

Croydon Housing Scrutiny Panel

Terms of Reference

1.0 Aims and objectives

- 1.1 To operate on behalf of Croydon Council tenants and leaseholders, to ensure that the council provides housing services that meet residents' needs and are of the highest standard.
- 1.2 To continually monitor and review the housing services provided by the council.
- 1.3 To provide an opportunity for tenants and leaseholders to examine performance and procedures relating to housing services and challenge and question staff who manage & deliver those services.
- 1.4 Make recommendations to senior managers and councillors on how housing services can be improved.

2.0 The role of the Housing Scrutiny Panel

- 2.1 The housing regulator requires housing providers to establish a scrutiny panel as part of the co regulatory approach, which means that the residents and the provider (the council) work in equal partnership to assess and scrutinise housing services. It is therefore essential that all aspects of the work of the Housing Scrutiny Panel are driven and directed by resident panel members but with support from officers of the council.
- 2.2 The Housing Scrutiny Panel will identify and prioritise the areas of service that require scrutiny.
- 2.3 The panel will identify and collect evidence, such as procedures, performance data, etc. to enable housing services to be scrutinised.
- 2.4 The panel will commission and oversee the full range of resident led scrutiny activities, such as mystery shopping, housing services inspectors, etc.
- 2.5 Where the panel members agree it is relevant or useful to do so, they may undertake, or participate in, such activities themselves.
- 2.6 The Housing Scrutiny Panel will examine the evidence, including results or reports from other scrutiny activities, identify issues with the service and make recommendations for service improvements.
- 2.7 The panel will produce written reports and action plans following each exercise, which will be presented to senior management or councillors.
- 2.8 The Housing Scrutiny Panel will monitor and review agreed action plans.

- 2.9 Members of the panel will provide regular feedback to other tenants about the activities of the panel.
- 2.10 Members will also proactively promote the Housing Scrutiny Panel and the work it undertakes to other residents, at meetings, events etc. and encourage other residents to get involved.

3. Membership

- 3.1 Up to 12 membership places will be available in total.
- 3.2 Anyone who is a Croydon Council tenant or leaseholder, or any member of the family of a council tenant or leaseholder living in the same household **and** who is over 18 will be eligible to apply.
- 3.3 One place will be reserved for an independent 'expert' who has considerable understanding or knowledge about social housing or scrutiny. This appointment will be agreed by the panel members and the appointee will not be eligible to become Chair or to have full voting rights.
- 3.4 One place will be reserved for a tenant representative from another housing provider. This appointment will be agreed by panel members and the appointee will not be eligible to become Chair or to have full voting rights.
- 3.5 Housing Scrutiny Panel members will be recruited via advertisements to all tenants and leaseholders of Croydon Council and applicants will be asked to self assess themselves against an agreed person specification.
- 3.6 Applicants will be shortlisted and interviewed by an independent panel who will select those who they feel best meet the role profile.
- 3.7 Members must sign an undertaking to abide by the relevant guidance relating to procedures and behaviour. Any breaches of this guidance will be investigated and dealt with firmly and promptly.
- 3.8 Panel members must commit themselves to a minimum 2 years service. At the end of the two years, members will stand down. Members who stand down at the end of their term of office may be re-selected but will be considered alongside other suitable applicants through the next round of selection and interviews.
- 3.9 In the event of a panel member failing to attend 3 consecutive meetings without good reason, they will be deemed to have resigned, unless otherwise agreed by the panel. Their place will be filled via the recruitment process.

4. Equalities, diversity and confidentiality

- 4.1 The Housing Scrutiny Panel will recognise the existence and importance of the diversity within Croydons' resident profile and will strive to ensure that no group or individual will be disadvantaged as a consequence of the panels activities.

- 4.2 The Housing Scrutiny Panel will be committed to promoting equality of opportunity to all persons in every aspect of the activities the panel carries out.
- 4.3 The work of the panel will have regard to the councils' respective Equality Impact Assessment and action plan and refer to the relevant section(s) of the Appropriate Behaviour Policy (available separately). In addition, all members must undertake mandatory equality and diversity training.
- 4.4 Housing Scrutiny Panel members will have access to sensitive and confidential information and must ensure this information is gathered, handled, shared and disposed of, in an appropriate manner.
- 4.5 It is therefore essential that Housing Scrutiny Panel members are familiar with and agree to abide by, the terms of the Access to Information Protocol. (available separately)

5 Frequency of meetings

- 5.1 The Panel will normally meet monthly with a minimum of 10 meetings per year. The meetings should take place at a time and in a central location that is agreed to be convenient to the majority of members.
- 5.2 The Panel may establish Task and Finish Groups (or similar small working groups) to lead on, or undertake specific activities. These groups must report to the Scrutiny Panel at an agreed frequency.
- 5.3 If agreed by a majority of members, the panel may meet more frequently than monthly but in all cases, consideration should be given to ensure meetings do not place an unrealistic burden on members.

6 Quorum

- 6.1 A quorum will be more than 50% of members e.g. if membership is 12, a quorum will be 7. Inquorate meetings should be noted and decisions ratified at the next quorate meeting.

7 Officer support

- 7.1 The Housing Scrutiny Panel will receive administrative support from the resident involvement team. This support will include arranging meetings, taking minutes and providing other general support to ensure panel members can undertake their roles efficiently.
- 7.2 Officers from the resident involvement team will also perform a liaison role between the Housing Scrutiny Panel and the council, to co-ordinate the involvement of other departments in scrutiny activities, such as work shadowing, gathering performance information etc. and arranging for relevant officers to attend meetings with members of the Housing Scrutiny Panel.

8 Facilitation of meetings

- 8.1 Every year, the members of the group will approve the selection of two members of the group who will take on the role of Chair and Vice Chair.
- 8.2 The facilitation of meetings will normally be undertaken by the Chair or in their absence, the Vice Chair will take on this role.
- 8.3 Any Housing Scrutiny Panel member may put their name forward to be selected for the position of Chair or Vice Chair at the relevant time.
- 8.4 In the event of more than one member being nominated for either position, voting will take place to select the successful candidate. Where a vote is required, each resident Housing Scrutiny Panel member present at the meeting, will have one vote.
- 8.5 If required, voting by secret ballot can be arranged and administered by the officers from the council.

9 Area of business

- 9.1 The remit of the Housing Scrutiny Panel will be to consider any area of housing service performance, provided or managed by the council.
This will include: (not exclusively)
 - housing management services
 - repairs or other services provided to council tenants and leaseholders by third party contractors or partners
 - the provision of statutory services relating to housing, such as housing advice, allocations etc.
 - resident involvement and communication
 - customer services relating to any area of the housing service
 - housing finance

10 Developing a programme of scrutiny work

- 10.1 The Housing Scrutiny Panel will develop a programme of scrutiny work and review this at least once each year. The priority areas for consideration will be decided using feedback from all available sources of information, including:
 - performance reports
 - reports from service review groups, Housing Services Inspectors, mystery shoppers, focus groups etc.
 - local resident groups and associations, or contact by individual residents
 - through formal housing panels and forums, Neighbourhood Voices, estate inspections
 - resident surveys
 - complaints monitoring
 - benchmarking

- 10.2 The Housing Scrutiny Panel may consider it useful and appropriate to commission surveys or similar activities themselves, in order to inform the process of prioritisation.
- 10.3 Members of the Housing Scrutiny Panel will consider and discuss information from the sources, as noted above, before making their decision as to which area(s) are to be scrutinised in the following exercise(s).

11 Carrying out a scrutiny exercise

- 11.1 Having identified an area of service to scrutinise, the Housing Scrutiny Panel will develop a detailed schedule of activities, which will feed into the scrutiny exercise. Some of these activities will be undertaken by panel members, while others will be commissioned by the panel to be carried out by others and the results fed back to the Housing Scrutiny Panel.
- 11.2 Activities will include: (not exclusively)
- collecting and studying procedures, service standards and performance reports
 - interviewing managers, staff and customers
 - mystery shopping
 - looking at existing customer feedback, satisfaction surveys or complaints
 - carrying out detailed inspection of the service
 - work shadowing
 - surveys
- 11.3 The above activities should be carried out in a timely manner and with reference to the relevant procedural protocols and guidance on behaviour etc. (available separately) to ensure the activities are conducted efficiently, appropriately and professionally.

12 Producing reports and action plans following scrutiny exercises.

- 12.1 The panel members will be responsible for collating the information and findings gained from the various activities, as in 11.2 (above) that feed into the scrutiny of a particular service.
- 12.2 Following open discussions, the panel members will produce a written report, detailing how the exercise was carried out, identifying key issues and concerns as well as showing any strengths in the service being scrutinised.
- 12.3 In order to be confident that the scrutiny exercise will lead to real and positive improvements to the service, an action plan must then be produced, based on the findings of the scrutiny report.
- 12.4 Officers from the resident involvement team will provide support and advice relating to the production of any reports and action plans but it is essential that the views and observations contained within either document are only those of Housing Scrutiny Panel members.

13 Relationship with other residents and resident bodies

- 13.1 The minutes of formal meetings, reports and action plans produced by the Housing Scrutiny Panel will be made available on the council's web site and to any tenant on request.
- 13.2 In addition, any activities that the Housing Scrutiny Panel are arranging, such as recruitment exercises, or other general information about the work of the panel such as procedures and terms of reference, will be displayed on the council's web site. Where relevant, information will also be made more widely available via the resident involvement e.newsletter, Open House etc.
- 13.3 The Housing Scrutiny Panel is an integral element of the resident involvement framework and the panel should ensure open channels of communication exist between the panel and other residents. This can be in the various forms shown in 13.1 and 13.2 above, as well as by way of formal reports or feed back provided to residents at meetings.

14 Relationship with the Tenant & Leaseholder Panel and Departmental Management Team

- 14.1 The reports and action plans produced by the Housing Scrutiny Panel will be delivered to either the relevant Departmental, or Senior Management Team in advance of a pre arranged meeting where members of the Housing Scrutiny Panel will then present their findings to the relevant directors or head(s) of service.
- 14.2 The full report and the action plan will be discussed and the relevant head of service or director will agree the action(s) shown on the plan, or make suggestions or recommendations about alternative actions, timescales etc. Any such changes should be agreed by the Housing Scrutiny Panel before being drawn into the final action plan.
- 14.3 The report and the final version of the agreed action plan will be presented to the Tenant & Leaseholder Panel by a member of the Housing Scrutiny Panel and published on the council's web site.
- 14.4 Where a member of the Housing Scrutiny Panel is also a member of the Tenant and Leaseholder Panel and the scrutiny report being presented relates to an issue / activity which is of particular interest to that resident, they must declare that interest and may not participate in any discussions or decision making.
- 14.5 A member of the Housing Scrutiny Panel cannot also be appointed as the Chair or Vice Chair of the Tenant and Leaseholder Panel. If a member accepts such an appointment, they must resign their place on the Housing Scrutiny Panel.
- 14.6 In urgent or exceptional circumstances the Scrutiny panel may request that the Cabinet Member for Housing, Executive Director or Director to attend their meeting with senior management as in 14.1 (above).
- 14.7 In the event of the Housing Scrutiny Panel being dissatisfied with the Management Team's response, the panel may write to the relevant Executive Director setting

out its concerns. The Executive Director will take account of the concerns and meet with the Housing Scrutiny Panel at a mutually convenient date within 21 days where the Executive Director will discuss the matter and provide the panel with a response. If the Housing Scrutiny Panel remains dissatisfied it may take its concerns to the Homes and Communities Agency or agree to take the matter through the councils' formal complaints procedure.

- 14.8 In the event of the council having concerns about the compliance of the Housing Scrutiny Panel with these Terms of Reference, representatives from the council will meet with the Housing Scrutiny Panel at the next scheduled meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Panel. (subject to 14 days notice in advance of the meeting) At this meeting the council will raise these concerns and establish a joint agreement to ensure that the Housing Scrutiny Panel complies with these Terms of Reference.

15 Budget

- 15.1 The council will consult with the Housing Scrutiny Panel and negotiate a budget to support the panel to operate effectively. An annual budget will be agreed and quarterly budget reports made available to the panel as required.

16 Training

- 16.1 All new members of the Housing Scrutiny Panel will undertake an induction programme within 3 months of joining. Further training and capacity building requirements of members will be assessed and relevant training delivered on an ongoing basis.
- 16.2 Members of the Housing Scrutiny Panel will work with officers from the resident involvement team to develop and review a training programme which will be arranged by the team. Training will be through sessions delivered by members of the team or by external trainers, or where relevant panel members may attend courses and similar events provided by other organisations. An element for training will be incorporated into the annual Housing Scrutiny Panel budget as per paragraph 15 (above).

17 Evaluation of Housing Scrutiny Panel activities

- 17.1 The work of the Housing Scrutiny Panel will be included in an annual impact assessment of the resident involvement work of Croydon Council and the findings of the impact assessment will be reported to the Tenant & Leaseholder Panel.

18 Alteration to these Terms of Reference

- 18.1 Any changes or amendments to these terms of reference must be approved by a majority of Housing Scrutiny Panel members at a panel meeting and then the changes ratified by the Tenant and Leaseholder Panel.