**1. Introduction**

Conflict is a natural process that can be found in even the best organised organisations and groups. It is not in itself a bad thing as it is through conflict that ideas and innovations originate and, as long as it is resolved, it can lead to a positive impact both on the individual & Ferndale Community Tenants Group.

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| The different ways in which people believe, think and act contribute enormously to the richness, vitality and excitement of community life. It is when these differences cannot be effectively managed that conflict arises. |

Conflict can be destructive as well as constructive. It is best to try and resolve conflict rationally and effectively and this can make the difference between a positive and negative outcome. Solving the conflict this way can also have unexpected fringe benefits, Such as increased group awareness, greater group togetherness and improved self-understanding.

If a problem is not addressed but is left to itself, it can turn nasty and foster bad inter-personal relationships that can ultimately harm the nature and ethos of Ferndale Community Tenants Group. In many cases it will be possible to resolve matters informally within the organisation but sometimes it may be necessary to call on the services of an outsider to resolve a dispute.

By resolving conflict successfully, you can solve many of the problems that it has brought to the surface, as well as getting benefits that you might not at first expect:

* **Increased understanding:** The discussion needed to resolve conflict expands people's awareness of the situation, giving them an insight into how they can achieve their own goals without undermining those of other people.
* **Increased cohesion:** When conflict is resolved effectively, people can develop mutual respect, and a renewed faith in their ability to work together.
* **Improved self-knowledge:** Conflict pushes individuals to examine their goals in close detail, helping them understand the things that are most important to them.

**2. Causes of conflict**

Ideally, the membership of Ferndale Community Tenants Group will reflect, in microcosm, the whole of the community the group seeks to represent. The closer any group comes to this ideal, the more it will also embody the tensions and anxieties found within its community.

* If conflict is to prove constructive rather than destructive, its underlying causes will need to be identified. This is not always easy, since the protagonists may not themselves be aware of their own true feelings and motives. The ‘presenting problem’ may not be the ‘real’ or underlying problem;
* The underlying problems may involve one, or a mix, of the following:
  + different views about policies, objectives and priorities;
  + competition for shares of inadequate resources;
  + absence of appropriate norms, policies or procedures;
  + exclusion from the planning and decision-making;
  + personal, historical or other hidden antagonisms.

**3. Creative conflict in groups**

There is some evidence of a higher risk that conflicts will break out at particular stages in the lifecycle of a group. For example:

* At the formation of a group, individuals may jostle for their own personal positions; paradoxically, this can mask differences of opinion on aims, methods, style, etc., since no-one wants to be identified as having a ‘negative attitude’.
* As the work develops, if these differences do not begin to resolve themselves they can start to cause conflict. Substantive disagreements over aims, etc., become mixed up with personal agendas and with grievances originating during the formation of the group.
* Through (usually informal) processes of deferment or negotiation, procedural and other norms of behaviour begin to be established that enable the work of the group to continue despite the initial conflicts.
* In the ideal situation, a state is achieved in which the group proceeds smoothly and efficiently.

In this model, conflict can be seen as a necessary and constructive stage of development that has to be worked through in order for the group to eventually work effectively.

**4. Conflict management**

***4.1 Conflict prevention***

As in so many other matters, where conflict is concerned 'prevention is better than cure'. This will involve a mix of human skills and structural arrangement. A good starting point is not to set up procedures for problems which are not likely to occur and to always try the informal approach to resolution before resorting to formality.

**Informal conflict prevention** often depends on at least one person, but preferably several, who will:

* be alert to the potential for conflict;
* be prepared to listen to, and take seriously, the different views and attitudes involved;
* have the tact and skill to intervene unobtrusively yet effectively as informal facilitator, conciliator or mediator.

This may be the chair or secretary or some other officer of the organisation. It may equally be someone who has no formal position within the organisation, yet who is known and trusted by the potential antagonists.

**Formal conflict prevention** is a matter of policies and procedures. Potential for conflict is reduced if organisations have policies and procedures (and, where appropriate, can offer training) in relation to such matters as:

* customer/client/user care and complaints;
* ground rules for behaviour in meetings;
* rules for users of premises;
* discipline and grievance procedures;
* policies on relationships - e.g. between volunteers and paid workers;
* handling aggression and violence.

***4.2 Informal Conflict resolution***

In many circumstances, particularly where only low-level conflict is involved, the parties concerned will come to their own resolution. On other occasions, minor and insignificant conflicts may best be ignored - indeed, seeking a resolution may only exacerbate a situation which, if left alone, will do no serious harm to anyone.

Where these methods are inappropriate or ineffective, however, intervention may be necessary. There are a number of techniques and resources available to help with resolving conflict. One which is considered in more detail here is known as the “Interest-Based Relational approach” (IBR). This approach aims to identify individual responses to the situation and to stop people becoming entrenched in a fixed position.

There are 5 key steps in this process.

1. Maintain a good relationship, be calm, courteous and constructive;
2. Separate the problem from the person;
3. Listen and understand the opposite point of view before replying;
4. Try to reach objective agreement as to the facts which surround the issue;
5. Keep an open mind as to what the outcome will be.

Abiding by these principles will help to stop the conflict from escalating or becoming a personal issue and as such out of control. A possible procedure based on this approach is:-

1. *Introduction*

Try to establish an overview of the conflict. Let each party know that the conflict is likely to involve both sides taking a position, not just one. It will therefore probably best be resolved through talking, listening and respect. If you are involved in the conflict, state that you are presenting your side of the argument. Listen to the other side but be prepared to recognise and understand that contrary point of view. If you are unclear on what is being said try to summarise what you think has been said and see if the two match. Try to keep calm and assertive not aggressive or submissive.

