

“Warmth, efficiency and flexibility”¹

Resource Centre support for resident involvement,
April 2021 to September 2022

Responsive, reflective and practical integrated support

As council Residents Associations across the city have emerged from Covid the Resource Centre has been there with our unique combination of services to offer the support they need, when they need it, using methods that are adapted to each situation and each group of people.

Resident activists have continued to use us throughout the pandemic because:

- ◆ We are easy to get in touch with—our phone line has been open four days a week, consistently without a break.
- ◆ They can phone up, drop in or book an appointment when it suits them. We build long-term relationships of trust so they can always speak to someone they know and who knows them.
- ◆ We have a consistent group of staff with a wealth of collective experience and skills.
- ◆ We provide practical, focused and concrete help and advice.
- ◆ We are very good at listening, reflecting, discussing an issue, in order to provide the support that people actually want.
- ◆ We are independent, so our focus is on understanding what residents want to say or do and supporting them to follow this through.
- ◆ All our services are interrelated and connect seamlessly together
- ◆ Our support for Residents Associations is integrated into our work with all the other community organisations in the city.

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¹Feedback from Nettleton & Dudeney Tenants’ Association, March 2022: “Very many thanks for all you’ve done & are doing at the Resource Centre. I’ve perhaps said it before, but your warmth, efficiency and flexibility made & make a huge difference.”

Supporting Associations to re-emerge

Between April 2021 and September 2022 we worked with 39 different residents' groups across the city.

After the lockdowns of 2020, this was a period in which it often felt like people had just had enough. They felt more isolated, less effective and frustrated about what was happening in their areas. At the same time, they were grappling with ever-changing regulations and how they applied to community activity.

We provided the following support for Residents Associations:

18 accounts examinations

Our practical and responsive service enabled treasurers to keep their accounts in the format that best suits them, to bring their paperwork to us, and to end up with a clear balance sheet to share with their Associations that fully described their financial activity and situation.

75 support and advice sessions

At the core of our service is our relationship with Associations. They trust us to listen, reflect and respond to whatever issue they bring to us. This can be an unplanned chat while they are using another service, some advice by phone or Zoom, or a booked appointment where the group has extended dedicated time from a member of staff.

As Associations began to re-emerge and re-engage we were consistently available, four days a week, to offer the support that residents needed, when they needed it, in the way that best suited them. This ranged from IT support to writing up minutes, from talking through an issue to filling in an online bank account form, from planning a garden party to thinking about committee roles or meeting structures.

181 pieces of print and design for residents' groups

This ranged from simply printing flyers or posters that a group sent by email, to the full drafting, design and printing of newsletters. We adapted to the needs and skill levels of each group to make sure they ended up with the printed materials they wanted and needed.

99 design, print and mailing tasks for the Community Engagement Team

Our close relationship with the Community Engagement Team meant we were able to support them by sending out mailings, collecting and collating information, drafting guidance and producing printed materials. This helped them to continue their essential role during Covid.

Support for 28 Resident Only meetings

Over the last 18 months we have supported residents to move their area meetings from Zoom to in-person and hybrid meetings. There were challenges as everyone adjusted to the changing situation, but we were there to provide both technical support and guidance to ensure everyone could participate. At the same time, we continued to support the resident chairs and the meetings to collectively discuss issues and put them forward to Area Panels for consideration by officers and councillors.

Online guidance

Our website guidance gave straightforward information on government restrictions, updated as changes happened, written specifically for organisers of community activities. We produced a sample covid risk assessment, guidelines for managing a group's money in an emergency, information on working online and advice about how to conduct hybrid meetings.

An integrated seamless service

Our integrated service meant that residents moved seamlessly from one to another, often without even noticing that they had done so. For example, when typing up some meeting minutes, we might have a conversation about a particular issue and how to move it forward, or look up what was discussed at the Area Panel; an Association might drop in to pick up their newsletters and take the opportunity to discuss an event they are planning and what regulations they need to follow.

See pages 7-10 for a summary of the work we did for each Association.

"The minutes for East are really good, concise, accurate and to the point. Wish you could come to all our meetings!"

Alan Clarke, Craven Vale

Case study: Resident only meetings

The Resource Centre has supported tenants' involvement in city-wide Council consultation structures since 1989. Our involvement has always been at the request of residents, who know and trust us through their long-term experience of working with the Centre.

Our secretarial support for the Resident only meetings is two-fold:

- ♦ to help residents put forward the issues that concern them as clearly and effectively as possible and
- ♦ to help individuals develop the skills they need to chair and run meetings.

Organisation of the meetings and writing the minutes is just part of this. We talk through the agenda and the issues being raised with the chairs, help them to think through how to make the meetings more effective, and support them to build their own skills. By having the same worker doing this over many years we bring our knowledge and experience of each Association and discussions that have happened over time. This enables us to provide a wealth of support with a light touch, that residents can trust and rely on.

"All of the background organisation is done so smoothly and efficiently by the Resource Centre, I never have to worry about whether things have got done or not. If there are last minute changes, or something new comes up, I know they will always help me out quickly and cheerfully."

