

# TENANT SCRUTINY PANEL

## TERMS OF REFERENCE

### INTRODUCTION

The new Regulatory Framework for social housing as set out in the revised Consumer Standards overseen by the Regulator for Social Housing have strengthened the role of tenant scrutiny.

There is a much stronger focus on the 'Tenants' Voice' within social housing, to make sure tenants are kept informed and can shape and meaningfully influence the decision making of their landlord, and that homes are provided which are warm, safe and secure. The Tenant Scrutiny Panel has a key role within a co-regulation approach – this is the requirement that landlords, their governing bodies, and tenants, assure their own compliance with the national standards, as part of a positive relationship with the Regulator.

**The scrutiny panel is a major part of the Transparency, Influence and Accountability standard which requires Lancaster City Council to be open with tenants and ensure:**

- They are treated with fairness and respect.
- They can access services, raise complaints, and influence decision making.
- They can hold Lancaster City Council, as their landlord, to account.

**Lancaster City Council has made a service commitment in the Service Improvement Plan 2025–2027:**

- We maximise efficiency and seek to be transparent with the services we deliver.
- We will involve and empower residents and ensure those who require support receive it.

### PURPOSE

The Tenant Scrutiny Panel gives tenants and leaseholders the power to hold Lancaster City Council accountable by examining services, challenging decisions, and providing resident-led reviews of policies and performance. The panel's purpose is to offer a tenant's "reality check," collect evidence like tenant feedback and performance data, and make recommendations for improving the quality and effectiveness of services. Scrutiny makes a difference by delivering service improvements, better value for money, and increasing transparency and accountability. This process ultimately aims to improve tenant satisfaction and tailor services to meet local needs.

**Creation Date:** October 2025

**Review Date:** October 2027

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### OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel are:

- **Hold Lancaster City Council Accountable:** The Scrutiny Panel will hold Lancaster City Council to account for their decisions, performance, and conduct, ensuring they are effective in their operations.
- **Provide a "Reality Check":** By reviewing how services are delivered, the Scrutiny Panel offers a crucial, real-world perspective on the quality of services from a tenant's viewpoint.
- **Influence Service Delivery:** The Scrutiny Panel investigates specific issues, gathers evidence from tenants and other sources, and propose recommendations to improve services.
- **Ensure Tenant Voice is Heard:** The process embeds a tenant-centred approach, ensuring tenant experiences and priorities are considered alongside other performance data.
- **Improve Organisational Performance:** The goal is to drive continuous improvement in Lancaster City Council's performance and service standards, leading to better outcomes for all residents

### ROLE OF MEMBERS

- **Training and Development of Skills:** To allow the panel to make robust recommendations, induction training will be provided to give panel members an understanding and overview of their role and responsibilities as a member of the panel. There will be ongoing training opportunities for the group to increase their skills and keep them update with local and national changes in legislation and policy.
- **Topic Selection:** Topics investigated will be drawn from a variety of sources such as tenant satisfaction, complaints, performance trends, lived experience, suggestions from other tenant involvement groups, and suggestions from the wider tenant base.
- **Evidence Gathering:** The Scrutiny Panel will collect evidence through various means, including tenant feedback, performance data, complaints data, and conducting "reality checks" on the ground, anonymised tenant satisfaction data, mystery shopping, desk top investigations, instigate focus or task and finish groups, conduct surveys amongst other tenants, site visits and pop- up events.

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### ROLE OF MEMBERS (CONTINUED)

- **Analysis and Recommendations:** The Tenant Scrutiny Panel will assess the gathered evidence and make evidence-based recommendations for improvement. Representatives of the Scrutiny Panel will present the Report of recommendations to the Chief Officer- Housing and Property, the Councillor with Portfolio for Housing and relevant Managers and Officers within Housing and Property Services.
- **Lancaster City Council Response:** The council will review and fairly assess all recommendations made by the scrutiny panel. Where recommendations cannot be implemented, a reason along with associated information will be provided to the panel. Lancaster City Council will respond to these recommendations and formulate an action plan with the Scrutiny Panel to implement recommendations in a meaningful and timely matter.
- **Monitoring Impact:** The Scrutiny Panel and the Tenants Voice Group will monitor the action plans formulated by Officers, elected members and residents and measure their impact to ensure lasting improvements. The Scrutiny Panel and Tenants Voice Group can also recommend the establishment of a focus or steering group where they deem this necessary for ongoing improvement.
- **Independent:** Tenants will lead and own the scrutiny process. They will choose topics, be given the information asked for within reasonable timescales, and compile their own recommendations.
- **Constructive:** Scrutineers are “critical friends” who identify improvements, hold the organisation to account, while also recognising good practice and working collaboratively.

### STRUCTURE AND MEMBERSHIP

The group will have a membership of up to 10 tenants and Leaseholders. Applications to join shall be continuously open to increase resident engagement.

A Chair will be elected by panel members to coordinate group activities, facilitate involvement and produce robust recommendations based on the findings and ideas of everyone on the panel. A chair is elected for a one-year term and members of the panel can nominate themselves. Agreement shall be reached by consensus. Where a consensus cannot be reached, agreement can be formed by a majority vote. Members of the panel must agree and adhere to the code of conduct. Members who do not adhere to the code of conduct will be asked to leave the panel.

Focus groups may be put in place where appropriate to work on themes, co-opted members could be from other partner organisations, the wider tenant base and include part of the membership from the main group, dependent on the subject matter. Tenant representatives will be asked to feedback from these groups at the main panel meetings.

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### STAFF REPRESENTATIVES ATTENDING AND CONTRIBUTING TO MEETINGS:

A member of the Community Engagement Team will attend meetings to give administrative support and provide requested documents and arrange meetings with officers. The Community Engagement Team will also facilitate meeting any training needs of the Panel. Council Officers will where possible attend meetings if requested by the Scrutiny Panel.

### MANAGEMENT AND COORDINATION OF MEETINGS

Meetings will run monthly with a minimum of 10 sessions each year. These meetings may be increased to fortnightly where the Panel feels they are needed. Panel members will be expected to attend 70% of all meetings, however if requested, an agreed absence period can be agreed by panel members.

Council Officers will where possible attend meetings if requested by the Scrutiny Panel.

### REPORTING ARRANGEMENTS

**Scrutiny Panel members will agree a schedule to keep tenants informed of their work including:**

- A written schedule of work showing upcoming topics chosen for scrutiny
- Participation in the annual report of recommendations and associated outcomes
- Attending other tenant involvement opportunities where appropriate
- Presenting updates, reports and action plans at Tenants Voice Group Meetings
- The Terms of Reference for the Group will be published on the staff intranet site and on the Lancaster City Council website.
- Minutes and actions of meetings will be e-mailed or posted out to all group members and published on the Scrutiny webpage on the Lancaster City Council website to keep the wider tenant base informed.
- Promotional short videos for social media and the Lancaster City Council Website will be produced by the scrutiny Panel and the Community Engagement Team.

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### CONFIDENTIALITY & DATA PROTECTION

Panel members must be aware that the Panel may have access to information not normally available to tenants and leaseholders. Information may also be commercially sensitive if shared outside the organisation. All members of the panel must keep information confidential where requested. Members of the panel recognise that the Council has a need to comply with the legal requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018.

### CODE OF CONDUCT

Any information provided in confidence to you in context with your work on the panel must not be shared with any person or organisation or discussed outside the panel meetings. Panel members shall treat each other, other tenants and council officers with respect. Panel members should therefore not use offensive, derogatory, patronising or discriminatory language. Violence, bullying, or threats will not be tolerated.

### REVIEW

This document, Scrutiny Panel Terms of Reference, will be reviewed, and where necessary updated, every 12 months by the panel. All recommendations and associated outcomes will be published, on the Lancaster City Council Housing website and in the Lancaster City Council Housing newsletter throughout the year to keep tenants informed of the Scrutiny Panels work.

### READING AGE ASSESSMENT

The "Tenant Scrutiny Panel Terms of Reference" is written in formal, professional language typical of policy documents. It contains multi-clause sentences, specialist terminology (e.g., "co-regulation", "General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)", "action plan", "focus or steering group"), and some complex concepts regarding governance and accountability.

Based on a qualitative review of sentence structure, vocabulary, and conceptual density, the document is likely to require a reading age of approximately 15 to 16 years (GCSE level, Key Stage 4).

This means it would generally be suitable for readers in Year 10 or Year 11 in the British education system. Readers below this age may find some sections challenging due to the use of technical terms and lengthy sentences.