

Paradigm

Paradigm Housing Group

A 'how to' guide for Resident Associations and Community Groups

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Why get involved?

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By getting involved with people who want to discuss common concerns or local issues, you can make a difference to where you live.

You can do this by working together with other people in your neighbourhood to set up a Resident Association or Community Group.

This guide tells you all you need to know about setting up a Resident Association or Community Group, and why they are important.

How can we make things better?

- By talking to the people and organisations that make decisions about where you live (council, police, MP, etc) you can make sure they know about the things that affect you and your neighbourhood.
- By working with other organisations, as an association or group, you can bring about changes for the better and get things done.
- Coming together as an association or a group can help community spirit in your neighbourhood.

What's in it for us?

- You benefit because your views and questions are listened to.
- Your neighbourhood can be improved.
- Local issues can be discussed and a group approach can be agreed.
- There is a better understanding of how issues affect people in different ways.

What's in it for Paradigm?

- By working together as one group, you can discuss and work towards improvements in your neighbourhood. This enables Paradigm to fully understand what is important to the whole community.
- Paradigm has a recognised body to approach in the area to obtain residents' views and identify areas of improvement.



What is the difference between a Resident Association and a Community Group?

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It's important that you set up a group that meets your neighbourhood's needs and level of commitment. You do not need to be a formally constituted "Residents' Association" to work with Paradigm. We will listen to and work with both Resident Associations and Community Groups.

For the purpose of this guide a Residents Association:

- Is a group of residents (either renting, or homeowners including shared ownership) who want to discuss and make changes in their neighbourhood.
- Must have at least 25% of its members renting or leasing their properties from Paradigm (including shared ownership). Multiple members from one household will only count as one member.
- Must sign a constitution, elect a Committee including a third person as treasurer, and hold a bank account.

For the purpose of this guide a Community Group:

- Is a group of residents (either renting, or homeowners including shared ownership) who want to discuss and make changes in their neighbourhood.
- Who want to work together to improve their neighbourhood and community without being formally constituted.

- Can range from well-established formal groups, or regular working groups to small and informal discussion groups.
- Can deal with a specific issue or project eg: parking problems, or a fundraising event.



I'm thinking about setting up a Resident Association or Community Group

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The next step if you are interested in setting up either an association or a group would be to:

- Talk to your neighbours and other people living in your neighbourhood first to see whether or not they would be interested and willing to get involved.
- Get in touch with your Paradigm housing officer to express an interest in having an association or community group in your area.

At this stage they would need to know;

- The area the group would cover, either street name or the name of the estate
 - The number of people who are interested in getting involved – this should be roughly 10% of households (for example: if there are 100 properties in the area, then at least 10 properties would need to have said they are interested in getting involved)
 - Why you would like to set up the association or group, eg: to look at a specific issue, or to generally improve things in your area
 - Your housing officer will be able to advise you:
 - If a resident association or community group is the best approach, or if things can be resolved differently
 - If another residents association or community group already exists, if so they will put you in touch
- If setting up a resident association or community group is the right approach, your housing officer will talk to you about the stages involved in forming your group
 - Your housing officer will then work with you to;
 - Help you invite people in your community to an initial meeting
 - Help you develop your group, and advise on electing committee members and holding meetings
 - Help you develop an action plan to identify the main problems/ issues the local people are unhappy about or want to change
 - Advise you on how to make local people aware your group exists and encourage more people to become involved
 - You (and the group) must be willing to;
 - Make sure you find out what people think/ want
 - Always involve as many people from your community as possible
 - Remember you are working together as a group, not an individual

Setting up your group

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Groups are set up for lots of reasons but usually because of shared interests or concerns about a particular issue in the area.

The area may be suffering from vandalism or noise, local facilities might be poor or improvements are needed to the environment.

It's often the case that if one local resident is worried about something, there will be other people in the area who are worried about the same thing. Talk to people you know, your friends and neighbours about your concerns.

By sharing your thoughts and by working together, a group can be formed that is a collective voice to put forward important views.