Muriel Briault, West co-chair

Listening to residents: our 2022 research interviews

To inform our work with residents we conducted a research study in early 2022². This deepened our understanding of how active Associations still were; how they were preparing to emerge from Covid; and what support they needed. It also gave us some valuable insight into:

- ♦ how residents see their involvement; and
- ♦ their role in improving their areas and strengthening their communities.

All community activity has been severely impacted by Covid³. For Residents Associations the impact has been particularly great. At the Resource Centre we have seen this in our work with Associations and residents across the city. It is our experience that they have struggled disproportionately as compared to other community organisations because:

- ♦ BHCC Residents Associations are based in communities which have experienced a significant reduction in overall income during the pandemic. Those who were already struggling financially were the most impacted and household debt increased.
- ♦ Associations historically rely on personal contact in preference to online communication. This ranges from bumping into neighbours on the street to meeting in-person in free or affordable local venues. Although there has been a small shift to online communication, the use of posters and flyers is still the central tool used to advertise meetings or other activities.
- ♦ Many of the core activists are pensioners, disabled, or surviving on very low incomes themselves.
- ♦ Many Associations were not able to make the shift to online working during lockdown—they just didn't have the technology, internet access or acquired skills to be able to do so.

These four factors combined to severely disrupt Resident Association activity across the city. Some put a lot of effort into continuing in whatever way they could, some effectively closed down, and some changed direction for a couple of years to respond to the pandemic, eg Craven Vale Community Association expanded its Food Bank and provided a tremendous service to its community.

²A fuller analysis of this research project is included as an appendix, from page 11 of this report

³See our report at <https://resourcecentre.org.uk/about-us/the-work-of-the-resource-centre-and-our-member-groups-in-2021-22/>

In this context, whilst everybody was still adapting to change and facing new challenges, our interviews deepened our understanding of why residents get involved (and stay involved) in their Associations. A key motivation is wanting to improve their area and make a difference, but having an Association which is friendly, mutually supportive, and makes people feel they are needed and useful is the foundation that makes this possible.

We also learnt more about what makes an Association successful and able to make things happen. Meetings, estate inspections and relationships with officers and councillors were universally seen as important, but social activities, projects that get people doing something together and some thorough research and organisational skills clearly make a big difference. Interviewees saw their work with other community groups as complementing and integrated with their Residents Association roles.

Our other key take-away from the interviews was that residents value having access to an independent person they can have an informal chat with in confidence, who they know and trust.

This process of listening, discussing, reflecting and offering practical support is at the core of everything we do.

“What I love about the Resource Centre is that I can pick up a phone and talk to someone straight away. I know you will help us and take the time to talk things through with us. It’s a lifeline”.

Heather Hayes, Coldean Independents

Case study: Essex Place

As we emerged out of lockdown, Essex Place residents were keen to get their community room up and running again. Before they could reopen they needed to think through how they could run the room safely in a situation where Covid safety precautions still needed to be taken.

“We really wanted to be getting together again,” said Linda King “but it felt like there were lots of blocks in our way and we weren’t quite sure how to move forwards. It was a bit frustrating. Then I got in touch with the Resource Centre—they’ve done loads for us over the years—and asked if they could help us find a way through. One of the things they did was show us how to carry out a risk assessment—it turns out this was much more practical and straightforward than we’d thought. They helped us write this up and we were one step closer to opening up.”

The committee also needed to have policies in place to make sure the community room was accessible and welcoming to everyone. The Resource Centre worked with five members of the Friendship Club and a representative from the Residents Association to put together an Equality and Diversity policy.

“We understood what you were saying,” said Linda. “You put it in a way that was easy to understand and helped us to see where we’d been going wrong. You started where we were at and made it easier to understand things that hadn’t been very clear before.”

The final strand was some practical organisation. The Resource Centre produced new booking forms and hire agreements, sign-in sheets and flyers. With all this in place, the community room was on its way.

Listen—discuss—listen again: Our resident-centred approach

When someone first comes to the Resource Centre they are often unsure of the help we can provide. We make them a cup of tea, show them round and have an informal chat. Taking the time to make these personal connections gives residents the confidence to come to us and know they will be listened to and taken seriously.

Conversations often start with a random thought or a moan, but this can evolve into a clearer idea of the issue they are concerned about and some practical ways they can start to address it.

We are a small team that works well. So whoever opens the door or answers the phone will know the resident, their Association, the key local issues and some of the history. They will know about other organisations in the area, what they have been doing and how they relate to each other.

When someone comes in for a chat, whether it is a planned appointment or an ad hoc contact, we start by listening to what they are saying, maybe ask some reflective questions, check that we understand what they are asking for, give advice which is specific to their question, and work through the issue with them. This can change a very daunting issue into a friendly and productive conversation.

Support through a period of change: Pause—review—plan—move forward

Many Associations have had to deal with big changes in what they do and who does it over the last few years. For some this has been directly related to the pandemic, for others it may have happened anyway, but the conditions and stresses of Covid have made it slower, more complex and more difficult. Each of these situations has needed a tailored response, because each group works in a different way and the people involved have different aims, experience and skills.

