



**Tenant Scrutiny Panel
Report – Amendment of Terms of Reference**

July 2014

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1. Acknowledgements

- 1.1 We would like to thank the members of staff of North West Leicestershire District Council (NWLDC) who assisted us by providing the key documents and information required to formulate our strategy.. We would also like to thank the wider participants and partners – particularly tenants - for supporting us at this important stage of the development of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel.
- 1.2 The Panel also wish to pass on a special thanks to Karen Talbot of i 4 design who produced a logo on behalf of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Tenant Scrutiny Panel was recruited in December 2012. Originally consisting of eight members, there are currently five longstanding members on the Panel – all tenants of NWLDC.
- 2.2 The Group came into existence as a result of Government recommendations that Local Authorities must appoint a group of tenants to scrutinise Council policy and procedures with a view to improving the delivery of services to tenants.
- 2.3 Initially the Group underwent extensive training to gain the skills necessary for its members to understand various areas – e.g.:
 - ❖ Finding out About Tenant Scrutiny
 - ❖ Benefits Changes (especially Under Occupation)
 - ❖ Council Self Funding
 - ❖ NWLDC Management Structure
 - ❖ Attendance at Seminars
 - ❖ NWLDC 30 Year Plan
 - ❖ Interview Training
 - ❖ Report Writing and Presentations
 - ❖ Work Shadowing
 - ❖ Observation of a full Council meeting
- 2.4 Training and Development of Tenant Scrutiny Panel members is ongoing as every individual has differing skills and knowledge and future projects will doubtless identify other training needs.
- 2.5 The first year has not been without its difficulties, as will normally be the case when several total strangers come together to start working together on a topic about which they have little or no knowledge. However, generally there is a good relationship between all members and every opinion and idea brought to the table is received with respect and considered on its merits.
- 2.6 Following its initial year as a group, the Tenant Scrutiny Panel have reviewed and amended their Terms of Reference for Cabinet approval. The proposed revised Terms of Reference reflect both past learning and future commitments of the group.
- 2.7 In its first year the Panel chose to undertake its pilot inspection on the Decent Homes Improvement Programme (DHIP). As a first topic this brought the Group into the realms of the biggest project the Council itself has undertaken.

Isolating one small part to concentrate on wasn't easy and, at times, it was difficult to keep the Group focussed on the area they had chosen.

3. Proposed Terms of Reference

- 3.1 Part way through the first year of the groups existence it became obvious that the current terms of reference were not robust enough and the decision was taken to review.
- 3.2 At a Tenant Scrutiny Panel working meeting the terms of reference document was scrutinised item by item. A number of amendments were made and additional paragraphs inserted to cover all eventualities. The panel believed the new document provides a stronger and more stable basis on which to work.
- 3.3 The panel approved the revised Terms of Reference at its Annual General Meeting on 18 February 2014 at which time there was a change to elected Chairperson and appointment to the role of Secretary.
- 3.4 The revised Terms of Reference can be found in Appendix 1).

4. Pilot Inspection Report

- 4.1 The Tenant Scrutiny Panel was faced with the decision in the spring of 2013 as to what area to choose as its first project. The magnitude of the Decent Homes Works made it ideal as a topic. However it was apparent that the group would have to find one element to concentrate on and the contractor Satisfaction Surveys became an obvious choice.
- 4.2 The Tenant Scrutiny Panel identified some areas where small changes to procedures could bring significant benefits for both tenants and NWLDC. Five clear recommendations were put forward to the Housing Service in February 2014. These were:
 - 4.2.1 Recommendation 1 - One recommendation identified by the Panel related to Completion Inspection Certificate Forms, completed by Contract Supervisors responsible for inspecting and signing off work. Previously these forms were duplicate forms completed by the Contracts Supervisor, who would pass one copy to the contractor for confirmation of works completed or of outstanding /not to standard works for completion. The other copy would be retained in house. Following discussion between the Panel and Contract Supervisors it was suggested that the Council implement triplicate forms so that tenants could have a copy of the form for their own records to inform them with regards to status of works outstanding. The Repairs and Investment team immediately implemented this process.
 - 4.2.2 Recommendation 2 - It was suggested that to improve survey response rates the seven day prior letter be amended to include pre-notification of the survey. The Panel worded a paragraph to include that would be inserted in both the 7 and 21 day letters, which reads: "Please be aware that on completion of the work you will be requested to complete a 'Customer Satisfaction Survey'. Please take this opportunity to tell us if you are happy or not with the services that we

have provided for you. This feedback will help us manage future delivery of similar projects.” The Repairs and Investment team immediately implemented this process.

- 4.2.3 Recommendation 3 - To further improve perception of NWLDC the TSP recommend a letter is sent to each household receiving modifications under the DHIP when the work has been completed to demonstrate that NWLDC ‘takes ownership’ of the process. The letter could be worded as follows:

“We are delighted to hear that the Decent Homes work on your home has now been completed. We hope you are happy with the improvements and are feeling the benefits of this investment in your property.

Hopefully you have completed the Contractor Customer Survey and returned it to us but if you have any queries or comments relating to the works that you would like us to consider please complete the attached form and return it to us in the enclosed reply paid envelope.”

The enclosed form would show tenant name, address and telephone number, ask for details of works and leave several lines for comments.

- 4.2.4 Recommendation 4 - it is recommended that Lovell are taken to task regarding the results of the face to face interviews on Question 5. Lovell need to review their practices to improve tenant satisfaction. It is understood that Lovell have now started a process to address this.
- 4.2.5 Recommendation 5 - The most prominent issue that was identified was the lack of or poor communication relating to delivery of the works. Fifty percent of tenant responses said they were unhappy with communication for one reason or another. The TSP suggests that Contractor Resident Liaison Officers ensure they introduce themselves to tenants, hand over an induction plan and explain their role, checking that full details of all relevant contact numbers are made available to tenants to improve the situation. This is the procedure already outlined in the DHIP Manual; the TSP recommend that NWLDC, along with its contractors, revisit the procedures agreed by both parties, reinforce those procedures with contractors and monitor the contracts more

- 4.3 The Housing Service has acknowledged and accepted all five recommendations and has produced an action plan that has subsequently been approved by the panel. The action plan and current status of items can be found in Appendix 2).

5. Future Plans

- 5.1 The panel have identified three areas for inspection during 2014/15:
- 5.1.1 Rent arrears and evictions;
 - 5.1.2 Role of Housing Officers
 - 5.1.3 Repairs Service

Janet Higgins, Chair, On behalf of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel