

# *A guide to setting up and running a Residents' Association*



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## Foreword

If you are thinking of starting a Residents' Association and you want to know more - then read on.

This guide is in two parts. Part one explains how to set up a Residents' Association, what help is available and the benefits.

Part two explains how to run a Residents' Association once it has been set up and gives advice on:

- The Committee and the roles of officers.
- The meetings.
- The Constitution.

We hope you find this guide useful when getting your Residents' Association up and running.

If you need further advice or support, or feel members of your committee would benefit from advice, please contact the Youth and Citizenship Team. Suitable advice might include:

- Event planning/management.
- Minute taking.
- Chairing a meeting.
- IT skills.
- Producing a newsletter.

The Youth and Citizenship Team is based at:

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# **Part One- Setting up a Residents' Association**

## **1. Introduction**

This guide has been written to help Harlow residents who may be thinking about starting a Residents' Association in their area. Its aim is to give a few ideas and useful advice on getting an Association up and running. It's not compulsory to use the formats described in this guide - after all, the Association is essentially for you, the residents. However, there are some criteria you need to meet in order to be formally recognised and supported by Harlow Council, these are outlined in detail later in the guide.

Harlow Council's Youth and Citizenship Team can help you by giving support while your group is getting started; help with things like finding a place to meet, or putting you in touch with existing groups who may be able to guide you.

Harlow Council also offers support in the form of a small 'start up' grant so that you can open a bank account and buy essentials like ink and paper.

Becoming involved in a Residents' Association gives people the opportunity to discuss important issues and have an influence in the decision making process in Harlow. Residents working together can change things and holding fun days can help build community spirit and mutual respect.

## **2. What is a Residents' Association?**

A Residents' Association is for everyone who lives in your area, whether they are council tenants, owner-occupiers, leaseholders or private tenants. You can set your own geographical boundaries for your Association.

An Association is usually made up of a group of people who have come together to address a particular concern on their estate or who wish to build a better sense of community in the area.

Residents' Associations can also play a vital role when consultation with local communities is needed, for example when there are proposals to regenerate a shopping hatch or close a local school.

An Association can carry out a range of activities from resolving local problems to organising street parties, or from promoting recycling projects to campaigning for youth facilities.

The purpose of a Residents' Association is:

- To represent residents' views and concerns.
- To provide a forum for residents to meet formally to consider matters of local concern and importance.

- To encourage and promote a sense of community spirit.
- To oppose racism, sexism, harassment and all forms of discrimination.
- To have a consultative role when there are proposals to make changes in your area.

### 3. Why start a Residents' Association?

There are many reasons why people living in an area, estate or street may want to get involved, for example:

- To campaign **for** something that will have a positive impact on your community, e.g. facilities for young people or traffic calming.
- To campaign **against** something that has a negative impact on your community, e.g. closure of a school or inappropriate development.
- To create a better sense of community and identity.
- To organise social activities or get involved in local events.
- To build relationships with council departments, and other agencies, to improve the area you live in.
- To increase knowledge of housing and community based issues.
- To take positive action to tackle problems and improve the area you live in.

These are just a few but there are many more reasons why people may want to get involved, they may even just want to get to know their neighbours or make new friends.

### 4. Getting started

Here are some pointers to get you started:

- Talk to residents in your area, find out if there is enough interest to make forming a Residents' Association possible.
- You need to talk to as many people as you can in as many ways as possible, e.g. door knocking, going into local facilities like community and health centres, churches, post office, schools and youth groups.
- Find out the common concerns of people living in your neighbourhood.
- Contact the Youth and Citizenship Team, who will be able to offer advice and support you in trying to get a group started. They may be able to offer resources and put you in touch with existing groups in the town.

- Organise a public event or meeting to discuss setting up a Residents' Association. The Youth and Citizenship Team might be able to help with a venue and publicity and will work with you to get a group up and running. See Appendix B for an example of a simple leaflet that can be distributed to make people aware of your initial meeting. Try printing four copies to each A4 sheet to save on paper and printing costs.
- Don't forget to invite your Ward Councillors and any local organisations you think might be able to help you.

## **5. How to get your Association recognised**

In order to be recognised by Harlow Council, a group should:

- Cover a specific area and be inclusive of all the people within it, providing a record of membership. See Appendix C for a simple template that can be used as a record of membership.
- Aim to improve the quality of life for everyone in the neighbourhood.
- Have a Constitution (which includes a clear equal opportunities statement) that is acceptable to Harlow Council. A model Constitution is included on page 14 to help you draw up your own.
- Have officers (to include Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary and Treasurer) who are elected by the members annually.
- Set up a community bank account with a minimum of two signatories to the account and circulate regular statements to membership.

## Part Two - Running a Residents' Association

### 6. Introduction

There are no particular rules on how an Association should be run, but you will have to make some decisions about how to organise the group to ensure it works effectively and fairly. You may want to start with questions like:

- **The Committee**
  - Do we need one?
  - How many should be on our committee?
  - What will their roles be?
- **Meetings**
  - How often should we meet and where?
  - How should we run our meetings?
  - What topics should we discuss?
- **Involvement**
  - How can we get people involved?
  - How can we keep people involved?
- **The Constitution**
  - Do we need one? (Yes, if you want your group to be formally recognised by the Council).
  - What should the rules be?
  - What are the priorities for people living in the defined area?
  - What should our aims and objectives be?

### 7. The Committee

The committee are a group of people elected by the members of the Residents' Association at an open meeting.

The committee are responsible for running the Residents' Association, organising general meetings for all members and an annual AGM to elect officers.

The committee will probably make decisions on behalf of the Association, when general members are not present, but these decisions must be reported back to all members.

The committee should represent all people living in the neighbourhood, e.g. men, women, old, young, black, white, disabled.

The committee should consist of at least 4 officers - a Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary and Treasurer. Their roles are as follows:

- **Chair**

The Chair is the person who guides the Association to achieve its aims and conducts the meetings. A Chair should ensure a fair discussion of issues. A good Chair ensures that all views are heard and considered, and would not solely put forward their own views. A Chair ensures that all residents are properly represented.

- The Chair should be aware of all the activities to be carried out by the Association and should familiarise themselves with the Constitution.
- The Chair should ensure that all officers play an active role in the Association.
- The Chair prepares the agenda for the meetings, with the help of the Secretary.
- The Chair should make sure each item on the Agenda is discussed and a decision made.
- The Chair should ensure that everyone has the opportunity to contribute to the discussion, within the agreed timescale of the meeting, and that a good atmosphere is maintained.
- The Chair should ensure that only one person speaks at a time and that no private conversations take place during a meeting.
- The Chair should ensure that people keep to the subject under discussion and are not aggressive, abusive and do not use offensive language.
- The Chair can have a casting vote in the event of a tie.

- **Vice Chair**

The Vice Chair helps the Chair carry out their role and will take over the work of the Chair if he/she cannot attend a meeting or is ill or on holiday.

- **Secretary**

The Secretary is a key role on the committee.

The Secretary is the person who sends out information to members, so that everyone knows what is going on and is often the first point of contact for committee members and residents.

- The Secretary ensures that a proper record is kept of all meetings and that all decisions are recorded and communicated to members.
- The Secretary should take minutes at meetings, e.g. make a brief written record of the discussion and decisions made.
- The Secretary should send out the minutes, as soon as possible, after each meeting and keep copies for future reference.
- The Secretary should help the Chair with setting the agenda.

- The Secretary should let people know about the next meeting, e.g. by sending out the agenda in good time (usually a week before the meeting).
- The Secretary should write and receive letters on behalf of the Residents' Association and keep members informed about these.
- The Secretary should keep an up to date record of membership.

Some of this work may be shared with other officers or members of the Association.

## **Taking Minutes**

People often worry about taking minutes but there is really no need - all they are is a brief record of the meeting. They should be clearly written and easy to read and understand.

Notes should be taken at the meetings, written up soon afterwards and circulated to members or a copy made available for all members to see. Copies could also be sent to interested parties, including Harlow Council's Youth and Citizenship Team.

The minutes should always:

- State the name of your Residents' Association and the date, time and place of the meeting.
- Contain a list of people present and those who have sent apologies.
- Be set out in the same order as the agenda.
- Contain a brief description of the key points of discussion and any decisions made.
- State who should carry out the decisions or actions in the text or have a column alongside with that persons initials.
- Give the date, time and place of the next meeting.
- Minutes do not have to show full details of a discussion, but must record any decisions made.
- Minutes should not record details of individuals who were discussed in confidence.

- **Treasurer**

The Treasurer makes sure any money belonging to the group is properly managed, recorded and accounted. They should ensure the Committee does not spend money it does not have and that all Committee members are aware of the state of the Association finances. Ideally, the written accounts of the Association should be audited every year by someone who is qualified and independent.

It is the Treasurer's job to:

- Open and maintain a bank or building society account in the name of the Residents' Association.

- Pay money received into the account promptly.
- Pay bills and expenses, as agreed by the Association's Committee, keeping a written record of money spent. Keep all receipts, bills, invoices and claims.
- Along with at least one other, nominated member of the Association, sign cheques (it is helpful to have three signatories listed on the mandate from the bank).
- Keep petty cash and a petty cash book for day-to-day expenditure.
- Keep a cashbook with a written account of money raised, received and spent.
- Prepare a regular statement of accounts for the committee and members.

Sometimes people are reluctant to volunteer for the role of Treasurer because they see it as a difficult job. In reality, it is quite simple and does not take up too much time. The Treasurer just needs to be methodical and keep good records every time a financial transaction takes place.