Case Study: Bates Estate

Bates Estate Residents Association lost its key activist and coordinator, Terrence, in the summer of 2020. He had been the driving force behind the Association for many years and was Chair of the North Area Residents meetings. He had always put in a tremendous amount of work and left a big gap to be filled. The Association became inactive, but the Resource Centre continued to have contact with one of the committee members, Peter, offering support and linking him in with North Area Residents meetings.

As a new committee emerged in early 2022 with support from the Community Engagement Officer, we worked with them to develop their constitution and meeting rules. We gave advice about chairing meetings, printed publicity materials for meetings and their jubilee event, and produced ID badges. We are currently helping them through the process of accessing their old bank account. Each interaction with them can involve a range of different issues or tasks. For example, the new chair popped in recently to update us on the slow progress with their bank account, introduce us to a new committee member and request an ID badge. The group is clearly growing in strength and confidence.

The Chair, Ian, said: "It was great to have someone who sat down, worked everything out with us and helped us to talk to the right person at the bank. Thanks to the Resource Centre for all their hard work helping us out. We just wish we had come here sooner"

Case Study: Ingram Crescent

Things were changing at Ingram Crescent RA. Some committee members had moved out of the area, others wanted to step back after several years of involvement. There was a question mark over the future of the Association—would new people step forward?

The committee had been getting practical support from the Resource Centre over many years and gave us a ring to talk through some options. They decided they wanted to relaunch the Association as a Community Group, with a broader and more open remit.

There were practical jobs the Centre supported them with on the way—drafting a new constitution, planning a relaunch meeting, publicity and social events. Gradually, a new group of people started to come together, residents who hadn't been involved before and were keen to get going.

Together with their local Community Engagement Officer, three of the new group came into the Centre to find out how we could help. We helped to plan their AGM and discussed ideas for involving people in the group, with the emphasis on bringing together everyone's knowledge and skills. We produced eye-catching publicity for the AGM and a large interactive poster to collect ideas at their next social event.

A well-attended AGM in September 2022 elected a new committee. For many of them, it's their first involvement with a community group. The Centre is giving support around how to spread the work load and get things done together, as well as training on keeping accounts and chairing.

"The Resource Centre have been so helpful to me as a new Committee member. It's great that I can ring up and talk to someone straight away about any issues or concerns I might have – they always listen and have helpful advice. I loved their design for our AGM flyer, and it's amazing that you can just ask for a poster and right away it's done!" (Elle)

Ready to respond with practical support

Sometimes people just want something simple and straightforward. They want to know that the help they got last year (or three years ago before the pandemic) is still available now. They want a quick, clear response and to be able to trust the advice they are getting.

Case Study: St James's House Community Association

Saint James's House Community Association contacted us in the summer of 2021 to request an examination of their accounts for the last three years. Once this was all done and up to date they asked for advice on what precautions they should take to run their AGM in person, how to do a Covid risk assessment and how to run a hybrid meeting. We printed their AGM flyers and they hired our Meeting Owl, projector and PA for their AGM in November of 2021.

On receiving his examined accounts, Chris Row said we had provided an *"Exceedingly good service. Rapid, thorough and extremely friendly."*

Being there when things are difficult

Running a Residents Association isn't all plain sailing. Often people with very limited resources are having to deal with difficult situations. Sometimes there are disagreements, different points of view, or conflicts. Volunteers can feel criticised by people in their area or others in their Association. Once this happens it can take a lot of time and energy to resolve the problem and get back to working positively. In this situation residents need someone independent who will listen to them, understand their point of view and help them look at possible solutions. This year, as always, we have worked with several Associations who were facing difficulties or conflicts. In some instances this has just required one conversation, or a series of conversations. In others it has been an extended process over several months, undertaking a range of different tasks to address the issue and get things back on track.

Conclusion

The last 2½ years have laid bare the challenges for Residents Associations in areas that are poorly resourced and have a high proportion of households living on very low incomes. They have also shone a light on people's determination to continue to come together to make things better. Having practical and straightforward support makes it possible for this to happen.

Throughout the pandemic the Resource Centre has continued to be available to listen to residents, respond to their requests and provide tailor-made support as and when it is needed.

We are aware that this period of change isn't yet over. Whilst some Associations are almost 'back to normal' others are still dormant and it isn't clear whether they will be able to restart or not. At the same time, lots of the amazing initiatives that sprung up during the early days of covid are still going, addressing the needs in their communities caused by reduced incomes, increasing prices, mounting household debt and poor health outcomes. Many Residents Association members are also involved in these other projects, which are facing volunteer fatigue and reduced funding options.

We will continue to be available to support Residents Associations and other grassroots groups in areas of social housing, just as we always have. We will continue to listen to what they need and plan to move onto the next stage of our research interviews to deepen our understanding of how groups work and what they need.

Summary of our work with Associations

April 2021 – September 2022

Albion Life

- ◆ Examination of Accounts May 22

Ardingly Court Residents Association

- ◆ Examination of Accounts July 21.
- ◆ Printed EDB consultation letters and information; event notices Aug 21.