- Are there people with experience of working in groups?
- Has anybody been a Chairperson or Secretary?
- What help will you need in setting up the group and advertising it in the area?
- What happens next?

It's important to remember that the responsibility of the group is the groups aims and not personal issues of individual members.

Your Paradigm housing officer can support you through these first meetings and advise on any issues.

Getting started

Once you have started forming your group it has to decide how it is going to progress. You will have to decide on things such as;

- What is the group going to do
- What issues will it try to tackle
- What area or street will it cover

People will have different ideas about what the group will do, and how it will run. Discuss the following ideas;

- How are you going to get more people involved in the group?
- What skills do the people in the group have?



How to run a meeting

It is important to make people feel comfortable. Knowing everyone's name helps, so ask people to introduce themselves and try to keep an informal atmosphere.

Set chairs out in a circle rather than rows, and a cup of tea and a chat before you begin can make people feel at ease.

When you are holding a meeting it is important that you think about it beforehand and be clear about what you hope to achieve.

You may want to keep your group quite informal, but if you want to get things done, you must have some sort of structure when you meet.

Here are a few simple guidelines to follow:

- Have a clear agenda
- Have an attendance sheet for each meeting to keep record of who is attending
- Make sure that the agenda is followed
- Make sure that decisions are made
- Once actions have been decided, create an action plan to keep to and monitor your objectives of having the group

- Keep the meeting interesting and enjoyable
- Provide accurate minutes, or decisions/ actions list to all members. Also note in the meetings who has passed their apologies to say they can not attend the meeting.
- In order to manage your successes create and keep to a scheduled action plan.

If the group has established a constitution the group will elect a Chair, Vice-chair, Treasurer and a Secretary. These roles provide leadership and guidance to the group.

If you do not have these formalised roles it is best for the group still to decide who would Chair and take minutes at your meetings (secretary) to make sure you keep the meeting on track and keep accurate records of what's been discussed and decided. The Chair and the Secretary can be circulated for each meeting for community groups but positions must be decided at the end of each meeting for the next cycle.

The agenda is the most important tool at a meeting - it sets out what can be discussed and in what order.

Preparing the agenda

The preparation of the agenda is the responsibility of the secretary and the chairperson who should liaise before the meeting to consider:

- What are the objectives of the meeting?
- What are the most important items? Put the most urgent items at the beginning of the agenda. These are usually the items that require a decision
- Refer to the action plan to keep accountable on your actions and way forward on your objectives.
- Look at the last minutes. Identify which items need to be discussed under the heading "matters arising"?
- What time limits should be set on each item and the whole meeting?

Once the sequence of the items has been agreed you will need to prepare the agenda.

There is a standard layout for agendas of normal meetings and an example is shown above right.

Wherever possible circulate the agenda before the meeting. This allows everyone the opportunity to think about what is to be discussed.

If a member has an agenda item it must be forwarded to the chairperson/secretary for consideration prior to the meeting.

Sample agenda

The Street Residents Group
Monday 19 October 2014 at 7pm
At 17 The Street, Community Centre, Watford

Items	Time
1 Apologies	7.30-7.35
2 Minutes of last meeting	7.35-7.40
3 Matters arising and action progress	7.40-7.50
4 Correspondence	7.50-8.05
5 Guest speakers – Mr Smith from the Council	8.05-8.25
6 Estate matters – car parking and dog poo	8.25-8.55
7 Reports back from committee members	8.55-9.00
8 Treasurers report	9.00-9.10
9 Any other business	9.10-9.25
10 Date of next meeting	9.25-9.30

Why take minutes of meetings?

The secretary or minute taker of the group is responsible for keeping a record of what is discussed at the meeting.

However informal you keep your meetings, it is important that you always keep a record of what is discussed. It is also useful to make a note of what actions or decisions were taken, in a separate list. This will ensure that items are always followed up and that nothing is forgotten.

Remember after each meeting to also update your action plan, where relevant.

Ask your Paradigm housing officer for more advice if you need it.

