



Resident Involvement Opportunities and Resource Guide

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Introduction

Residents' have been at the heart of the shaping and scrutinising services within Sanctuary for many years; this has been confirmed both by the accreditation received from the external, independent housing consultants *Housing Quality Network*, and the improvements to the service that residents everywhere receive as a result of residents holding Sanctuary to account.

This document has been produced as a guide for all residents of Sanctuary who would like to explore opportunities for resident involvement themselves.

Principally, this guide should also be a useful resource if you are thinking of starting up a residents' group at your scheme or in your neighbourhood; such groups enable you to present a collective view and to work with Sanctuary staff to seek improvements within your community.

Let's be clear from the outset – resident involvement provides great opportunities for personal development and for improving services for all tenants and residents; but it doesn't allow you or anyone else to access preferential treatment from Sanctuary, nor does it provide short cuts to get personal problems sorted. What it can do is help you to understand processes and address problems such as neighbourhood improvements or other problems by introducing a formal channel for conversation and information flow.

Resident Involvement Statement

Sanctuary is committed to having an on-going conversation with all of its residents, (regardless of tenure), service users and customers in all issues that affect their homes and local communities. Sanctuary recognise that it is only through such conversations that real improvements to services can take place

and therefore seeks to understand the views, concerns and aspirations of customers everywhere. Effective dialogue with our customers can contribute to significant Value for Money savings and challenge us to deliver on our promises – our Local Offers.

But resident involvement is more than that, it can also yield numerous social benefits by building residents self confidence, providing social groups to tackle isolation, some residents have also been helped into employment through training and capacity building. Over recent years, residents have:

- Led a scrutiny process where trained residents inspect Sanctuary services and make improvement recommendations; these have included having morning and afternoon appointments for non urgent repairs and ensuring that serious anti social behaviour is followed up within 24 hours.
- Challenge senior staff through Scrutiny panels, holding them to account for the delivery of Local Offers (service standards).
- Introduced a resident led estate inspection process which has been adopted nationally and allows us to continuously review the conditions of our estates.
- Been actively involved with the Procurement process; including selection of contractors.
- Developed a specific forum for Home Owners to discuss their concerns which has led to real improvements in areas such as the presentation and provision of information and the re-investment process.
- Been actively involved in the development and review of policies, procedures and strategies.
- Residents also design and tailor services to their needs, this is known as Co-production.

“Traffic Lights” of Involvement Opportunities.

There are a variety of options for residents wishing to be involved volunteers, each with a differing level of time commitment. In order to help you consider the options, we have used a traffic light system to highlight how demanding the roles are. Low levels of involvement score green and high levels score red; just choose which level of involvement suits you and then look through the opportunities within it. Obviously, some options can be undertaken without leaving the comfort of your own home, others such as scrutiny work often need you to travel and possibly even stay overnight.

For your ease the options are scored as: **Green** – Requiring a small amount of commitment, perhaps just a few hours per quarter, close to your own home.

An example of green involvement might be ‘Mystery Shopping’, working with a simple check-list, you pose as a customer and record your experience whilst testing Sanctuary’s services; the findings are passed to Sanctuary’s scrutiny team for analysis.

Amber – This requires some travel and would involve you attending training courses to help you become more effective.

Communities of Interest score an amber level; if you are a homeowner, you may wish to join our Home Ownership Forum where specific topics of importance to leaseholders and shared owners will be discussed which might include re-investment or management charges; possibly service charges or procurement of services and so on.

Other groups have been formed to specifically assist staff with selecting

contractors for large planned maintenance projects. Just tell us your interests and we can let you know what is on offer.

Red – A formal application would be needed for this level of involvement which involves training, a lot of travel (at our expense) and potentially nights away.

Resident Scrutiny is a good example of working at this level.

The National Resident Scrutiny Panel is part of the regulatory requirement within housing, similar panels are found across the health service or in schools. Their work offers a constructive and friendly environment where residents can challenge staff about housing operations, performance levels or services delivered; they can, where appropriate hold senior staff to account. Their work might involve reviewing statistical trends such as complaints or how long our properties are taking to re-let; they challenge departments to deliver on our ‘Local Service Standards’ and help to ‘shape’ new services by bringing a residents’ perspective, before the service is formally launched. The panel currently meets four times per year, generally in Warwickshire, with an over night stay. You will need strong analytical skills for this role.

Due to the nature of the work, applicants for the scrutiny panel are asked to submit an application form outlining what strengths you could bring to the panel, as you would expect if you wanted to be a school governor or similar.

If interested, let us know what your background is and how you can bring new strengths to this team.

Part A – Resident Scrutiny

The operation and function of all registered housing associations, like Sanctuary, is regulated by the Government through the Homes and Communities Agency, (a department of the DCLG); as a result, there is an expectation that residents are involved with the shaping and scrutinising of the services that the landlord delivers - this is similar to the function of a Board of Governors at a local school.

The scrutiny process takes many forms; it involves quarterly meetings with senior staff where Sanctuary's performance against any regulatory expectations is monitored. For instance, customer satisfaction with the services they receive or how quickly empty homes are re-let; this way Sanctuary's senior staff are 'held to account' and a 'critical friend' relationship is built.

Another function is more practical, it might involve actively scrutinising (that is investigating) areas of interest. So the panel may commission some 'Mystery Shopping' type exercises to experience the service first hand, equally it may be involved with hands on estate inspections, which provide a snap shot of the appearance and condition of neighbourhoods and schemes.

A recent scrutiny project was undertaken across the country which considered customer satisfaction following the reporting of a nuisance complaint. The project reviewed Sanctuary's policy and procedure for Anti-Social Behaviour; it benchmarked against other organisations' best practice and it reviewed the process and actions followed by staff who managed nuisance cases. At the end of the project it brought a customer perspective to a corporate activity and made several recommendations, which were welcomed by staff.

Many of the activities of the scrutiny panels are reported in the resident newsletters Voice (Sanctuary Housing), Snapshot (Sanctuary Supported Living) or In-Touch (Sanctuary Home Ownership) also there is more information on Sanctuary's website:

<https://www.sanctuary-housing.co.uk/resident-involvement>

A scrutiny panel is a formal committee and which meets quarterly with all of the orders and terms of reference that a 'board' would have. Therefore it is only for those who would be comfortable in a board meeting environment and reading a lot of detailed papers in preparation for the meeting.

To be clear, however, a scrutiny panel is not a forum for raising individual complaints or personal matters, and members would be expected to declare an interest should an agenda item affect them personally.

Part B – Communities of Interest

Estate Inspections

In each local operating area, formally known as regions, Resident Inspectors are recruited to work with local housing staff to conduct inspections of up to 20 housing estates or schemes per local operating area per year. The process involves walking around the estate and scoring its appearance against a list of pre-determined standards. This converts to a Red; Amber; Green traffic light grade. Improvements are recommended before the estate is re-inspected in the following half of the year.

Level of Commitment - **Green**

Mystery Shopping

Level of Commitment - **Green**

This is about 'testing' the service that Sanctuary offer; posing as a customer but working within strict guidelines and controls, you may be asked to telephone or to visit a local office and to record (afterwards) your experience. This helps us to make improvements for everyone else's benefit. A short training course is necessary.

Liaison Groups

Level of commitment - **Amber**

The resident scrutiny structure requires small sub-groups to liaise with specialist departments within Sanctuary. Residents are recruited for their expertise and past experience; for instance groups include:

- Sanctuary Supported Living.
Residents with appropriate experience have linked to our supported living directorate, meeting with staff and service users to ensure that all of the principles of co-production and co-regulation are extended accordingly; including residents being involved with the design and scrutinising of the services which they receive. One particular method is using a test

known as the 'family and friends' test where trained residents might visit a scheme and report back on how likely it would be that they would 'recommend the scheme to their own family and friends;' their findings are then reviewed by senior staff to see where improvements can be made.

- Procurement of new services.
Residents were recruited to look at contractor tenders and to assist staff with the purchase of new products and services; examples are the installation, maintenance and repair of communal lifts on high rise blocks; and kitchen and bathroom replacements. Full training was provided to equip residents for the task.
- Home Ownership Forum, a formal panel that meets quarterly and is specifically designed for Leaseholders, Shared Ownership, and those who have purchased their home under Right to Buy or Right to Acquire. It is a forum that can discuss technical matters that are only relevant to their tenure, such as Management Charges, Ground Rent, Section 20 Consultation, Long Terms Agreements and so on.