Bates Estate Community Association

- ◆ Meeting with new secretary and CEO to talk about how the RC can help and introduce them both to what we can do. May 22
- ◆ Discussion with secretary and chair about drafting a constitution, chairing meetings and meeting rules, followed up by email information. June 22
- ◆ Three sessions with group to clarify the status of their bank accounts with Lloyds, support the group to complete change of signatories paperwork following Terrence's death, and switch from a personal account to a community (business) account. Aug 22

- ◆ Printed agendas, minutes and meeting papers April 22, July 22; Jubilee event flyers May 22; lists of useful phone numbers May 22; draft constitution, rules for meetings and agendas June 22; Minutes Sept 22
- ◆ Designed and printed ID badges May 22; headed paper May 22; business cards July 22

Bevendean Bulletin

- ◆ Printed newsletter Nov 21, May 22

Bristol Estate Leaseholders and Tenants' Association (BELTA)

- ◆ Advice about requirements for Companies House submission for Community Interest Company. Drafted balance sheet for them to submit based on income and expenditure sheet they had compiled. July 22
- ◆ Printed AGM flyers and posters June 21; posters advertising mobile Covid unit Aug 21; nature posters Sept 21; Worry Tree café flyers April 22; large format 'what we've done' posters June 22.

Central Area Resident only Meeting

- ◆ Support for new Chair who was taking over as chair following the previous Chair's death. Went through the role, what we can do, things the meeting needs to sort out. July 22

Clarendon and Ellen Residents Association

- ◆ Printed and mailed out EDB review papers. July 21

Clarke Court Residents

- ◆ Advice on how to access mental health support & training for residents dealing with ASB. Oct 21
- ◆ Agreed to administer their EDB grant as they don't have a bank account. Set up a system that would meet the requirements of BHCC and the needs of the group. Aug 22

Coldean Independents

- ◆ Supported Chair to draft articles for the Coldean newsletter, listening carefully to what she wanted to convey and writing these up, for Summer and Winter 2021 plus Spring 2022.
- ◆ Designed and printed posters asking for gardening volunteers for Waldron Avenue planter and ideas for EDB bids Jan 22
- ◆ Supported group to communicate with the council regarding their concerns about the diminishing supply of council housing. This happened over four separate sessions, to map out the issues, think about how to express them, discuss at Resident Only meetings and discuss at a meeting with the Deputy Chair of Housing. April to Aug 22
- ◆ Support with computer skills and setting up an email account. May 22
- ◆ Designed and printed contact cards May 22
- ◆ Helped to draft EDB application. Aug 22

Coldean Residents Association

- ◆ Supported re-launch of Coldean newsletter with complete re-design, followed by layout, design and print for Summer and winter 2021 plus Spring 2022 editions.
- ◆ Worked with group on a fundraising project, over 8 dates starting in March 2021 - budgeting, planning, preparation, writing applications to Awards for All and Sussex Community Foundation. Work pending whilst group sorts out their bank account.
- ◆ Discussion on how group can cover the cost of their newsletter in light of increased costs for print and delivery. They do 3 issues per year. Went through BHCC application and gave suggestions about additional information to include. Aug 22

Conway Court Residents Group

- ◆ Zoom session with newly involved resident about starting a group just for Conway Court residents. Jan 22

Craven Vale Community Association

- ◆ Examination of Accounts June 21 and June 22
- ◆ Printed AGM flyers and posters July 21; flyers for 'welcome back to Craven Vale' week Aug 21; newsletters Oct 21 and November 21; ASB meeting and open meeting flyers February 22
- ◆ Printed newsletters April 22, May 22, July 22; Jubilee posters April 22; community garden questionnaires June 22

East Moulsecomb Tenants and Residents Association

- ◆ Designed and printed AGM notice Oct 21

Elwyn Jones Court Tenant Association

- ◆ Examination of accounts May 21 and March 22.
- ◆ Researched a list of suitable entertainers for social events. Sept 22

Essex Place—The Friendship Group and Essex Place Tenant Association

- ◆ Worked with 5 members of the Friendship Club plus a representative of the RA to discuss how the group ensure the community room is accessible to all and possible changes they could make. Followed by drafting of an Equalities policy and plans to make sure community room is accessible. June 21
- ◆ Talked through plans for a joint AGM and how to make sure all residents know how they can book or run activities in the community room and how to get support with running them. Feb 22
- ◆ Supported group to carry out a Risk Assessment, including what should be included and how to implement it, followed by drafting of the risk Assessment for the group. July 21
- ◆ Drafted a new booking form and hire agreement for the community room. Designed a new booking pack to include the booking form, hire agreement, risk assessment and Equality & Diversity policy. Printed sign-in sheets and QR code poster. Aug 21
- ◆ Drafted, designed and printed: letters to residents about the garden and posters about rubbish in the hallways; test and trace posters and sign-in sheets Aug 21; bingo leaflets November 21; bike shed flyers, letters and agreements March 22; and PCSO meeting flyers March 22

Friends of Hampshire Court

- ◆ Gave contact numbers for City Clean so they could resolve rubbish problems. Oct 21
- ◆ Held EDB grant on behalf of group as they haven't got a bank account July 21, Dec 21, April 22
- ◆ Printed list of EDB bids December 21; EDB forms April 22
- ◆ Typed up and printed EDB forms April 21, June 21, August 21

- ◆ Designed and printed: newsletter to go on noticeboards April 21, June 21, July 21, September 21, October 21, January 22; notice of meeting May 21; information notice August 21; EDB letters to residents March 22; EDB consultation posters April 22; Community table signs April 22; Newsletter posters April 22

Hereford Court Community Association

- ◆ Helped member to sort out problems with his tablet and email May 21, Sept 21, Aug 22.
- ◆ Designed and printed meeting notice September 21; AGM poster Oct 21
- ◆ Examination of Accounts November 2021.

