

# 19 Twin Crescents Tenant Management Organisation



As a tenant management organisation, Twin Crescents is able to manage the maintenance and repair of properties, whilst retaining the ownership and control within the tenant membership base. The co-operative has established means to reduce conflict and tensions, outside of formal business meetings, thereby strengthening the governance of the organisation, without compromising active participation of members.

## What it Does

Twin Crescents Tenant Management Organisation (Twin Crescents) is a co-operative of tenants which has an agreement with the landlord to manage their housing. In this case, the landlord is the Walsall Association of Tenant Management Organisations (WATMOS) which was set up in 2003 by eight tenant management organisations in Walsall to take on the ownership of their council houses.

Twin Crescents manages 67 homes in Garden and Grove Crescents in the Pelsall area of Walsall. The homes consist of five different types of property from family houses to flats. The whole estate comprises 110 properties, 43 of which are owner-occupied by those who bought their ex-council houses. Tenants resident at the time of the transfer have also retained the right to buy their properties.

Twin Crescents manages the repairs, allocations, rent arrears and tenancies for the properties.

## How it Came About?

In 1991 residents were fed up with the appalling conditions – the properties were run-down, the communal gardens overgrown and the quality of life was not good.

They formed the Twin Crescents Residents' Association to tackle these problems. Attempts to petition the council met with little support. Feeling frustrated and ignored, the residents became eager to investigate the options for improving matters on the estate themselves.

Examples of successful tenant managed co-operatives in neighbouring areas proved a positive stimulus for creating their own similar co-operative. Their determination led to the formation of the Twin Crescents Tenant Management Organisation in 1997.

## Governance Structure

The Co-operative is managed by a management committee, elected from the general membership.

There are twelve elected tenants on the Management Committee, representing a cross section of the single people, families and elderly people on the estate. Any member over the age of eighteen can vote.

The Management Committee does not designate seats for different types of members, for example tenants or owner-occupiers. The Committee, however, does manage to represent different sections of the membership, by default.

The full Management Committee meets monthly. In addition to the full management committee, there are regular established sub-committees dealing with specific areas of governing the work of the organisation. These sub-committees cover working areas such as lettings, repairs, finance and personnel. Each of these committees meets monthly between the main committee meetings to discuss progress in each of the areas, and report back to the full Management Committee.

## Facts & Figures

- Organisational Type – Tenant Management Organisation
- Legal Form – Industrial & Provident Society
- Date Established – 1997
- Location – Walsall, West Midlands
- Number of Members – 67 homes
- Number of Workers – One part-time member of staff (30 hours)
- Turnover – For the financial year ending March 2003, turnover was £60,035.



Twin Crescents employees various approaches to encourage participation, including a tenant gardening group.

New committee members of Twin Crescents are given an induction where they are introduced to their roles and responsibilities, the work of the Co-operative and the work of WATMOS. This can be a difficult process as many members are elderly and some have difficulty understanding the complexities of the committee.

Members of the committee do debate issues although most decisions are reached through consensus. However, serious divisions can arise. Many residents are given authority and responsibility for the first time in their lives and living in a housing co-operative can involve quite personal relations.

Furthermore, the Co-operative relies on volunteers not just for formal governance but also to serve in the bar and office and to run the community centre. This can create pressures especially in terms of people 'pulling their weight'. Sometimes personal rivalries and bitterness can creep into the formal meetings.

On one occasion Twin Crescents called in a mediator who helped the members to express their feelings; a few members agreed they had been acting inappropriately and stopped participating for some time although they are now supportive of the Co-operative.

Since this incident, the Tenant Management Organisation has established regular 'clear the air' meetings. These regular meetings give

tenants the opportunity, distinct from the formal Management Committee meetings to air complaints, raise issues and resolve tensions. In doing so, the formal meetings tend to keep to the business agenda.

### Participation Practice

The tenant management organisation employs a part-time worker, to undertake the office-based work of the Co-operative. The worker occupies an office in one of the flats in the heart of the estate, and operates very informally and welcomes the opportunity to talk about issues with residents in a friendly atmosphere.

Leaflets are distributed to residents before the AGM to encourage them to attend meetings and explain the process of formal participation in the co-operative. Leaflets are also distributed to all residents informing them about social activities. Notice boards in the flats help to ensure residents know about meetings and activities.

New tenants are encouraged to participate at their initial interview where they are given information on Twin Crescents and how it is run. Upon joining they are invited to attend meetings and social occasions which also helps to introduce them to the Co-operative.

New proposals may be discussed with the wider members such as the decision to extend the community room. The community room was established from surpluses of the Co-operative, and therefore required a resolution at an AGM to authorise the expenditure. Prior to this the proposals had been discussed over a number of years. The committee put up plans of the new building and invited ideas from residents. Issues were fully discussed at a number of AGMs, with the process taking two to three years to agree.

Gardening has encouraged many tenants to participate. When some people started to improve the gardens, others followed suit so that now all the green spaces on the estate have been improved.

Social events are held such as bingo, barbeques, children's parties, meetings and other activities, all of which help to build up a sense of community and sympathy with the work of the Co-operative.

These events are now so numerous that they are organised on a regular basis by a residents committee which has seventeen members, some of whom are also on the Management Committee. Informal activities not only help tenants to get to know one another better but have also raised awareness of the governance of the Co-operative.

### Stakeholder Engagement

Twin Crescents involves tenants and owner-occupiers on the estate in the management of the Co-operative as well as in the social events.

They support the wider local community through involvement in community carnivals and other events alongside more formal participation such as the Pelsall Pride Partnership.

In addition, through its involvement in WATMOS, the Co-operative ensures that it is made aware of city-wide issues.

### Measures of Success

Twin Crescents has made a tangible difference to the life of the people who live on the Crescents. Being able to fund a community centre out of surpluses is testimony to their effective governance and management.

Another indication of the success of the Co-operative is that all tenants have chosen to join the Co-operative as have most of the owner-occupiers. In tenant management organisations, generally, existing tenants do have the option of not joining.

Overall the success of the Co-operative can clearly be reflected in the general level of service delivery. Empty homes are usually let very quickly. Rent arrears have been greatly reduced and Twin Crescents has been able to tackle some complex neighbour nuisance problems effectively. The police were invited

to use a room next to the office as a base and this has helped to reduce crime.

### Key to Success

Members of the Tenant Management Organisation put their success down to the close-knit community feel of the estate which has been built up over the years. This has come about as a result not only of the effective work of the committee but also through the informal activities that fostered neighbourly feelings.

A small group of people bringing about positive change has helped to convince others on the estate and the continued driving force of a few key people has also helped to bring about change for the better.