Minuting meetings

There are a few simple guidelines to follow when making notes at a meeting:

- Do not try and write down everything that is said
- Always record a decision
- Avoid going into too much detail
- Record action points agreed by the group with initials of the person responsible.

Once written, a copy of the minutes should be sent to anyone in attendance at the meeting, or who has given their apologies. As well as your Paradigm housing officer.



The issues that can and can't be raised at meetings

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A member of the group can raise any issue but the following are a few examples of typical subjects.

Consultation

Where local people would like to express their views over proposals to change any matters affecting the area. Like planning applications or works to properties.

Improvements to the Housing Service

Where an improvement to the housing service is suggested or proposed like introducing caretakers or extending opening hours.

Highlighting Areas of Concern

Problems within the local area can be brought to the attention of Paradigm Housing to discuss any appropriate action e.g. poor lighting, play area issues or ASB.

Further Information

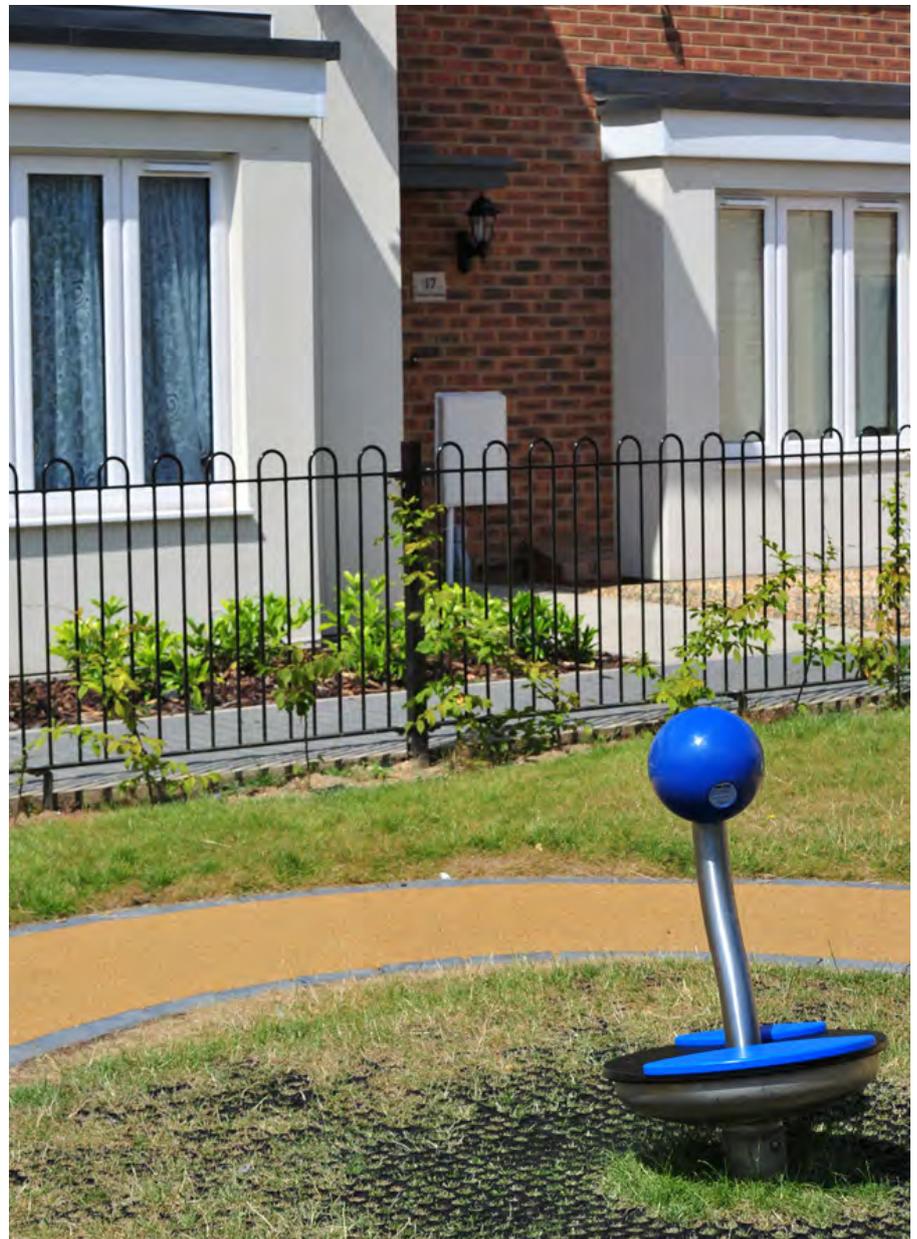
Members of the group can request further information about any topics that relate to their area.

