

Tenant Engagement Update, Housing Services, Cheltenham Borough Council

November 2024

Tenant Panel

The Tenant Panel, previously known as the Tenant Improvement Scrutiny Panel (TSIP), has successfully transitioned into the new governance structure of CBC housing. It consists of nine members from various localities across Cheltenham, representing the broader tenant community.

Since April, the panel has played an active role in shaping and providing feedback on several key initiatives:

1. **Consumer Standards Improvement Plan:** The panel has shown keen interest in how housing services are adapting to new regulations. They have reviewed the self-assessment results and were satisfied that we are making the right steps to become fully compliant. The panel has requested ongoing updates on the plan's progress.
2. **Fencing Policy:** The panel has explored the possibility of offering tenants more choices in the style and height of fences, indicating an interest in further consultation on this issue.
3. **Single Equality Scheme:** During discussions on equality and diversity, the panel highlighted a desire to address "non-reporting" within housing and its connection to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI). They expressed interest in using this topic as the foundation for a new scrutiny review.

Additionally, the panel is conducting a scrutiny review following a presentation by Natasha Dhillon. The focus of this review is on whether the current complaints handling process meets tenants' needs and how housing services are learning from complaints. This review is set to be completed before Christmas.

As part of the Consumer Standards Improvement Plan, the Tenant Panel members will also participate in Property Compliance Training provided by Penningtons.

The panel has nominated Agnieszka Wisniewska to represent them on the newly formed Housing Committee.

Leaseholder Panel Update

As part of the new governance structure, all leaseholders were invited to express their interest in joining a newly formed Leaseholder Panel, aimed at representing the collective interests of all leaseholders.

The panel's first meeting took place in August 2024, with seven leaseholders attending (with apologies from others). All attendees expressed a desire to join the panel. A second meeting, held after further promotion through letters, saw increased participation, with 12 leaseholders in attendance.

The panel is currently meeting monthly as it establishes itself, with plans to transition to quarterly meetings once fully operational.

Key outcomes from the first two meetings include:

1. Membership: 10 leaseholders have officially agreed to join the panel.
2. Terms of Reference: The panel reviewed and unanimously approved its terms of reference.
3. Housing Committee Representation: Bozena Tarnowska was selected to represent the panel on the Housing Committee.

The panel has begun identifying key areas for exploration, with a focus on service improvement. These include:

- Understanding the Lease: A back-to-basics approach to clarify the respective responsibilities of CBH as the housing provider and those of the leaseholders.
- Neighbourhood Works and Planned Maintenance: Ensuring transparency in scheduling and delivering value for money.
- Service Charges: Developing a clearer understanding of service charges and how they are calculated.
- Leaseholder Experience: Leveraging the lived experiences of leaseholders to improve communication and transparency.

As a starting point, the panel has requested a review of the leaseholder handbook and website information to ensure they meet the needs of leaseholders.