

Local Residents' Forum procedure guide & Terms of Reference

Procedure for establishing a Local Residents' Forum

- 1.1 The following guidance has been developed for both officers and residents to support the establishment of a Local Residents' Forum only in blocks and estates where housing management services are provided by Croydon Council.
- 1.2 A Local Residents' Forum can be established in response to requests from a local resident or councillor, or from a council officer, who may have become aware of a local issue or problem that might benefit from open discussion. Requests should be made to the council's resident involvement team in the first instance and the enquiry will be allocated to a resident involvement officer. Within 5 working days, the officer will discuss the issue(s) with interested parties and other council colleagues to agree that setting up a Forum is the best option.
- 1.3 A Forum will only be established where the issue is relevant to, or impacts on, a number of people or properties in the area and will not be formed in order to discuss personal matters or those affecting an individual. In addition, it must be felt appropriate for the issue(s) to be discussed openly and agreed that there is sufficient interest in the subject to draw local people to a public meeting.
- 1.4 If it is agreed to proceed, the resident involvement officer will speak briefly with key local residents, within a further 5 working days, to advise them how a Local Residents' Forum will work and go through this guidance and the Terms of Reference (TOR) with them. They should also discuss and agree the geographical area the Forum should cover, which may range from a single block or a group of houses, to a small estate.
- 1.5 It is not expected that a series of planned or regular meetings will be scheduled for a Local Residents' Forum. Following the initial meeting, subsequent meetings will only be arranged to enable further discussion or feedback about the original issue, or in response to other local issues being raised that meet the criteria in 1.3 above.
- 1.6 The resident involvement team will work in partnership with local residents and others to make arrangements for the first meeting, which should take place within 6 weeks of the initial enquiry. This will include agreeing a date and the programme, booking a venue, inviting relevant guests to the meeting and producing promotional material. (see sect 4. of the TOR for details of roles)
- 1.7 The Resident Involvement Officer will make brief notes at the meeting, and will also produce and distribute an action plan after the meeting. (see sect. 4.12 to 4.14 of the TOR)
- 1.8 Where further meetings are required, the resident involvement team will continue to work with residents and take on responsibility to arrange and administer the meeting(s) as noted in 1.6 and 1.7 above.

Terms of Reference

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Local residents' forums are regarded as informal groups and this document aims to set out how these groups operate and clarify roles and responsibilities.
- 1.2 The key residents involved (see 1.4 above) should go through this document with the RIO who is supporting the group, to ensure a good level of understanding. Other local residents should be made aware that this guidance is available but there is no need for the TOR to be formally approved or accepted by the group.
- 1.3 Local Residents' Forum is the term used to refer to the way this type of group works and how it functions etc. Where the officers and key residents choose to do so, they may agree a name for the Forum that is felt to be more likely to draw local residents to meetings. Alternately, it may be agreed not to use a 'name' and promote the meetings as a 'local meeting' or similar.

2.0 The block or area represented

- 2.1 A Local Residents' Forum may only be formed in an area where housing management services are provided by Croydon Council.
- 2.2 The RIO and key residents should work in partnership to agree the area that a proposed Forum will cover. A formal record or note should be made of the area that it is agreed a Forum will cover and any subsequent amendments to this area should also be noted.
- 2.3 Anyone can attend the Forum who is over 16 and lives in the area noted at 2.2 above, regardless of their tenure; including tenants and leaseholders of properties managed by Croydon Council, or other landlords; or those who have bought the freehold of their homes.

3.0 The Local Residents' Forum should meet the following aims

- 3.1 To give all residents from the area, a chance to meet with their neighbours and discuss issues and concerns regarding the management of the properties they live in and the local environment.
- 3.2 To enable residents to hold positive discussions with representatives from the council, other service providers and local community organisations, regarding service provision or other issues affecting the area, that have been raised by residents (other than those concerning individuals) and work towards resolution.
- 3.3 To enable residents to be consulted on plans for the local area in connection with improvements or changes to the properties in the area, the delivery of housing services or the local environment.
- 3.4 To encourage a greater sense of community within the Forum area.

3.5 To enable interested residents to take part in such meetings and discussions without the need to form a committee or take on administration work related to the group, which is often associated with more formal residents' groups.

4.0 How will the Local Residents' Forum work and who will do what?

4.1 Where it is decided to arrange a Forum meeting, officers from the resident involvement team will work in partnership with local residents and / or other officers to agree the time, date and venue of meeting(s). Meetings should be held at a time that is convenient and appropriate for the majority of people in the area. Venues should be as near to the Forum area as possible and fully accessible.