Highcroft Lodge Residents Association

- ◆ Discussed plans to hold an AGM and how to ensure they are meeting all the requirements. May 21
- ◆ Provided email advice about organising a 'meet the neighbours' event in their garden, including legal requirements for amplified music, followed by phone advice on legal position if people bring alcohol to share. June – Aug 21
- ◆ Designed and printed: meeting flyers Feb 22; AGM flyers March 22; CCTV signs April 22; AGM notices May 22; minutes May 22

Hollingdean Residents Association

- ◆ Worked with group to write up the minutes of their meetings Oct 21, Dec 21, Jan 22 and Feb 22, April 22, May 22, July 22, Aug 22.
- ◆ Series of discussions about when and how to hold an AGM to consult on proposals for an EDB bid, re-start face-to-face meetings and consult on EDB proposals. Aug – Dec 21
- ◆ Tech support for laptop donated to the group by the Resource Centre: installing updates, doing scans, fixing Zoom etc. Jan 22
- ◆ Support to resolve access problems with group Facebook account. Jan 22
- ◆ Support with EDB bid for community garden. Jan 22
- ◆ Three separate discussions with the new treasurer about information needed to open a bank account (constitution, minutes of meeting where decision made, names and details of three signatories). Followed by work on Zoom to complete online application to Lloyds. Helped signatories to upload signatures. Jan – Aug 22
- ◆ Designed and printed: contact cards April 21, Sept 21, Oct 21, Dec 21; AGM flyers and agendas Oct 21; EDB bid forms Oct 21; minutes and meeting flyers Dec 21, Jan 22, Feb 22; Dunster Close Community Garden consultation flyers and forms Feb 22; parking flyers March 22; AGM agendas, papers and reports March 22; minutes and agendas April 22, May 22, July 22; flyers for public meeting April 22, May 22, June 22, July 22; meeting cancellation posters July 22.

Holmstead Residents Association

- ◆ Phone discussion with Chair about vandalism of notices about the RA meeting, dealing with racism and anti-social behaviour and making changes to the group to help resolve this. June 21
- ◆ Designed and printed: posters, letters to residents and reminder cards for relaunch of Association June 21; consultation form for mural design July 21; letters and notices Nov 21

Ingram Crescent Community Group

- ◆ Discussion with West CEO's about possible ways of organising without officers and bookkeeping issues. Feb 22
- ◆ Discussion with secretary about options for how to change the structure of the group to make the organising roles less onerous, changes they might want to make, what they need to do, how we can help. This may include a new constitution and/or relaunch of the group. Feb 22
- ◆ Advice to group on new constitution. April 22
- ◆ Discussion on how to address childcare to enable one resident to participate more easily in the session. Sept 22
- ◆ Session with new committee and CEO. Discussed how RC can help them, talked about plans for AGM, mapped out flyers and posters. Discussed ideas for involving people in the group - large poster to collect ideas, simpler communication, emphasis on bringing together everyone's knowledge and skills. Sept 22
- ◆ Emailed action plan and task list from meeting, details of future support available from Resource Centre. Sept 22
- ◆ Examination of Accounts Oct 2021.
- ◆ Printed AGM posters, flyers and minutes plus information about EDB, ICRA and the green plan, plus the newsletter July 21; fundraising letter to local businesses August 21; Posters for garden party, August 21; AGM minutes and agendas Sept 21 and Nov 21; water butt posters Oct 21; Jubilee event posters April 22
- ◆ Designed and printed AGM flyers and posters, ideas poster and stickers Sept 22

Malthouse Court Residents Group

- ◆ Designed headed paper, Jan 22

Millwood Community Centre

- ◆ Met the new committee at the centre. Discussed support the Resource Centre can offer them. Provided advice about public liability insurance for hiring out to parties etc. Aug 22

Nettleton Court and Dudeney Lodge Tenants and Residents Association

- ◆ Following a referral from the Community Engagement Team, sent some information on the current state of play with community group bank accounts. Dec 21
- ◆ Examination of Accounts April 22.
- ◆ Layout work and print of newsletter May 21, Aug 21, Nov 21, Jan 22; meeting notices May 22.

North Portslade Residents Association

- ◆ Support to resolve issues they're having with bank accounts with advice to close dormant account and open a new one for the RA. May 21

Pankhurst Area Community Association

- ◆ Set up new accounts spreadsheet for 2021/22. Made amendments to the Resource Centre grant tracking system to help them track internal transfers more accurately and account for funds held within their account on behalf of groups.
- ◆ Printed newsletter Nov 21.

