

**GETTING INVOLVED:
STANDARDS
AND SUPPORT
FOR TENANTS & RESIDENTS
GROUPS**

for tenants and landlords

Developed by the Welsh Tenants Federation, TPAS Cymru and the Welsh Assembly Government, and endorsed by the Welsh Local Government Association and the Welsh Federation of Housing Associations





1. WHAT THIS LEAFLET IS FOR

This leaflet has been produced by the Welsh Tenants Federation, TPAS Cymru, and the Welsh Assembly Government. It is aimed at people who are thinking of setting up a tenants and residents group, and at members of existing groups. It is also aimed at landlords.

In particular, the leaflet aims to:

- clarify how tenants and residents can get involved in making decisions about their homes and communities
- set out realistic minimum steps that groups should take, to ensure their landlord recognises and supports their group
- advise landlords about how best to provide such support.

2. KEY PRINCIPLES

'Social landlords' (local authorities and housing associations) and their residents should work together in a spirit of trust, respect and co-operation. In doing so, both parties should accept the following principles:

- Partnership working, based on an approach that is open, fair and inclusive
- Building and maintaining communities is essential to the wellbeing of an area





- Tenant and resident involvement – as an individual and in groups - is important for developing a democratic society
- There must be equal opportunities for involving everyone. Special arrangements may be needed to help some people to take part.

3. OPTIONS FOR INVOLVEMENT

Tenants themselves should decide which type of involvement suits them best. This may vary from area to area. There are many options, including:

Information: being kept informed of decisions and issues

Consultation: being consulted on decisions and issues

Participation: being given the opportunity to decide what is discussed, and to be involved in decision-making

Partnership: being given the opportunity to make decisions, share information and ideas, and spend delegated budgets.

The rest of this leaflet focuses on formalised group working as a vehicle for tenant participation. It is not the only way for tenants and residents to get involved.

4. TYPES OF TENANTS & RESIDENTS GROUP

Landlords should encourage all positive forms of participation, depending on what their residents want. Here are some structures that can be used:

Federations

Groups of tenant and resident associations and local panels joining together to form an area or landlord-wide federation. These should have written terms of reference

Tenants & Residents Panels

Groups of tenant and residents, and individual elected tenant members joining together to form an area or landlord-wide panel. These should also have written terms of reference, and possibly landlord officers representation

Tenants & Residents Associations

Tenants & residents of an area forming an association with elected officers and a written constitution

Sheltered/Supported Housing groups

There is a very wide range of supported accommodation. Participation arrangements need to be flexible and tailored to each setting, e.g. house meetings, advocacy groups, etc





Informal & temporary groups

There are many types of less permanent groups, including those formed to tackle a single issue. To be effective, these *may* benefit from terms of reference. Fun days and social events can also be used to discuss housing or community issues in a relaxed way. Other informal approaches include 'key tenant' schemes, where selected individuals liaise between their estate/area and the landlord.

5. CORE STANDARDS / RECOGNITION CRITERIA

Every formal Tenants and Residents group should be as representative as possible, with a *constitution, terms of reference, or set of standards or rules* which **MUST** include:

- membership being open to all tenants and residents in a defined area
- general meetings to be held at suitable intervals
- committee members and officers to be elected by the full membership
- for small groups a commitment to endeavour to become a constituted association with elected officers
- all information received to be passed on to all members
- all members to be notified of all training opportunities, seminars etc.
- equal opportunities for all, including an anti-discrimination statement

- a complaints and grievance policy, for use by any member.

Landlords should help groups to achieve the recognised standard. This help may include funding, advice, and example documents. Model constitutions, terms of reference, and policy statements are available from TPAS Cymru (see back page for contact details).

6. STANDARDS FOR EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

Tenants and Residents group meetings, and meetings with the landlord are an important aspect of involvement.

Tenants and Residents groups and landlords should ensure that they:

- publicise meetings effectively, with adequate notice
- hold meetings at suitable times and in accessible places
- ensure meetings are run in a fair and democratic way
- ensure that the outcomes of meetings are fed back to everyone who attended, and to others who are affected.

