



## **Darlington Borough Council**

### **Terms of Reference – Tenants Panel**

#### **Background**

As a social housing provider, we have a duty to ensure that tenants and members of the community have a formal role in assessing and influencing the performance, service delivery, plans and behaviour of Housing Services.

The Regulator of Social Housing states that all social housing providers should ensure that tenants are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in:

- The formulation of their landlords' housing-related policies and strategic priorities.
- The making of decisions about housing-related services are delivered, including the setting of service standards.
- The scrutiny of their landlords' performance and the making of recommendations to their landlord about how performance might be improved.
- The management of their homes, where applicable.
- The management of repair and maintenance services, such as commissioning and undertaking a range of repair tasks, as agreed with landlords, and the sharing in savings made.
- Agreeing local offers for service delivery.

With this in mind we have an active Tenants Panel and Online Tenants Panel who are vital in the success of everything we do.

#### **Aims**

The overall focus of the Tenants Panel is to ensure we provide an excellent service to our Tenants and meet regulatory requirements that we are accountable for.

1. The Panel will hold the Council to account for delivery of the service objectives, performance, customer satisfaction and inequalities in service delivery.
2. It will provide an informed view on the challenges facing tenants. They can establish time limited Task and Finish groups to support this activity.
3. It will review, scrutinise and make recommendations on new policies and procedures.
4. Aid Darlington Borough Council in having an open and transparent service where tenants are at the heart of everything we do.
5. Aid Darlington Borough Council in scrutinising performance and helping us to continually improve.

6. Help us to learn from complaints, looking for missed opportunities and helping us to review processes.
7. Monitor performance and hold Darlington Borough Council against the Regulator of Social Housing's Consumer Standards.

### **Membership of Group**

- Members must be a tenant of Darlington Borough Council
- Members must not be an employee of Darlington Borough Council or an Elected Member
- Members are able to participate in a number of ways such as:
  1. Formal meetings both in person and online
  2. Reviewing policies
  3. Mystery Shopping
  4. Attending Notice of Possession Proceedings review meetings
  5. Assisting the promotion of the tenants panel at events
  6. Decision making
  7. Attending and promoting community events
- Members must not be subject to any anti-social behaviour order or investigation by either Housing Services, Civic Enforcement, the Police or any other enforcement agency.
- If a member has rent arrears, they must have an up to date arrangement to repay these in place and be keeping to this.
- Members will need to agree to keep these terms of reference, Darlington Borough Council Code of Conduct and have a commitment to undergo training and development as part of their role.
- Members will be expected to promote the Panel and be Tenant Involvement Champions to internal and external agencies.
- Members will be expected to represent Darlington Borough Council and Housing Services at events.
- Members will assist in creating content for our Housing Connect magazine through the Tenants Panel section in the magazine. Tenants Panel members may be asked to provide information for social media and website campaigns.
- Members will be asked to have their photo taken to promote the Tenants Panel and Housing Services unless unable to due to exceptional circumstances.
- All members will be able to claim expenses for reasonable costs incurred in their role in the panel.
- The panel will be supported and co-ordinated by the Tenant Involvement Team, who will work with the panel in all aspects of their activity.
- Members of the panel must not disclose any confidential information outside of the Panel.
- If a current Tenant Panel member becomes in breach of their tenancy for any reason, they may be asked to step down from being a Tenants Panel member. Members will be able to rejoin once any breaches are resolved.
- All current members will have a right to appeal if they are asked to leave the Tenants Panel. This process will be overseen by the Head of Housing at Darlington Borough Council.
- Council Officers who support the panel will at times seek to ensure the independence of the panel. Officers will ensure that any conflicts of interest are addressed, and members of the group may be asked not to vote if this is the case.

- Housing Services will provide training opportunities and appropriate technology, such as laptops, to Tenants Panel members to assist them in engagement.
- Tenants Panel members will be expected to be involved in Housing matters, attend training sessions to improve their knowledge so they can better hold Housing Services to account.

#### **Activities of the Tenants Panel**

- **Tenants Panel Meetings**
- **Mystery Shopping**
- **Policy decision making**
- **Performance Scrutiny**
- **Online Training**
- **Surveys**
- **Promoting the Tenants Panel and how more tenants can be involved.**
- **Voting on Community Funding Bids**

#### **Equality and Diversity**

- It is the responsibility of Darlington Borough Council staff to try and ensure that the panel is representative of the residents it serves, and positive action may be taken by staff to encourage tenants from any under-represented groups. This will include attending events, speaking with housing officers and contacting tenants who may want to get involved from all under-represented groups.
- Translators can be arranged for any Tenants Panel members who may need it.
- The Tenants Panel will consider the impact of equality and diversity in all aspects of its scrutiny work.
- Housing Services will ensure a range of opportunities to be involved is available to assist vulnerable tenants.

#### **Roles**

- All tenants panel members will have equal responsibility but may be asked to provide information if they have expertise or an interest in a particular field.

#### **Meetings**

- Tenants Panel will meet 10 times a year at a minimum with extra meetings arranged under special circumstances.
- Any Literature or Policies sent to tenants should be responded to within 5 working days. This will be sent via email or by post, depending which the individual tenant prefers.
- Members will be expected to send apologies if they are unable to attend and invitations to meetings be responded to in a timely manner.
- Members will be expected to promote the panel at all opportunities.
- Members will be expected to represent Darlington Borough Council and Housing Services at events.
- Meeting will be held at various locations to encourage more participation from tenants.
- The panel will aim to reach decisions by consensus. If this is not achieved, members will vote on an issue by show of hands. If not, all members are available to vote it will be judged by the quorate available. No vote will be passed without 50% involvement.

- Panel members must declare any interest in any of the activities the Panel will be undertaking.
- Members will be expected to attend the majority of yearly meetings. This can be either face to face or online. If this is not possible the panel member should inform the Tenant Involvement Team.
- Members should assist with the Tenants Panel Housing Connect Page. The Housing Connect magazine will have three editions a year with a page dedicated to the tenants panel in each.
- The quorum of any formal meeting shall be 50% of the current membership of the panel, this will not include any members who are at the meeting for the first time.
- Other meetings such as special interest meetings may be arranged alongside the monthly meetings

### **Online Tenants Panel**

- As of 2024 Darlington Borough Council has set up an online tenant's panel to assist active tenants who may be unable to attend meetings in person.
- Online Tenants Panel members will be sent all information via email and will be expected to send back responses within 5 working days.
- Darlington Borough Council will set up an online only meeting at least once per calendar year, which online members will be expected to attend.
- A prospective Online Tenants Panel member will be contacted by the Tenant Involvement Team before undertaking any activities.
- Activities of the Online Tenants Panel will include: Mystery Shopping, Policy Decision Making, Performance Scrutiny, Online Training, Surveys, Promoting of the Tenants Panel and Voting on Community Funding Bids
- Both the Aims and Equality and Diversity of the Online Tenants Panel will fall in line with those of the Tenants Panel.

Print Name:

Signature:

Date: