



LANCASTER CITY  
COUNCIL HOUSING

# SCRUTINY PANEL

COMMUNAL CLEANING CONTRACT FEBRUARY 2025

SCRUTINY OF THE COMMUNAL CLEANING CONTRACT  
(CONTRACT DELIVERED BY 'LCD' - OUTSIDE CONTRACTOR)



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# 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In recent years there has been a much stronger focus on the 'tenant voice' within social housing, to make sure tenants are kept informed and are able to shape and meaningfully influence the decision making of their landlord, and that homes are provided which are warm, safe and secure.
- 1.2 From 1st April 2024, the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) have new responsibilities and powers and a new focus on proactive consumer regulation. This includes using inspections and the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) to help to monitor social housing landlords are meeting the new Consumer Standards.
- 1.3 The new Consumer Standards reflect the Regulator's revised statutory objectives as set out in the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008, as amended by the Social Housing Act 2023, and the expectations set out in the Social Housing White Paper in respect of a revised consumer regulation role for the Regulator.
- 1.4 There Are Currently Four Consumer Standards:
  - The Safety and Quality Standard
  - The Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard
  - The Neighbourhood and Community Standard
  - The Tenancy Standard
- 1.5 The scrutiny panel are a major part of the Transparency, Influence and Accountability standard which requires Lancaster City Council to be open with tenants and ensure:
  - They are treated with fairness and respect.
  - They can access services, raise complaints, and influence decision making.
  - They can hold Lancaster City Council, as their landlord, to account
- 1.6 Lancaster City Council has made a service commitment in our Service Improvement Plan 2025-2027:
  - We ensure homes, and our buildings are decent and energy efficient.
  - We take pride in our neighbourhoods and corporate buildings, ensuring they are clean and safe.
  - We maximise efficiency and seek to be transparent with the services we deliver.
  - We will involve and empower residents and ensure those who require support receive it.
- 1.7 These commitments are relevant to scrutiny:
  - Best Value for Council resources and more tenants benefit from support/ services.
  - Increased opportunities for effective and continual tenant involvement and provide opportunities for tenant scrutiny.
  - Tenants can hold the service to account and can engage in different ways that meet their needs, and that engagement is meaningful.
- 1.8 In response to this Lancaster City Council in partnership with its tenants developed a framework for tenant scrutiny. This included the establishment of and recruitment to a tenant scrutiny panel. The panel members have received a range of training to prepare them to conduct effective scrutiny exercises and there is a programme of on-going training to enhance skills and knowledge.

1.9

The scrutiny panel's role is to explore, examine and test the current services provided by Lancaster City Council Housing on behalf of their tenants. The panel investigate what is currently in place and make recommendations based on the evidence gathered during the scrutiny period. The aim of these recommendations should be achievable and set to a workable timescale.

1.10

The Panel chose to review the Communal Cleaning Contract which is currently being delivered by LCD due to feedback received from the Tenant Satisfaction Measures, complaints received by residents' groups from dissatisfied tenants, recurring theme at Tenants Voice meetings and lived experience.

1.11

This report details the findings and recommendations of this scrutiny exercise, which took place between June 2024 and March 2025. This scrutiny exercise took a lot longer than expected due to various issues including, ill health, childcare responsibilities, work and family commitments. The group decided to take a break from July to October and then continued with the exercise.

