



TENANT ENGAGEMENT EXPERTS

tpas

National Scrutiny Week 2020

Insight, Good Practice
and Top Tips





Introduction

During the last week of July 2020, Tpas launched the very first scrutiny week to celebrate all that is great about tenant/resident/customer led scrutiny, and wow what a week it was!

Housing Associations, ALMO's, Councils, and scrutineers from across the country came together digitally to participate in five days of scrutiny roundtables, show case sessions, webinars, Q and A panels, and social media sharing.

It's probably no surprise then that such an amazing week generated a huge amount of scrutiny good practice, insight and advice. We simply had to capture and share all that with you in this document.

So here's a big thankyou to everyone who got involved in the week, whether in the events themselves or via social media. You should be incredibly proud of the scrutiny work you do and the difference you make.

This document is your legacy which I'm sure will be used to improve and develop scrutiny further in the coming years.

Louise Thompson

Head of Business Services

P.S We're all on for doing it again in 2021 aren't we?!



Ten Top Tips from Clive Betts MP

Scrutiny week kicked off in style with the charismatic Clive Betts MP (Chair of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee) answering questions from a group of tenant scrutineers.



We have taken Clive's excellent insight and advice and transformed them into these ten top tips:

1. Don't be afraid to innovate. Embrace new ideas to gather evidence, think about going out and talking to people, use social media, look at citizens' juries and roundtables. Scrutiny can be done digitally – maybe not as well in some circumstances – but it enables us to carry on and it does work well. Be careful not to exclude those who are not digitally enabled, and sometimes if interviewing those who aren't that willing to give information, it's easier to challenge when you're with them face to face in a room.

2. Be independent. The scrutineers should choose the topic and decide what to scrutinise. They must have complete freedom in this – it's their decision and no one else's! However they can look at topics in response to organisational business – so for example when the Government publishes the white paper, this will be scrutinised by the committee. Also scrutiny can be stimulated by an event such as the Grenfell Fire tragedy.

3. Reach out to more people. Don't just rely on the usual suspects – use less formal methods – see tip one. Allow people to contact you to tell you about the issues that matter. People can write to us to ask us to look at subjects to scrutinise and we have been more varied in gathering evidence so we go out visit places, and talk to people. For example we went to meet young people to hear about their experience of the homelessness services. Also important to keep in touch with key groups such as Grenfell United.

4. Track recommendations. Have learnt that when people say "that's an interesting idea", what they really mean is, "we're going to go away and forget all about it". It is therefore vital to follow up scrutiny and keep asking "you promised to do this, what have you done?" The report is not the end of it, keep pushing and follow up.

5. Make people feel comfortable. People will feel differently about being invited to take part in scrutiny evidence gathering, so need to make them comfortable and may need to treat them differently depending on who they are, so for example there will be members of public who haven't been to parliament and we need to make them comfortable so they open up.

6. Don't be afraid to challenge. There's nothing wrong with critical reports, sometimes you do need to say "you have to do better, or do this differently," as scrutiny is meant to be helpful. The more capable people take it in their stride and see the positives. Others who are less confident or capable don't, and may get defensive.



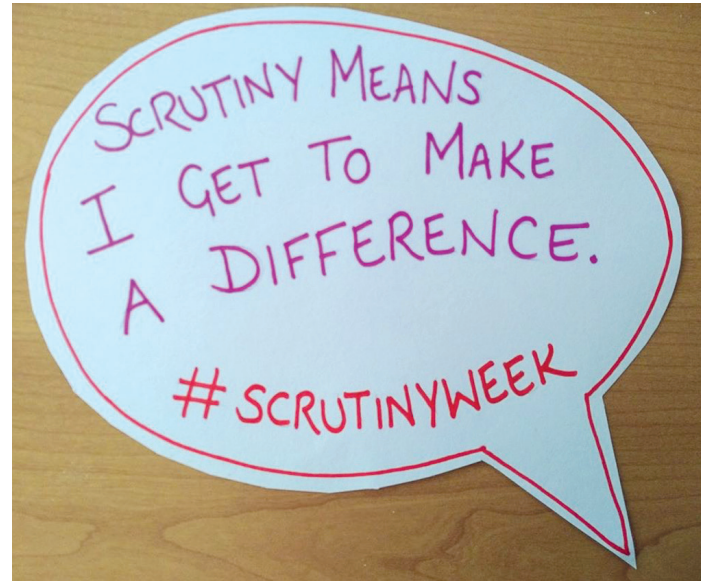


7. Do your prep. Read papers beforehand and do research as you need to know something about the subject you are reviewing. You can't be an expert but need to know enough to know if you are being fobbed off and so you can't be "blinded by science."

