Tenant Inspectors: Terms of Reference

Last updated 2024

# Background

The Tenant Inspectors (TI) were originally set up in 2008 when Best Value was introduced by Government. As part of Best Value services need to be reviewed with customers at the centre, taking on board their comments, aspirations and amending and developing and improving services to meet customer expectations.

These principals were carried through the Housing White Paper and into the Regulatory standards for landlords.

As part of the [Transparency, Influence and Accountability standard](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transparency-influence-and-accountability-standard) it says that registered providers must give tenants opportunities to influence and scrutinise their landlord’s strategies, policies and services.

The Tenant Inspectors**’** panel is a way of complementing and assisting the council to highlight improvements and good practice. Participation as a member of this group is one way that tenants can have a say in how services are designed and delivered.

# Aims of the Project

The group will be made up of tenants and leaseholders who will be recruited to inspect our services and make recommendations for improvements and confirm current good practice. This will mainly affect Housing Services.

# Objectives

The Tenant Inspectors will carry out at least one inspection a year but potentially more.

Areas to inspect could include any aspect covered by the services delivered by Housing Revenue Account for example:

* antisocial behaviour
* allocations
* asset management
* estate management
* income management
* leaseholder services
* supported housing
* tenant engagement

Inspections will be carried out within agreed parameters and could include:

* observations of access points
* mystery shopping
* case studies
* work shadowing
* examining processes and procedures
* desktop reviews
* interviews
* attending meetings
* visits
* focus groups
* surveys

Following an inspection the tenants will produce a report outlining good practice and identifying areas for improvement.

An action plan for improvements is agreed with Housing and reviewed at a later date (6 months–1 year).

# Code of Conduct

The Inspectors will adhere to the [Tenant Engagement Code of Conduct](https://www.southampton.gov.uk/media/zoomja13/code-of-conduct-updated-may-2021.pdf). This explains how tenants and leaseholders of Southampton City Council are expected to behave in all situations when taking part in Tenant Engagement activities. It also helps to avoid action that may bring the group into disrepute and applies to all volunteers when taking part in any Tenant Engagement activities. On top of that, there is an additional Code of Conduct specific for those representing the Tenant Inspectors. This additional code ensures the group remains business like with the best level of service for everyone.

# Equal Opportunities

This group and all members involved will carry out their duties according to current equal opportunities legislation. They are committed to equality of opportunity in every aspect of their activities regardless of race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, age, religious belief, gender, marital status, and sexual orientation.

# Health and Safety

For all visits and activities carried out by the Tenant Inspectors, the facilitating officer will ensure that the appropriate risk assessment is carried out.

# Confidentiality

The group is aware that participants will have access to information not normally available to tenants and leaseholders. This data may also be commercially sensitive if shared outside the organisation. Participation is therefore confidential and should not be communicated externally without explicit permission. If permission is agreed, the information must be appropriately 'blinded' and anonymous so that identities are protected.

# Data Protection

Members of the group recognise the need to comply with the legal requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018, and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

The group recognises that during the course of inspecting processes and procedures they may see records or information about individuals, employees or other customers, and as such undertake to use this knowledge solely for the purposes of improving the way services are delivered. At no time will participants discuss individual cases or circumstances.

# Insurance

Group members, and activities carried out by the group, will be covered within existing Southampton City Council insurance arrangements.

# Expenses

All group activities will be covered by the existing Tenant Engagement Expenses scheme.

# How to become part of the Tenant Inspectors

To be a member of the TI, you must:

* Be a current tenant or leaseholder of Southampton City Council of at least 12 months, or;
* Have been trained about the aims of the project and skills, attitudes and techniques needed for it.

You cannot be a member if you:

* Are an employee of Southampton City Council (unless you have agreement from your manager)
* Are in breach of your tenancy or lease agreement which causes conflict of interest.

There is a limit of 12 members for any one inspection.

New members can only join in-between inspections.

To apply to join the Tenant Inspectors, contact the Tenant Engagement Team in the first instance.

# Training

Members will be offered relevant training which they will be expected to attend, and this will help equip them with the necessary skills they will need to carry out their role effectively.

Service area managers will provide the group with relevant background information to be inspected, including standards, policies, and procedures.

The Tenant Inspectors will be managed by the Tenant Engagement and Participation Team.

Tenant Inspectors

Code of Conduct

Tenant Inspector meetings are covered by the Tenant Engagement Code of Conduct. This additional code of conduct sets out the standards of personal attitudes and behaviour that you must observe which is critical to the success and credibility of the Tenant Inspectors (TI).