Part C – Starting your own Residents' Association.

Starting a residents' group is not difficult and should be fun as well as a learning experience; hopefully this guide will help you decide what option is best for your community or scheme and how to turn a vision into reality.

Groups can start for a variety of reasons but all groups should have a clear purpose which is outlined at the start, so that everyone understands and can make an informed judgement whether they want to join in or not. Whatever the purpose or vision of the group it is crucial that we build a constructive working relationship between the group and Sanctuary staff. Together we can improve services and your experience of Sanctuary; we have a dedicated team who will assist you to get started and arrange on going officer support.

Being clear about the group's purpose

Some groups are started just to provide a social activity for its members, often in residential schemes, they may just offer a quiz, an interesting talk or a game of Bingo. These groups don't need a chairman or secretary, but we recommend that they have a constitution so that everyone knows what to expect from them. Any cash they hold would normally be kept in the scheme's safe rather than held in any bank accounts. This is to ensure that it is always readily available for the scheme's benefit.

Other groups can also be formed on larger housing estates where residents want to get together to improve the neighbourhood and environment. Where groups form just to look at one specific area of service; say to suggest improvements to the estate for instance grounds maintenance. Once the objective has been achieved then the group will disband. These are called 'Task/Finish'

groups; the purpose should be clearly spelt out in a constitution along with the key contacts such as a chairman.

Where the group has a longer term objective and wishes to hold funds or to use Sanctuary facilities such as a meeting room in a scheme or office, then the group must be formalised and have a constitution and an annually scrutinised bank account. These are called formal residents' associations and we would recommend that they register with Sanctuary in order to benefit from a variety of opportunities.

Getting together

Once you have made a list of what you are aiming to do (your objectives), and everyone is clear about what you are trying to achieve, you need to start thinking about the following:

- How the group will be representative of all or at least the majority of residents in your scheme and prevent the exclusion of anyone.
- Whether or not you will make a small membership or attendance charge, therefore need a bank account.
- Will you be serving refreshments? If so how will these be provided?
- How will you keep members informed about what you are doing i.e. information on notice boards, leaflets, newsletters, letters.
- Who you need to work with to achieve your aims (Sanctuary staff, councillors, community workers).
- Will you need to use a Sanctuary office or photocopying facilities, are the rooms accessible for those with restricted mobility.
- What time will the meeting take place – think about availability of those attending, are they working, collecting children from school, staff availability, more critically – does it clash with Wimbledon fortnight!

Different sorts of group:

1. Informal / Social groups

To be clear, you are free to start this kind of group yourself; you don't need permission but remember:

- If you want to use a Sanctuary meeting room you will need to arrange this with the appropriate member of staff and carry out a risk assessment as advised. (This is to ensure that your meeting doesn't pose a threat or hazard to other people on site – see the Risk Assessment form at **Appendix one**)
- If you intend handling money, then you will need to do this in a clear accountable and transparent way which always involves a specific group bank account and having your accounts checked on an annual basis. Sanctuary staff can assist with this.
- If your group is on Sanctuary premises, staff reserve the right to close the group if there are clear indications that it is working in a way that brings the name of Sanctuary into disrepute or otherwise fails to meet Sanctuary's required standards; this maybe in areas like diversity or failing to use the premises in a way that they were intended.

2. Formal Constituted groups

Having a constitution is always the best way for a group to function. A constitution is a document that gives the framework for the way in which your residents' group works. It explains what the residents' group is, what its purpose is, and what the rights and responsibilities of different members of the organisation are. Constitutions usually explain what the rules will be for making financial reports and keeping proper accounts.

Why do you need a constitution?

- So that everyone in and connected to the residents' group knows exactly what the aims of the residents' group are.
- So that everyone knows how the residents' group will run.
- So that everyone knows who is responsible for the running of the residents' group, how it functions, how it controls the behaviour of individuals and how it empowers a committee to act or make decisions.

