



COMMUNITY AMBASSADORS

RICHMOND UPON THAMES

How to be a Community Ambassador

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our guide for our local community ambassadors. Richmond Council has been supporting the development of Community ambassadors in the social housing stock in the borough for the last four years.

The project is all about working with the local landlords to deliver improvements, communities and ensure that residents are involved in making the decisions about what happens in their local area. Local councillors are on hand to support this work and can help resolve issues with council services.



We now have 24 ambassadors working across our main landlords, but we are always looking for more and there is always more to be done! So we have produced this guide to explain about the role, what is expected and the support you will receive.

If you are interested in getting involved then please do contact us at housingcommunityambassadors@richmond.gov.uk to find out more.

Over the last year we have raised over 150 communal repairs and working with the local landlords have had a real impact on the local environment. Our ambassadors are also playing a greater role in the Borough's Housing work and the Housing Associations' engagement work.

We hope that this will continue to see improvement in service delivery for residents over the coming years,

We look forward to working with you,

Yours Sincerely,

Cllr C Varley

Lead Member for Housing

Cllr J Millard

Deputy Leader and Lead Member
for Finance and Resources

OUR OFFER TO VOLUNTEERS

Introduction

The Community Ambassadors form a central part of the council's plans to drive up services and standards in social housing across the Borough.

We want to recruit residents who are keen to make a difference in their local area to get involved and to this end we have made the scheme as flexible as possible. The core responsibilities are an active involvement in local inspections and attendance at our Forum. Full support will be given throughout your time as an ambassador.

The project has space to include everyone who is interested – so please ask if you would like to get involved but might need some support.

If you sign up we will:

- Offer you full support in developing a relationship with your landlord and local councillors.
- Provide support and follow up on issues highlighted at local inspections.
- Provide training and advice on 'getting involved'; changes to social housing law, updates on the role of the Housing Regulator and other bodies involved.
- Pay expenses for Ambassador related activity.
- Offer you the opportunity to get involved in the Borough's other work.
- Support you to attend the Adult Health and Housing Committee on occasion.
- Run four community ambassadors Forum each year – to enable networking and information sharing between Ambassadors and Councillors. The Forums are an opportunity for you to learn from each other as well as share good practice going on around the Borough.
- Offer free membership to TPAS through the Council's membership.

In return, we expect from you:

- Attendance at your local inspection. These will be quarterly for our bigger estates and six-monthly for smaller areas.
- Attendance at our induction session and the Community ambassador Forum.
- Contributions to and involvement with other ambassadors through our Whatsapp group and other outlets that might be used.

Please note: that as we develop this scheme, we expect other opportunities to arise, and these will be offered across the Ambassadors on an equal basis.

Experienced ambassadors are happy to act as a 'buddy' to new recruits, if you would like this please ask and we will match you.

Any questions or problems

housingcommunityambassadors@richmond.gov.uk



ROLE PROFILE

Richmond Council is building a volunteer network of ambassadors across the social housing in the Borough to help strengthen our local communities and ensure that residents have a voice on the decisions that affect where they live. If you are interested in getting involved, and making a positive contribution to your community then why not sign up? It is a chance to have a say, meet new people and have a real impact on where you live.

As the project develops, we expect this guidance to change and will always be interested to hear what you and your colleagues think about the work you are doing.

Location

Your local area and across the Richmond borough.

Role summary

The main Housing Associations in Richmond have committed to support the recruitment of Community Ambassadors who will help to bring about resident led improvements in their area. The role is about improving communal areas and communities, not taking up personal issues or cases.

With guidance from the Community Ambassador Project officer, the community ambassador will be able to work with the Housing Association to undertake estate inspections and be able to monitor the completion of repairs and estate improvements.

You will also be able to get involved in activities that are important in your area and you will get support from the Council and the local landlords. This is not about the Ambassadors sorting everyone's problems, but helping the landlords develop the communities on their estates.

You will be invited to an Induction session where you will have the chance to decide if you would like to sign up.

Key role of the Ambassadors

- Helping the council and the Housing Associations develop engagement across the Borough so that the residents' voice is heard in decisions that affect their community.

- Working with the Council and the local landlords to help develop local activity which has local resident support. This could include - Creating an inclusive and inviting environment, inspiring residents to contribute ideas, working together towards improvements to the physical environment.
- Attend and feedback at the 3-monthly forum with other Ambassadors
- Acting as the residents' voice in estate walkabouts.

Skills/Abilities/Knowledge required

- Good listening, communication and interpersonal skills
- Some basic IT skills.
- An interest and enthusiasm in improving your area – training and support will be given to allow you to build on your enthusiasm for where you live and the wider Borough.
- Happy to work as part of a Team -and support colleague ambassadors.
- Self-sufficient and can work independently, but feel confident to ask questions should the need arise

Training

You will be supported in making the most of the role.

We will provide some training, and the council will work with you and the landlords to make sure the training is relevant and effective.

Training will be delivered in a variety of ways that is useful for the Ambassadors.

We would encourage everyone who gets involved to attend our induction session.

Time requirement

The time you spend on your role as Community Ambassador will depend on the amount of time you can give. But we do hope that interested people will be able to attend the initial training and do at least one estate inspection a quarter.

Length of commitment

Because this role is about building and developing relationships with residents, Councillors and Housing providers it is hoped that anyone signing up will join for a minimum six month commitment.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM AN ESTATE INSPECTION

What does being involved in an estate inspection mean?

A major part of the Community ambassador's role is to take part in regular inspections of your estate or the area where you live.

This will be organised by our project officer with the support of local HA staff. Local councillors and the Lead Member for Housing at Richmond will be invited to take part.

At the inspection we will walk the area/ estate and agree the Top 10 issues the Landlord and Council need to take away.

We will agree a time for a return visit to check on progress. This will usually be between three and six months depending on the nature of the repairs and the size of the area.

We will also agree when the Landlord is going to feedback on progress – but feel free to check in with them on how things are going. This is useful particularly for bigger repairs which may take some planning.

And do keep an eye on progress in between inspections!

But always remember: it's not your job to direct how work is done. And we don't deal with repairs inside a resident's home in this scheme.

Over time as repairs get completed, we will work with you to look at community improvements that the landlord and/or the council might be able to support.

Any questions or problems

Housingcommunityambassadors@richmond.gov.uk

HOW ARE HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS REGULATED?

Introduction

Since 2023 and the passing of the Social Housing Act all social housing landlords have been regulated by the English Housing Regulator. There are some exemptions for landlords with a small amount of stock, but all the landlords we deal with fall under this regulation.

This has the positive effect of ensuring consistency in regulation, but depending on the Regulator's resources may mean some HAs are not inspected for many years.

The method

The method that the Regulator will use to assess landlords' performance will be to assess how they are doing against the Regulator's standards. They will also liaise with other bodies like the Housing Ombudsman.

The standards fall into two areas:

1. Economic Viability.
2. The consumer standards.

The Consumer Standards are the new provision and for the purposes of the Community Ambassadors' work are the most important. However, as an active resident within your association you may wish to look at all the Standards. The standards have been well trailed and consulted on.

The Consumer Standards

1. The Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard

This standard includes the requirement for all Social Landlords to conduct the Tenant Satisfaction Measures survey each year.

It also details what Associations should be doing in regard to: Engagement with tenants; communication; complaints and performance information.

2. The Neighbourhood and Community standard

This standard makes it clear that “providers must cooperate with partners” and support local partnership arrangements.

It also has a specific provision on how providers tackle ASB and Domestic abuse.

3. The Safety and Quality Standard

This standard details what a provider must do to ensure they have ‘quality’ homes.

1.4 - States that providers must provide for ‘effective, efficient and timely repairs.

It also covers Health and Safety and adaptations.

4. The Tenancy Standard.

This standard explains what a provider must do to allocate their home fairly and appropriately.

The Code of Practice

The regulator has produced a Code of Practice which explains how they will assess the standards when it comes to inspection. They have not been proscriptive in how they expect the Standards to be met. This means each provider is free to meet the standard in a way that suits them.

However, the regulator is clear that any claims will need to be backed up with evidence on how they have been met.

The details of the Standards, the Code of Practice and the results of recent inspections are available from: www.gov.uk/government/publications/consumer-standards-code-of-practice

The Regulators website is available via www.gov.uk

Other Standards -

The Economic Viability standards cover -

- Rent
- Value for Money
- Governance and Financial viability

These standards have existed for some time. The Rent standard covers all providers – and the second two cover only HA's - because Local Authorities have different governance structures.

The English Housing Regulator does not have any powers to assess the provision of service for leaseholders.

Any questions or problems

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SETTING UP A RESIDENTS GROUP

Introduction

During the COVID lockdown many community groups stopped operating and unfortunately many landlords have been slow to reinstate face-to-face and community meetings.