Philip Court Residents Association

- ◆ Designed and printed AGM flyers, Sept 22

Poplar Close Residents Association

- ◆ Discussion with local resident about restarting Poplar Close Residents Association. Offered follow-up support. Sept 21

Robert Lodge Community Centre

- ◆ Helped to draft a poster advertising the open day, then printed them. July 22

St James's House Community Association

- ◆ Advice about Covid 19 risk assessments and precautions to take for organising an in-person AGM. Oct 21
- ◆ Information about the meeting owl and how it can be used and how to run a hybrid meeting. Oct 21
- ◆ Examination of Accounts for 2018-19, 2019-20 and 2020-21 carried out Sept 21.
- ◆ Printed AGM flyers Aug 21; 'Who can help' posters Feb 22.
- ◆ Hired: meeting owl, data projector, screen, laptop and PA for meeting Nov 21; PA and parachute for event June 21 and June 22.

Sanders House Social Club

- ◆ Email conversation with Scheme Manager about the Social Club funds. Offered to do an independent examination and then give more advice, particularly about how to hold funds when account is closed. April 22

Sloane Court Social Group

- ◆ Advice over four sessions on how to close the Social Club whilst ensuring all procedures are correctly followed and any remaining funds are used appropriately. Aug 21
- ◆ Prepared draft agenda and notes on how to run a meeting of residents. Aug 21

Somerset Point Tenants Association

- ◆ Design and print of letters to residents about EDB and the garden April 21.
- ◆ Design and print of AGM notices and agendas July 21.

Warwick Mount Tenants Association

- ◆ Advice on refunding money to committee members. Dec 21
- ◆ Designed and printed letter to residents Nov 21.
- ◆ Examination of Accounts May 21

Wiltshire House Residents Association

- ◆ Designed and printed re-launch posters and flyers June 22; printed EDB consultation letters Sept 22

Woodingdean Tenants and Residents Association

- ◆ Examination of Accounts June 21.
- ◆ Designed, printed and packaged for distribution Newsletter June 21, Sept 21, Dec 21, Feb 22, May 22, Sept 22.
- ◆ Examination of Accounts June 22.

Woods House Residents Association

- ◆ Discussion and advice about the new community room. Included information about getting volunteers to help run breakfast/lunch club. April 22
- ◆ Went to coffee morning to discuss their community room and rebuilding after Covid. May 22
- ◆ Examination of Accounts June 22.

Woods House Social Club

- ◆ Examination of Accounts June 22.

Appendix: Analysis of research interviews

Residents' reps in Brighton and Hove: What do they do and what do they need?

In early 2022 the Resource Centre interviewed key activists from Residents Associations across the city. We aimed to understand how active Associations were; how they were emerging from Covid; and what support they needed.

We had in-depth discussions using broad open-ended questions, rather than a tick-box form. This was based on our experience that giving people space to have a chat means they will explain things in more detail, share concerns more candidly, and talk about those things that are difficult to pinpoint but are often very important once you identify them and draw them out.

The knowledge we gained during this research has helped us to support Associations more effectively over 2022.

The interviews helped us to learn more about why people get involved, what they get from it, and what things make it difficult. We also asked about the main issues Associations were facing, what helps them to make the changes they want to make and what the obstacles are. Finally we asked their views on the Resource Centre's services and what additional help or services they felt would be useful.

Key findings:

People get involved in Residents Associations because they:

- ✦ Want to get to know their neighbours
- ✦ Are positively encouraged by those who are already involved
- ✦ Are invited to participate by someone they know
- ✦ Want to improve their area and be proud of where they live
- ✦ Enjoy being part of a positive and friendly group that is doing something useful

Resident reps are usually active in many other groups

This provides:

- ✦ Opportunities to network and share ideas
- ✦ Sharing of knowledge and experience
- ✦ Added value to support that is given to individual activists
- ✦ Extensive local knowledge
- ✦ Stronger communities

The most effective strategies when trying to get problems resolved are:

- ✦ Talking to council officers that residents know and have an ongoing relationship with
- ✦ Working with councillors who are supportive
- ✦ Attending Residents meetings, Area Panels and city-wide involvement groups to identify common issues and get to know the officers responsible for dealing with them
- ✦ Estate inspections/walkabouts
- ✦ Getting local people together to do something positive
- ✦ Thinking outside the box and trying different strategies

Things that make it difficult to effect change are:

- ✦ Conflicts between individuals or within Associations
- ✦ Things moving very slowly
- ✦ Decisions not being implemented

Social activities and events are important because they:

- ✦ Bring people together and increase community cohesion
- ✦ Increase the network of contacts for the Association
- ✦ Provide activities that local people can afford

Support from the Resource Centre is useful because:

- ✦ It is good to talk through an issue or sound out a problem and think about what to do next
- ✦ Being listened to is an important part of the process
- ✦ Support is available when it is needed
- ✦ Residents appreciate help with communicating their ideas clearly
- ✦ The Accounts Examination service is supportive and straightforward

Why do people get involved?

One of the age-old problems we hear repeatedly is ‘people don’t want to get involved’, so we asked people why they **do** get involved. There were four very clear threads in what interviewees said. People get involved because they want to:

Get to know people in their area

Most of those we spoke to said they were new to the area, or had experienced a significant change in their life, that made them want to connect more closely with their local community and get to know their neighbours.

Make a difference to their local area so they can be proud of where they live

Respondents identified one or two issues that they cared about, that made them want to influence changes in their area. This provided impetus for them to go along to an event or meeting.

Once involved, the small changes they helped to make made a big difference to them. We heard phrases like: “I wanted to leave a legacy”, “I can look around and think: I did that”, “When doing things for other people you get a warm feeling”, “The occasional quick wins make you feel good”.

Feel that they are part of a friendly group

The personal connections people make at their first meeting/event are pivotal to their decisions to go back and get more involved.

Feel listened to and useful

When people went to their first meeting and felt that they were listened to and could make a useful contribution, it made them want to go back. This encouraged them to get more involved and think their contribution would make a difference.

The ecosystem of local community activity

Nearly all our interviewees are involved in other areas of community activity, consultation or representation. This ranged from helping with a volunteer café to being in a theatre group, from being a governor at the local school to sitting on an NHS Patient Participation Group, from local nature projects to lunch clubs, from local housing charities to the U3A, from being a church warden to a student union rep.

They all attend Resident Only meetings, Area Panels and some are involved in city-wide resident involvement groups.

This cross-fertilisation between groups adds experience and value to Resource Centre work with residents. They bring their skills and knowledge from other activities to their Residents Association, and equally the support and advice they get from the Resource Centre disseminates through the other organisations they participate in. As expertise organically moves from group to group the outcome often becomes greater than the sum of its original parts.

Alan: “When people come along to events, they get to know others and are more likely to get involved in the Association

Have found having a week of small events, as compared to one big event, is better for getting the community to gel.”

How does resident involvement actually change things?

Whilst Residents Associations all have a core role in their community, they are also unique entities that have evolved over time depending on where they are and the experiences and motivations of those involved.

The connection between groups is just part of this equation. It is underpinned by activists' involvement with others in their community. They know what the issues are because they live in the area and see what happens first hand. They see the positive things, but also the problems. The way in which they find out about local issues—often just through knowing other local people, being out and about, and talking to people—is central to this. Being identified as 'the person from the Residents Association' means they are regularly approached when people have problems they don't know how to resolve.

For many, social activities were seen as an fundamental part of this process—when people come along to a coffee morning or fun day they get to know others and talk about the things that matter to them, then they talk about what can be done about it.

This face-to-face contact is complemented by Facebook, WhatsApp, noticeboards, newsletters, email or phone contact and suggestion boxes.

Many take on a wider role by organising social events or kids' parties and running community gardens or other nature projects. They see the benefits as being twofold: a lot of people on estates are living on very low incomes that restrict their ability to take part, so these events give them a chance to go to something they can afford; they also bring people together and give them the opportunity to get to know each other and so increase community cohesion.

All Associations spend a significant amount of time addressing problems in their areas: upkeep of communal areas, repairs to people's homes, anti-social behaviour, parking, rubbish and recycling, unkempt gardens, security and grounds maintenance.

We asked what strategies or approaches they found most useful when trying to get problems resolved and found a common thread: being able to communicate with those who can get things done. This happens in several ways:

Relationships with key council officers

Over time residents reps get to know council officers and how to contact them. Actually knowing them and developing a dialogue was seen as far more effective than communicating with an unknown officer by phone or email.

Relationships with Councillors

Many Associations have councillors who provide useful support, especially when the established channels have been exhausted. They feel that councillors will be listened to and have the influence to get things done.

Ben: "We have a Facebook group that 65% of residents are on. We know this excludes some people so we also have noticeboards, but don't have enough time to go round posting stuff on them all the time.

Basically people are nosy—when things are happening on the estate or in the community room is a great way of getting to talk to people and engage with them."

Attending Residents meetings and Area Panels

These were seen as a really useful way to identify issues that are common to several areas, help officers to understand them more clearly, and for the council to take action to resolve them. They also help residents to become more informed about what is happening in other areas of the city. Several residents commented on the importance of having the Resource Centre to take the minutes, as an independent organisation which helps to clearly state the central problems being raised by residents.

City-wide resident involvement groups

These give residents a chance to get to know each other and officers. They provide a focussed way to look at specific problems or issues and enable residents to have an input into how they can be resolved.

Estate inspections

Residents value having the opportunity to take officers around the area, show them the issues and agree an action plan to resolve them. Several interviewees talked about how effective they are in ensuring the upkeep of local areas.

Other strategies

As respondents described the processes they go through, it became clear that a lot of thought and work takes place in the background, in addition to meetings and discussions with the council. This can be broadly described as:

- ✦ Getting local people together to do something

The solution to an eyesore might be a community garden, some public art or running activities to encourage positive use of a space. Dealing with Anti-Social Behaviour often requires local people to be persuaded to come forward with evidence or keep a diary. All of these take time to plan, organise and execute effectively and local volunteers are key to making them successful.

- ✦ Trying something different

Some issues are more complex to resolve and residents have to 'think outside the box' to find solutions. This can involve meeting with officers, councillors and/or other bodies to facilitate inter-agency working. It can also necessitate residents putting their heads together and coming up with alternative solutions that may not have been thought of or tried before. A lot of time commitment goes into this, with thorough research, investigating different ideas, explaining proposals in a clear and detailed way, and attending lots of meetings to turn ideas into reality.

Jason: “The Residents Only meetings and Area panel work as a good way to get issues resolved and make your voice heard.”

Tony: “The Task and Finish group felt useful because it was focused and time limited”

Muriel: “Our Councillor is brilliant. He means what he says and things get done when he asks for them.”

What are the obstacles?

We asked people what things made it difficult for them to make improvements and resolve problems in their area. Again, two common themes emerged.

Working together as a group can be difficult

Nearly everyone said they find it hard to get more people involved, particularly those outside the demographic of the existing Association, whether that be younger people or those from BAME communities. One respondent described the need to have people who are pro-active and have the drive to get things done, but that demoralisation can set in when things take too long causing these people to give up and leave.

Others talked about disputes and conflicts that arise between individuals who have been active in their Associations or within their community. This can make things unpleasant for other people and can take the energy away from the key purpose of the group. It became clear that, when this happens, Associations need support to resolve disputes so they can move forward and get back to what they really want to do. One interviewee described how it had taken two years to move their Association away from personal conflicts to a place where everyone gets on and works well together. This took a lot of time and tenacity with an emphasis on creating a sociable atmosphere where people could get to know each other and develop friendships.

It can be hard to get things done

Nearly everyone we spoke to expressed frustration that it takes a very long time to get anything done, from small issues that are perceived to be simple and straightforward, to bigger issues that are significantly impacting people's lives. Sometimes an agreement is made at a meeting with officers, after a long process of discussion, but then this isn't followed through and the agreed action doesn't happen.

Interviewees said that they often didn't feel listened to, so they have to elicit the support of officers or councillors to get things done. One respondent said they felt that the council treated residents as adversaries rather than people who have useful knowledge and skills that can help them to do their job.

They also said it can be really difficult to get hold of council officers, from a range of different departments, and that they often have to repeatedly send emails or make phone calls before getting hold of someone.

Why is the Resource Centre's support useful?

Interviewees talked about all the different Resource Centre services. The design, layout and printing service for newsletters, flyers and posters was described as speedy, helpful, efficient and affordable. The Accounts Examination service was clearly valued. Several groups had used the equipment hire service, with Chris saying: "It provides access to things, but also teaches us how to use them so increases our skills at the same time".

But, during our interviews it became clear that there is one thing residents value about the Resource Centre above all. They can have an informal chat, in confidence, with someone they know and trust. They can sound out a problem, go away and think about it or talk to others, then come back and discuss it again. They can do this when things crop up rather than having to wait a long time to get a response.

Sometimes, for residents, an issue can feel so big that it is hard to work out what the central problem is. Sometimes people just don't know what to do next, to try and make the change they want to see. In these situations they need more than an information sheet, training course or stock answer. They need space to be listened to, to work through an issue, or to look at it a different way. They need to think about all the small steps they can take and how to go about it. As part of this process they might need some practical support to write something in their minutes, a letter or email, or even some notes for themselves to help clarify what they are thinking.

Muriel: "When we ask for information, the Resource Centre always come up with what we need"

Looking to the future

We are very grateful to the residents who participated in these in-depth interviews. Their considered and detailed responses have added to our understanding of how Residents Associations work.

The insights gained from this research have given us a new perspective on ways to tackle the perennial issue of how to enable resident involvement. Turning the question from 'Why don't people get involved' to 'Why do they get involved?' is a way for both residents and Resource Centre workers to generate a fresh perspective.

Learning from other Associations

In responses there was an emerging theme around facilitating Resident Association activists to get together in different ways to discuss common issues. This already happens with the Resident Only meetings, but one respondent felt it would be useful to do this city wide, and another suggested local training sessions.

Help when it's needed

Residents found our question about what help people would need in the short to medium term quite difficult to answer. This reinforced our understanding of the way local resident volunteers work. It is not easy for groups to know what help they will want in the future. But, when they do need advice, support, a listening ear, some printing or some equipment, they need to be able to pick up the phone and get it.

The Resource Centre will continue to provide this responsive, flexible support and also to reflect and learn from groups as we work together.

Resource Centre services for Residents Associations

Design and Print

We can help with every stage of producing printed publicity, from drafting, through design, to finished product.

Equipment hire

Residents Associations are eligible to become Resource Centre members, giving 10% discount and advance booking for all our equipment for hire.

Accounting support

Free examination of accounts, training and advice on book-keeping, and ongoing support for treasurers. We can also hold funds for Residents Associations to enable EDB projects if there is no group bank account.

Advice and support

Associations are welcome to call us to ask a quick question, or arrange a longer advice session. We can meet on Zoom, face-to-face at the Resource Centre, or at residents' homes.

Resident Only meeting support

Secretarial support for the four area-based resident only meetings, and support for the elected resident Chairs between meetings.

info@resourcecentre.org.uk

01273 606160

www.resourcecentre.org.uk

Theresa: "You give us the opportunity to have an informal discussion. We can work through an issue or sound out a problem with someone we know and trust.

You provide a touch stone and a human resource, not an anonymous voice at the end of a phone."