8. Use experts. There are people out there who will be willing to help and advise you on subjects. For example, universities have a lot of experts who will help free of charge.

9. Learn good questioning techniques. Remember don't give your own view before you ask the questions. Be persistent and do ask the same question in a different way if you aren't getting an answer, it might be they haven't understood the questions. Do suggest if they don't know the answer, they can give it to you later in a written response.

10. Don't be fobbed off. Tenants are the experts – they live in the properties. Don't be afraid to stand up to professionals and do not accept any fobbing off.



27th - 31st July 2020

**My top
scrutiny
tip:**

**"Don't be afraid
to challenge"**

#ScrutinyWeek



**Connect, learn
and
Showcase your
work.**

The Scrutiny Experts

This session brought together a panel of experts to offer insight and answer questions on all things Scrutiny. Members of the panel were Jacqui McKinlay, Chief Executive Centre for Public Scrutiny, Caritas Charles, Tpas Associate, Joan Swift, PA Housing Scrutiny Panel Member, Dr Dave Mckenna, Independent Scrutiny and Governance Consultant.

Thoughts on General Scrutiny

Scrutiny has to...

- have senior buy in and should never be a tick box exercise
- feel positive
- make an impact
- be part of the governance structure - **can you see the lines that take you from tenant led scrutiny to the decisions the board are making?**

Scrutiny delivers...

- **Value for money** – no-one cares more about what happens to rent money than those who pay the rent.
- **Trust** – improves landlord/tenant relationship – feel more confident in the landlord.
- **Tenant development** – opportunity for new skills/experiences and even employment.
- **Indirect outcomes** – just knowing that scrutiny exists effected their behaviour – keeps people on their toes even if their area is not being looked at – just existing has positive effects.

Scrutiny is...

- **Statistics** – must have good data and evidence. But need qualitative info too – need that anecdotal stuff too.
- **Communications** – good scrutiny needs an effective communications plan that covers each other, staff, senior management and the wider population and public.
- **Revolutionary** – scrutiny doesn't just mean a group or a panel. Test out new ideas, be inventive – do challenge own perceptions and look for new avenues.
- **Understanding** – good scrutiny needs mutual understanding between staff, tenants, board members and councillors.
- **Trust** – tenants have to trust the scrutiny process and know it matters to the organisation.
- **Investment** – scrutiny needs to have time, money and resources invested into it.
- **No limits** – confident providers shouldn't fear scrutiny – they should open up all areas to it so operational, investment, policy, corporate plan.
- **You** – it's the staff / tenants people who work in scrutiny that make it successful.



Scrutiny tips...

- **Do carry out scrutiny health checks on panels** – make sure you are doing the right thing.
- **Make sure scrutiny can access all areas** so should be able to scrutinise all aspects of the business.
- **Make sure scrutiny is given access to all areas of the business.** There should be no areas that are off limits.
- **Do keep your ears to the ground** – yes data is good but listening and knowing what the wider tenant base are saying is important.
- **Think about having an independent advisor** who can support and guide you – independence is essential.
- **Do challenge and don't be soft** – ask that question - be direct.
- **Do check out good practice** and learning from local government scrutiny.

Views on Board Members...

- **Board members are involved in decision making**, so cannot be part of scrutinising it too! You can't mark your own homework.
- **Scrutiny has to be independent** and this is compromised if board members are part of it
- **Scrutiny does need good informal relationships** with board members as it needs their support to work. So do work and develop this.

Thoughts on People and Culture...

- Culture eats structure for breakfast – yes structures important are but the most important thing is a how people behave in those structures
- Don't worry about what things are called – it's people doing the right thing that matters.

Comments on Length of Reviews...

