



SCRUTINY GROUP - TERMS OF REFERENCE

Purpose

These Terms of Reference (TOR) set out the role, rights and responsibilities of the Torus Scrutiny Group. The Scrutiny Group was established to provide an enhanced scrutiny role across the services Torus provide to ensure an enhanced, empowered tenant voice. Scrutiny is an important function, which helps to ensure that customers receive high quality services that are relevant to their needs and demonstrate value for money. It adds a new dimension to the Torus decision-making process and supports existing assurance structures by examining and questioning performance and decisions made by the organisation from a tenant's perspective.

Role

- To ensure that Torus provides high quality housing services and is a well-managed organisation which places residents at the heart of the business
- To give tenants a strong voice in shaping Torus' services and priorities
- To ensure that Torus embeds the national standards from the Regulator for Social Housing by the monitoring and challenging of compliance and self-assessment to these standards
- To form an effective but independent part of the governance and assurance process feeding through to the Landlord Operations Committee of the Torus Group Board
- To deliver independent scrutiny of all Landlord services with the aim of making continuous improvements for customers
- To receive reports on customer feedback from surveys, focus groups, mystery shopping, tenant inspection and any other evidence-based feedback and to identify areas for improvement
- To act as a critical friend in order to shape, influence and drive-up standards, performance and service delivery, providing constructive, evidenced feedback and scrutiny reports with recommendations to the Torus Landlord Operations Committee
- To ensure Landlord services are accessible and meet the needs of all customers
- To promote better value for money and identify areas of waste where possible
- To inform and involve the wider tenant body in the activities of the group
- To agree with service leads priorities for service improvement and monitor progress against agreed action plans

How the Scrutiny Group will achieve its purpose:

The Scrutiny Group will:

- Identify and prioritise services for review, based on a wide range of data, including complaints, performance reports, customer feedback and customer insight
- Complete independent reviews of services and seek improvements, giving recommendations from a customer's perspective
- Seek approval from Landlord Operations Committee to commission Tenant Inspectors to carry out an in-depth inspection of service area as part of any review.
- Develop and adhere to an operational approach to scrutiny and avoid any duplication with existing service reviews and audits unless they can add any value.
- Work positively and collaboratively with the Torus Tenant Voice Team and other engaged and involved tenants and groups, in the spirit of co-regulation
- Adopt an evidence-based approach to all of their work
- Monitor and use complaints, performance data and customer feedback
- Commission research (e.g., lessons learnt from complaints, satisfaction surveys, interviews, presentations, reports) to inform their work
- Produce review reports with recommendations for improvement, these will be balanced, evidence-based and take into account regulatory standards, good practice and the operating context and to be discussed with management and presented to the Landlord Operations Committee for approval
- Monitor the delivery of agreed actions and outcomes from previous scrutiny reviews, escalating any issues to the Landlord Operations Committee where necessary
- Oversee recruitment and development of volunteers to the Scrutiny Group
- Widely publicise reports and the outcomes of reviews to ensure an enhanced, empowered tenant voice
- Carry out other activities to shape and scrutinise service delivery as agreed with Torus Tenant Voice team

The Scrutiny Group will aim to undertake at least 2 service reviews each year (depending on scale and scope) and will adopt an evidence-based approach to the reviews and associated recommendations for improvements.

The Group will consult Torus management on the proposed areas for review and outcomes before updating the Landlord Operations Committee and making recommendations for approval.

The Scrutiny group will report to the Landlord Operations committee at least once a year on its operations and produce a Scrutiny Annual Report that will be submitted to the Torus Board Away Day each year.

Membership

The Scrutiny Group will comprise of a maximum of 12 members with no fewer than 6 members with tenants always maintaining the majority membership. The Chair will be an independent member of the Group selected and recruited based on skills and expertise in customer service and governance. The Chairs responsibilities include:

- Presenting (or nomination of a representative from the group to present), the progress and outcomes of any scrutiny reviews to the Landlord Operations Committee
- Agreeing the agenda for all meetings, in advance of the meeting date
- Chairing meetings
- Having a casting vote when applicable

The tenants ideally will comprise of:

- 4 members from Liverpool
- 4 members from St Helens and
- 4 members from Warrington

However, recruitment will also be sought from the wider remote housing areas

The profile of the group should, where possible, reflect the tenant base of Torus.

Membership will be for a maximum of 3 years with an option to extend. Where a member leaves the group before the end of the term, a recruitment process will be undertaken. All terms are subject to an annual review.

Membership to the Scrutiny Group is only open to those who meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Current tenants of Torus; or
- Current customers of Torus, i.e., are currently in receipt of, and pay for, regular or periodic ongoing services from Torus, e.g., leaseholder, or shared owner

Exclusions apply to the following groups: whom may not be eligible to apply:

- Members of staff within Torus: or
- Customers in material or serious breach of their tenancy or lease agreements
- Anyone under 18

- All vacancies are publicised, and anyone who is interested can express an interest. Every individual who does so will be invited to find out more, and supported to complete an application form
- New members to the Scrutiny Group will be appointed through a selection process
- New members of the group will participate in an induction training programme to help them fulfil their role. They will also participate in further training as and when required to support them in their role
- Members will be expected to act as individuals and not represent any interested group, area or political party
- New and continuing membership will be subject to an annual appraisal and personal development process, which will take account of attendance, contribution to reviews and how members work as part of a team
- Any member who is in breach of their tenancy conditions or becomes involved in any activity which brings the name of the Scrutiny Group and/or Torus into disrepute will be suspended, pending investigation, and may be asked to resign
- If a group member wishes to resign, they should inform the Tenant Voice Team in writing or by email
- All members must sign the code of conduct and confidentiality agreement. Any Group member who breaches the code of conduct will be asked to leave the Group

Meetings

The Scrutiny Group will agree their own schedule and frequency of meetings, which will be determined by their work plan and associated activities, however the Group will meet a maximum of 12 times a year. Some of these meetings may be set to cover training and development, Torus will provide reasonable travel expenses and electronic equipment in order for members to participate in meetings.

- Members of the Scrutiny Group should make every effort to attend meetings. If a member is unable to attend, apologies should be sent to the Governance and Regulation Team in advance of the meeting to avoid unnecessary costs
- Any member missing a meeting without giving prior apologies may be contacted by the chair and/or a representative from Torus Tenant Voice team
- If a Scrutiny panel member fails to attend three meetings in any rolling 12-month period without giving prior apologies, it will be assumed they no longer wish to be a member of the panel and their membership will be terminated
- Torus recognises that there may be exceptional circumstances preventing a Scrutiny Panel member from attending training and/or meetings e.g. ill health. Such circumstances will be discussed confidentially and an agreement regarding involvement will be reached by both parties

- An attendance register is to be kept for all meetings (to include apologies and authorised absences) and Torus will provide support to ensure the effective running and smooth administration of the group.
 - The Tenant Voice Team will support the Group to obtain data, reports etc from internal teams in a timely manner to support the scrutiny function
 - The quorum of the Group will be 4 members with at least 1-member from each of the housing areas plus the Chair.
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Safeguards

Members must:

- Adopt and abide by the code of conduct; and
- Agree to undergo a mandatory induction and training programme;
- Uphold Torus' high standards of conduct and probity by adhering to the code of conduct and respecting confidentiality of information; and
- Remain objective and not bring personal issues into their work with the Scrutiny Group
- Scrutiny Group members must not disclose confidential information to anyone else outside the group. Members who breach confidentiality will be removed from the Group
- The Scrutiny Group shall conduct an annual review of its work and effectiveness, with the support of a Tenant Voice team member. This annual review will include a review of the terms of reference.