

London Tenants Federation

Some dos and don'ts around support for council tenants in their struggles

Since this event today is the launch of a toolkit aimed at helping council tenants to challenge gentrification and displacement from their homes and communities, LTF feels it appropriate to set out (below) some common sense dos and don'ts around the kind of support we might want in terms of our struggles.

LTF brings together borough- and London-wide groups of social-housing tenants; the majority of which comprise council tenants. Our member organisations bring together grass-roots tenants and residents associations whose experiences provide the evidence for the work we do in attempting to influence housing and planning policy at the regional level.

In times of struggles, we, our member organisations and their member tenants and residents associations are pleased to receive support from others. However, sadly a number of recent examples of apparent provision of support that have been drawn to our attention don't fit with our notion of careful and sensitive bottom-up support. In some instances, non-council tenants have descended top-down upon estates and attempted to appropriate the campaigning space – which ultimately disempowers.

Below are some do's and don'ts that we request anyone contemplating 'supporting or helping' should consider:

Please do -

- always consult first with existing tenants and residents associations / campaign groups before descending in on a council estate;
- find out if the existing tenants and residents association or campaign group wants support and if so, offer support sensitively; letting the existing association or campaign take the lead and credit;
- understand that council tenants and residents have a range of political affiliations, and probably most often none. Any trade-mark political tracts or chants will just put ordinary tenants and residents off, will make it difficult to keep people together and will make even those who might otherwise support the sentiment feel very uncomfortable;

Please don't

- assume the right to take over and 'organise' or to say that people should join in with whatever you are doing because it is 'on their behalf'. You must bear in mind - who asked you in and what is your mandate?
- set up a new group and appropriate / monopolise the campaigning space, if there is already an existing tenants and residents association campaign there;
- presume that you know more about the issues than the tenants and residents of the estate.

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