

West Dunbartonshire Scrutiny Panel Terms of Reference

1. Name

The name of the Panel will be the West Dunbartonshire Scrutiny Panel.

2. Aims:

- well organised, effective and independent Panel to review, assess and challenge housing services performance
- a formal and recognised role in housing services performance framework
- contribute to improving housing services which are of the highest standard and which meet tenants and other customers' needs
- develop greater customer influence in decision-making on services

3. Objectives:

- consider all areas of housing service performance against agreed local and national targets and standards
- establish priorities for reviewing the Council's performance and oversee tenant-led scrutiny activities as detailed in the programme of work
- make evidence based recommendations to the Housing Management Team (HMT) for on-going service improvement
- scrutinise and make recommendations to the HMT about proposals for targets

4. Role:

- acting as a 'critical friend' take an independent and objective view of West Dunbartonshire Council's housing services performance
- form an integral part of the performance management framework through effective links with the Housing Management Team and the formal tenant participation structure
- contribute to improving housing services

5. Membership:

There will be a maximum of 12 people on the Scrutiny Panel.

All WDC tenants and owners who receive a factoring service from the Council are eligible to apply to be on the Panel. However tenants who are in breach of their tenancy or anyone who is subject to an anti-social behaviour order will not be accepted on to the Panel.

Employees of West Dunbartonshire Council housing services cannot join the Scrutiny Panel. Members of the Panel must also declare any relationship they have with any West Dunbartonshire Council elected member or employee.

Tenants and residents serving as members in tenants and residents' associations cannot take part in the Scrutiny Panel. Tenants and residents' associations have a different role within the participation process. In order to maintain the independence of both structures, in the short-term, the two should be kept separate. It is important for the Panel to establish itself, its role and relationship separate from other structures.

Whilst the Scrutiny Panel and tenants and residents' associations are separate there are clear connections and the Panel recognises the added value that the RTOs can bring. Liaison with tenants and residents' associations, sharing information and feedback to associations is addressed later in these terms of reference.

A role profile for members of the Panel is not necessary. The Terms of Reference and Code of Conduct will suffice. This will be reviewed once the Panel has completed its development phase.

Turnover of membership of the Panel during any one year should be given careful consideration. The Panel should aim to achieve a balance of retaining skills and experiences for consistency whilst encouraging new membership. Membership may be reviewed on an annual basis.

The Tenant Participation Officer will be responsible for recruitment of new members; however timing and approaches to recruitment will be discussed and agreed with the Panel members.

The Panel can co-opt members with specific skills considered appropriate to assist the Panel in its duties.

Any Panel member who fails to attend three consecutive meetings without apologies will forfeit their membership of the Panel.

The quorum of the Panel shall be half plus one of its membership. Inquorate meetings should be noted and recommendations ratified at the next quorate meeting.

A chairperson will be elected each year. Their term of office will be 12 months. The Chairperson can stand for re-election but should be considered alongside other suitable members wishing to be considered.

The vice-chair will deputise for the chair in their absence. The maximum term of office for either a Chair or Vice Chair will be three years in total.

The role of the chairperson:

- Chair the Panel and co-ordinate its activities to achieve its aims
- liaise with officers and others as necessary to plan for forthcoming meetings
- ensuring fair discussion and getting through the agenda on time
- welcome members and introduce guests
- promote the work of the Panel and champion its activities
- encourage members to rigorously challenge and scrutinise
- encourage members to develop their skills

6. Frequency of Panel meetings / working groups

During the development phase the Panel will normally meet once a month. Depending on its work plan the Panel will meet as required but within a minimum of four quarterly meetings per year (to be reviewed at the end of the development phase).

Scrutiny groups must report to the Panel at an agreed frequency.

7. Support and resources

Administrative support, support to liaise with existing tenant participation structures and to provide reports and feedback will be provided by officers within the Housing Strategy and Development Team as required during the development phase of the Panel.

All new Panel members will undergo induction training based upon the Stepping Up to Scrutiny Programme.

Panel members along with the Tenant Participation Officer will identify training and development needs and take part in training and development sessions as appropriate.

A handbook of key documents will be collated during the development phase.

All Panel members will be able to claim expenses for reasonable costs incurred in their role on the Panel, in line with the Council's existing policies.

Resources to support the Panel will be met by the Tenant Participation budget during the development phase of the Panel. The Tenant Participation Officer will be responsible for ensuring that budget expenditure is recorded.

The Panel will be able to request reports and information from the Council to carry out its scrutiny activity. All requests for information and evidence must be made via the Housing Strategy and Development Team.

8. Programme of work

An annual programme of work which will detail scrutiny activities will be developed by the Scrutiny Panel. Priority areas for review will be decided using information and feedback from all available resources, for example:

- performance indicators
- satisfaction surveys
- annual return on the Charter
- Assurance and Improvement Plan
- Annual report to tenants and other customers on Charter performance
- Reports from service review groups, tenant inspections, mystery shopping and focus groups
- Complaints information

The draft Annual Return on the Charter will be discussed with the Scrutiny Panel each year before submission to the Scottish Housing Regulator.

The Panel members can contribute to the production of the Annual Report to tenants and other customers on the Scottish Social Housing Charter.

9. Relationships with other tenant participation groups and accountability

The Panel will ensure that reports and recommendations made by the group focused on improving Council performance and services to tenants will be made widely available to tenants and other customers.

In order to keep staff, tenants and residents associations, the sheltered housing forum and the wider tenant and customer body up to date about the progress and work of the Scrutiny Panel the following methods could be used:

- Existing Tenant Participation or Housing Strategy Updates (or development of a Scrutiny Panel update)
- Quarterly Housing News magazine
- Council website (possible Scrutiny Panel page)
- Liaison meetings with the Council and WDTR
- Panel members could also attend other events as appropriate to discuss their work

The Housing Management Team (Housing Management Team) will consider all reports and provide a formal response.

The HMT will provide a response to the Panel within 21 days of receiving its report. If a full report is not available then the response will advise when the full response will be available.

The full response must include an action plan to bring about improvements and or an explanation where recommendations cannot be implemented.

In the event that the Panel is dissatisfied with the HMT response the Panel may write to the HMT setting out its concerns. The HMT will take account of these concerns and arrange for a senior manager to meet with the Panel at a convenient date within 21 days where they will provide the Panel with a response.

If the Panel remains dissatisfied it may take its concerns to the Scottish Housing Regulator.

In the event of the HMT having concerns about Panel compliance with the terms of reference or code of conduct then senior officers will meet with the Panel to raise concerns and establish joint agreement to ensure that the Panel complies with the terms of reference and code of conduct.

10. Evaluation

The work of the Panel will be subject to an annual monitoring and evaluation programme. The programme will include collection and feedback from Panel members, the HMT, managers, officers and tenants and residents associations and any individual tenants or other customers. Outcomes of the evaluations will be reported to the Panel and the HMT.

11. Review of the Terms of Reference

The Panel supported by the Tenant Participation Officer will carry out a review of the Terms of Reference at the end of 2015.