

A GUIDE TO SETTING UP AND RUNNING A RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

At SW9 we are committed to providing a high quality service to our residents. To achieve this, we need to know that residents needs and expectations are being heard and where possible, acted upon.

One way of achieving this is through improved communications between residents and SW9 through Residents' Associations.

What is a Residents' Associations

A Residents' Association (RA) is a group of people living in an area, block or street who have come together to take up issues of common concern in relation to their housing, community and general environment.

Why start a Residents' Association?

A collective voice is a powerful voice. Being united with other people who share your living environment, means that you have the opportunity to influence and shape the quality of the services to your local community and improve residents' quality of life.

Groups of residents might start an RA for the following reasons:

- To campaign for something positive
- To campaign against something or get services improved
- To give your community a greater voice than you would have as an individual
- To create a better sense of community in your area
- To keep residents informed of what's happening in your neighbourhood

Where do I start?

Step 1: The first thing you will need to do is to find out if there are other people in your community that are also interested in forming a RA.

At this stage you want to know if the same issues are relevant to your neighbours, would they come to an initial meeting and if in principle they think it's a good idea to have a RA.

Step 2: Get in contact with SW9's Community Engagement and Communications Manager who can provide further guidance and support.

Step 3: Arrange an initial meeting with fellow neighbours/local community and SW9 officers. This meeting is purely for other residents to learn more about the benefits of a RA and how it operates and the role of committee members. It is important during this meeting you are able to encourage other residents to take up roles within the committee e.g. Chair, Vice Chair, Treasurer, Secretary or a RA member. This meeting would take no more than one hour.

SW9 will help you to create a poster that you can use to promote the meeting.

Step 4: Once you have generated interest and support to form a RA, you hold an inaugural / first meeting. This meeting must be moderated by the Community Engagement and Communications Manager acting as the Independent Observer to ensure the process is conducted fairly and in accordance to the registration process.

During the inaugural meeting you will:

- Name the RA
- Elect committee members
- Formulate a constitution (SW9 can provide you with a model constitution)
- Agree on code of conduct
- Sign an equal opportunities statement
- Decide on the aims of the RA

Once the RA has formed, the RA's first meeting takes place thereafter and all roles elected become effective immediately. This meeting is a chance to talk about the issues which everyone is concerned about. It is good to have an agenda in advance.

What is a Constitution?

The Constitution is a set of rules which guides how you operate. SW9 can provide you with a model template for this.

A constitution:

- Provides a clear outline of the aims and objectives of your association
- Gives the RA credibility with the landlord and potential funders
- Clarifies the role of the committee
- Ensures accountability
- Enables the association to apply for a bank account

Important: Any changes to your constitution must be consulted with members 14 working days before the Annual General Meeting.

What is a code of conduct?

A code of conduct outlines what behaviour is appropriate and acceptable within in a particular setting. Your residents association will require to include a code of conduct as part of your constitution or as a separate signed document. All committee elected members will be expected to sign a code of conduct. SW9 can provide you with a model template of a code of conduct.

A code of conduct:

- Establishes common principles for everyone to follow
- Safeguards group members from poor treatment by others
- Gives permission to ask anyone who breaks the RA's code of conduct to leave

What is an equal opportunities statement?

An equal opportunities statement ensures people have the same opportunities in life as other people, without being treated in an unfair way because of their race, sex, sexuality, religion, or age. A statement of equal opportunities is usually included as a statement within your constitution; it should give reference to how you intend to include everyone within your given community or can be a stand alone document. SW9 can provide a model statement for your RA.

Annual General Meeting (AGM)

An AGM is an annual review of how the RA is doing; this meeting is about looking at what has happened in the past year and preparing for the upcoming year.

The purpose of the AGM:

- Is to present the chairman's and treasurer's reports of the work and achievements across the year to members, the format of which will usually be within a short written report. This needs to include a summation of the year's activities, and provide an end of year financial statement.
- The current committee members stands down
- Agree changes to your constitution
- To give members an opportunity to question the committee and discuss how they see the RA developing
- Elect new committee members

AGM's need to happen within one calendar year, but not more that fifteen months, of each other.

Before your AGM, you need to:

- Advertise it, in line with the timeframe set out in your constitution; good practice is between 14 days written notice
- Any proposed changes to the constitution must be published and consulted with members in writing, 14 days ahead of the AGM.
- Have an Independent Observer (Community Engagement and Communications Officer) take responsibility for the AGM process.
- Generate interest in committee positions amongst members and provide information on these positions

Going forward – meetings

Following your first public meeting and the election of the committee it's time to pave the way forward.

Meetings

How often will you meet? RA's sometimes meet every two months, others meet every quarter, it will depend on your RA and what suits your collective need.

Decide on the date of the next meeting at each meeting or at the first / AGM for the whole year. The purposes of your meetings are to pass on information, discuss issues, make decisions and lead their resolution.