PLEASE NOTE:

While groups are a place for issues to be raised, individual housing related issues will not be discussed eg; rent account, specific repairs. Personal housing related issues should be resolved through the normal channels.

Be aware of politics

All groups should be non-party political. Include local councillors but keep free from political issues between parties or councillors in your area.



The role of the Chairperson is important to the group. They are often seen as the figure head, providing leadership and guidance without dominating meetings or inhibiting members. The Chairperson should ensure that the group follows its aims and objectives.

The chairperson is the person who makes sure things get done – not the person who does or decides everything.

In the absence of the chairperson a vice chairperson can undertake the duties.

The role of the chairperson can change per meeting, if agreed with all the members of the group and this decision of who will chair the next meeting must be decided and minuted at the end of the last meeting. The previous and next Chairpersons must handover outside of the meeting to understand what actions are underway in order for the next chair to follow up prior to the next meeting.

During the group meetings the Chairperson will:

- Introduce the meetings.
- Approve the minutes of the last meeting.
- Introduce agenda items and make sure decisions are made.
- Make sure everyone has the chance to contribute to the discussion and that no one person dominates the discussion.
- Maintain control and make sure the meetings run smoothly.
- Close the meeting.

The chairperson is also the person who is responsible for the work that is done outside the meetings and organises people to do work. The chairperson calls the meeting to order, they ensure everyone is given the opportunity to express their views.



The Secretary's role often becomes the key role within the group. They administer any paperwork that comes to, and leaves, the group.

They have the job of making sure everybody knows what is going on. However, they should make sure that they do not try to take everything on, as the group should share the work.

The Secretary must liaise closely with the Chairperson to ensure that things run smoothly and that the group stays focused, even if other members are not present.

The Secretary's duties include:

- Arranging meetings - a time, date, place etc
- Consulting with the Chairperson in selecting items and circulating the agenda
- Keeping a record of attendance
- Preparing and circulating the minutes (can be an inter-changing role)
- Dealing with the correspondence in connection with the group and reporting on this at each meeting.

The role of the minute taker can change per meeting, if agreed with all the members of the group and this decision of who will take minutes for the next meeting must be decided and minuted at the end of the last meeting.



All members of the group should be encouraged to become involved in its work. Member's duties include:

- Electing a chair and secretary (or minute taker), or deciding whether this position can circulate for each meeting
- Identify ways of improving the local area
- Providing a response to proposed changes
- Receiving and responding to standards of performance of the group
- Making a commitment to attend the meetings
- Providing their own point of view whilst representing the opinions of other residents in the area.



A treasurer will only be required if the group being formed is a Resident Association who has applied and been granted funding. Or if the Community Group has decided to carry out a one-off fundraising campaign.

The role of the Treasurer is to make sure that the money belonging to the group is properly managed and accounted for. The Treasurer will keep a record of income and expenditure.

The Treasurer's duties include:

- Opening a bank account and paying all money received into the account.
- Keeping a record of all money received and issuing receipts.
- Paying bills as agreed by the group and keeping a record of expenditure.
- Maintaining an account book detailing income and expenditure and preparing regular statements for the group.

At the end of the year the treasurer will have to provide a report to the Annual General Meeting on how the money has been spent. This is really just a list of what monies have been received and who from and what monies have been spent and what on.

- Arranging for the account to be independently examined yearly usually in time for the group's Annual General Meeting (AGM). The independent examiner must not be a member of the group.