## 2 SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

- 2.1 The first meeting was held on 10th June 2024 to discuss the plan and how the group would gather information for this scrutiny. They also discussed who they would need to speak to, to get a better understanding of the communal cleaning contract and issues around its delivery.
- 2.2 At the following meeting on 24th June 2024 on invitation of the Panel Alison Ducie – Building Cleaning Supervisor, the officer with responsibility for managing the external cleaning contract with LCD attended. Alison provided the schedule of cleaning for 24/25, explained her role and the difficulties she has faced with the contract. Alison discussed with the group how the cleaning is monitored and how reports of dissatisfaction are dealt with. The panel requested a copy of the Service Agreement – Cleaning Contract and a meeting with Angela the manager of the cleanings at LCD.
- 2.3 At the following meeting on 19th July the group formalised their plan to scrutinise the Communal Cleaning Contract with LCD against key areas of enquiry as shown below.
- What information regarding the communal cleaning contract and charges is provided by the council and how is it communicated to residents?
  - How easy is it to report issues with the communal cleaning?
  - Delivery of service -is it value for money, is a good job done, customer services.
  - Customer care – how are customers treated, behaviour of operatives?
  - Are service users satisfied with the overall service received from LCD- satisfaction levels and complaints, feedback forms?
- 2.4 As part of their investigation, the panel met with Alison Ducie, Building Cleaning Supervisor, Council Housing Lancaster City Council.
- 2.5 Alison attended a scrutiny panel meeting on 24th June 2024 and gave the panel an overview of the communal cleaning contract and her role at Building Cleaning Supervisor. Alison also provided a copy of the schedule of cleaning for 2024/25. Alison explained that managing the LCD contract is only one part of her job and that there are 132 blocks of flats in the district which receive the communal cleaning service from LCD. Alison said she is trying to formulate a check list for checking the blocks.
- Alison explained that before she started in post LCD had been awarded the contract after a tender process and this is due to expire in March 2026. Members of the group asked if tenants can be involved in this process and Alison thought that would be possible. The group also thought that what should be covered in the cleaning contract for blocks should be made easier to understand. Alison said that would be something to look at as well as making sure each block has a schedule so they know when their cleaning should take place.
- The group also asked if Alison felt that LCD were doing a good job and Alison explained that what we pay LCD is a lot cheaper than having in-house cleaners and she thought it was value for money but there are issues about the standard of the cleaning in some of the blocks.
- The group asked Alison if it would be possible to organise a meeting with Angela from LCD to discuss issues from her side regarding cleaning of the communal areas and to get an understanding of the issues the cleaners face in the blocks.
- The group thought that window cleaning was part of the contract, but Alison explained that people pay extra for the cleaning of windows. The group asked if this could be advertised so all residents know this is something they could pay an extra service charge for if the block agreed.

Alison also explained that part of the LCD contract is to vacuum the mats/carpeted areas within the blocks however not all the blocks have access to a plug socket, so they are not able to do this in every block

Alison explained that residents needed to contact Council Housing regarding issues so that she can go out and check the block and go back to LCD and ask them to rectify the issues. The group thanked her for her time.

2.6

**The panel conducted a desktop review of the following information:**

- Service Improvement Plan 2023-2025
- Cleaning Contract – Council Flats- Communal Areas
- Cleaning Contract Check list (monthly checks)
- Tenant Satisfaction Measures
- Cleaning Schedule 2024
- Cleaning Schedule 2025
- Costs and breakdown from Admin department
- Cleaning Tender Document
- Information received from Alison

2.7

In addition to the printed material provided and the meeting with Alison Ducie, the group organised three pop up events to get feedback from residents in areas with a high level of blocks of flats who receive the communal cleaning contract. These events took place:

- 20th February 2025 - Mainway
- 21st February 2025 - Branksome
- 7th March 2025 - Hala

The group formulated the survey, and the events were advertised with posters, on local residents' groups social media and on Council Housing social media. Alison Ducie, Angela from LCD and a cleaner attended all three of these events to be on hand to answer questions from residents. The cleaners also brought a van with them so residents could see what they carry with them when they do their rounds.

2.8

The panel also tried to find information regarding the cleaning contract on our website but were unsuccessful.

# 3 FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## 3.1 General Outcomes

The group found that from the survey, pop-up events and TSMs, most residents are happy with the cleaning contract overall. There are some issues the group feel would enhance the service and give the Council and residents better value for money. There seems to be gaps in communication and residents don't feel fully informed about what they are paying for and when the service should be provided. There were also issues about how much time should be spent in each building. There seem to be an overall feeling of a lack of communication between the council and the tenants about this service. All the residents that the group spoke to think all the LCD staff were friendly and approachable.

## 3.2 What information regarding the communal cleaning contract and charges is provided by the council and how is it communicated to residents?

3.2.1 The panel felt that there was a general lack of availability of printed information in the blocks of flats for residents. The council is working towards providing a higher proportion of information online and reducing the amount of printed communication. The panel feel that the move to reduce the availability of printed information and advice about housing services does not meet the needs of many council residents who are not yet fully online. Also, for people who are online there is no information available about the communal cleaning contract.

### Recommendation:

- The panel felt that a schedule of when the cleaning should be done, should be displayed in each block.
- The panel felt that a list of cleaning included in the service charge should be displayed in each block, so residents know what to expect to be cleaned and what is not included.
- The panel felt that the contract itself was large and most people who were spoken to had not seen a copy of the contract but also felt if they had they would probably not read it due to its size. However, the panel thought that a QR code or a link to the contract on our webpages would be a good idea for people who wanted to look at it in more detail.
- The panel felt that information about the cleaning schedule and changes to it should be advertised on social media.
- The panel also felt that information regarding the cleaning contract in a user-friendly format should be on our webpages.
- The panel felt that information about who usually cleans your block would help people feel more secure within the block. Know your cleaner - with a photo of your usual cleaner with their name, along with the other information.
- Make sure that a number is displayed clearly with the other information so that residents can contact easily if the cleaning has not been done or if there are issues with the service.
- Breakdown of cleaning to be carried out and service charge for the block sent out with rent letters.

