



Scrutiny Council

The Scrutiny Council

What is the Scrutiny Council?

The views, aspirations and priorities of customers are at the heart of how Guinness Northern Counties (GNC) reviews and improves services.

The Scrutiny Council assesses and monitors GNC performance on a regular basis. We then use this information to help find areas that need improving, which enables real scrutiny of key services. The Council and GNC work together to make sure our services are working right.

The Scrutiny Council is an independent group, made up of GNC tenants and residents. A tenant acts as Chair and another as Vice Chair. The group is facilitated and supported by a member of the GNC Customer Support Team- a dedicated Customer Engagement and Support Officer. The officer helps to organise and run the meetings on the Council's behalf.

Most people who join the Council are new to engagement. To ensure members can operate and contribute

effectively they are offered free training, e.g. Equality and Diversity, budgeting, how to challenge effectively, how to deal with conflict, how to understand performance data etc.

The group is voluntary, although expenses to cover attending meetings and training are reimbursed to members by GNC. The group meets every month- sometimes more- for a whole day. Members are also expected to carry out some Council work in their own time e.g. read documents pertaining to a case, do light touch research, write communications for the wider customer base and GNC staff etc.

The Council is particularly suitable for those customers who want to influence high-level decision making for the benefit of all customers, who have knowledge of our services and good life skills they can bring to the post.



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What do we do?

We look at performance data, complaints trends and satisfaction survey results. We can also take referrals from groups of customers.

When we identify a service that is underperforming we scrutinise the service and the possible causes affecting performance. Once we have identified our key findings we make recommendations for improvements, streamlining and how to better tailor the service to meet customer needs and expectations, or how to make the service perform in a way that increases value for money. Each case we do is also reviewed in the future to ensure the recommendations we made have been actioned and that performance is improving.

The Scrutiny process makes sure that customers are measuring, testing and monitoring the services they receive from GNC and that customers are influencing the development of the business and approving changes. The Scrutiny process gives GNC a solid co- regulation approach.

How long have we been operational?

The Scrutiny Council as it is today was formed in 2010. There are 12 places available on the Council, which is open to all GNC residents, and includes a Chair and Vice Chair. These positions are filled via election amongst Council members and are periodically re- elected. Membership is for 2 years, at which point it will be reviewed. Members also receive an annual appraisal, conducted by the Chair and Vice Chair.





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What we have achieved so far

Since the present Scrutiny Council was formed in 2010 we have investigated 4 areas that were underperforming.

These areas were;

- Call backs to customers,
- Repairs being done right first time,
- Complaints,
- Voids.

Improvements and recommendations we have made and that have been adopted by GNC include;

- The promotion of the complaints procedure (leaflets, website, customer magazine),

- Analysing of complaints data and trends to identify areas that need improving and acting upon these findings quickly,
- Taking a more commercial approach to the letting of void properties,
- The development of a 'hard to let' strategy.

We have also just finished our latest case assessing the impact of Welfare Reforms so far on both tenants and GNC and what can be learnt from how GNC prepared for and supported customers through those changes whilst minimising risk to the business. This learning can then be applied as further Welfare Reform changes continue to come in to force e.g. Universal Credit.





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How we interact with Guinness Northern Counties

The Council has a good working relationship with GNC and strives hard to represent the wider customer base at all times. We often meet with and interview members of staff within GNC as part of our cases, and we have regular meetings with the Director of Neighbourhood Services and our representative on the Board, to ensure we communicate regularly with them face to face and maintain a good working relationship.

Our aims and objectives

Our aim as a Scrutiny Council is to be an independent tenant group that acts with integrity and professionalism and offers a 'critical friend' function to GNC on behalf of the wider customer base. We want to ensure tenants receive the best possible services and that those services offer value for money.

Our objectives include;

- To identify scrutiny referrals in all areas of performance management,
- To commission staff and customer interviews and reports to enable the Council to carry out its duties,
- To assess GNC performance against cooperate standards and targets,
- Manage our workloads, action plans and produce an annual report summarising our work.



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What is a typical meeting like?

A typical meeting starts at 10.30am. We review and agree the minutes of the last meeting and discuss any issues arising and outstanding questions. We then review performance data and satisfaction survey data.

Then we work on our latest case- this can include discussing evidence, interviewing staff or customers, or analysing the results of surveys. We also give each other updates on events we have attended that are relevant to the work of the Council.

We may also discuss ways to communicate about the Council and the latest opportunities available to us for networking and benchmarking with other customer panels and Scrutiny Councils. Our meetings usually close around 2.30pm.

How can you get involved or join the Council

We always need new members and the fresh input and ideas they can bring to the group. It's easy to join- just get in touch with the Customer Support Team to request an application form. If your application is successful you will be invited to have a (very) informal interview with the current Chair and Vice Chair of the Scrutiny Council at a time that suits you.

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