

DRAFT Guide to Tenant Scrutiny in Brighton & Hove

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1. Welcome

Thank you very much for showing an interest in becoming a member of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel (TSP) in Brighton & Hove.

We have put together this information pack to explain why Brighton & Hove City Council (BHCC) is introducing tenant scrutiny and how you could play an essential role in improving housing services for BHCC tenants and leaseholders (residents).

We hope that this pack will answer any questions you have, but if not please contact Karen Amsden on 01273 291084 or email scrutiny@brighton-hove.gov.uk with any queries.

2. What is Tenant Scrutiny?

Why are we introducing tenant scrutiny in Brighton & Hove?

The Government is currently making big changes to how social landlords are regulated. As part of this, your council will be expected from April 2012 to involve tenants and leaseholders in scrutinising their housing service. Areas of the service that the Panel could check include:

- Repairs
- Allocations
- Rent levels
- Service charges
- Anti-social behaviour
- Community development

Working together

The aim is to give you a greater say in important issues that affect your home and hold BHCC to account if you do not feel they are delivering a sufficiently good service. Rather than the council being inspected to check how well it delivers its services, tenants and leaseholders will lead the way and will be expected to identify their issues of concern.

A tenant scrutiny panel

Setting up a scrutiny panel of tenants and leaseholders is often seen as the main way of achieving tenant scrutiny and consists of:

*'...a group of tenants [and leaseholders] with the power to review information about their landlord's performance and make recommendations for improvement.'*¹

¹ Housing Practice, CIH Briefing 19

What can tenant scrutiny do for you?

The key areas which tenant scrutiny will be encouraged to look at will be:

- How well the Housing Service is performing
- Whether services are meeting tenants and leaseholders' needs
- Complaints

Tenant scrutiny will give you a formal way of:

- Identifying areas of concern
- Finding evidence. This could be anything from customer satisfaction surveys, complaints information or information on how well different services are performing
- Asking questions
- Making recommendations on how to improve services
- Helping the council to make the best use of the money it receives from you

As a result you will have the chance to influence and be involved in:

- Recommending housing policies and setting service standards
- Recommending priorities for the service
- Recommending how services are delivered
- Reviewing the council's performance
- Managing the repair and maintenance services

What can be achieved by tenant scrutiny?

Some housing organisations have already introduced tenant scrutiny and the benefits to tenants and leaseholders have included:

- Improved services
- Reduced service costs
- Higher levels of tenant satisfaction

The panel will be supported by the council's Scrutiny team and will have real power to influence the quality of the service that residents' receive.

4. How will tenant scrutiny work in Brighton and Hove?

In 2011 a group was set up to look at widening resident involvement in the city. Known as the Innovation Group, they were made up of long standing involved residents, Cllr Wakefield (Chair of the Housing Committee), residents who were not currently involved and council officers.

This Group developed the following set of principles for the establishment of the Panel:

1. A panel of twelve people
2. Need different skills and experiences to sit on the panel
3. Mix of one third existing elected tenant representatives and two thirds tenants who are not elected tenant representatives
4. Representative of all tenants – e.g. mix of ages, ethnicities, etc
5. An open day for people interested in being involved to come along and find out more about tenant scrutiny
6. Informal recruitment process to the panel that is non intimidating, with selection taking place against some criteria
7. Training and learning opportunities to be offered to all panel members - e.g. in research, working as a group, performance issues, gathering information and evidence
8. The panel should move beyond consultation and engagement. It needs to exercise real power and drill down on issues to get a detailed picture, before making evidence-based recommendations
9. Recommendations will be made to the Housing Committee, which will remain the ultimate decision maker
10. The panel should be supported by the council's Scrutiny Team (independent, experienced and non-political), possibly with independent mentor for the first year or so.
11. Membership of the panel should be time-limited, with positions for 2 years, but 3 years for the first group
12. Members of the panel should be replenished annually one third at a time following the initial tenure of approximately three years - or as required
13. The possibility of working collaboratively with other local housing providers to share learning and skills should be explored once the panel has been up and running for a while.

Members of the Innovation Group were also keen to see the panel invite an independent member or mentor to join them.

How will the Panel work?

Tenant Scrutiny is in the relatively early stages of being developed across the country. So much of the detail of how the Panel will work in practice will be decided once the Panel members have been recruited. However once the

Panel has been established it will be expected to report annually to tenants and leaseholders and agree an annual work plan.

Scrutiny reviews

Based on the evidence about the housing service, the Panel will decide to look in more detail at a number of specific areas of the service, where they feel there is the greatest need for improvement. These will be the scrutiny topics for the year.

How will the Panel look at these scrutiny topics?

Each topic will be looked at in detail by the Panel and members of the public will be invited to submit evidence to them. Other ways of gathering evidence could include:

- Shadowing staff or contractors
- Interviewing managers
- Talking to residents
- Looking at performance information
- Looking at complaints information
- Looking at policies and procedures
- Visiting other landlords to say how they do it

Who will support the Panel?

The Panel will be supported the council's Scrutiny Team which will help it to work independently to gather its evidence and look at topics. The panel will be able to benefit from the Scrutiny Team's experience in carrying out challenging and constructive reviews of pressing issues.

Where will the Panel report to?

Once the panel have produced a report on a topic, any recommendations they make will be presented to the council's Housing Committee. This Committee will agree a response to the report and/or recommendations of the panel. The response of the Housing Committee, along with the original report of the TSP, will then be reported to Housing Management Consultative Sub-Committee.

5. Brighton & Hove Tenant Scrutiny Panel (TSP) - Draft Terms of Reference

5.1 ROLE OF THE PANEL

The role of the panel will be to:

- Address tenants and leaseholders concerns about the housing service
- Recommend how to improve services
- Consider how well the council is planning future services

Aims and Objectives of the TSP

- To work on behalf of tenants and leaseholders, to ensure that the council provides housing services that meet their needs, and achieve the standards set out in the 2012 regulation framework for social housing.²
- To act as a driver for the continuous review and improvement of housing services.
- To provide an opportunity for tenants and leaseholders to examine the housing service's performance and procedures, as well as challenge and question staff who manage and deliver the service.
- Act as a 'critical friend' on behalf of tenants and leaseholders to senior staff and councillors in relation to improving housing services

5.2 MEMBERSHIP OF THE PANEL

The members of the Panel will be selected using the following principles:

- Tenants and leaseholders will be able to apply for to join the Tenant Scrutiny Panel (TSP). Up to 12 places will be available for panel membership. At the setting up of the panel, one of these places will be reserved for an independent expert or mentor.
- All Brighton & Hove Housing tenants and leaseholders will be eligible to apply.³
- The panel will benefit from a range of skills and experience and so will seek to attract a mixture of existing tenant representatives and uninvolved tenants and leaseholders (the aim would be to attract 1/3 of

² <http://www.tenantservicesauthority.org/upload/pdf/rt-main-full.pdf>

³ The selection panel may wish to consider whether tenants in formal dispute with the council would suffer an adverse impact on their ability to discharge their duties as a member of the panel.

the Panel from currently involved residents and 2/3 from residents who are not currently involved)

- Successful applicants will be selected from those considered to best meet the role profile following discussions with the selection panel
- The membership of the TSP will aim to broadly reflect the diversity of the resident population
- Panel members must sign the Code of Conduct and then uphold it at all times
- All panel members will be expected to attend an induction course and be available to undertake additional training throughout the year

An important part of setting up the Panel will be to attract tenants and leaseholders who are not currently involved, and those who come from harder to reach groups such as younger people and Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups.

Recruitment and succession

Panel members will be recruited using an advertisement to all tenants and leaseholders, as well as other promotional material. They will be asked to complete an application form. Panel members will then be selected by an interview panel. Both an induction, and training, programme will be provided. Panel members will be asked to sign a code of conduct.

[TBC following comments in HMCSC] Panel members will be asked to commit themselves to a term of two year's service, except for 50% of the initial members of the first panel who will be asked to serve a term of three years to ensure staggered recruitment in future. At the end of their term members can seek reselection up to a maximum of eight years.

5.3 PANEL MEETINGS

Frequency of Meetings

The Panel will aim to have a minimum of four meetings per year. The TSP may establish scrutiny reviews to examine specific issues. In the event of a panel member failing to attend three consecutive TSP 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.

Quorum

A quorum will be if more than 50% of members (i.e. if membership is 12, a quorum will be 7). Inquorate meetings should be noted and information referred to the next quorate meeting.

Meetings

In the interests of openness and transparency, meetings will generally be open to the public and representatives of the press, unless at a meeting where a resolution to exclude the press and public is passed by those present.

5.4 SUPPORT AND RESOURCES FOR THE PANEL

Training and development

All new panel members will undertake an induction programme, and their training and capacity building requirements will also be assessed. The training programme for panel members will be developed, delivered and regularly reviewed to ensure that they are able to carry out their work plan.

Officer support

The TSP will be supported by the council's Scrutiny Team to take minutes, advise tenant representatives, co-ordinate meetings and support the drafting of reports and recommendations to the council.

Budget

The panel will have access to a limited annual budget to carry out the following:

- Seek independent advice and training
- Undertake visits
- Publicise their events
- Other necessary work of the panel

5.5 THE WORK OF THE SCRUTINY PANEL

Areas of Business

The remit of the TSP will be to consider all areas of the housing service performance. It will be able to request any relevant information, or the attendance of council officers, which is needed to undertake its duties.

The work of the TSP

The panel will ensure that services are effectively scrutinised and shaped by tenants by:

- Act independently to voice the concerns of Brighton & Hove CC tenants and leaseholders
- Examining and evaluating policies, strategies and procedures

- Monitoring performance, with the ability to dig down where there are questions about performance
- Challenging councillors and senior staff through agreed scrutiny reviews. This will include:
- Collecting evidence to enable housing services to be scrutinised
 - Examine the evidence, make recommendations for service improvements
 - Make recommendations to senior management or councillors
 - Monitor and review agreed action plans
 - Tell other tenants and leaseholders what the panel is doing and encourage them to get involved

Annual work programme

The TSP will agree an annual work plan at the beginning of each year. The priority areas for review will be decided using feedback from all available information, including:

- Performance reports
- Reports from area panels, mystery shoppers, City Assembly and other relevant sources
- Tenants and residents' associations
- Tenant surveys, complaints data and benchmarking

Reporting arrangements

All recommendations of the TSP will be presented to the council's Housing Committee within two months of a review's recommendations being agreed by the panel/or the next meeting of the Committee. The Housing Committee will agree a response to the report/recommendations of the TSP. The report of the panel and the response of the Housing Committee will then be presented to the Housing Management Consultative Sub-Committee.

A summary of the report, recommendations and any agreed actions will then be reported back to the TSP and published on the council's website.

Access to information

Brighton & Hove City Council, and its contractors where relevant, shall provide the TSP with information, advice and documents to enable it to carry out its scrutiny role (providing that it is appropriate to do so – taking into account commercial sensitivities and access to information and privacy laws).

5.6 IMPACT OF THE TSP

The accountability of the TSP to tenants and leaseholders

It is important for the panel to be accountable to BHCC residents by:

- Publishing its findings in an annual report which provides information about their findings and work in the previous year
- A dedicated tenant scrutiny page on the council website, which would include meeting dates, minutes of meetings and panel reports. This information would also be provided to any tenant or leaseholder on request
- Consulting with a wider group of tenants and leaseholders about what scrutiny reviews should be carried out
- Residents will be able to raise an issue directly with the panel and meetings of the panel will have time set aside to consider requests for scrutiny, letters and questions
- Using social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, to raise awareness of the work of the panel

Evaluation of activities of the TSP

A review of the effectiveness of the panel will be undertaken after the first 12 months of its operation.

The work of the panel will be subject to an annual impact assessment and its findings will be reported, this will make recommendations for improvements.

6. Tenant Scrutiny Panel Application Form

Completing the application form

If you need any help in completing this form, or require it in any other format or language, please contact Karen Amsden, Scrutiny Officer on 01273 291084 or email scrutiny@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Your details

Full Name	
Postal Address	
Postcode	
Telephone number	
Email address	

Please tick the boxes below to say in which areas you have knowledge and experience that you could bring to the Scrutiny Panel. We don't expect you to be answer 'yes' to everything. Induction and training will be provided and there will be support from the Scrutiny Team.

Your knowledge and experiences	Yes	No	Not sure or Some
Are you a Brighton & Hove City Council tenant or leaseholder living in a BHCC property?			
I want to act on behalf of tenants and leaseholders to improve services for everyone who lives in a BHCC property			
I have worked on a committee or a Board			
I have worked as a volunteer			
I have worked in the community			
I want to work as part of a team and contribute to group discussions			
I am able to understand documents and give my view on them to a group of people			
I have good listening skills and am prepared to listen to other points of view			

Ability to commit to the work of the panel

Commitments needed	Yes	No	Not sure or Some
I can commit the time needed to make the scrutiny panel a success (at least 5 hours per month)			
I am willing to participate in the training sessions			
Available to attend tenant scrutiny panel meetings			

Details of employment and voluntary work

Please give us brief details of your current and past employment, or any other experience(s) which you could bring to the Panel.

Please explain why you want to join the scrutiny panel and why you would be a good scrutiniser.

Do you have any other skills and experience that you would like to tell us about, including any qualification or training?

Declaration

Please read the following statements carefully and sign and date this application form:

- I am not employed by Brighton & Hove City Council (BHCC), or business partner, or potential business partner of BHCC
- I have read and understood the details included within this application form
- If appointed, I am prepared to comply with the Scrutiny Panel Code of Conduct and to act in good faith and in the interests of the Panel
- I understand that if one of the members of the Scrutiny Panel's behaviour brings the Panel into disrepute, action may be taken to remove or exclude that person from the Panel
- I know that Panel members are volunteers and are not entitled to receive payment (other than properly incurred expenses)
- I declare that all the information provided on this application form is correct and that if appointed I will be liable to action which could include my removal from the Scrutiny Panel should I knowingly give false information.
- I acknowledge that Brighton & Hove City Council will conduct any necessary checks to verify this information. I understand that if I don't want these checks to go ahead my application will not be progressed.
- I am able to commit to attending Scrutiny Panel meetings and take part in any necessary training

Signature

Date.....

Please return this completed application to:

Karen Amsden, Scrutiny Officer, Room 128, King's House, Grand Avenue
Brighton & Hove, BN3 2LS

Or email scrutiny@brighton-hove.gov.uk

7. Induction and training programme

7.1 Why do I need an induction before I become a panel member?

The aim of the induction programme is to:

- Explain the aims and priorities of the housing service and the role of the TSP
- Make sure panel members know what is expected of them
- Enable the panel to become effective as quickly as possible

7.2 What would I gain from the induction?

- Understanding what is scrutiny
- Understanding what your role would be on the scrutiny panel
- Knowing your other TSP members
- Identifying your training and support needs and agreeing a training plan
- Understanding your housing service and the main issues facing social housing
- Meeting the key people you will need to work with in BHCC Housing Service

7.3 What kind skills training might be provided?

The induction programme will give you a chance to agree a training plan to develop the skills and knowledge you need. This could include:

Skills training

- Communication skills
- Evaluation
- Team working
- Confidence building
- Understanding the organisation
- Understanding performance information
- Negotiation skills
- Report writing
- Presentation skills

Knowledge

- Relevant policies and procedures
- Using ICT and social media
- Key issues facing social housing
- What excellence looks like - e.g. Benchmarking reports, Audit Commission reports

7.4 Your induction pack

Before you join the TSP you will be given an induction pack which will include the following information:

- The Terms of Reference (TOR)
- Role description
- Code of conduct
- Relevant policies and procedures
- Contact information for key members of staff
- List of ways (e.g. websites) to gain information for carrying out scrutiny reviews

7.5 Ongoing training

As part of the annual evaluation of the effectiveness of the scrutiny panel, an annual programme of training will be developed for each member of the TSP.

8. Draft Tenant Scrutiny Panel Member Role Description

The role description describes the skills and qualities you would need to carry out the work which is involved in becoming a panel member. It also tells you how the council will help you develop your skills.

8.1 What is involved in tenant scrutiny?

Purpose

The purpose of the role of a Tenant Scrutiny Panel (TSP) member is to work as a member of a team to:

- Represent BHCC tenants and leaseholders, to make sure that they receive services of the highest standard
- Benchmark the performance of BHCC Housing against other similar organisations
- Select the key issues and topics to review and scrutinise
- Take an independent view of the performance of BHCC Housing
- Collect evidence to enable services to be scrutinised
- Assess performance against agreed standards
- Hold councillors and officers to account where performance falls below expected standards

Key Activities

The key activities you would carry out as a TSP member are to:

- Attend meetings, training and planning sessions
- Read documents in preparation for meetings
- Review performance information provided by BHCC Housing and other sources
- Choose issues and topics for review
- Compare performance to other similar organisations
- Question officers on areas of interest
- Participate in detailed reviews of areas of concern
- Where standards fall below expected levels, consider how improvements might be made
- Work co-operatively with other TSP members, BHCC staff and tenants and leaseholders
- Assist in the preparation of reports

Responsibilities

Your main responsibilities as a TSP member would be to:

- Carry out audits of services provided by BHCC
- Work with officers and other residents to understand the services provided and make recommendations for improvements

- Familiarise yourself with, and adhere to, relevant BHCC policies and procedures such as the Code of Conduct, Confidentiality, Health and Safety and Equality and Diversity
- Remain impartial and objective at all times
- Not to raise any personal issues or concerns via the TSP
- Act professionally and carry out your responsibilities with integrity and high standards of behaviour at all times
- Promote the work of the TSP and the wider principles of tenant and leaseholder involvement
- Treat everyone with respect and ensure that you are responsive to the needs of all people in the community.

8.2 What sort of person are we looking for?

Knowledge and experience

- Knowledge and experience of the housing services provided by BHCC
- Knowledge and experience of the needs and expectations of tenants and leaseholders of BHCC

Skills and abilities

This table lists the key qualities and experience you need to be an effective member of the scrutiny panel. Some of the skills are essential but the others can be developed with training and support from the Scrutiny team.

Skill	Essential	Desirable
Commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to attend regular meetings of the TSP • Commit time to read papers in advance of the meetings • Attend and participate in training sessions 	
Communication skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good communication skills • Good listening skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report writing skills • Presentation skills • Able to contribute to meetings
Analysing information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to analyse and question • Making decisions based on evidence 	
Teamwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to work as part of a team • Working to agreed deadlines • Support majority decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to share skills and knowledge to help other Panel members

Personal qualities

We would expect a tenant scrutiny panel member to have the following qualities:

- A good communicator
- Have good concentration
- A good listener
- Have an ability to handle and respect confidential information
- Tactful and diplomatic
- Professional, open minded and non judgemental
- Able to work to deadlines and as part of a team
- Able to attend meetings as required
- Respects others and their views
- Able to share skills and knowledge

8.3 What can we offer you?

Training, support & mentoring

All members will undertake an induction programme and further training needs will be assessed. Appropriate training, support and mentoring will be provided.

Improving your opportunities for employment

The tasks you carry out as a TSP member, as well as the training and support which is provided, will enhance your employability skills.