

# Scrutiny Panel Terms of Reference



Platform Housing Group (PHG) is a housing association whose mission is to ‘*build a better future by investing in affordable homes, services and communities.*’ To achieve this, we are committed to working with our customers, formally and informally, by creating opportunities for them to be involved.

The Scrutiny Panel is one of the formal ways in which customers can hold the organisation to account. The Scrutiny Panel will challenge Platform towards continuous improvement in service delivery and service standard and it will support the communication between customers and those with the governance responsibilities for Platform.

Platform uses the CIH’s definition of scrutiny which is as follows:

*“It is an approach where a housing provider’s frameworks for directing, account for, monitoring, assessing, and reviewing its own direction and performance are based on the views and priorities of tenants – done well, it can allow tenants to hold their landlords to account for their decisions, performance, and conduction.”*

In addition, Platform recognises that for scrutiny to be effective it must have independence to choose the areas they wish to scrutinise and carry out that scrutiny.

## **1. Role and Responsibilities of the Scrutiny Panel**

The Scrutiny Panel will work on behalf of all customers to ensure that Platform provides high standards of service within the available resources by scrutinising Platform services and making recommendations for service improvements. It is aimed at ensuring the customer voice is effectively heard within PHG so that services reflect customer views as much as possible, resulting in high quality customer experiences.

The Scrutiny Panel will use a structured, evidence based investigative approach to every scrutiny project.

The Scrutiny Panel will complete a minimum two scrutiny reviews each financial year.

The Scrutiny Panel will report its findings to the Customer Experience Panel and will, in the report:



- a. assess what works well
- b. alert the Customer Experience Panel about standards that fall below the agreed and expected levels
- c. provide evidence-based recommendations on how improvement might be made
- d. append a high-level action plan/management response from the relevant Director with information on resource implications, risks, and other key issues.

On an annual basis the Scrutiny Panel will meet to review the progress and effectiveness of scrutiny reports and activities. It will report on an annual basis, the outcomes scrutiny has achieved on behalf of customers and the organisation.

Scrutiny Panel members are not required to take part in every review but will be removed from the Panel if they do not participate in any review within a 12-month period, this does not exclude them from joining the Scrutiny Panel again in future.

Participating members are required to attend meetings or contribute via email prior to meetings if unable to attend.

Any conflicts of interest (e.g. matter directly relates to them, family members, friends or organisations with which they are involved, any active formal complaints with PHG) must be declared at the start of each review and the Scrutiny Panel member will not take part in that review. If a Scrutiny Panel member wishes to resign, they should inform the (current) Chair and PHG via email.

## **2. Membership and Recruitment of the Scrutiny Panel**

The Scrutiny Panel will have no maximum number of members but can only operate with a minimum of five members.

All Panel members will be drawn from Platform customers and their families. This includes partners, spouses, or family members of Platform customers who live in one of our homes and who are over the age of sixteen.

All Platform customers are eligible to apply subject to the recruitment and eligibility criteria.

Members of the Customer Experience Panel are not eligible to be members of the scrutiny panel.



Members must not have a current breach of tenancy; where a breach is identified the Panel member will step down with immediate effect until the tenancy issue is resolved.

Avoiding conflict of interest:

Platform Scrutiny Panel members must be independent of other formal involvement groups, committees, or Board.

Panel members will adhere to Platform's Code of Conduct.

### **3. Term of Office**

Panel members will be appointed initially for a three-year term.

### **4. Chair**

The Chair and Vice-Chair will be elected through a vote by Scrutiny Panel members.

The Chair and Vice-Chair will be elected on an annual basis.

In the absence of the Chair at a meeting, the Vice-Chair will be responsible for running the meeting.

### **5. Formal Meetings**

The Scrutiny Panel will meet formally at least three times per year.

The quorum for Scrutiny Panel will be three of the members.

Any Scrutiny Panel member who has been absent for two consecutive meetings, without notifying a reason for the absence, will automatically relinquish their position as a member of the Scrutiny Panel.

Where in-person meetings are held, they will be arranged in venues that are accessible.

Dates of meetings will take account of the needs of the majority of members.

Agendas and any supporting paperwork for formal meetings will be distributed 7 days prior to the meeting.

Monitoring of progress with implementation of recommendations of scrutiny reports will be reviewed at the formal meetings



Minutes of meeting will be produced and agreed with the Chair within two weeks of a formal meeting. Minutes will then be circulated to the rest of the panel for agreement as a true record at the next formal meeting.

## **6. Links between the Scrutiny Panel, PHG customers and the Customer Experience Panel**

The Scrutiny Panel will, where possible at its formal meetings, make decisions about the topics/service areas it will review.

The Scrutiny Panel will use a structured evidence-based approach to reviewing a service area and will involve other Platform customers in the review. Examples include, but are not limited to, obtaining customer views through focus groups, carrying out mystery shopping exercises, estate or property inspections, customer surveys, customer interviews.

Following a scrutiny review, the Scrutiny Panel will report its findings and recommendations to the Customer Experience Panel. Reviews will be reported to the Group Board through Board reports.

## **7. Authority and Access**

To enable the Scrutiny Panel to carry out its work it will have unfettered right of access to all information within PHG and the active co-operation of any of PHG's staff.

## **8. Reports and information**

Officers will ensure that relevant performance and management information is made available to the Scrutiny Panel in advance of meetings.

## **9. Information and Confidentiality**

The Scrutiny Panel has the right to examine all relevant data and insight related to the scrutiny project, except information which contains personal, commercially sensitive, or other information that is deemed to be of a confidential nature, and which should not be shared with anyone other than Platform employees or Board members

The Scrutiny Panel can request information, may interview relevant staff to get more details, where needed, about the scrutiny project area. Any request will be made via the nominated staff as agreed at the start of each scrutiny project.



All members of the Scrutiny Panel will be required to abide by the expectations and requirements of the Code of Conduct.

## **10. Conduct of meetings**

The Scrutiny Panel will allow freedom of address by any member and will operate in accordance with the Scrutiny Panel Code of Conduct.

Members of the Scrutiny Panel must ensure confidentiality of items discussed in accordance with the Scrutiny Panel's data protection policies and only disclose those areas for consultation with others outside of the meetings as directed.

## **11. Support, joint working with Platform Housing Group staff and training.**

The Customer Engagement Team is responsible for administration relating to the Scrutiny Panel.

The service area under review will nominate a lead staff member to liaise with the Scrutiny Panel.

The Scrutiny Panel will be provided with training and support to enable them to fulfil their role. The training may be provided by an external specialist or by PHG staff. PHG will ensure that the Scrutiny Panel has access to regular and on-going training to enable them to fulfil their role.

## **12. Review**

These Terms of Reference will be reviewed after the first year of operation to ensure they are relevant and fit for purpose

## **13. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**

PHG encourage fair and equal treatment for all, regardless of race, colour, ethnic or national origin, religion, gender, physical or mental disability, appearance, political affiliation, sexuality, age, or class.

Membership of the Scrutiny Panel will, wherever possible, reflect the diversity of the communities served by the Group, especially in relation to the characteristics listed above. The Scrutiny Panel will also represent people with diversity of thought and opinion and with life experiences that can help to inform and shape the Group's services.

PHG will identify obstacles that may prevent customers from contributing and will endeavour to find solutions to enable customers to contribute to its work.



## **14. Conduct of Panel Members**

The Scrutiny Panel, and members individually, are expected to abide at all times with the terms of the Code of Conduct and Data Protection Agreement. Scrutiny Panel members must act with integrity and with respect for others in the exercise of their duties and responsibilities.

Any disputes or grievances, including concerns around the conduct of other Panel Members or Group officers should be reported to the Customer Engagement Manager and the Chair of the Scrutiny Panel (where the matter does not relate to them), or in their absence, the Head of Customer and Community Engagement. The principles of the Group's Whistleblowing process should be followed in these cases.

## **15. Expenses**

Members of the Scrutiny Panel may receive reasonable out of pocket expenses incurred in the performance of their duties and in accordance with relevant Group policies (e.g., to cover travel, car parking).

## **16. Remuneration**

Scrutiny Panel members undertake the role on a voluntary unpaid basis and may receive a reward of £5 per hour, up to an annual reward of £250, in high-street vouchers.