The constitution must include:

- Name of your residents' group.
- The residents' group's aims and objectives.
- Rules to ensure fairness and democracy.
- An Equality and Diversity protocol.
- Who the officers of the residents' group are and how the committee of the residents' group is made up.
- What happens to any money should the group fold.

Please see **Appendix two** for the Sanctuary model constitution.

The Committee and its role

The committee must be elected by the members to carry out the work of the residents' group. The committee organises general meetings of all the members, and the residents' group's Annual General Meeting (AGM) and must carry out the decisions made at these meetings.

Try to make sure that the committee is representative of the community that the residents' group represents

Ideally, you will need to appoint a Chair person and a treasurer; you may also have a secretary.

Chairperson

The Chairperson is the person who oversees meetings and makes sure

things get done. They are responsible for the smooth running of the association. The main tasks for the Chairperson to do are:

- Guide the residents' group to achieve its aims and objectives.
- Chair the meetings of the residents' group.
- Work closely with the secretary to keep all members informed.

During the residents' group meetings the Chairperson will:

- Make sure each item on the agenda is discussed.
- Ensure that everyone who wishes to gets an opportunity to contribute to the discussion.
- Keep order and control within the meeting.

Outside the residents' group meetings he / she must:

- Liaise with Sanctuary staff.
- Be aware of all activities carried by members of the residents' group.
- Prepare agendas for meetings in conjunction with the Secretary.

Secretary

The Secretary's job is to keep all members of the residents' group informed of all activities and planned initiatives. The Secretary must also ensure that local residents are aware of and can be involved in the activities of the residents' group.

The Secretary's main duties include:

- Locate and book premises for the meetings.
- Consult with the Chairperson for the agenda for the next meeting.
- Prepare all the papers for the meeting, i.e. minutes of last meeting and all correspondence dealt with since.
- Taking minutes of meetings.
- Letting people know where and when the next meeting is and the topics of discussion.
- Writing and receiving letters on behalf of the residents' group.

The Secretary is usually the first line of contact of any residents' group, and it is useful for him / her to keep up-to-date records on:

- A membership list with names, address, telephone numbers and email addresses.
- All dates of meetings.
- Any useful contacts and addresses i.e. the telephone number for Sanctuary, officers, local councillors, etc.

The Secretary (or in absence a nominated person) takes minutes of all residents' group meetings and it is important that all minutes are kept.

Treasurer

Should the residents' group decide to handle money, the Treasurer would be for managing the finances and ensuring their safe keeping and transparent accounting.

Some banks offer accounts for small charitable organisations and will, therefore, assist with guidelines on correct cash handling; information can also be found on the Charity Commission website. The amount of work involved will vary according to the size of the residents' group and the amount of money you receive and spend, but the principle duties are the same. The Co-Regulation Team can provide the names of some banks that offer this facility.

Sanctuary, however, will not be responsible for the loss of any monies held and will not hold money on anyone's behalf, you should therefore, thoroughly consider this option before deciding whether to hold cash or not.

If you do choose to hold money, then any formal recognition of your residents' group by Sanctuary would involve ensuring that your constitution covers certain functions; some of these are listed under:

- Opening a bank account in the residents' group's name.
- Paying money received into the bank, keep a record of money received and issue receipts.
- Paying bills and keeping record of money spent.
- Keeping an account book and petty cash book.
- Preparing financial statements for the committee and for the AGM.
- Signing of cheques. It is usual to agree in the constitution that two out of three officers handle the funds.
- Making arrangements for the seamless change of treasurer should they wish to step down or move away.
- Making arrangements for the correct disposal of funds held should the group close.

Arranging a meeting

The Agenda - An agenda is a way of informing everyone what is going to be discussed at the meeting and in what order. The agenda should contain the name or the proposed name of the residents' group, the date, time and venue of the meeting and a list of items that you will be discussing. (Information on creating an agenda is attached at **appendix three**).

The Meeting

Meetings should be interesting and enjoyable. Knowing who everyone is helps, so make sure people introduce themselves. Encourage members to use simple language rather than jargon and abbreviations, as this can make people feel left out and may prevent them from contributing. Chairs are responsible for ensuring that everyone has an opportunity to speak and that their contribution is valued.

Throughout the meeting there should be someone taking notes (the Secretary), just the key points of what is being said.

These notes need to be written up into minutes. The minutes record what happened at the meeting, what actions were decided upon and who is responsible for carrying them out. The minutes should be made available for the whole neighbourhood or scheme to read. For further guidance, see 'The Minutes' in the next section.

Formal groups should have an Annual General meeting and generally a minimum of three other meetings in one year; whilst social groups may meet monthly formal groups need to consider a longer space between meetings in order to let any action that they have commissioned take place.

Minutes

Minutes are written notes made as a record of what happened at a meeting.

They show:

- Where / when the meeting took place.
- Who was present and any apologies.
- The decisions that were taken and who was going to carry out the proposals.
- Notes of the discussions, and opinions raised at the meeting.

Tips for good minute taking:

- Gain an understanding of the meeting. If you are familiar with the subject then the minutes will be easier to take.
- Leave plenty of preparation time before the meeting to set up where you are sitting, and plenty of time after the meeting to type up the minutes.
- Try to type up minutes while they are fresh in your mind.
- Know what not to minute, very long discussions may have a lot of repetition, not all information needs to be recorded word for word.
- Four eyes are better than two. Get someone else who attended the meeting to read through the minutes for accuracy, spelling and grammar.

Always use a consistent template for taking minutes (an example template is attached at **appendix four**).

Lastly, cash handling.

Cash handlers are in a vulnerable position and therefore acting in a transparent and accountable way is always required. Sanctuary tends to recommend the guidelines laid down by the Charities Commission and some of the key tenets are:

- Cash should not be amassed without a purpose. Sanctuary suggest that no more than £500 is owned by a group.
- Where money has been raised by the scheme as a whole, it is important to be clear what it was raised for and to restrict the spending of it accordingly. This money may not be used for the running of the group or for social purposes and spending it requires the agreement of the scheme as a whole.
- No cash should be held by an individual nor in petty cash tins. Always use the bank and have multiple signatories for spending it.
- In residential schemes the cash should be held in the scheme safe.
- A balance sheet should be presented every year for scrutiny by an independent person.

Sanctuary can help with all of this and provide training as appropriate.

3. Registration with Sanctuary Group

The best type of relationship with Sanctuary is to undergo our 'registration' process. The advantages of the group being registered is that you

- are entitled to use Sanctuary venues or facilities to hold your meetings
- are entitled to invite any relevant (local) Sanctuary member of staff along to a meeting, depending on a reasonable amount of notice being given and the individual staff member's availability.

- are entitled to apply for funding from either of our 'Money-box' or 'Grand-ideas' initiatives, details of which can be found on our website under:

<https://www.sanctuary-housing.co.uk/community-investment>

- are also at liberty to request, through the Scrutiny team, resident training such as Chairs training, secretarial or treasurer training to assist you in the running of your group.

The registration process is annual, this way everyone can be sure that a group continues to deliver the highest standard of resident involvement and service improvement. Each year following registration you will be expected to send the Scrutiny team a copy of your constitution (which may have been amended), minutes of the AGM, financial accounts and a brief over view of achievements in the year. The Scrutiny team will probably request to attend and observe one of your meetings.

Registration is simple and involves providing evidence of the representative make up of your group, this can be done by demonstrating that all members of the scheme or neighbourhood were notified and invited to a meeting and evidence that the majority of residents voted in favour of starting the group. You will need to send in a copy of your constitution, membership list and a copy of the minutes of the most recent meeting.

You will then receive a letter confirming your registration or asking for further information.

What registration is:

The role of a formally registered residents' association is to act as representatives for their members, uphold the principles of equality and diversity and to create a positive working relationship

with Sanctuary and any other organisations.

should inform the staff member in what capacity they are speaking.

What registration is not:

Members are not allowed to seek preferential treatment in relation to the services that they receive nor to discuss specific service failures or complaints other than those that affect the scheme or neighbourhood as a whole.

Where a potential conflict of interest may arise, this should be clearly identified by the person concerned and when contacting the Association the individual

**Information Pack:
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Contact Information

Should you have any questions or queries you can either ask your scheme co-ordinator, Housing Officer or get in touch with the Scrutiny and Co-Production team on:

scrutiny@sanctuary-housing.co.uk

Telephone number 01905 334633