- It does depend on the review but it is important to build timescales into the project plan and do set deadlines to provide focus and clarity.
- Can look to reduce length of review through the “Bootcamp” method - this reduced time of a review to three weeks. However, one organisation found that this method wasn't tenant led enough and produced too many recommendations.

Insight into Scrutiny reports...

- Can be a staff member who writes it but it can't be their views in it!
- There is a fine line between not allowing staff to influence but having them provide the needed capacity and support.
- Can be done collaboratively by staff and tenants but need to ensure that the tenants sign it off
- If staff write the report, it can be like writing someone's love letter for them – so it might be beautifully written but it doesn't reflect who you are and what you are trying to say!
- Reports don't have to be huge technical docs as most people don't read all of it. Make it short and gets to the point.
- Board members need to have faith in the process so they are already aware of and know the process, and methodology, and therefore only have to read summary and recommendations.

Ideas to Control Domineering Panel Members...

- **Think about having an independent advisor** with skills in managing domineering personalities. Managing and working with people can be hard and sometimes you will need help to do this.
- **Consider whether it is dominating or are they just being passionate** and actively involved. Maybe we should welcome this passion and enthusiasm and see the positives?
- **Bring in group discussion** – have conversations about how can we make sure everyone is involved.
- **Make sure you check in with the team regularly**, review things and have conversations about how people are doing.
- **Give the panel the opportunity to get training** on how to work with different personalities. This will skill up the panel and develop their knowledge and confidence.
- **Could it just be different learning and working styles?** The dominant person likes acting in that way and the quiet people are also happy that way.

Can just be a misunderstanding – understanding different learning styles – will help. Check out Six Hats by Edward de Bono at the bottom of the page.

Thoughts on Scrutiny Impact...

- **Monetary value** – Scrutiny makes savings! For example Hull City Council – 60k savings as a result of a review of the caretaking service
- **Social value** – Scrutiny develops skills and supports personal development. It also delivers empowerment and enjoyment
- **Business value** – Scrutiny improves services and there are many examples of this, including the recruitment of an anti-social behavioural specialist post as direct result of a scrutiny review.

Scrutiny changes board decision making and thinking as it reminds them that what matters to tenants! Scrutiny improves the culture by building trust and collaborative working. Scrutiny energises staff, they get a new take on their job and feel they are working with tenants to make a difference.

The Six Hats

The White Hat:
calls for information known or needed.
"The facts, just the facts."



The Green Hat
focuses on creativity, possibilities, alternatives and new ideas. It is an opportunity to express new concepts and new perceptions - lateral thinking could be used here.



The Yellow Hat:
symbolizes brightness and optimism. You can explore the positives and probe for value and benefit.



The Blue Hat

is used to manage the thinking process. It ensures that the 'Six Thinking Hats' guidelines are observed.



The Black Hat

signifies caution and critical thinking - do not overuse! Why something may not work.



The Red Hat

signifies feelings, hunches and intuition - the place where emotions are placed without explanation.





Scrutiny Showcase Roundup

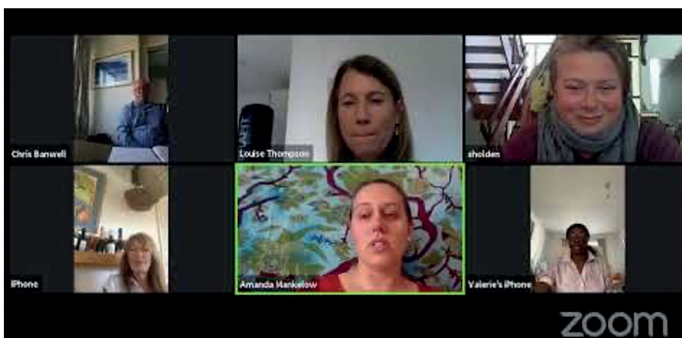


- They have a dedicated central panel that was established in 2014.
- The panel meet 10 times per year and they have had 119 recommendations implemented in total.
- They use a variety of methods to collect evidence including door knocking, and focus groups.
- Now working on zoom as a result of pandemic and they will continue to use digital platforms for scrutiny, as it has been cost effective, more inclusive, and has also made recruitment easier.
- They have had lots of excellent outcomes including:
 - ✓ Ensuring resident liaison officers have a more prominent role in major works.
 - ✓ Improving complaints feedback to contractors.
 - ✓ Removing jargon in letters.

- A big objective of scrutiny at Hull is Value for Money.
- Scrutiny is split across service areas so for example they have a scrutiny panel for multi storey living, one for repairs, one waste management etc.
- Topics for reviews are fed into scrutiny either direct from tenants or via Tenants Forum.

Successes include:

- ✓ 51k saved due to a scrutiny review of ASB
- ✓ 75K saved due to a review of customer services and a reduction of telephone time.
- ✓ 200K year saved due to a review of the laundry service which recommended that a cash free system replace cash.





- They have had a scrutiny panel for nearly 10 years
- The panel consists of a dedicated panel of around 8-10 people.
- They are supported by an independent Advisor and carry out around 3 reviews a year.
- They have made a total of 140 recommendations.

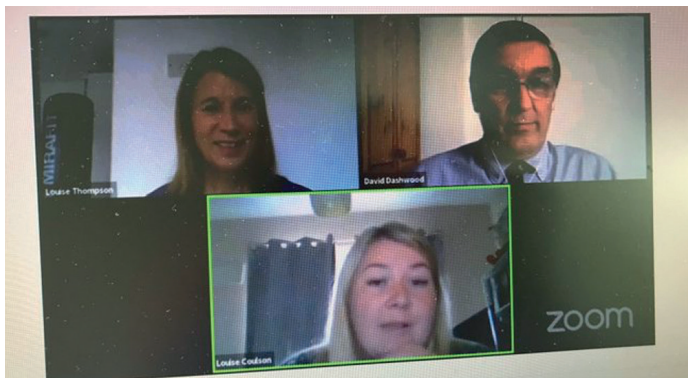
Successes include:

- ✓ Securing a dedicated ASB post and a handy person service.
- ✓ Ensuring fire safety messages are clear and communicated effectively.
- ✓ Implementing a new phone system with call back technology.
- ✓ Designing new reception area.
- Also have changed attitudes and culture of organisation by building trust/rapport which has brought staff and tenants closer together.
- Have used lock down to review past reviews and track impact.
- They plan to start new digital only scrutiny in Sept 2020.

- Scrutiny started in 2014 with the Together for Residents scrutiny panel.
- Scrutiny changed over time and they have adapted process to meet the different needs of residents which includes general needs/older persons and support services for younger people.
- They now use task and finish approach but scrutiny also happens across the business with resident auditors, virtual panels, and scheme activities.
- They have always used video technology due to the geographical spread of stock which is across 81 local authorities.
- It is vital that scrutiny is integrated across the business and that all staff and the board understand its value and importance. Therefore we have a scrutiny panel newsletter, staff training induction session covering scrutiny, and “ what are you going to do better for our residents” pledge cards. They also have real and meaningful interaction with the board.

Scrutiny successes include:

- ✓ Reintroducing of pre-voids to reduce costs.
- ✓ Introducing project money pots for local groups.





- Scrutiny is undertaken by a dedicated panel who are supported by the Customer Engagement Team.
- They have done 14 investigations in total.
- Scrutiny has delivered many recommendations and many have been accepted
- Highlights include improvements and changes to tenancy management, the lettable standard and Heating.
- The panel have clear, open and transparent process in place and getting scoping right is important.
- Scrutiny involves looking at performance data, inviting staff to present on topic and doing research on line.
- The panel prepare and write the report and submit it to senior management and Community Voice for approval.
- They have now moved scrutiny on line and are doing virtual meetings.
- They have a dedicated panel of around 6-10 tenants who report direct to the Board.
- A set of competencies are used to recruit scrutineers who meet fortnightly
- The panel are supported by the Governance and Scrutiny Officer as well as an independent mentor.
- They have their own budget and have an annual away day
- They have very robust governance documents including a terms of reference
- Scrutiny successes include
 - ✓ The Greenspace review which resulted in a new online system that gives residents access to a live schedule so they can now see what work is planned and when it will happen.
 - ✓ Shaping and influencing the reception service in the new building.