4.2 A Forum will not normally meet more than three times each year. However, if residents request it, a further meeting may be called within any one year to discuss urgent issues. (i.e. max 4 meetings per 12 months)

4.3 Any item(s) to be included on the programme for discussion at a meeting must be notified to the resident involvement team at least 14 days before the date of the meeting, in order that relevant guests can be invited to the meeting and that the item can be included on any publicity.

4.4 The resident involvement team will agree the programme for Forum meetings and ensure guest speakers and representatives are invited to attend. This may include representatives from various council departments, local ward councillors, contractors, local community organisations or statutory services, such as the Police.

4.5 Guest speakers and representatives, as above, will be invited to attend Forum meetings to advise and support residents in discussions and in particular, to assist in finding satisfactory resolutions to issues.

4.6 It is essential that, as far as possible, efforts are made to ensure everyone in the area is aware of the Local Residents' Forum, what it aims to achieve and that local people are informed of the details of meetings and encouraged to attend.

4.7 The resident involvement team will produce and make available, suitable publicity material prior to each meeting such as flyers or posters. It is expected that local residents distribute such flyers or posters.

4.8 Meetings of the Forum must be open to anyone living in the area and there is no requirement for people to join or become a formal member of the Forum. However, it is good practice to use an attendance sheet or otherwise have a record of those who attended a meeting.

4.9 Forum meetings should provide an informal but orderly atmosphere, where all attendees are made to feel welcome and are encouraged to take an active part in the discussions, in a polite, orderly and respectful manner.

- 4.10 Wherever possible, a local resident will be selected from those attending the meeting, to take on the role of Chair. This is to ensure these meetings remain focussed on the needs and interests of local people. If the Forum meets more than once, it is considered best practice that the responsibility for Chairing meetings is rotated between interested residents.
- 4.11 The primary role of the Chair will be to ensure discussions at the meeting progress in a timely manner and to encourage all attendees to behave politely and respectfully towards one another. The Chair may ask anyone who is being disruptive to behave appropriately or leave the meeting.
- 4.12 Residents who are interested in gaining a better understanding of the way the council works and how to get the most from meetings will be encouraged to attend relevant training provided by the resident involvement team.
- 4.13 It is not expected that full minutes of these meetings be produced but an officer from the resident involvement team will be responsible for ensuring brief notes of the meetings are taken, particularly relating to any decisions or actions agreed. Any actions will be agreed with those present at each meeting and an action plan will then be produced within 10 working days of the meeting, detailing who will undertake each task and by when.
- 4.14 The resident involvement team will ensure copies of the action plan are distributed to all those who completed the attendance sheet for the meeting, as well as any other interested parties as required. Copies of the action plan will be made available to any resident from the area, upon request.
- 4.14 Whilst the resident involvement team will take the lead in chasing and updating actions on the action plan, it is intended that all attendees and guest representatives, will share responsibility for ensuring actions are progressed appropriately.

5.0 Equalities

- 5.1 The Residents' Forum shall positively promote equal opportunities within the community and will treat all people with dignity and respect, recognising the value of each individual. The Forum shall work for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against persons on grounds of race, gender, age, sexuality, disability and religion.
- 5.2 Residents attending meetings of the Forum should try to consider and understand the diverse views of the whole community and represent the best interests of all residents in the area, during any discussions.

6.0 Decision making

- 6.1 These meetings are informal and decisions made may not be binding. However, it is expected that open discussions take place involving all those affected by an issue. The aim is for these discussions to result in solutions or positive outcomes which must be supported by the majority of those present before being agreed. There should then be a commitment to complete any actions as agreed and indicated on the action plan.
- 6.2 If it is not possible to progress an action, (for instance due to legal or financial reasons) the officer or other suitable representative should explain why and as far as possible make suggestions for alternative actions or options. This will either be at a future meeting or through the action plan.
- 6.3 If the residents in attendance at a meeting of the Forum request it, the council officers can arrange for any voting to be carried out by way of a secret ballot.

7.0 Code of Conduct

- 7.1 All those taking part in a Local Residents' Forum will abide by Croydon Councils' code of conduct relating to those engaged in resident involvement.(available separately).

8.0 Finance

- 8.1 Local Residents' Forums will be established for the sole purpose of enabling open consultation and discussions amongst local residents. There is no expectation that they will perform any financial function and will not be responsible for seeking or raising funds.
- 8.2 There will be no cost for residents to attend meetings of the Forum and any expenditure regarding publicity, venue hire and administration of the Forum will be met by the resident involvement team.

9.0 Alterations to the Terms of Reference

- 9.1 These Terms of Reference have been approved by the Tenant and Leaseholder Panel and form guidance which will be adopted by any group of residents wishing to develop a Local Residents' Forum. Any significant change(s) must receive the endorsement of the Tenants' & Leaseholders' Panel before it (they) can take effect.