Landlords should also provide allowances, transport, or technical help for people who need help to participate in meetings, for example childminding allowances or arranging for interpreters, signers or induction loops.



7. STANDARDS FOR INFORMATION

Information is vital to the success of participation. This is a joint responsibility of the landlord and of Tenants and Residents groups. Both should ensure that all information:

- is expressed clearly, in plain language
- is accessible, using large print, cassettes, translations, etc if needed
- does not use racist, sexist or other biased language
- is timely and relevant to people's needs.

As a minimum, all new and existing groups should receive information on the landlord's:

- strategy for tenant involvement
- policies and procedures for tenant involvement
- the existing Tenant Participation Compact and any local or specialised Compacts (Compacts are agreements between landlords and tenants groups, setting out how they will work together)
- a list of other Tenants and Residents groups, with contact details
- the relevant staff contact and/or tenant participation officer.

8. LANDLORD SUPPORT

Tenant involvement is now considered to be an integral part of developing good quality services that are relevant to tenants' needs and aspirations. Social landlords can support tenants' voluntary activity through grants, training, staff support and other help. Specifically, landlords should:

- ensure that their policies for tenant involvement are supported by appropriate structures, procedures, staff and other resources
- agree a training programme with tenants and residents groups, to help them understand the benefits and responsibilities of participation
- provide staff, councillor and board member training, to ensure that all employees, consultants and advisors are fully aware of their tenant involvement policies and procedures
- encourage tenant and resident representation at all conferences, seminars, etc. that particularly affect their tenants and residents.

Landlord support should also include:

- reasonable financial help, e.g. start-up grants, annual grants, and estate budgets
- facilities, for example access to premises and equipment, stationery, photocopying and help in sending out newsletters



- 
- advice, and support for community development and local tenant networks.

9. ACCOUNTABILITY

In return for landlord recognition and support, groups should provide evidence that they meet the core standards, (as set out in Section 5). Following each Annual General Meeting, groups should notify the landlord:

- that the AGM was properly publicised
- that a committee and officers was duly elected, and supply details
- of any amendments to the constitution and terms of reference
- of the previous years minutes/notes, and provide copies
- of the activities of the group during the previous year
- of the group's programme for the coming year.

All such items should be available to any individual tenant at all reasonable times. Landlords may also wish to carry out a 'health-check' on a group from time to time. Groups must agree to this, providing reasonable notice is given.

10. ADVICE AND SUPPORT

You may be concerned that setting up and maintaining a tenants and residents group might take up too much time and effort. It need not, as lots of help is available. As well as getting help from your landlord, you can also obtain specialist advice from a number of other agencies. The main agencies providing advice and support for tenants and residents groups in Wales are:

Tenant Participation Advisory Service (Cymru)

Transport House	Ty Blodwel
1 Cathedral Road	Broad Street
Cardiff	Llandudno Junction
CF11 9SD	Conwy, LL31 9HL
029 2023 7303 (S.Wales)	01492 593046 (N.Wales)

Welsh Tenants Federation

Milbourne Chambers
Glebeland Street
Merthyr Tydfil
CF47 8AF
01685 723922





Other agencies that may be able to advise on tenant involvement issues include:

Advice on getting involved, for tenants living in supported housing

Cymorth Cymru

Baltic House
Mount Stuart Square
Cardiff, CF10 5FH
029 2049 1513

Advice on getting involved, for black/ethnic minority tenants

BME Tenants and Residents Advisory Network UK

173 Lozells Road
Birmingham, BR19 1RN
0121 551 5760

Tai Pawb - this Cardiff-based organisation will be fully operational from April 2005. Contact details can be obtained from the Housing Directorate, Welsh Assembly Government.

Advice for leaseholders, including rights to information

Leasehold Advisory Service (LEASE)

70-74 City Road,
London, EC1Y 2BJ
0845 345 1993