# Your role

As a member, you will carry out thorough assessments of the services provided by Southampton City Council and suggest how they can be improved. To do this, you must approach the task with the right attitude, as follows

* Be honest and open. Without this, you won’t be able to get to the truth about services or be able to make a difference.
* Be positive. It’s important to highlight any problems or failings, but make sure you also pick up on successes and good points. Always try to look for and suggest improvements to make the service better – for both customers and the people providing it.
* Be friendly, polite and courteous. You will only get cooperation and support from people if you build and keep a good relationship with them. You must not insult, abuse or use any kind of offensive language or behaviour towards anyone with whom you have contact as part of the project. Be tough on *problems*, not on people.
* Listen and keep an open mind until you have collected the relevant facts and evidence. Try to understand and appreciate the concerns and circumstances of the people who you meet.
* Actively show that you are interested in and care about the service that you are inspecting, and that you want to make a positive difference.
* Choose the right time, place and way to feed back your thoughts and findings. Do not share your impressions and ideas with people while you are still collecting evidence from them.
* Adhere to any relevant rules or Council policies. For example, observe any bans on smoking/vaping.

# Being objective

Your direct experience as a customer is what makes you special and unique as a member of this group. Your own experience and views should inform, but not dominate or dictate how you work. To help you stay impartial and avoid any conflicts of interest, you must:

* Not audit or inspect parts of the service that have a specific or particular link to you and your local area (for example, you should not assess the front-line Warden service of your own block).
* Let the member of staff managing the project know in writing if you have any personal connection with any part of the service which you are asked to audit/inspect (for example, if you are related to a member of staff providing that service, or a connection with a contractor or supplier).
* Look for evidence to test and challenge your personal experience of the service and organisation. Do your views reflect those of customers generally?

# Conflicts of Interest

Individuals should disclose any interest, whether personal or on behalf of any group they represent, that they consider may affect or influence their approach to the matter under discussion.

Group members must not expect to receive favourable treatment by staff because of their membership of a particular group. They must use the normal procedures for reporting repairs, complaints etc.

# Handling information

As a TI member, you will have access to a lot of information about Southampton City Council and its customers and suppliers. Some of this information will be personally or commercially sensitive.

You should follow two simple rules in all your work:

* Treat **all** information that you receive as confidential, unless there is a clear reason to share it more widely. So, for example, you should use and share any information that you collect about what service is provided, how and why. But you should **not** share information about members of staff or customer’s personal identity or circumstances.
* If you are in any doubt about whether something is confidential or not, ask the member of staff who is managing the project.

If you come across anything which is inappropriate please contact the Tenant Participation Office for further guidance.

Aside from these formal protocols, you will need to be tactful and diplomatic in all your dealings with people as part of the project. Always think about how you say what, to whom, and what impact it may have.

# Discrimination

No TI member will discriminate on any ground against any other individual. Discriminatory language will not be allowed.

All those who attend meetings have the right to be treated with dignity and respect regardless of their race, colour, ethnic or national origins, nationality, gender, marital status, age, sexuality, religion**,** or any other matter which causes people to be treated with injustice.

In your work as a member, you must have and show respect for the people you deal with, and take their circumstances and personal differences into account. The key is simply to respect differences fairly, so that you do not exclude anyone from your work, or treat anyone inappropriately or unfairly.

Again, this can sometimes be difficult, and only you can make it happen. So, in your work, think about:

* How you assess the service – does it allow everyone to have a say? For example, telephone surveys may exclude people whose first language is not English.
* Where you work. For example, holding interviews in an upper floor office may be difficult for people who use a wheelchair or have limited mobility.
* When you work. For example, holding focus groups during the day may exclude people with childcare responsibilities or who are at work.
* Being consistent. For example, don’t be ‘tougher’ on some people than others without reason.

Again, if you are in any doubt about how your work might affect different people, please ask the member of staff who is managing the project.

# Being professional

Being professional is partly about all the things covered above, but it is also about how you personally conduct yourself. You are an ambassador for yourself, all residents, and the whole project.

# Staying safe

Before you start any auditing or inspection, Southampton City Council will conduct a short exercise to identify and assess any risks that might arise from your work. You must then observe any rules or guidelines and take reasonable steps to ensure the health safety and welfare of yourself as well as others.

# Breach of Code of Conduct

If a group member does not abide by the code of conduct they can be warned to leave the meeting by the facilitating officer if necessary. The facilitating officer can also give a member of the group or member of the public two further warnings if they continue to breach the code of conduct. If the individual continues to ignore the code then the TI can ask the meeting to vote on whether the member should be asked to leave. The members present can also vote as to whether the tenant/leaseholder should be barred from the group for a period of time.

#### **CODE OF CONDUCT – Member agreement**

I have read and understood the Code of Conduct rules/guidelines laid out in this document and agree to abide by them.

I understand that any actions I take that may contravene this Code of Conduct**,** or harm the reputation of the Tenant Inspectors Group in Southampton City Council, may result in possible expulsion from the group.

Signed:

Print name…………………………………………………………………………………….

Witnessed:

Date: