

**it's**  
**MY**  
**life**



Guide to resident meetings

# Introduction

All residents should be offered the opportunity to meet regularly to talk about issues affecting them and their home. It is also important to involve and consult people in a way that best suits their communication needs and preferences.

This guide has been written following the It's My Life project in Brighton and Hove which trained service users with learning disabilities to support other residents to develop their own meetings.



# What is a resident meeting?

A meeting is a place for residents to talk together about where they live and how things are going. They should be a place where residents can express their views and these can then be acted upon so there is an ongoing commitment to developing the service with its residents at the heart of that process.

The word 'meeting' isn't always useful as it conjures up images of formal business meetings. Resident meetings do not have to be formal or long. The most important thing to remember is that residents must be meaningfully involved which means meetings need to be developed in a way that suits the communication methods, and preferences, of the residents. The

format will therefore be determined by residents. Some services may decide that meetings are not an appropriate way to involve the people they support. However, all residents can still be involved in developing the service they receive as everyone has some way of communicating their preferences.

In some services residents may also choose to opt for one-to-one meetings with a manager, instead of or as well as a residents meeting.

It is important that all services produce a statement about their particular approach to ensuring that residents' views are heard and acted on.



# The importance of resident meetings

The Government white paper 'Valuing People Now' makes it clear that service providers should be including service users in making choices about all aspects of their lives. It is therefore essential that resident meetings are seen as part of this process.

Residents have a right to give feedback about the service they receive and where they live, it is vital that they are aware of this and know that they will be listened to.

There are other benefits to holding meetings:

- They give residents a sense of control over where they live and the way they are supported
- Residents are able to speak out and give support to each other
- Meetings can help develop skills and confidence
- They are a good social opportunity
- Talking about issues can stop problems escalating

Above all, residents will be the best people to talk about the service they are receiving as 'experts by experience' and it is essential that their service reflects their preferences.



# Getting started

It is not difficult to get started. You could start off by getting some biscuits and asking everyone to sit round and talk to each other. Keep it informal with no pressure.

Some key things to consider:

## **Time, frequency and length**

Find a good time for everyone to meet. A regular time every week or two means that you can create continuity. And don't make the meetings too long!



## **Rules for meetings**

It is a good idea for the residents to make some simple rules which they all agree on. For example:

- Be friendly to each other
- Listen to each other
- Take it in turns to speak
- Everyone needs to be respected
- No one should 'talk down to' or laugh at anyone in the meeting
- Feel free to get up and walk around if you need to

It is important that everyone has a chance to make the rules and agrees to keep to them. This should be discussed at the first meeting and may need revisiting from time to time.

The staff supporting the meetings can be really helpful in role modelling positive and inclusive behaviour to ensure that everyone is treated in a respectful way and feels included. Also think about the use of visual aids to indicate whose turn it is to talk and to ensure everyone is in the habit of listening to each other and taking turns. For example, the use of something simple like a 'green card' to indicate who is talking can be an effective way to encourage everyone to take turns. You could also think about ways to encourage discussions to move on, such as having a bell that can be rung when members of the meeting feel it is time to move on.

Display the rules in every meeting as a reminder.

## Having a social element

Meetings work well if they are based around a shared social activity. You may want to think of alternatives to basing the meetings around food as this can be an issue for people with food addictions or behaviour only motivated by food. One service, where this was an issue, found a positive way around this by encouraging residents to bring fruit to share and try, or by making smoothies together. They even found that attendance at meetings improved.

## Making residents feel comfortable

Everyone should sit where they feel comfortable so they can feel as involved as possible.

Some services have found that it isn't feasible to get all their residents to meet together due to the difficult tensions that it creates. Instead they have developed one-to-one 'supervision' sessions so that the residents are still involved.

It is desirable to aspire towards having group meetings wherever possible, as well as 'supervisions'. In larger services it may be more appropriate to have more than one meeting.

## Using pictures

Pictures may aid a resident's understanding. Be consistent and use the same picture to depict a certain thing e.g. 'house' or 'meeting', and keep it simple.



# The agenda and preparation

## Continuity

Work with residents to develop a format that becomes familiar and accessible to them. This will build confidence which will improve the meetings.

It is important that the whole team take responsibility for supporting colleagues who facilitate the meetings.



- Agendas can be written on whiteboards or large paper sheets and added to over the week leading up to the meeting. Use pictures and photos to make them meaningful and accessible.
- Talk to the individual residents before the meeting to help them prepare.
- Resident meetings should be a standard item at team meetings so that everyone is aware of any issues.
- Team meetings should consider what items could go to the residents meeting.
- Team meetings also need to report back on any actions coming out of resident meetings. Even if a resident's suggestion or idea cannot be acted on, they need to be kept informed of the reasons why it cannot happen. Residents need to be able to see how their involvement is helping to develop the service.



# What to talk about?

If you are just starting to have meetings it is quite likely that it will take a while for residents to bring their own items and issues.

Have some topics that can be discussed which will help the residents get into the habit of meeting together.

These could be:

- Sharing **news** and looking at diaries.
- **Planning** social activities.
- Personal or service issues.
- **Choosing staff** for activities.
- Talking about any **concerns**.
- **Recruiting new staff.** They should be discussing what sort of person they would like when someone is leaving, or inviting candidates to their meeting.
- **Menu planning.**
- Discussing **house rules.** Issues

such as noise, communal areas and privacy.

- Learning about things such as **Fire Plans, Tenant Handbooks, accessible leaflets, safeguarding and how to make a complaint.**

Keep the agenda short - don't overload the residents - one item only may be appropriate, and it may be appropriate to talk about one issue over more than one meeting.

A simple agenda could look like this:

- The meeting starts with tea and biscuits
- We share our news
- We talk about things
- We finish the meeting and go home



# Recording

Keep a record of what is talked about at meetings so residents can see what decisions have been made.

There are a variety of different ways of keeping notes but it is probably useful to use a mixture of words and pictures/photos, using whatever means are most accessible to the residents.

Always try to involve the residents in this as much as possible. You could encourage the residents to draw pictures about what is being talked about, or what they have got from the meeting, and take photos of the meeting. A member of staff could then put this together with their notes and actions from the meeting to create a full record. This also means that residents who do not like speaking or are unable to speak can still be involved.

Experiment and see what works best. Use the same pictures for the same things each time.

Typed notes are much easier to read. Keep the notes in a place where everyone can look at them, maybe in a folder in the living room, not the top shelf in the sleep-in room!

Look at any action points from the previous meeting at the start of each meeting. This way the meetings will be connected and also give the residents a real sense of achievement.

Remember agencies such as the Care Quality Commission and Local Authorities will be looking for evidence that meetings are happening, so it is vitally important to ensure that all the hard work is recorded including what actions have taken place as a

consequence, or why an action could not take place.

Some actions may not be practical or achievable, however, residents still need to be made aware of any follow-ups - positive or negative.

It is very important that there is a link between resident meetings and staff meetings so that all staff are aware of what residents have been talking about and demonstrate a commitment to addressing any issues that have arisen.



# Supporting a resident to chair a meeting

Ideally, chairing will be done by the residents, although initially they may need support and guidance with this.

Make it clear whose turn it is to lead the meeting. They should then be supported to:

- Remind everyone of the rules.
- Remind everyone of the main things that were talked about in the last meeting and any actions that happened as a result.
  - Make sure everyone has a chance to say something and stop people interrupting each other.
  - Make sure people are clear on what is being talked about and that they know what things have been agreed.



Residents should be encouraged to take turns in chairing the meetings.

## Keeping regular meetings going

It is very helpful to do things in the same order each meeting but not to the point of being inflexible.

This does not mean you have to talk about the same things each time!

Get into the habit of having meetings at a set time and stick to a routine. It might help to put pictures up showing the running order of the meeting so that everyone can become familiar with the structure.

Staff should receive support from their managers through supervision to deal with any difficulties and challenges.

# Tips for staff supporting the meeting

Think about peoples' motivation for attending - maybe add a pleasant or fun aspect to some part of the meeting so it is more enjoyable. If in doubt keep it **social** and **short**. Meeting every 1 to 2 weeks is ideal as this makes it more immediate and relevant.

Have as many visual tools as possible at the meeting. If people have put items on the agenda to talk about, support them to bring items to the meeting to show the others. Support the residents to bring things of interest to the meeting.

Make sure that the same nominated staff facilitate the meeting each time. It should be no more than four people (ideally one or two), in order to allow for shift patterns and staff holidays. If more than one staff member facilitates

the meeting, make sure that roles are clearly defined.

Keep paperwork simple and to a minimum. Identify key action points. Show people their successes. If they wanted to change something about the house or the way something is done they need to know that the changes happened because they asked for it.

One important thing to remember is that progress can be slow. Services that have effective resident meetings have often taken a long time to make these something that the residents really engage with and small steps of progress are usually made over a long period of time.

Don't worry if you find that no big issues are coming out of the meetings

or that they repeat the same pattern every time. This can help to develop residents' confidence but may also be a good reason for keeping them fairly short.

## **Review progress over months and years - not weeks!**

Above all, be patient, be persistent, maintain continuity, keep meetings social, keep them short and keep a record.

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