



BETRA Tenant Management Organisation Board Members Handbook



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INTRODUCTION

Tenant management organisations (TMO) such as BETRA are legal bodies set up and run by tenant-led management committees. These committees, or boards, enter into a legal management agreement (contract) with the landlord – in our case Havering Council – and are paid annual management and maintenance allowances in order to carry out the management duties that are delegated to them.

Management of the Barnstaple Estate is a serious business. BETRA has some 216 properties on the estate. But these are more than just properties, these our people's homes, and this estate is our community. So becoming a BETRA board member is a big deal. It's a chance to make a contribution to the development of our community, a chance to have your say when big decisions need to be made; a chance, in short, to make a difference.

With opportunities come responsibilities. Board members are accountable for the decisions they make and the expenditure they oversee. This booklet has been designed to give new and existing board members an overview of their role and responsibilities. We also hope it will help residents appreciate the work that board members do, and perhaps even inspire some of you to think: "I'd like to do that... Maybe I could become a member of the board?!"

Ken Howson,
Chairman of BETRA

BACKGROUND

BETRA was formed in April 2004, when a group of residents decided it was time to apply for the right to manage their estate as a TMO. This was no easy task and it took hard work and many hours of training before the group was deemed fit and ready, by both the relevant Government department and Havering Council, to take on the responsibilities of a TMO. Ever since BETRA has managed homes and grounds maintenance on behalf of the Council for the Barnstaple Road and Montgomery Crescent estate.

Between 8-900 people live on our estate, which is situated in Harold Hill in the London Borough of Havering. The estate is made up of 13 Houses, all of which are three stories high:

- Accrington House
- Alcester House
- Amptill House
- Angmering House
- Cardigan House
- Devizes House
- Kirkham House
- Oundle House
- Radstock House
- Southsea House
- Stroud House
- Thornbury House
- Upton House

BETRA'S VALUES, AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

BETRA operates on the basis of shared values. Board members and staff are expected to adhere to, and promote these values:

- embodying excellence in all we do through achieving continuous improvement
- gaining the trust of our community by being passionate about what we do, supporting those who need our help and fostering a community spirit
- shaping our services to meet the needs of local people
- valuing and rewarding our staff team as our greatest asset
- creating a sense of ownership and personal responsibility
- respecting all members of our community and valuing their diversity
- ensuring the disabled, elderly and vulnerable are a priority on this estate.

First and foremost, BETRA aims to ensure that the estate is maintained and that contracted services are provided to the highest level for the

residents. The Board oversees the day-to-day running of the estate, and helps come up with new ideas for improvements. Board members attend training courses to help them with their role on the committee.

BETRA employs a small team to manage and undertake all operational aspects of the business. This work includes:

- checking all common areas of the estate each day, identifying any issues, and having an order of job priority
- removing any rubbish around the estate daily, inspecting the communal bins daily and cleaning graffiti as soon as it is noticed/reported
- encouraging active participation by all residents and keeping you informed of any opportunities arising in the local area
- treating all residents equally, taking everybody as an individual and taking appropriate action when required to uphold residents rights and protect their welfare
- holding annual surveys to keep the Board informed of residents views and priorities
- organising community events and activities
- hosting a website and producing a regular newsletter and other information booklets in order to keep residents informed about our work.

TENANCY SERVICES

BETRA has a management agreement with Havering Council to deliver particular services. At regular intervals we review and negotiate this contract with the Council, and from time to time our powers can change in accordance with central government policies.

Here is a summary of BETRA's current responsibilities:

- provide an estate-based office
- provide responsive repairs and maintenance
- provide grounds maintenance for the estate
- manage and prepare void properties for re-letting

- (where appropriate) work in partnership with the Council on major works
- comply with the management agreement on financial matters
- provide first point of call on tenancy management issues
- deal with anti-social behaviour issues, in cooperation with the Council's legal team
- deal with unlawful occupancies, breaches of tenancy or lease agreements, referring back to the Council where appropriate
- provide new and prospective tenants with a meeting with our manager, to view the flat and explain tenant rights, responsibilities and the role of the TMO
- maintain a motivated, efficient and effective staff team
- ensure forward planning to fill vacancies
- ensure effective management of contractors and ongoing assessment for value for money
- provide quarterly monitoring reports to the Council including all data required
- ensure regular – at least annual – satisfaction surveys are carried out and results analysed and acted upon
- ensure effective governance of the TMO including membership, Board membership and sustainability, accountability, and an effective split between governing and operational activities.

STRUCTURE

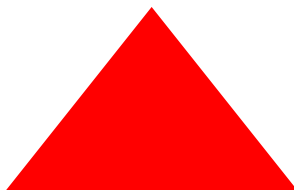
BETRA's constitution allows us to have a board of up to 15 residents, proportionate to the numbers of tenants and leaseholders on the estate.

The board is elected at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) held in June each year. At the AGM one third of the board is asked to stand down and submit themselves for re-election. This ensures that the board maintains some continuity of membership and skills acquired. Residents, either tenants or leaseholders, are welcome to stand for election and new members will be made most welcome.

At the AGM, the board elects its officers: a chair, vice-chair, secretary and treasurer. The board goes on to authorise and set up sub-committees as and when required. Prior to an AGM, if a resident wishes to join the board they can be co-opted and then they submit themselves for election at the next AGM. Please note: co-opted member do not have a vote until they become a fully elected member.

● **How BETRA works**

RESIDENTS / TENANTS



CHAIRMAN

Board

Sub Committees

1) Staff and Finance

2) Social Activities

MANAGEMENT

Staff Team

Estate Manager

Estate and Grounds -

Maintenance Officers

Regarding lines of authority, two points should be noted:

- Board members should approach the estate manager on matters relating to the work of BETRA staff.
- Likewise, and importantly, tenants should approach the estate manager when wishing to discuss their own tenancy issues – not the chairman or a board member, as they cannot be involved in the ‘operational’ side of the TMO.

● **BETRA SHARES**

It is important that all residents feel they have a stake in BETRA. To encourage this feel of ownership we have, since 2006, signed up over 210 registered shareholder members who each hold a share to the value of 10 pence.

Yes, that’s right, just 10p! This is a symbolic gesture that allows members to express their support for BETRA. It also gives them the opportunity to

attend board meetings and speak at them, if they so wish. However, voting rights at board meetings are reserved for board members only. Ideally we would like to see the vast majority of our residents sign up to be shareholders. So, if you haven't already, why not pop into the office to collect your BETRA share certificate today? And don't forget to bring 10p!

Please note: Regardless of whether or not you are a shareholder, BETRA strives to deliver the same level of service to all its residents.

SUPPORT FOR BOARD MEMBERS

We know it can be challenging to join a management committee, especially if you've not served on a board before. The following should help you to understand how things work. And if you are thinking about standing for the board, but would like more information before committing yourself, we would be delighted to meet with you. Please get in touch with our Chairman Ken Howson or our estate manager Lindsey Taylor.

Ways in which we support new and prospective board members:

Mentoring: This is where one of our current established board members shows you the ropes, talks through the small amount of paperwork involved, and generally makes sure to be there for you to help explain the procedures.

Observing: You are welcome to come along to any of our open meetings as an observer, just to get a feel of things before putting your name forward to join our board. Our meetings usually take place every couple of months, and are held on weekdays at 4pm and 7pm alternately in the estate office.

Induction meetings: We will set up short one-to-one sessions with the chair, secretary and treasurer, as well as our estate manager, to explain in more detail the role.

Training: BETRA holds regular training sessions related to the role and responsibilities of being a board member, led by our consultant, Liz Michael. These sessions are often in conjunction with our sister TMOs in

Havering (PETRA and DELTA), and sometimes with other TMOs from neighbouring boroughs. BETRA will also fund training for members which could enhance their skills and knowledge associated with the running of an organisation such as ours.

Study visits: We will sometimes arrange visits to other TMOs in Havering and beyond, so that you can see how they operate and get an opportunity to talk to their committee members and staff.

THE ROLE OF A BOARD MEMBER

Our Board members have certain responsibilities. BETRA has adopted a Code of Governance which sets out the roles of the management board, its officers and our staff, and how they relate to each other. You will be given copies of key documents including this one when you put your name forward as a prospective board member.

Please read the Code of Governance and Code of Confidentiality. We can only keep the confidence of our residents if they know that we will treat their information with the upmost respect and in confidence. In some circumstances our estate manager may have to report to the board details of individuals or issues that would come under the heading of private information. You must not share this information with anyone outside of the board – even if at some stage you cease being a board member.

As a new board member you will also be asked to read, agree and sign the Code of Conduct and Standing Orders. These and other documents are very important and it is essential that you understand your responsibilities in these matters. Once this has been achieved and your training is complete, we will ask you to sign each policy/document. This formal approach helps to underline the importance we place on making sure our board treats everyone who lives on the estate fairly.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

Michele Wilson, Treasurer

‘I retired two years ago and thought I’d give it a go. I wanted to put something back into the community. There’s a lot of satisfaction to be had seeing improvements happen and knowing you helped make it happen.’

‘Everyone should care about their neighbourhood; we’d all be richer for it.’

