately encouraged and resourced to fully engage in the participation process and be involved in decisions affecting them.
3. Continuously develop ways of improving communication and information dissemination to meet the needs of all our tenants and leaseholders.
4. Develop and support tenant and leaseholder involvement Borough wide.

2.3 Our objectives

Our objectives, on a year on year basis are to:-

- a) Ensure tenants and leaseholders get the information they need to influence decisions which are made about their home, estate or areas.
- b) To make tenants and leaseholders aware of their rights to be involved in the management of their home and resources available to meet this right.

- c) To explain fully to tenants and leaseholders how they can become involved.
- d) To explain who is responsible for different service areas and to publish regular performance information to tenants on service delivery.
- e) To let tenants and leaseholders decide how they want to become involved ranging from simply receiving information to becoming a member of the Wrexham Tenant and Member Partnership.
- f) To create new opportunities for tenant and leaseholder participation through continuous improvements at a pace they are happy with.
- g) To ensure that hard to reach groups such as the elderly, disabled, young people and tenants of ethnic minorities have an opportunity to be involved.
- h) Regularly monitor and review this strategy to ensure it continues to be effective

The Reason for the Strategy and the Benefits of Tenant and Leaseholder Participation

The main purpose of this strategy is to set out how we will consult and communicate with our tenants and leaseholders during the period of the strategy (3 years).

It ensures that our services are designed, developed and delivered in line with the needs and expectations of our customers and ensures adequate methods and appropriate timescales for participation are in operation.

The benefits of tenant and leaseholder participation are invaluable across the board. Participation gives us the opportunity to make informed decisions in developing and implementing “Policy”, based on tenant and leaseholder needs. By listening to our customers, we will improve our services and more effectively identify problems and find solutions early on. Participation enables tenants and leaseholders to exercise more control over their housing and related services, which is a fundamental aspect of their lives and promotes a greater sense of community at both a local and national level

Participation also empowers tenants and leaseholders, gets their voice heard and increases confidence and personal skills. Furthermore, it provides interaction and improves the social aspect of their lives.

If tenants and leaseholders understand and are able to be part of the processes in delivering housing and associated services a better working relationship and trust will develop and increase the levels of satisfaction with the services provided.

Keeping Tenants and Leaseholders Informed

The exchange of information is the most basic form of tenant and leaseholder participation.

Information is provided to tenants and leaseholders for two reasons

- to help and make the best use of the services available to them, and ;
- to enable them to influence policy.

We recognise that some tenants and leaseholders will be more interested in participating than others and that a range of methods is necessary to keep tenants and leaseholders informed and involved. Before people decide whether or not they want to get involved they need good quality information which is accurate, up to date and easily understood

The present range of methods of providing information is as follows:

- Wrexham Tenants Federation
- The Tenants' Handbook
- The Leaseholders Handbook
- Quarterly Newsletters
- Leaflets
- Home visits
- The Tenants' Assembly
- The Leaseholders Assembly
- Review Groups
- Surveys
- Questionnaires /surveys
- Public Meetings
- Surgeries
- Website
- Office notice boards
- E-mail

Information will be provided about:

- The Tenancy Agreement
- Rent increases
- How we allocate our homes
- Day to day repairs
- Planned repairs
- Programmed repairs
- Rent collection
- Empty properties
- Homelessness
- Performance
- Tenant /Leaseholder involvement
- Resources

- Service charges (leaseholders)

The Council, the Federation, Tenants' Assembly and Leaseholders Assembly all agree that information will be:

- In plain English or Welsh
- Accurate, relevant and clearly presented and appealing
- In any other appropriate language (upon request when needed)
- On audio cassette or cd if required
- In large print or braille if requested

Consultation

There is no single piece of legislation which sets out social housing tenants' and leaseholders rights to participate. Legal rights are given through a number of mechanisms including Acts of Parliament and contracts (i.e. tenancy agreements/leases) and cover the following:

- We will ask your views about any of our housing plans if they affect you in a major way. For example, we will talk to you about any modernisation or improvement work we have planned for your home or your area. We will involve you or your tenants' groups in local housing issues.
- We must ask your views about any planned changes to the terms of the tenancy agreement (or lease for leaseholders). We will tell you in writing if these changes are to go ahead.
- Tenant organisations have the right to take over managing their homes. This is called the 'right to manage'. The scheme allows tenant organisations to run services instead of us. Ask at your local housing office for more details.
- As a member of the public, you have the right to go and listen to our Executive Board and Scrutiny committees. These meetings of councillors decide how the housing service is run and managed. You have the right to see the records (minutes) that are kept of the meeting. You can find out more by contacting the Guildhall, Wrexham or by asking at your local housing office.
- Your right to be given information. You will be able to see certain information which is recorded on file and related to your tenancy in particular. However, you must write in. There is a small charge.

We will also consult with you about:

- proposed policy changes
- changes to service delivery
- monitoring and evaluation frameworks
- any proposed stock transfer
- service charges (leaseholders)

Consultation will take a variety of forms including:

- surveys
- questionnaires
- comment cards/forms
- consultation events
- Tenants' Assembly
- Tenant group meetings and review groups
- Website

We will provide feedback about any consultation exercise we carry out.

Participation

The ultimate goal for our strategy is to have more tenants and leaseholders playing an active part in our decision making process.

We recognise that traditional methods of tenant participation, such as membership of committees, requires considerable commitment of time and energy and that many tenants and leaseholders are unable or unwilling to make such a commitment. They may, however, welcome the opportunity to comment on our policies and services, take part in small surveys or be part of a review/focus group looking at a particular project or issue. The strategy aims to develop a range of different ways to allow tenants and leaseholders to be involved at a level they are comfortable with.

We will offer the following opportunities for participation;

The Wrexham Tenant and Member Partnership – 10 Tenants and 10 Elected Members who meet bi-monthly to monitor performance and service delivery. One of its main roles is to promote resident involvement in the delivery of landlord services.

(For terms of reference for Wrexham Tenant and Membership Partnership see appendix 1)

Wrexham Tenants Federation – supports Tenants' and Residents' Associations and 'Tenant Panels' within Wrexham Council and reaches out to areas in the Community who have been under represented in the past. A Tenants' Support Worker and Administration Assistant help run the Federation and monthly meetings are held with representatives of Tenant and Resident Associations in the borough. The Federation has the nomination rights for five of the tenants that sit on the Wrexham Tenant and Member Partnership and meets the training needs of these representatives and tenant groups.

Tenants' and Residents' Associations – groups of tenants, leaseholders and residents who work within a defined area. This area can cover a local estate or could be a single block or street and is open to everybody who lives within its boundaries. Upon meeting certain criteria Tenant and Resident Associations can apply for grant funding from us. (For the criteria for forming a Tenants' and Residents' Associations and being entitled to grant funding see Appendix 2)

Tenant Panels – groups of tenants and leaseholders who share a common interest and come together in areas where there are no Tenant and Resident Association.

Wrexham Tenants' Assembly – meets bi-monthly and is open to any tenant or leaseholder to attend. The group looks at things the Council has been doing and provide feedback and opinions on what things the Council should be focusing its efforts on within housing services.

Wrexham Leaseholders Assembly – meets at least quarterly to consult and discuss issues relevant to leaseholders. (Leaseholders can also attend Wrexham Tenant Federation meetings and Tenant and Resident Association meetings).

Review Groups – held at least on a quarterly basis. A number of groups of tenants which meet with officers and look at the different services we provide e.g. estate management, voids, repairs etc.

Newsletter Editorial Groups – a group of tenants and leaseholders who provide views on what people might like to read about and assist in ensuring their respective newsletter is easy to read.

Sheltered Tenants Association – a group of Sheltered Tenants who meet monthly to consult and discuss issues specific to Sheltered Tenancies.

Peoples Champions / Village Voices - a tenant or leaseholder, especially in geographically isolated areas, who is willing to act as a channel of communication between individual households and ourselves.

Training

We are committed to ensuring that staff, tenants and leaseholders have the necessary skills and resources to allow them to get involved with confidence. Training needs will be assessed on an ongoing basis and we will make available appropriate training courses for staff, tenants and leaseholders involved in the participation process. This may include joint training events or attending training courses at Trafford Hall National Communities Resource Centre.

In addition, basic training will be available to tenant and leaseholder groups new to the process, for example training on how to run meetings, taking minutes, keeping financial records and the role of officers.

We will regularly assess, review and monitor training needs to ensure that tenants, leaseholders and staff, build and maintain the skills, confidence and knowledge necessary to successful participation and partnership working.

Resources

We recognise that meaningful tenant participation cannot be achieved simply by informing tenants and leaseholders that they are entitled to be involved in our decision making. A considerable amount of support is required to ensure that tenants have the confidence and resources to participate effectively.

To support and encourage the development of tenant participation there will be an annual budget set by the Council's Executive Board and tenants will have access to the following resources:

- Grant funding of the Wrexham Tenants Federation which assists the development of new groups and supports existing ones.
- Tenant and Resident Association group funding grants.
- Support of council staff including attendance at meetings, where appropriate.
- Provision of meeting facilities and hosting of Tenants Assembly, Leaseholders Assembly and review groups
- Access to independent advice and assistance.
- Policy to be decided on payment of reasonable expenses for attendance at meetings.
- Guidance and support to all groups to enable them to become Registered Tenant and Resident Associations.

Monitoring and Review

The Tenant and Leaseholder Participation Strategy will be a working document subject to continuous review and is supported by an action plan to ensure it is meeting objectives and achieving targets. (Appendix 4)

Listed below are the things we will check each year, and compare to see if more tenants and leaseholders are getting involved. Each year we will review the action plan and a full performance report will go to the Tenant & Member Partnership on the following standards as a minimum:

- Number of different tenants and leaseholders involved in various groups - e.g. Review Groups, Tenants' Assembly, Leaseholders Assembly.
- Number of Tenants and Residents Associations recognised by The Council.
- Number of Tenant Panels
- Number of Peoples Champions
- Number of un-registered Tenants' and Residents Associations.
- Percentage (%) of Council homes that are represented by a Tenants Association.
- Percentage (%) of Council homes that are represented by a tenant panel
- Percentage (%) of Council homes not covered by a tenants association or panel.
- Number of Tenants and Residents Associations formed in the last year.
- Number of tenants attending training courses funded by the Council, provided in house or externally.
- Amount of money we give to each tenant association each year.
- Number of meeting places provided by the Council.
- Number of tenants who return the pre – paid card in the tenants' newsletter giving their opinions.
- Number of tenants who return the customer satisfaction survey form sent out with repairs receipts.
- Number of leaflets / newsletters produced to ask tenants and leaseholders their views on an issue.
- Number of formal meetings with officers of the Federation and Council Officers
- Number of Tenants' Assembly Meetings and Leaseholder Assembly meetings held and the number of attendees.
- Number of service Review Groups held and the number of attendees.

Equal Opportunities

We recognise the importance of equality of opportunity for all our tenants. We aim to achieve equality of opportunity by ensuring commitment to the provision of readily accessible services and facilities and by encouraging participation practices which take account of the diversity of groups and individuals.

Registered Tenant Associations have committed to the promotion of equal opportunities in their publicly available written constitutions. (For an example of a constitution see appendix 3)

Working together with our tenants and leaseholders we will:

- develop participative activities where as many tenants as possible are represented. We want people from different backgrounds and with different experiences to get involved in the decision making process.
- promote participation free from prejudice and bias with regard to ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion or belief
- consider geographic location, special needs, language differences, learning difficulties or disability.
- make active efforts to ensure that everyone who wants to get involved CAN get involved and strive to make our events and activities occasions where everyone can feel safe and welcome.
- address issues of accessibility with regard to information, publicity, venues, transport, rural locations, caring responsibilities and other identified objectives, as budgetary constraints allow.
- ensure that equality of opportunity is integrated into all tenant participation as an overarching principle and at the core of activities.
- input to and be informed by the Council's Race Equality Scheme and the Commission for Racial Equality Code of Guidance in rented housing.

Appendix 1 – Wrexham Tenant and Member Partnership Terms of Reference.

The Wrexham Tenant and Member Partnership meets bi-monthly to monitor and review performance and service delivery. One of its main roles is to promote and encourage resident involvement in the delivery of landlord services.

The Wrexham Tenant and Member Partnership meet regularly and comprises of ten tenants and ten elected members.

The aims of the Wrexham Tenant and Membership Partnership are:

- To monitor and review the activities and performance of the Council's Landlord Services/and services delivered by the Authority which directly affects tenants.
- To consider and make recommendations to the Executive Board on future service delivery options for the Council's Landlord function.
- To consider and make recommendations to the Executive Board for the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan.
- To consider and make recommendations to the Executive Board for an annual service operational plan consistent with the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan.
- To consider and make recommendations to the Executive Board to adopt and revise policies and procedures for the delivery of the landlord services.
- To promote the engagement and participation of tenants in all aspects of the delivery of the landlord services

Appendix 2 - Registration of Tenant Organisations

Introduction

Wrexham Housing Services Department is committed to maximising opportunities for its tenants to participate in the decision making of the department and is working with tenants to develop a range of opportunities for participation, including the creation of new Tenant and Resident Associations or new panels. The Department will actively support tenants who wish to set up Tenant and Resident Associations and will work with them to meet the criteria in order to become Registered Tenant Associations

2. Criteria for Registration of Tenant Organisations

2.1 Constitution

An application must have a written constitution available for inspection by the public that sets out:

- its objectives and area of operation;
- its membership criteria and procedure for application for membership;
- its procedure for election of its committee and office bearers;
- how its business is conducted, including delegation of powers;
- how its decisions are reached;
- how its funds are managed;
- its procedures for meetings of members, including the annual general meeting;
- its procedure for amending its constitution; and
- its commitment to the promotion of equal opportunities and tenants' housing and related interests in relation to the Co-operative.

A Model Constitution is provided in Appendix 3

2.2 Committee

An application must have a committee, the members of which are elected at an annual general meeting of the applicant. Members of the committee must be required to stand down after a period specified in the applicant's constitution.

The committee must consist of at least three members. In order to qualify for grant funding at least 50% of the officers and 50% of the committee must be council tenants.

The committee procedures set out in the constitution of the applicant must require that the decisions of the committee are reached democratically.

2.3 Area of Operation

Tenant and Resident Associations must operate within a defined geographical area in which the Wrexham County Borough Council owns and manages properties. A map of the area should accompany a constitution.

2.4 Membership

Membership of the association shall be open to all legitimate tenants & residents living in the defined area.

Membership is automatic; however, any person not wishing to be a member may request that their name be removed from the register held by the secretary.

Membership shall be open, with equal opportunities for men and women regardless of race, religion, gender, age, sexuality, disability, race or marital status.

2.5 Accounting

An Association must maintain proper and timely accounting records. Its constitution must require that an annual financial statement is prepared showing income and expenditure and a statement of assets and liabilities. The statement should be inspected by a third party (Wrexham Tenants Federation is suggested) and be presented at the annual general meeting.

2.6 Consultation and Representation

An Association must be able to demonstrate its commitment to representing the interests of its members. It is recognised that an Association may comprise of a mix of tenants and other residents within its defined area of operation. In this event it must be able to show that, when consulted by the Housing Services Department it has a mechanism in place to obtain the views of only those of its members who are Wrexham County Borough Council tenants.

2.7 Submission of Application Material for Registration

An Association must submit the following application material for registration to Wrexham Housing Services Department:

- the written constitution;
- names and contact addresses of committee members (identifying office bearers and any co-optees);
- a map or list of streets and description of the area of operation; and
- a copy of the minutes of your first public meeting

3. Procedure for Registration of Tenant Organisations

Wrexham Housing Services Department will support tenants who wish to set up Tenant and Resident Associations in their areas. We will encourage Associations to become Registered Tenant Associations as this will ensure that they have a formal role in the Tenant Participation process. The departments Tenant Participation Strategy will set out how Registered Tenant Associations will be consulted and involved in the development of the departments policies, strategies and delivery of services.