Successful meetings will have a clear agenda and be chaired well. The agenda ensures you know what you're there for whilst the Chair should ensure the agenda is kept to, decisions are made and that a respectful environment is maintained throughout.

Some important things to remember in meetings:

- Everyone should listen to each other; multiple conversations shouldn't take place
- It's good practice for members wishing to speak to raise their hand and the Chair will indicate when to speak – this means everyone gets a chance to speak and meetings are not dominated by a few
- Members should bring the Minutes of the last meeting and the agenda to the meeting
- Invite non-residents giving 10 days working days' notice with agenda – note, SW9 officers will only attend meeting upon invitation.

Think about the environment you create for the meeting, after all you want people to be engaged and interested in what's going on:

- How will the room be laid out
- Let everyone introduce themselves at the beginning of the meetings

COVID – you must ensure you take precautions to ensure meetings are COVID compliant. Consider holding RA meetings virtually. SW9 strongly urge RA's to avoid meeting within individual households or in places that prevent social distancing. Ensure you carry out a risk assessment before each meeting or any social gathering.

Setting up for success

You will want to get the best out of your RA; here are some tips on setting up for success:

- Share tasks There should be a balance between members when it comes to getting things done. Those who do too much can start to feel tired and demotivated whilst those not doing enough can feel unimportant and disengaged. A strong association will share tasks.
- List the jobs that need doing and see if they are equally distributed amongst members, the list could include things like writing letters, booking rooms, putting up posters etc.
- Share information - Let people know what you're doing as an association. Try sending out regular newsletters or setting up a website or other social media page for the RA.

Although your neighbours might not regularly attend meetings it doesn't mean that they won't be interested in what's going on. There may be reasons why they can't attend such as having children or working shifts.

When people feel informed they are more likely to want to be involved and you can think of other ways to involve them. Perhaps set up an email address for the RA where people can email their recommendations.

Reflect

As time goes on pause to think about how your RA is doing. Especially think about the following:

- What are you trying to achieve?
- Are you achieving these things?
- How are you communicating with people about what you do?
- Are members enjoying their involvement with the RA?
- Do people have much to say at the meetings?
- Is this group representative of the wider community?

Knowing where the RA's strengths and weaknesses lie will help you to continually improve.

Support from SW9 Community Housing

There are a number of ways that SW9 will support you to help you set up and run your RA.

Help with engagement

The Community Engagement and Communications Manager will help you in engaging your neighbours and community.

Some of the ways we can do this include:

- Sending letters / promotional materials to notify your neighbours about the RA
- Attending your initial meetings to support you
- Provide on-going support and guidance

Training

We provide specialist training that addresses a variety of the skills necessary to run a successful RA. Here are some of the courses we run:

- Setting up a group
- Running effective meetings
- Committee skills and committee members roles
- Tackling community issues
- Working together as a group

Funding

We also financially support RAs by providing seed funding. As a start-up fund we give formally recognised RAs £100, this is referred to as seed funding. This money is intended to help the RA start work and should be used to the benefit of all.

The purpose of this money is to support the work of the RA and could be used in a number of ways i.e. to reimburse committee members for costs incurred in carrying out the work of the RA such as buying refreshments and snacks for a meeting or used towards a social event. This funding can only be provided to RAs with a dedicated RA bank account.

Venues for meetings

We can help you find a suitable venue to host your meetings. We will cover reasonable costs for local venues where you would like to hold your meetings.

Where available you can also use SW9 community space free of charge.

Increasingly, meetings held online using Teams, Zoom or other online meeting methods has become popular. Your RA may find this convenient.

Printing & posting

We can help with any printing you might need for the RA, such as printing meeting minutes or leaflets. We can also assist by sending out meeting invitations on your behalf.

Officer attendance

We can arrange SW9 officers to attend your meetings if you would like them to. This may be because you would like an update from your housing officer or estate officer on a specific issue.

We ask that you give 10 days working days' notice prior to the meeting in order for the officer to schedule it in their diary and that you have a specific issue for them to attend to. You will need to provide an agenda for the meeting 10 days in advance of the meeting date.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT SW9

Email: getinvolved@sw9.org.uk

Phone: 020 7326 3700

CHECKLIST:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Are your neighbours / community interested in setting up a RA and being involved? Up to 6 is a good number initially.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Are there common concerns / topics you're concerned about?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Arrange a planning meeting to talk about the possibility of setting up a RA.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Arrange an inaugural meeting to formalise the RA, elect a committee, sign the constitution, code of conduct and equal opportunities statement. Discuss any training requirements.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Collectively decide on dates of future meetings, agenda items and any special guests to invite.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Decide if the RA requires a bank account. If so, the Treasurer will have to contact different banks for further details on setting up community accounts – remember, banks will ask for individual bank statements and other private data. SW9 can produce a letter for the bank supporting the RA.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Every 12 – 15 months ensure an Annual General Meeting takes place where the committee stands down and a re-election of a committee members take place.



Think about how you will promote the work of the RA. Will you create a website, have a dedicated email account, put up posters, hand out fliers or hold social events.