However, it remains the case that a local group working on behalf of all your neighbours can be the best way to get things done. Resident associations can ensure that everyone living in a defined area feels involved in the local decision-making process.

Getting a group started

There are some rules that any successful association needs to abide by. You should also check with your landlord – they may have expectations for any group.

1. The Association must be open to all. It does not mean that everyone must join or be active. But everyone in the area should feel able to join.
2. The Association should adopt a constitution. This document lays down the rules by which the Association operates.

This should include:

- How the officers are elected and for what period.
- How often the association will meet – and how often in person/hybrid.
- Opening a bank account and how it is governed.
- Setting a membership fee.
- How activity and spending will be reported.
- The Association's area of operation.

TPAS: www.tpas.org.uk have lots of good advice on these issues.

It can seem unnecessarily bureaucratic to do all this. But, if you decide to open a bank account, the bank will expect to see a constitution and if you ever decide to apply for external funding the local authority and any other body usually only fund constituted bodies.



The constitution should include:

- How the officers are elected and for what period.
- How often the Association will meet and how often in person.
- Opening a bank account – signatories etc.
- Setting a membership fee.
- The area the Association will be active in.
- What will happen if the Association is wound up.

First job as a group

The first job of any steering group is to test support and what the issues are.

Do this by talking to people where they gather – the playground, car park, school gates etc?

Have some idea of what you think the issues are:

- Repairs?
- Green spaces?
- Kid's activities?
- Parking?

Don't be put off if there is a lot of cynicism, unfortunately many people don't believe anything will change. But it is true that a group of people can be an effective way of getting things done.

Once, you've done this, it's time to call a meeting. Try and do this face-to-face if you can but more people are used to online meetings these days.

Meeting

At your first meeting it's fine not to do the 'formal stuff'. But have a discussion, seek out other volunteers and decide what your Top three priorities are. Set a time for a launch of the Association.

Invite your landlord to this meeting, and if you haven't already told them what you are doing. You want to be doing this in partnership with your landlord. If they have an engagement team, they should be able to help – book a room, get your message out etc. They might even have a specimen constitution you could use.

Always set yourself realistic targets, new lights in a stairwell should be doable in the first few months, but a new Community centre will take longer.

Once you've got something underway it's a good time to launch your group with a formal meeting. Always invite the landlord and your local councillors.

Plan to

- Elect officers.
- Adopt a constitution.
- Set the membership fee.

Make sure there is lots of time to tell people what you've been doing, and what your plans are.

Finally, always leave a meeting with an upbeat message for the future!



RUNNING A SUCCESSFUL COMMITTEE

If you decide to establish a Group, you will need a committee to run things.

The committee is usually made up of people who have a bit more time but everyone who can contribute in this way is performing a valuable service.

There are four main roles in any committee. These are very short profiles which cover the main points of the roles.



- 1. The Chair:** Leads the association and controls the meetings that the Association holds. They are usually the public face of the Association, and it is their job to ensure that everyone feels involved and that new members feel welcomed and supported.
- 2. The Secretary:** Coordinates the association; takes minutes at meetings, prepares the agenda in partnership with the Chair. They usually keep records of any actions – ensuring the Association does what it has agreed to do. They deal with any correspondence – including emails the Association receives.
- 3. The Treasurer:** Deals with the finances – keeps a record of outgoings, makes sure people are paid their expenses etc Prepares an annual report for members.

If you have enough volunteers then you might want someone to deal with membership and recruitment or promote your work through social media.

Through all this its important to remember that you are a Team. It's everyone's responsibility to ensure that all the work gets done.

CONTACTS

Community Ambassador

housingcommunityambassadors@richmond.gov.uk

Housing Association partners

(Usual Opening hours - Monday to Friday 9am-5pm)

Richmond Housing Partnership

8 Waldegrave Road,
Teddington,
TW11 8GT

0800 032 2433

MTVH

52, London Road,
Twickenham,
TW1 3RP

0300 456 2929

(**Please note:** you need to make an appointment before visiting MTVH)

L&Q

Head Office,
29-35 West Ham Lane,
Stratford,
E15 4PH

0300 456 9998

(**Please note:** you need to make an appointment before visiting this office. BUT the local office on Richmond Hill is open regularly and you should try there first)

PA Housing

Case House,
85 High Street,
Walton-on-Thames,
Surrey, KT12 1DZ

0300 123 2221