A Support Pack will be made available to any tenants who are interested in setting up a Tenants Association. This will include information on:

- How to get started
- How to organise public meetings
- Committees and Office Bearers
- How to run successful meetings
- Constitutions
- Equal Opportunities
- Criteria for the registration of Tenant Associations
- Support which the Housing Services Department can offer Tenant and Resident Associations
- Training for Tenant and Resident Association committees
- Where to get more help and support

Housing Services staff and/or the Wrexham Tenants Federation will work with tenants who are interested in setting up a Tenant and Resident Association to find other people in the area who are interested in being involved and will offer assistance in organising a public meeting. Attendance at later meetings will be subject to invitation by the Association.

If a Tenant Association wishes to become a Registered Tenant Association the Policy Officer Communications will work with the Association to ensure they meet the required criteria and will assist them in preparing the material they will need to submit with their application. For more information on the criteria for registration see section 3 above.

If the Association has met the required criteria it will be formally entered into the

4. Register of Tenant Associations.

If the application has not been successful the Association will be notified in writing detailing the reasons why.

Appendix 3

Model Constitution of Wrexham County Borough Council Tenants and Residents Association

1. The Name Of the Association will be XXXXXXXXX Tenant and Resident Association

2. AREA

The Area covered by the Association is XXX , as shown on the map attached, and includes all tenancies and residencies in that area. The association will endeavour to ensure that it's committee is made up of tenants and residents who represent the whole geographical area of the association.

3. AIMS OF THE ASSOCIATION:

- a) To represent all tenants and residents living in the area stated in 2 above.
- b) To encourage recreational and social activities which are open to all members.
- c) To provide regular information to and consult all members.
- d) To promote tenants' and residents' rights and the maintenance and improvement of their housing conditions, amenities, and environment.
- e) To be non party political.

4) MEMBERSHIP:

- a) Membership of the association shall be open to all legitimate tenants & residents living in the defined area.
- b) Membership is automatic, however, any person not wishing to be a member may request that their name be removed from the register held by the secretary.
- c) Membership shall be open, with equal opportunities for men and women regardless of race, religion, gender, age, sexuality, disability, race or marital status.

5. ENDING MEMBERSHIP

- a) Membership shall end when a member moves out of the area.
- b) In the event of gross misconduct, membership can be suspended, or ended by a two thirds majority vote of the committee.
- c) Racist, sexist, and threatening behaviour shall be treated as gross misconduct. Any member has the right of appeal to a general meeting before expulsion takes place.

6. MANAGEMENT

- a) The association shall be managed by a committee, elected at the AGM.
- b) The committee will consist of a Chair, Treasurer, Secretary, and up to XX members, who should be fully representative of the estate. There shall be a majority of tenants.
- c) If vacancies occur among the committee, or officers, the committee has the

- power to fill them from among its members until the next general meeting, when elections for vacancies can take place.
- d) The committee shall have the power to co opt members of groups represented on the estate in order to further the interests of representation and equal opportunity.
 - e) Meetings will be held monthly, with a minimum of *nine* meetings (inclusive of the AGM) per year.
 - f) The officers shall report to each meeting on their work.
 - g) There shall be no more than 1 officer from each household.
 - h) All matters relating to the payment and use of any grant received from the Housing department shall be decided by a vote of tenants only.

ALL MEETINGS SHALL BE OPEN FOR ALL MEMBERS TO ATTEND.

(optional)

7. ANNUAL GENERAL MEETINGS.

- a) The committee shall call an AGM for the purpose of:
receiving audited accounts, accepting the resignations of the committee and officers, of electing a new committee and officers for the coming year, for making recommendations to the committee and voting where necessary on proposals to amend the constitution.
- b) The AGM will be called within *15 months* of the last AGM
- c) Not less than 21 days notice of the AGM shall be given to all members.

8. GENERAL MEETINGS

Meetings of the Association shall be open to all members to speak and vote. Decisions of meetings shall be binding on the committee. All meetings shall be advertised.