Ken Howson, Chair

‘I’ve lived here some 22 years, and been involved for the last 14. BETRA has improved this estate hugely – ask any long-term resident. Listening to residents and seeking their input is important to me. For example, because BETRA is well run we often make a surplus on our annual budget, and we look to residents to advise on how best we can spend this money.’

‘Membership of the board involves looking at the bigger picture. So not just pushing for what you want, but thinking about what’s best for everyone.’

Wendy Thomas, Member

‘My introduction to BETRA involved me getting burgled! I was a young single mum at the time, and I’d just moved in. It was a very difficult time for me, and BETRA was fantastic! They were extremely good to me, changing the locks immediately and checking I was ok. That’s when I decided I wanted to get involved.’

‘To some people, sitting on a committee sounds dreary – a bunch of stuffy people talking nonsense. But it’s not like that at all. (Well, not often, anyway!) We’re a diverse bunch, our conversations are lively, and I’ve made some good friends during my time with BETRA.’

‘Organising our fun days has to be the most rewarding part of it. Seeing all the kids just loving it, and having the parents expressing their appreciation – it makes you feel good.’

‘To all residents I’d say next time we have a fun day, get involved! Come over to the office, give us your ideas, offer to help out on the day – it’s hard work but so worth it.’

Angela Colson, Member

‘I’ve lived here for 15 years, but have only become involved with BETRA in the last few. The biggest difference BETRA has made has been in grounds maintenance – the care of the lawns, paths, flower beds and railings, for example, has all improved.’

‘Becoming involved has been good for me. I’m quite an anxious person, but helping at BETRA has given me confidence, and I’ve learnt new skills along the way.’

‘My one wish for BETRA is to see more young people getting involved – their input could make a big difference.’

Diane Howson, Member

I’ve been involved with BETRA from the start. I help around the office and I’ve recently taken on some of the gardening, planting spring flowers. We have a laugh, me and the boys, and I know Lindsey appreciates the help I give her.

‘On a freezing cold day in January, there I was planting some bulbs when two elderly ladies came up to me and said they though the flower bed would look so lovely in a couple of months’ time thanks to me, and I thought that was so sweet of them!’



LEARNING TO MANAGE

We believe it is really important that board members are given the skills and knowledge to enable them to manage what is, after all, a small business. We receive a committee and communications allowance from the Council and we encourage all board members to take part in training relevant to managing BETRA TMO.

Induction and training sessions may be formal or informal. Some training could be as simple as visiting other TMOs to talk to their committee and learn from their experience, whilst other training could be more formal such as learning how the finances are controlled, data protection responsibilities, or health and safety accountabilities.

There are a number of organisations that provide training for community groups such as ours. We try to circulate these to board members and encourage attendance. We also sometimes hear of training being organised by the Council for their staff and, where appropriate, we ask to be included in this training.

We recognise that sometimes it is difficult for members to attend all-day sessions, and to travel, so we also organise trainers to come to our offices and deliver sessions at times that are convenient for our members. We feel it is a responsibility of both old and new board members to keep themselves well informed of the issues that can impact on our TMO.

REGISTRATION DETAILS

BETRA is registered with the Financial Services Authority (FSA) under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1965-1978. This registration brings with it certain responsibilities. We have a set of rules registered with the FSA which we must abide by.

A summary of the FSA rules is set out below:

- All lawful residents of the Barnstaple Estate who are aged 18 years or over are entitled to join BETRA TMO by purchasing a share.
- Each share costs ten pence and entitles the holder to lifelong membership (providing they remain a lawful resident of the estate).
- An annual general meeting must be held every year to elect the Board, appoint an auditor and receive the accounts and balance sheet for the year. In addition, special general meetings may be called by the Board or by 10 per cent of the members of the TMO, giving all members 14 days' notice of such a meeting.

- The Board must have at least six elected members but not more than 15 and the quorum for any Board meeting is one third.
- The Board can invite people who are not members of the TMO, perhaps experts in a particular field, to attend meetings.
- The TMO must keep a register of its shareholders and a copy of that register must be held off site.
- The TMO must ballot the estate's residents every five years and get 50 per cent plus 1 in order to continue.