How to open a bank account

Initial enquiry to bank

Obtain application form to open a current bank account

Treasurer to complete application form with up to 4 signatories (who must be unrelated) to draw money out of the bank

The bank specifies "any two" signatories desirable

How do you keep the accounts?

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

1. Cash received
2. Cash paid
3. Petty cash receipts and payments

These transactions should be displayed in a cash analysis book. The left hand side of the page is to record monies coming into the association and the right hand side of the page for monies going out.

It is recommended that you write up the books at least once a month.

Also check the bank statements against the entries in the book.

(Accounts should be examined at least once a year by an independent examiner).

Cash received (In)

Money that is received by the group has to be recorded on the left hand side of the page

(IN).

It should show:

- The date that you received the money
- The amount received
- Who it was received from
- Whether it was received in cash or cheque.

You should give each transaction a number that corresponds to the copy of the receipt that you gave to the other person. These copy receipts should be filed in the correct order so that you can quickly check that all money received has been recorded. Receipts that are cancelled must also be kept so that every number is accounted for. Standard receipt books are available from most stationary shops.

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

Cash paid (Out)

The money spent by the group is recorded on the right hand side of the page

(OUT).

This should show:

- The date of each payment
- Who it was paid to
- The total amount spent
- The cheque number if applicable.

Keep any cancelled cheque stubs. Once a week or month you will need to draw out some petty cash by cheque. These transactions should all be recorded.

Comparing your accounts books with your 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. Because it takes several days for a cheque to go through the banking system you will find some items are not shown on the bank statement. On the other hand the statement may show some items that are not included in your account books, such as bank charges. These should be entered into your cash paid sheet before attempting the balance sheet.

Paradigm Housing Officers are able to provide some support and advise you with setting up either Resident Associations or Community Groups.

When you are thinking about setting up an association or a group, your housing officer can support you with the following:

- Your housing officer will be able to advise you;
 - If a resident association or community group is the best approach, or if things can be resolved differently
 - If another residents association or community group already exists, if so they will put you in touch
 - If setting up a resident association or community group is the right approach, your housing officer will talk to you about the stages involved in forming your group
 - Your housing officer will then work with you to;
 - Help you invite people in your community to an initial meeting
 - Help you develop your group, and advise on electing committee members and holding meetings
 - Help you develop an action plan to identify the main problems/ issues the local people are unhappy about or want to change
 - Advise you on how to make local people aware your group exists and encourage more people to become involved
- When the group has started your housing officer can support you with the following;
- Providing you with examples of meeting agendas or minutes.
 - Will ask you to send over any meeting minutes and they can keep a record of them.
 - Will help you with any housing advise as per your action plan.
 - Can suggest any local governing bodies that you could invite to be guest speakers at your meetings to support your action plan.
 - Attend your meetings when invited, if it would support your action plan. It is not essential for the housing officer to attend all meetings.



It is important that you try to publicise the group as much as you can to encourage more people to become involved and to find out what they think.

Remember, not all publicity is good publicity. Groups that attract bad publicity can suffer as a result. Most local papers however, do promote community groups and will publish stories or advertise events. If you have a success make sure that you let them know!

There are some methods of publicising the group that you may wish to try:

Newsletters

Newsletters are a useful way of telling local people what is going on.

Newsletters can be anything from one side of paper to several pages stapled together. It is a good way of keeping your members informed and updated on issues that affect them.

Producing a newsletter should not be seen as a difficult task and it will be made easier by a little forward planning.

- Decide who will be responsible for producing the newsletter
- Find out what skills you have within your group. Is anyone good at drawing?
- Does someone have access to a computer?
- Is someone good at writing articles?
- Find volunteers to deliver it?
- How often are you going to produce the newsletter? It is up to you entirely, but thought must be given to costs, time, etc

- What is it going to look like?
- What are you going to call it?

Posters

Posters that are placed in prominent places can be useful, especially if you have an event to publicise. Paradigm may be able to help you produce these and get them laminated.

Surveys – get out there

Surveys are a good way for you to get out and about in your local area and meet people, finding out what they think about the area and getting new ideas for change. Word of mouth should not be underestimated as a valuable tool in publicising a group and recruiting new members.

