**TOOLKIT FOR SETTING UP A NEW ALMSHOUSE CHARITY**

**Starting a new almshouse charity is perhaps easier than it first appears. This toolkit is designed to take you on a step-by-step process.**

1. **Points of reference**

In the first instance it would be helpful to refer to the website of The Almshouse Association, [www.almshouse.org](http://www.almshouse.org) and to speak to the team at the Association who will be delighted to discuss the concept of a new almshouse charity with you and provide guidance.

The Charity Commission’s website, www.gov.uk contains a wealth of information on setting up charities generally to which reference should be made.

1. **Definition of an almshouse and their features**

Throughout the process the generally accepted definition of an almshouse should be borne in mind:

An almshouse is:

* a unit of residential accommodation (usually a house or flat) which belongs to a charity, is provided exclusively to meet the charity’s purposes (for example, the relief of financial need or infirmity) and is occupied or is available for occupation under a licence by a qualified beneficiary.
* typically a charity which is established for purposes which are to be furthered by the provision of one or more almshouses.
* usually a charity for the relief of financial hardship by the provision of housing and associated services or benefits which must (or is authorised to) provide its primary benefit by the grant of a licence to occupy the accommodation that it owns to its beneficiaries.

**In addition, an almshouse charity is likely to have one or more of the following features:**

1. The origin of the charity is a private gift for the relief of poverty;
2. The beneficiaries are required to pay a weekly maintenance contribution that must not be set at a level that would cause hardship;
3. The nature of the accommodation is such that the licence requires that beneficiaries must show particular consideration for the needs of other residents;
4. A significant proportion of the accommodation is permanent endowment;
5. The beneficial class or the geographical area from which it can be drawn is restricted.

Note: Almshouses do not necessarily have the word “almshouse” in their name; they may be referred to by another title, such as ‘College’, ‘Hospital’ or ‘Homes’. This is due to the historical nature of some almshouses and the contemporary usage of these terms at the time the almshouse was established.

1. **The following steps then to be taken**
	1. The need – The “lead” needs to clearly establish the need e.g., Affordable housing in the parish/town for all/young families/refugees/men over 50 etc? Use relevant data to confirm thoughts.
	2. The charity’s objectives. The above determines the charity objectives in terms of why it exists and what good it will do. In writing the charity’s purposes the way in which the charity will create ‘public benefit’ needs to be made clear.
	3. Choose a name. There are rules on what words you can choose. Names which duplicate or are similar to other charities need to be avoided. Avoid using misleading names or words you don’t have permission to us e.g., trademarks.
	4. Find trustees-usually a minimum of 3. Check who is eligible, what skills they need to have, decide how long their appointments should last and whether they can be reappointed when their term ends. It is a legal requirement to follow the governing document rules concerning the appointment of trustees and their length of service.
	5. Establish the charity – the “lead” can establish the charity with the Charity Commission. <https://www.gov.uk/setting-up-charity>
	6. Governance – the newly formed charity needs to decide on its structure. Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)/Trust/Limited by Guarantee <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/charity-types-how-to-choose-a-structure>
	7. The charity’s governing (scheme) document needs to be written and guidance on how to go about this is available at [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) Once the governance has been decided upon and the document produced, the new charity needs to be registered with the Charity Commission if the anticipated income is at least £5,000 or the charity is a CIO.
	8. Seek funding – Depending on the funds available some new charities will require loans, grants and other donations. The Almshouse Association will be able to provide guidance on possible funding routes.
	9. Finding the land – Almshouses have a unique status and as such are often supported in the community. Local councils may well have supported many almshouse charities under Section 106 funds or community funds. Rural Exception Schemes may be available. Contact your local Rural Community Council.
	10. Deciding on what to build – The trustees will need to discuss the range, style and number of almshouses bearing in mind their suitability for residents i.e., considerations in terms of safety, access and functionality will need to be considered especially in the case of older people or those with disabilities. There will be a model of modern almshouses that will be similar to the ideal the trustees are considering. Please speak to the Almshouse Association who will be able to introduce you to a list of architects. Today’s almshouse is likely to be carbon neutral, designed for easy living for all generations and having integrated IT and health systems.