

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

London Tenants Federation brings together borough- and London-wide groups of social-housing 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. We feel that support that facilitates tenant empowerment is the best kind of support

Sadly, it has occasionally been drawn to our attention that apparent provision of support hasn't correlated with our members' notion of careful and sensitive bottom-up support. At times, non-council tenants have descended top-down on estates and ultimately appropriated the campaigning space, which ultimately disempowers.

We've set out some do's and don'ts that we would like anyone contemplating 'supporting or helping' to consider:

Please do -

- always consult first with existing tenants and residents' associations / campaign groups before descending in on a council or housing association estate;
- find out if the existing tenants and residents' association or campaign group wants support and if so, offer support sensitively, still enabling the existing association or campaign take the lead and credit;
- understand that council tenants and residents have a range of political affiliations, and most probably often none. Any trade-mark political tracts or chants will simply put ordinary tenants and residents off, will make it difficult to keep people together and 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 tenants and residents 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 tenant and residents' association or tenant campaign group there;
- presume that you know more about the issues than the tenants and residents of the estate.