Surveys will also help you to find whether you have support for a proposal you want Paradigm to consider. You should aim to get at least two thirds of the local people within the groups area to support a proposal.

Here are a few points to consider when conducting a survey:

What information do you need to find out?

- Focus on issues related to peoples everyday lives
- Keep it short and simple. Don't tackle too many issues

How do you do a survey?

- Speak to people face to face
- Use questions that can be answered either yes or no
- Let people tell you what their issues are - don't tell them
- Try multiple choice questions

- Allow space for them to write their own issues
- Avoid sensitive information (eg Income)
- Use a code system that allows you to identify people who could not return the survey, but keeps the views of identifiable residents

How do you analyse results?

- Perhaps find someone to create a database on a personal computer
- Look for patterns, both average views, plus obvious differences eg if older people reply differently

What do you do with the results?

- Produce a written summary with your main findings, highlighting anything impressive or unusual
- Put the written summary out in a newsletter to all those who could have replied (not just those who did reply!) Remember to say what you are going to do with the results!
- Think about issuing a press release
- Organise a meeting, inviting those who can deal with some of the issues raised
- Consider repeating the exercise at regular intervals. You can then compare for progress

Your housing officer can offer further advice.

So, you have set up your group, lots of local people are interested and they have identified the issues that they are unhappy about.

What's the next step? How are you going to tackle these issues?

You need a plan – The action plan consists of various elements:

- You need to identify the problem, i.e. dog mess on the streets
- You need to know what outcome you require ie no dog mess
- You need to know what help exists from agencies ie dog wardens, the police, street cleaning etc
- You need to identify who is going to lead and coordinate the action plan (this does not mean do all the work!)
- You need to identify ways to alleviate the problem i.e. put up signs, provide bags and poop scoops, dog waste bins, get the dog warden to visit, talk to people with dogs etc
- You need to have deadlines for all of these actions to ensure they get done in a reasonable time.
- You need to be able to tell if your campaign is a success, i.e how will you measure any improvement.

After the plan has been put into effect

At times your plans may not have immediate success! Plans are more successful in some areas than others. In each action plan, there must be ways of monitoring the plan, measuring success and reviewing the campaign.

The sequence therefore is:

- 1) Define the problem
- 2) Design an action plan
- 3) Decide how success will be measured
- 4) Put the plan into action
- 5) Was the plan a success?
- 6) What went wrong, if anything?
- 7) Design a new action plan based on what went wrong

Remember – you can use your agendas and minutes to organise the work needed to achieve the groups' aims.

Remember to share your completed actions plans with your Paradigm housing officer, to keep them informed on your groups progress and successes!

Example Action Plan

Subject area	Outcome required	Action required	Deadline	Responsibility
Make dog owners aware of the offence they are committing	Notices are up warning of the offence they commit	Request signs from the council	Immediately	A Brown
Facilities are available for cleaning up dog mess	Doggy bags are available locally	Get bags from the council - arrange to be available free in local shops, library etc	1 week	B Smith
	Dog bins are sited for the disposal of bags	Approach council - will they provide bins? If not, will local firms/people sponsor them and will the council allow us to put them up	1 week After council makes decision on bins	B Smith
Dog Wardens are notified of the problem	Dog Wardens are aware of the problem	Write to/phone dog wardens to inform them of the problems	1 week	C Jones
Publicity distributed to give details of free bags and warning dog owners of the forthcoming campaign	Leaflets distributed, press releases sent, articles in newsletter	Produce leaflets, issue press releases and send articles to newsletter editor	3 weeks	C Jones

What is a Resident Association and Community Group?

A Resident Association or Community Group is a group of residents (tenants, shared owners, leaseholders and owner-occupiers) who get together because they want to discuss and drive through changes in their neighbourhood, or simply create a stronger sense of belonging and neighbourhood spirit by arranging social events. There are two types of groups; a constituted Resident Association and a Community Group.

A constituted Resident Association will elect a committee, sign a constitution and hold a bank account.

A community group will remain informal and has no bank account, making accessing funds difficult.

It's important that you set up a group that meets your neighbourhood's needs and level of commitment. You do not need to be a formally constituted "Residents' Association" to work with Paradigm. We will listen to and work with both Resident Associations and Community Groups.

What is the Code of Practice?

The Code of Practice for Resident Associations and Community Groups explains the responsibilities of a group and outlines the support offered by Paradigm.

There are four stages in the code. Existing associations will very quickly progress to Stage 2.

Stage 1 Advise, guide and evaluate

The role of the Paradigm housing officer is to provide support and advice to your group. They will check if another Residents Association or Community Group already exists in your area.

If one does exist the housing officer will put you in contact with them. If not, the housing officer can help you establish a new association; assuming there is a minimum of 25% Paradigm properties within your membership. As well as whether forming a group is the best approach for the issues you are wanting to improve on.

The housing officer will then evaluate the proposed purpose of the group and advise the most appropriate format, for example, is it better to create a Community Group, which can also be either short-term or informal, or an Resident Association with a constitution, chair person, secretary and treasurer.

The housing officer will be able to provide appropriate support such as templates and application forms.

Stage 2 Getting started and becoming independent

This stage can take up to six months.

First, you need to write an action plan to establish roles and responsibilities, and identify existing resources and skills (for

example, is there a resident with accounting skills willing to be the treasurer?)

The group should then complete an application form and identify any training needs, which would need to be discussed with the housing officer.

Paradigm have the ability to organise and pay for training, when a sufficient need has been identified.

Once a Residents Association has a signed constitution, it will be eligible for a start-up grant of £150-£350 (depending on the percentage of Paradigm properties represented in the area).

The Residents Association will now be independent and autonomous and organising its own meetings, activities and fund-raising events.

It is responsible for forwarding copies of minutes and agendas to the housing officer. In return, the Residents Association receives a certificate showing it has been recognised by Paradigm and advice and support from the Paradigm housing officer(s).

Stage 3 Ongoing support

Paradigm will aim to:

- resolve any housing issues
- advise on community initiatives
- provide information, access to resource, offer support and answer queries
- provide funding for some community initiatives

The housing officer can:

- attend mid-week meetings or ask the Residents Association or Community Group to look at particular community issues
- ensure Paradigm action relevant issues from the minutes of the meetings
- log contacts and documents relevant to the Resident Association
- provide support and advice on running effective community events
- help organise and finance any training required
- work with the Resident Association to help the community, involve residents and help at some events

The Resident Association's responsibility to Paradigm is to:

- pass on committee contact details to the housing officer
- forward meeting dates, agendas and minutes to the housing officer
- contact the housing officer if Paradigm staff are needed to take part in a meeting or project
- invite guests to meetings
- ensure the Resident Association has public liability insurance and carries out risk assessments for community events

Stage 4

Annual review

There will be an annual review of all active Resident Associations recognised by Paradigm, starting at the end of the first year.

The review will be led by the Paradigm housing officer.

The aim of the review is to assess:

- the Resident Associations relationship with Paradigm and local community
- whether the Resident Association reflects the diversity in the community
- the Resident Associations balance sheet, that the accounts have been audited and public liability cover exists
- the Resident Associations achievements and goals for the coming year
- whether Paradigm residents have been actively involved and consulted when appropriate
- whether the contact records for the committee are up-to-date
- that the Resident Association is working to the principles laid down within its constitution

If the annual review results in a 'green light', which equates to 75% or above, the Resident Association is eligible for a continuation grant.

The continuation grant is administered by Paradigm Housing Group and ranges from £100 to £300.

If the Resident Association receives an 'amber' or 'red light', the housing officer will either refuse the grant but continue to support and guide the Resident Association and review again after six months, or formally terminate any involvement with the Resident Association on behalf of Paradigm.

If the Resident Association doesn't agree with this decision they have the right to appeal by writing to the housing officers direct line manager.

Contact us

For more information about the Code of Practice please contact our Customer Services team on [0300 303 1010](tel:03003031010) or email: enquires@paradigmhousing.co.uk