● **MANAGEMENT AGREEMENT WITH THE COUNCIL**

BETRA has a management agreement with Havering Council which sets out in detail the services our TMO must provide. This includes key policies and procedures such as our equal opportunities policy and our financial procedures. There are eight chapters in the agreement, based on the TMO's responsibilities, as follows:

- Chapter 1 sets out the outline of the contract and how it can be changed.
- Chapter 2 deals with the responsive repairs and maintenance services that the TMO has responsibilities for.
- Chapter 3 deals with the level of rents and service charges. (BETRA has no involvement with this aspect of the agreement and so that is stated)
- Chapter 4 sets out how the Council calculates our allowances. It determines that our annual allowance is paid in quarterly installments, and it requires us to have our accounts audited. We are also required to prepare a budget for the year and show we keep a close watch on our expenditure. Surpluses made can be rolled over but eventually have to be spent on improvements to the estate.
- Chapter 5 states that the Council is responsible for ending tenancies and taking legal action against tenants who have breached their tenancy agreement, and leaseholders who have breached the terms of their lease. The TMO can ask the Council to take action provided it has made an attempt to persuade the tenant or leaseholder to stop breaching the agreement.

- Chapter 6 says that BETRA is responsible for employing its own staff and contractors and has its own recruitment and employment procedures and contracts for each employee. This chapter also sets out arbitration procedures should the TMO and the Council have a serious disagreement.
- Chapter 7 includes all the performance standards that BETRA and the Council must meet with regard to services and the way the TMO operates. The Council holds regular monitoring and development meetings with the TMO. The TMO must produce an annual report of how it has performed and must monitor its performance in relation to equal opportunities policy.
- Chapter 8 includes an explanation of all the terms included in the agreement.

MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE ALLOWANCE

In order for BETRA to provide services, we receive a management and maintenance allowance from the Council. The current MMA spans three years, 2015, 2016 and 2017. It is based on what it costs the Council to provide the same service to its own directly managed properties. The profits (surpluses) BETRA makes each year are closely monitored by the board to ensure compliance with our stated business plan. Using any surplus made, the board identifies improvements we can make to the estate over the following three to five years.

THE BETRA BUSINESS PLAN

The current business plan spans 2015-2017 and is a comprehensive report on our specific objectives for the next two years, as well as a detailed document about BETRA TMO.

WORKING WITH OUR STAFF

The Board maintains an excellent working relationship with our TMO Estate Manager and her team, as well as the various contractors we employ for various specialist jobs. However, if any Board member has a concern about a staff member they are asked to raise the issue first with the Chairman.

LONDON BOROUGH OF HAVERING

For full details on all aspects of the Council's Housing Service, it is best to go to their website at www.havering.gov.uk and follow the links to the Homes and Housing section. Their email is: homes@havering.gov.uk. BETRA often liaises in particular with the Council's Resident Involvement Team.

KEY BETRA DOCUMENTS

Board members should read and have copies of the following:

- The Board Members Handbook
- The BETRA Constitution
- The Code of Governance
- The Code of Confidentiality
- The Code of Conduct and Standing Orders
- BETRA's Business Plan 2014-17
- Declaration of Interests
- Equal Opportunities Policy



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is involved in becoming a board member?

We hope that this booklet goes some way to answering that question. Board members are ordinary residents on the estate who care about their community. They are prepared to attend meetings (four to six per year) to hear about and discuss what happens on the estate, and make decisions relating to financial and staffing issues.

Will I have to attend every meeting?

No, holidays, sickness and other personal reasons may prevent you from attending some meetings. When this happens, you should send your apologies in advance to the Secretary, or by phoning the office on 01708 344300. If you fail to turn up on more than three separate consecutive meetings without sending apologies we will consider that you have resigned.

What's in it for me?

It's a chance to exercise and develop your people and business skills, to enhance your CV, to make friends and improve your community. What's not to like?

What happens in the meeting?

There is a set agenda for each meeting allowing us to go through the various items for discussion in a methodical way. Meetings will usually last between an hour and 90 minutes. There may be reports to be read and reviewed, financial documents to be circulated, and correspondence to discuss. There will be an opportunity for members to ask questions and make suggestions. Sometimes there are confidential items that need to be considered, perhaps involving personal information about staff, staff wages, etc. These are kept separate from the main minutes. Any non-board visitors present will be asked to leave the room while these items are discussed, as required by our Code of Confidentiality.

Will it cost me anything?

No, and if you have to employ a babysitter, or incur other expenses in order to attend BETRA meetings and training, you will be entitled to out of pocket expenses.

If I want to get involved?

If this booklet has left you thinking, “I’d like to get involved with BETRA”, then pop into the BETRA office for a chat with our estate manager Lindsey Taylor. And remember, putting your name forward to become a member of our board is just one of the ways residents can get involved. To find out more, do please get in touch.

BETRA

Tenant Management Organisation

8 Angmering House

Barnstaple Road

Harold Hill

Romford

RM3 7SX

Phone: 01708 344300

Email: betratmo@btconnect.com

www.betratmo.org.uk

BETRA is a not-for-profit community organisation registered with the Financial Services Authority, registration number 29444R.

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