It is for you to decide how the workload of the Association will be shared amongst the committee - the amount of work involved will depend on what you want to achieve and the number of activities you plan to hold. Help and support is available from The Youth and Citizenship Team. If you are not sure please ask!

## **8. Meetings**

Meetings should be held on a regular basis, whether it is monthly, bi-monthly or quarterly. Some Associations hold separate meetings just for the Committee, as well as general meetings for all members. Others prefer to hold all their meetings as open meetings for anyone to attend.

It is important to publicise the meetings in the neighbourhood so that everyone has the opportunity to attend and have their say. Meetings are a way of exchanging information, discussing and sharing ideas and making decisions.

The success of a meeting depends on:

- Having a clear agenda.
- Good Chairing.
- Deciding the way forward.

Meetings should be interesting and enjoyable and, most importantly, people should feel comfortable. Try to make the atmosphere less formal, e.g. make sure everyone introduces themselves and sit in a circle. It takes time and practice to get it right and make things run smoothly.

If people do not attend your meetings it does not mean they are not interested in your Residents' Association. You need to find out why people don't attend, e.g. they can't find a babysitter or haven't been able to read or understand your leaflet/agenda. Or perhaps they just don't want to come out at night, in which case varying the times of your meetings might help.

## 9. Keeping people involved

Once you have set up your Association, your committee members have been elected and know their roles, and you know what you want to achieve as a group, the biggest task is to get and keep people involved.

You don't want the Association to be a clique of activists, nor a 'one-man-band'. Here are a few ways of preventing these things from happening:

- **Define Your Aims**

If your Association was set up because of a number of issues or problems, it may be a good idea to do a survey of the neighbourhood to establish the priorities.

You need to look at the long-term aims, but remember the short-term issues, that can be addressed quickly. This will help people see the point of staying involved. Regular success, even if small, will help to keep people involved and interested.

- **Share tasks**

There can be a lot of work involved in running an Association and it's best to share the tasks. Sharing the workload and responsibilities means that it's not left to just a few people and all members feel involved. It will help to prevent people from becoming discouraged and your group will get more done and be more successful.

As a check, list all the jobs that need doing and put the name of the person who does that job. You will easily see whether the Association does share out the work or not.

- **Keep in touch**

If people are to feel involved and encouraged to contribute they must know what the Association is doing and what decisions it is making. Send out regular newsletters/leaflets and generally let people know what's going on. They may rarely attend meetings but as long as they feel part of the Association they may, at some stage, offer support. Try knocking on everyone's door in the neighbourhood at least once a year and organising public meetings and events.

- **Have fun**

Try to make your Association enjoyable. Being in an Association can be hard work but it is possible to get a lot of satisfaction from the social side of working together with people.

Try to avoid your meetings becoming a place where people just come along to have a moan. Even if you just break for tea or coffee half way through your meetings, you'll be creating a friendly atmosphere where people can chat and get to know each other.

Social events also help. Remember, no one stays long in a group where they feel uncomfortable, have no friends and never have a good time. They'll find something else to do!

## **10. The Constitution**

Your Association will represent the many people in the area it covers, all with different needs and views. A written Constitution, covering the aims and rules of the Association, should be agreed so that everyone who is a member can understand it.

Your constitution should include:

- Aims.
- Membership.
- Subscriptions (if appropriate).
- Conduct of business.
- Committee meetings.
- General meetings (including Annual General Meeting and special meetings).
- Quorum (the minimum number of people needed for a meeting to go ahead).
- Notice of meetings.
- Sub committees (if appropriate).
- Duties of officers.
- Alterations to the Constitution.

In order for Harlow Council to formally recognise your Association or offer financial support, your Constitution will need to be approved. This is to ensure that your group operates democratically and fairly represents the views and interests of residents in the area.

The following model constitution will help you to write a constitution for your Association.

## **11. A final word**

Why not regularly sit back and think about how your Residents' Association is getting on?

Ask yourselves:

- What are we trying to achieve?
- What are we doing to get there?
- What have we done in the past 6 months?

- When did we last send out a newsletter/leaflet?
- Do people come to our meetings?
- Do people say anything when they come to our meetings?
- Do members enjoy the meetings?
- Are as many people involved now as there were a year ago?

Asking questions like this can help identify what your problems and successes are. Always keep in mind there are more important things than how many attend your meetings.

While you may want people to attend your meetings, talking to people, listening to what they have to say, representing them and working towards changing things for the better is just as important as getting them to attend meetings.

**GOOD LUCK!**

## Appendix A - Model Constitution

# CONSTITUTION

### 1. Name

The Association is known as:

The area covered by the Association is:

### 2. Aims

The aims of the Association are to:

- Represent the interest of members.
- Ensure that all members are consulted regularly and that all residents eligible for membership are encouraged to join in.
- Promote community, social, educational and other such activities that is valuable to the residents of the estate/area.
- Improve the facilities of the estate/area.
- Help build a good relationship between residents and Harlow Council.
- Encourage a sense of community by encouraging mutual respect and tolerance and promoting a multi-racial society and opposing racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination and harassment.

### 3. Members

Membership is open to all people living in the area covered by the Residents' Association who accept the aims of the Association, irrespective of nationality, race, religious or political belief, ethnic or national origin, sex, colour or age.

Membership is open to all people living in the area covered by the Residents' Association, irrespective of whether they are tenants, leaseholders or owner occupiers.

The Association's Committee may suspend the membership of any member whose conduct damages the reputation of the Association. This can be done at special meetings.

#### **4. Subscriptions (only if appropriate)**

Subscriptions will be set at the Annual General Meeting.

#### **5. Conduct of business**

The business of the Association will be conducted by the Committee.

The Committee will be elected at the first full meeting of the Association and at each Annual General Meeting. Candidates must be proposed and seconded by members of the Association and may be elected on a straight majority of members present at the meeting.

The Committee will be made up of the following members;

- Chair
- Vice Chair
- Secretary
- Treasurer
- And at least four other members

The election, or removal, of officers or committee members, may only be carried out by an Annual General Meeting of the Association. The committee may temporarily fill any vacancy arising among the officers of the Association from its other members until the next Annual General Meeting of members, at which time an election shall take place.

No committee meeting shall take place without a quorum. A quorum is four members of the people you need to have a proper committee, including at least one member from the office of Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary or Treasurer.

The Committee shall arrange a minimum of four open meetings per year for the members of the Association, to discuss issues affecting the Residents' Association.

These meetings will be called by the Association, which will ensure that every resident in the area covered by the Association will be notified of the meeting.

#### **6. Annual General Meeting**

The Committee shall call an Annual General Meeting of the Association so that members can hear the Committee's report on the year's activities, listen to the Treasurer's report on how their money was used and elect a new Committee. Notice of the meeting will be sent to all members and to all those eligible for membership.

## **7. Special meetings**

Special meetings to discuss emergency matters directly affecting the Association or its interests must be arranged at the request of at least three committee members or by a written request signed by at least a quarter of the membership of the Association.

All members shall be provided with at least 14 days notice of the date, time, venue and agenda of the meeting. The meetings are open to all members of the Association.

## **8. Sub committees**

The Committee may appoint sub committees to carry out the activities of the Association. Any sub committee formed to look at a particular project or problem will keep accounts of their spending and a record of their meetings.

## **9. Duties of officers**

The officers will organise the work of the Residents Association. The Chair shall conduct the meetings of the Association. The Vice Chair shall carry out the duties of the Chair, in his/her absence.

The Treasurer will open a bank account in the Association's name. Cheques should be signed by the Treasurer and at least one other committee member. The Treasurer will keep a proper account of the money being received and spent by the Association and at least once a year will give the accounts to an auditor to be checked.

The Secretary will let members know about meetings, keep minutes of the Association's meetings and maintain a list of the Association's members. Minutes shall be made available to any member, on request.

## **10. Finance**

All money granted to, or raised by, the Association shall be used for the benefit of the Association's members only in line with the aims and objectives set out in the Constitution.

All expenditure must receive prior agreement from the Committee. Expenditure, other than petty cash, should be formally approved by the Committee. A vote must be taken and the result minuted.

## **11. Alterations to the Constitution**

Any changes to the Constitution must be discussed at an open meeting. Members will be given at least 14 days notice of the date, time, venue and content of the meeting. Any change must be approved by at least two thirds of the members present and voting at the meeting.

The Committee, or if a Committee no longer exists, a majority of remaining members of the Association, can propose that the Association should be dissolved. They must give at least 14 days notice to all those eligible for membership of the Association of the date, time and venue of the meeting and the fact that this matter will be discussed. For the sole purpose of dissolution, a quorum need not apply; the Association may be dissolved by a two-thirds majority of those present.

Once the Association has satisfied its liabilities, assets remaining in the Association's funds shall be used for purposes of benefit to the community, as the meeting shall decide.

**Appendix B - Example leaflet for your first meeting**

**Do you care about the area  
in which you live?**

**Would you like to influence local decision making  
and help make positive changes?**

**Why not set up a Residents' Association in  
(name of area)**

**The first meeting of this new group will be held on  
XX/XX/XXXX**

**at: (venue)**

**From XXam/pm to XXam/pm**

**Come along, meet your neighbours and have the opportunity  
to discuss issues that are of interest or concern to you.**

**See you there!**

**All enquiries to (name and number/address)**

**Appendix C - Simple template to record membership**

Name	Address	Email	Telephone