1. *Fact Find*

This is where you start to scratch the surface of the problem.

* Ask the other person for their point of view and explicitly state that you respect and value their opinion and that some element of co-operation is going to be required on both sides to help solve the problem.
* Try to pick out what is driving the opposite party and how your actions are causing conflict to occur.
* Get both parties to use their feelings to describe the issues or actions that they feel are causing conflict (I felt … when …). This should help to stop the other side getting defensive and thinking they are being accused of something.
* Try to look at the problem as though you are an outsider looking in and assess how the conflict is affecting the running of the group. Is it affecting work performance? Holding back decision making? Focus on work matters and ignore any personal differences.

1. *Decide what the problem is*

It might be argued that this is an obvious step, but it is crucial to agree what the point of difference is if it is to be resolved. Different people might view the same problem differently. If you cannot agree the exact problem, try to understand what the other person sees as the problem.

1. *Generate multiple possible solutions*

In order to solve the conflict completely everyone will feel the need to contribute towards the resolution. Come up with lots of ideas and be open to those previously not thought of.

1. *Agree a solution*

A solution may already have been reached by the time you get to this stage. Hopefully, both points of view will have been recognised by the two sides and a mutual solution will have become apparent. If there are still some real differences between the parties then negotiation to find a suitable middle ground, where everyone feels they win, will be needed. One of the best negotiation techniques is to aim to arrive at a position where everyone feels they have gained – what is sometimes called a win-win position.

**4.3 Formal Conflict Resolution**

If the informal approach does not work, or if matters have gone too far for it to be used (for example, the parties will not speak to one another), it may be necessary to adopt a more formal approach and to bring in an outsider to mediate between the opposing camps, or to facilitate a discussion between them. Community Matters can help with suggesting a possible advisor or mediator, or see the contacts section below.

**5. When conflicts lead to violence**

In a worst case scenario, however good the precautionary measures and the resolution processes, conflicts may end in violence.

Violence is rare and is usually (although not always) an immediate, unpremeditated, anger-led response to a situation the perpetrator regards as intolerable. Alcohol or other drugs may have a significant part to play and, where this is the case, no amount of planning, policy-making or informal conflict prevention will be effective. Those on the spot, however, will have to deal with it.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has developed the following working definition of violence at work:

'Any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work’.

The former Department of Health and Social Security (DHSS) included in its definition of violence[[1]](#footnote-1)2:

‘Severe verbal abuse or threat where this is judged likely to turn into actual violence; serious or persistent harassment (including racial or sexual harassment); threat with a weapon; major or minor injury; fatalities’.

HSE advice relates particularly to the situation of employed workers. Nonetheless, it is also applicable to volunteers in comparatively vulnerable situations. The HSE booklet gives practical advice to help people find out if violence is a problem for their staff and, if it is, how to tackle it.

The possibility of violence to staff, volunteers or users of community facilities needs to be addressed in the Health and Safety context and realistic risk assessment is an obvious first step in enabling individuals and organisations to develop appropriate policies and strategies.

This policy / Guidance was adopted by Ferndale Community Tenants Group on 3rd August 2017

Signed. Steve Medlin. Chair

**It is scheduled to be reviewed at the Committee meeting October 2021**

**6. Further Information**

***6.1 Further Reading***

*The Health and Safety Executive,*

*Violence at Work.*

*Preventing Workplace Harassment and Violence.*

*Violence at Work: Findings from the 2010/11 British Crime Survey.*

*“Dealing with violence and aggressive behaviour”* at[www.humansolutions.org.uk/aggression](http://www.humansolutions.org.uk/aggression.html)

***6.2 Useful Addresses***

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| Community Matters  12 – 20 Baron Street  London  N1 9LL  Tel: 020 7837 7887  Fax: 020 7278 9253  Helpline: 0845 847 4253  E-mail: [*info@communitymatters.org.uk*](mailto:info@communitymatters.org.uk)  Website: [*www.communitymatters.org.uk*](http://www.communitymatters.org.uk)*/onlineguidance* | LawWorks  National Pro Bono Centre  48 Chancery Lane  London  WC2A 1JF  Tel: 020 7092 3940  Fax: 020 7242 3407  E-mail: [*enquiries@lawworks.org.uk*](mailto:enquiries@lawworks.org.uk)  Website: [*www.lawworks.org.uk*](http://www.lawworks.org.uk) |
| ACAS (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service)  Euston Tower  286 Euston Road  London  NW1 3JJ  Tel: 0845 747 4747  Website: [*www.acas.org.uk*](http://www.acas.org.uk)  ACAS publications  Tel: 0870 242 9090  Fax: 01375 484 556  E-mail: [*acas@ecgroup.co.uk*](mailto:acas@ecgroup.co.uk) | Health and Safety Executive  Caerphilly Business Park  Caerphilly  CF83 3GG  Tel (infoline): 0845 345 0055  Fax: 0845 408 9566  Website: [*www.hse.gov.uk*](http://www.hse.gov.uk)  HSE Books  PO Box 1999  Sudbury  Suffolk  CO10 2WA  Tel: 01787 881165  Fax: 01787 313995  E-mail: [*hsebooks@prolog.uk.com*](mailto:hsebooks@prolog.uk.com)  Website: [*www.hsebooks.com*](http://www.hsebooks.com) |

1. 2 DHSS Advisory Committee on Violence to Staff, 1986; quoted in More + Nicholls, Managing Aggression and Violence: PEPAR Publications Ltd, 1997. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)