9. CONDUCT OF BUSINESS

At all meetings:

- a) Any offensive behaviour shall not be allowed, and will constitute a breach of reasonable manner.
- b) Decisions shall be taken by a majority vote. In the case of a tie, the chair has the casting vote. All votes are to be counted and recorded in the minutes.
- c) The Quorum for meetings will be one third of the Committee Members
- d) All meetings must be minuted, and be made available for inspection by any member at any meeting.
- f) All business must be addressed through the chair.

10. FINANCE.

- a) All monies raised by and on behalf of the association shall be applied to further the aim of the association, and for no other purpose.
- b) The treasurer shall keep proper accounts, and shall open a Bank, Post

Office or Building Society account in the name of the Association. The committee shall appoint XX authorised signatories for any cheques and cheques shall be signed by a minimum of XX signatories. The signatories shall not be related, nor live in the same household.

- c) The books of the association must be made available for inspection to any member at all meetings. A qualified auditor, or other professional person or organisation, who are not members of the association shall audit the accounts once per year, prior to the AGM.

11. Information

- a) An information newsheet will be published and distributed to all households in the association at least twice per year.

12. Dissolution

- a) If the committee, by a majority, decide, at any time, to dissolve the association, they shall give at *least 21 days* notice of a meeting to all members. If, at that meeting, a vote is passed to dissolve the association, the committee shall have the power to dispose of any assets held by the association.
- b) Any assets remaining after payment of any debts, shall be donated to charities operating within the area, in consultation with any bodies who funded the association during that financial year.

This constitution was adopted as the constitution of the XXX Association at the Steering Group meeting held on XXX at XXX

SIGNED _____
SIGNED _____

Guidance notes for doing your own
Constitution

These notes should help you decide on your constitution.

1. Name

The name of the association is up to you. Most people call the association after the area they represent. Some people call themselves "Tenants Group "or "Residents Association" rather than Tenants & Residents Association. People will judge you by your name so think about the message you want to put across.

2. Aims & Objectives

You can add your own aims and objectives. You need the paragraph about charitable aims if you ever want to apply for Lottery funding. The group must not support political parties.

3. Membership

You need to decide the area that your group covers. It cannot be the same area as any other association. The area you chose should be a distinct area with clear recognised boundaries. If you are only including parts of some streets or roads, you will need to list housing numbers or provide a map. Some groups have decided to have a membership list. This will be treated as "the area" they cover.

4. Equal Opportunities

Your group will have a lot more influence if you can show that you are representing everyone in your area and making real attempts to involve people and hear their views. It is against the law to discriminate on grounds of age, disability, race or gender and it is possible to discriminate without meaning to - by holding your meetings in an inaccessible place for instance. Think about all the people you represent; think about their different needs and what might stop some people getting involved.

5. Management Committee

You can appoint more Officers if you want - some people have a vice chair. You might want to set a minimum or maximum size for your committee - but it's up to you and whatever works.

6. Annual General Meeting

Every home you represent must get written notice of the annual general meeting and that is one of the criteria for registration. It is very important that all your members know they can vote and stand for election at the Annual General Meeting. You may want to send out nomination forms in advance so that you know who is standing for election. You will need to hold the election of the officers and committee at the meeting. You might want to get an independent person to chair this part of the meeting.

The Annual General Meeting is also the time when you report back to your membership on what you have done during the year. This includes a financial report and you should arrange for the books to be checked by an independent person or auditor and give members a written breakdown of income and expenses. Some groups distribute a written annual report to their members at the meeting.

7. Special General Meetings

A Special General Meeting is used to deal with major events, like changing the constitution of the group.

8. Running your Meetings

It is up to you how often you have general meetings that are open to all members. We would encourage groups to use a variety of ways of involving their membership. Remember that most people never come to meetings so you might want to use surveys, galas, or social events to reach people.

It is important that people feel involved in the association even if they don't come to meetings. They might be able to help out in other ways. In your newsletters try to make it easy for members to contact the committee and try keep them in touch with what you are doing.

It is a good idea to plan the dates of your meetings in advance. That way you have a better chance of getting housing officers and guest speakers to attend. You should give invited guests at least two weeks notice of the meeting and it is best to let them know in advance what you want them to talk about.