Steven Whitbread
"Being part of the Customer Scrutiny Panel provides me with an opportunity to be part of group with common purpose. It provides me with an opportunity to represent my fellow customers of Stockport Homes and help support changes which will positively affect the communities it serves."

stockport homes
Proud to be part of SHG

23TH - 31ST JULY 2020 tpas
Proud to be a tenant scrutineer
#ScrutinyWeek



- Phoenix Community Housing are based in south London they have a dedicated panel which is part of their governance structure.
 - They have a clear process built around a Plan/Scope/Review/Monitor framework.
 - They also have a suite of key documents that include recruitment policies, Terms of Reference, Roles and responsibilities, Scoping and Reporting templates, action tracker and annual impact assessment.
 - Scrutineers attend an in-house training academy to take part in a nine week programme covering social housing history, finance – most sessions are delivered by staff.
 - They use different approaches for their review reports including infographics, PowToon animations and power points and produce summary reports which they post on their website.
 - All scrutiny recommendations are tracked using a traffic light system and staff keep this updated
 - Scrutiny Successes can be found at www.phoenixch.org.uk/documents/resident-scrutiny-panel-reports
- Weaver Vale Housing Trust is a Large Scale Voluntary Transfer (LSVT) housing association, formed in July 2002.
 - Operating in Cheshire, they have a dedicated and very committed scrutiny panel.
 - Key information about the scrutiny methodology and outcomes can be found in an excellent scrutiny panel annual report. This is in the Tpas resource hub.
 - The Panel have made the shift to digital and are now working effectively on Microsoft teams.
 - Scrutiny successes include:
 - ✓ Saving 32K by recommending that the “Just Rewards” scheme was stopped.
 - ✓ Decreasing complaints and implementing a new app in property services.





**NORTHAMPTON
PARTNERSHIP HOMES**

- Orwell Housing Association reviewed their scrutiny panel in 2017.
 - Now have a new task and finish approach co-ordinated by a resident steering group.
 - The task and finish groups do door knocking, review docs, staff interviews, on site visits, and research.
 - This has worked well and widened out scrutiny to engage with more residents.
 - The new approach has resulted in more reviews being undertaken – have done 4 reviews in last 18 months, and have made 50 recommendations.
 - Since the review they have made lots of positive small steps and as a result made big advances and have a constructive and positive relationship with staff and the board.
 - Recent successes include reviewing the website and they are currently undertaking an environmental review.
- They are an arms length management organisation and have been through a scrutiny transformation after recognising that some of the scrutiny processes needed reviewing.
 - As a result of the ideas and inspiration gained by attending the 2019 Tpas scrutiny conference, a new scrutiny process was launched in Jan 2020
 - They now have a new simple format with clear processes based around a focus day of information where staff, documents, and other data are brought together at the same time on this day.
 - The reviews are set to last around 8-12 weeks depending on the review.
 - Before lockdown, started to review residents newsletter but recognised that it couldn't go ahead in its planned format, so have now switched to an online survey and zoom meetings.
 - The newsletter review has identified 19 recommendations and it is due to go to EMT in Aug 2020 for approval.
 - They do expect to return to in person meetings but they will keep zoom to enhance the process.
 - Their scrutiny is a work in process and they will keep reviewing.





- Scrutiny started at SOHA in 2010 and they have a dedicated panel.
 - The scrutiny reports go to board as well as the department whose service is being scrutinised.
 - They also have a tenant auditors group who look at services.
 - Reviews are decided by looking at performance information but also focus on what issues tenants are telling them about.
 - SOHA can ask for the review of a service but the panel can refuse and they have done this twice.
 - They always follow up on the recommendations and have an action tracker that tells them what is still outstanding.
 - Scrutiny successes include:
 - ✓ There are many examples of improvements to services as a result of scrutiny.
 - ✓ Scrutiny has also influenced decision making. A good example of this is the review of fixed terms tenancy which resulted in the board supporting their recommendation not to use them.
- A review topic is chosen by examining customer satisfaction data and Key Performance Indicators, they also invite ideas from a customer group, and the board and staff can also make suggestions.
 - Currently looking at Anti-Social Behaviour as the policy was due to be reviewed and the organisation wanted scrutiny to look at it. They are doing the review in two parts - part 1 has seen them interview staff on Microsoft teams and part 2 shortly will focus on customer experience and they will do customer journey mapping.
 - Process involved looking at metrics and KPI's, then a staff presentation to identify issues, and then a project plan.
 - Evidence collecting included phone interviews, case studies, surveys customer journey mapping, on site visits, desk top reviews.
 - Digital working is going well.
 - Top tips:
 - ✓ Plan well but allow for flexibility too.
 - ✓ Don't use jargon.
 - ✓ Act as a critical friend – not there to have a go or air personal issues.



Onward

Creating positive spaces



- 2017 – reviewed and co designed a new scrutiny framework following the merger of different landlords.
 - 2018 - launched new scrutiny framework comprising of three regional scrutiny boards.
 - 2019 – embedded framework and established scrutiny/ board relationships.
 - 2020 – looked to regroup and strengthen but plans thrown off course by Covid 19 so had to adapt digitally.
 - Have recently recruited digitally to the panels using Teams, and have had some good successes.
 - Scrutiny successes include:
 - ✓ Co designing a new environmental handbook.
 - ✓ Changing how complaints are logged and recognised.
 - ✓ Shaping new website.
 - ✓ Changing the key performance indicators around electrical servicing.
 - ✓ Changes to the information provided in capital projects.
 - ✓ Introducing environmental monitoring for customers.
 - ✓ Transforming information about repairs.
- At the outset they had a formal panel, which was strong and very committed, but it was very Southend based, and wasn't engaging with enough residents.
 - They therefore created something different by merging scrutiny with main residents committee who now co-ordinate a bootcamp approach to scrutiny.
 - First review in bootcamp style was Grounds and Estates maintenance.
 - Promoted it to residents across social media and got 20 residents to join the bootcamp day which involved icebreakers, mind mapping, Q and A sessions, group work and customer journey mapping.
 - They videoed the day to show what happened but also to see how things could be improved, and as a result changes have been made for second bootcamp and it is working well.



Stephen Hannon,
Tenant Scrutineer



- Swindon have a dedicated scrutiny panel who connect well with the community and wider tenant base.
- They regularly seek feedback from tenants to inform scrutiny topics by going out and talking to people.
- The Panel recently reviewed the “one stop shop” service. As a result of the review the Council increased number of encrypted terminals so tenants can now self-serve with scanning docs.
- The review also recommended that the terminals should be taken out into the communities and this is now being considered.
- The panel host scrutiny networking events in the South West.
- The panel is working on its digital media and is setting up a Facebook page to connect digitally and also to collect evidence.
- Their good practice has featured in the Tpas report “Successful Scrutiny for Council Tenants” which you can find here: www.tpas.org.uk/knowledge-hub
- The lead councillor for housing, director of housing plus other senior management all support scrutiny and they ensured residents are equipped with the technology needed to work digitally.
- Swindon Council are a great example how investing in scrutiny and wider tenant involvement should be done.

Other Highlights

- Roundtables - you can watch the recordings of these by following the links below or by heading over to the Tpas England Youtube channel: www.youtube.com/user/TPASEngland
 - Scrutiny Good Practice www.youtube.com/watch?v=7vZxNktl6KQ
 - Where next for Local Authority Scrutiny? www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ri7IYFtgOyM
 - Tpas Scrutiny research paper “Successful Scrutiny for Council Tenants” and “National Scrutiny Review to understand how social housing landlords have responded during COVID-19 crisis” can be found in the Tpas Resource Hub: www.tpas.org.uk/knowledge-hub
- And finally** – We hope you have found the insight, good practice and top tips useful, and that this will be a document you can keep and refer to, wherever you are on your scrutiny journey. However, we know that there may be times when you feel that you need a little more specialised scrutiny support and advice, so why not check out the Tpas Scrutiny services: www.tpas.org.uk/scrutiny-services



This report is dedicated to Carole Burchett, scrutiny panel member from Soha and an ex Tpas Board member.



Carole sadly passed away in early September 2020. Carole believed passionately in the power of scrutiny for what it could achieve for tenants and landlords. We will ensure we carry on her legacy and keep championing scrutiny across the sector.

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