



Harden Customer Led Scrutiny

Access to Information Protocol

1. What is the Access to Information Protocol?

- 1.1 This Access to Information Protocol provides a set of standards that members of the Scrutiny Panel must comply with when accessing and using information from Harden Housing Association, in order to carry out their scrutiny duties.
- 1.2 The protocol also sets out the types of information that may or may not be provided and also the service level that Panel members can expect from staff in response to information requests.

2. Why Have an Access to Information Protocol?

- 2.1 Harden is required to have safeguards in place to protect personal, commercial and legally sensitive information. These safeguards extend to Board, Management and all staff members and also to customers who require information in order to carry out their respective involvement activities. Compliance with this protocol will protect the interests of those entrusted with confidential information.
- 2.2 The service level element of this protocol will ensure that staff are given reasonable time to provide relevant information and also ensure that Panel members receive information in a timely manner or are kept apprised of any reasons for delay in the provision of information.

3. Application and Enforcement of the Access to Information Protocol

- 3.1 Compliance with the Access to Information Protocol will protect the interests of those entrusted with confidential information as set out in 2.1 (above). Compliance is also a requirement of the Code of Conduct. Panel members must, therefore, abide by this protocol and any reported breach of the protocol will be considered a breach of the Code of Conduct and dealt with accordingly.

4. Principles of the Access to Information Protocol

4.1 Confidentiality

- 4.1.1 Panel members must respect the confidentiality of customers, staff and the organisation and any data provided by the organisation and Panel members must exercise discretion and care in performing their duties and responsibilities.



4.1.2 Panel members will **not** be provided with any information that is personal to individual customers and any information provided must be of specific relevance and essential to the scrutiny project being undertaken.

4.1.3 All members must adhere to the Data Protection guidance provided by Harden.

4.2 Requests for Information

4.2.1 All requests for information must be made via the Scrutiny Support Officer.

4.2.2 Scrutiny Panel members must not approach other members of staff directly to obtain information.

4.3 Response to Requests for Information

4.3.1 Harden will respond to requests within 10 working days. Where information is not readily available within this time, the reasons for any delay will be provided and an estimated date for provision of the information will be supplied. The Scrutiny Support Officer will be responsible for monitoring the provision of information within these specified timescales.

4.3.2 Information provided will relate to general information required for Scrutiny purposes only, such as information demonstrating performance and trends eg numbers and nature of complaints, performance indicators, results of satisfaction surveys and consultations. Data relating to individual customers will **not** be provided.

4.3.3 Information will be provided in electronic format wherever possible. Scrutiny Panel members should advise the Scrutiny Support Officer if they require a paper copy of any documents.

4.4 Use of Information

4.4.1 Panel members will ensure that use of information provided is restricted to scrutiny purposes only.

4.4.2 Members must ensure that information is retained securely and if required, the Panel should advise the Scrutiny Support Officer if secure storage is required.

4.4.3 Information provided must not be discussed with anyone other than members of the Scrutiny Panel, relevant Harden staff and the independent mentor.

5. Breaches of the Access to Information Protocol

5.1 Breaches of the Protocol by Scrutiny Panel Members

5.1.1 Compliance with the Access to Information Protocol a requirement of the Code of Conduct. Panel members must, therefore, abide by this protocol and any reported



breach of the protocol will be considered a breach of the Code of Conduct and dealt with accordingly.

5.1.2 Details of the procedures for dealing with breaches of the Code of Conduct are set out in the separate, Code of Conduct document, section 5.

5.2 Breaches of the Protocol by Harden

5.2.1 Harden are committed to meeting the service level element of this protocol. Failures to meet these commitments should be reported to the Scrutiny Support Officer who will liaise with the member of staff who has failed to meet the service level.

5.2.2 Should the Panel remain dissatisfied, they may report their concern to the Head of Customer and Community Involvement or deputising officer in their absence. The matter will be investigated and the investigating officer will report back to the Panel within 7 days.

5.2.3 Scrutiny Panel members who remain dissatisfied may at any point use the formal Customer Complaints process.

6. Review

6.1 This Access to Information Protocol will be reviewed annually by the Panel and the Board and any revisions jointly agreed. In the event of certain elements proving unworkable between regular reviews, or should the scope of work require it, the Panel and the Board will undertake an early review.

I agree to abide by the Access to Information Protocol and know that failure to do so can result in me being permanently excluded from the Scrutiny Panel.

Signed: _____ Date: _____