## 3.3 How easy is it to report issues with the communal cleaning?

3.3.1 The panel felt that due to the lack of information about what should be cleaned and when this cleaning should happen it was extremely difficult for tenants to raise a complaint about the cleaning. Also, with there only being one officer checking cleanliness following the visit by the cleaners there are not enough spot checks done.

### **Recommendation:**

- Clearly display cleaning schedule in all blocks so people know when to expect their cleaners.
- Clearly display what should be cleaned on each visit and the average amount of time you should expect to see your cleaners in your block.
- Clearly display contact number so people can phone with a complaint or complement about the cleaning.
- Use a dedicated email for residents to send in pictures of the unsatisfactory cleaning so these can be sent straight to LCD to ask them to rectify this.
- Send out satisfaction surveys every quarter via text message with a link for people to complete from a selection of the properties who receive this service.
- Have a QR code with a link to cleaning check list for residents to complete.

## **3.4 Delivery of service – is it good value for money? Has customer services been delivered to the desired standard?**

3.4.1 The panel felt that the service worked well but there were issues with attention to detail. They felt there should be more accountability from the cleaners and more time spent in the blocks.

3.4.2 The panel felt that residents should be more involved in the tender process for the communal cleaning contract.

### **Recommendation:**

- The panel felt that there should be signing in and out process. This could be either by scanning a QR code or phoning a number to say they have arrived and then again on leaving the property. 60% of tenants surveyed want a signing in and out process.
- The council to make sure that all cleaners have access to a power point in the communal area to be able to plug in vacuums for the mats/carpeted areas. If this is not possible for LCD to use rechargeable vacuums for mats/carpeted areas. If the residents are paying for this service, it should be delivered.
- The time allotted for each block should be advertised clearly for residents in the communal areas. It should be specified on the rota and cleaners should be made aware of the amount of time allotted to each block. If there is not enough time to complete all tasks specified in the contract the cleaners should be feeding this back to managers.
- Tenants should be part of the tender process by being part of the interview panel before the contract is awarded.
- Change from normal mops to steam mops to give enhanced cleaning to blocks.
- Making sure all items within the contract are completed as specified e.g. Light shades.
- Check sheets to be completed by cleaner and signed at the end of cleaning of each block via a form on their phone which then goes to Alison and Angela.

## **3.5 Customer Care - how are customers treated, behaviour of cleaners?**

3.5.1 Overall, from the information provided to the panel, tenants are very satisfied with the customer care they receive on an individual basis.

3.5.2 The panel feel that from their own experiences and those of members of their community that generally cleaners attending tenants' homes were polite and helpful. The panel have heard a lot of praise for the cleaners and the job they do, especially in some of the more challenging blocks.

**Recommendation:**

- The panel felt that a satisfaction survey sent out periodically to residents would be great to give the cleaners some positive feedback about their work.
- It would be nice to share nice comments on social media about the cleaners.
- The panel felt it would be good to make complements as well as complaints easier for tenants.

3.6

**Are service users satisfied with the overall service received from LCD-satisfaction levels and complaints, Feedback forms?**

3.6.1

Overall tenants seem satisfied with the service provided by LCD. There does not appear to be anything in place to measure levels of satisfaction apart from the TSMs.

**Recommendation:**

- The panel felt sending out a satisfaction form quarterly to various properties would help to assess ongoing satisfaction.
- If technology allowed it would be good to have a smiley face system of satisfaction within the blocks via a QR code and promote this on social media.
- There are still a lot of complaints regarding the cleaning contract, but the panel feel a lot of that is lack of communication and expectations of tenants.
- More information about what the cleaners can and can't move to clean in the communal areas to make sure the cleanliness of communal areas has joint responsibilities.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

- 4.1 The Panel are pleased to report that most staff responded positively to the review, were open and candid in their replies and appeared willing to consider ways to improve the way the Communal Cleaning Contract is delivered to its tenants.
- 4.2 It is the intention of the Panel that this report and its recommendations contained within it be presented to senior managers and the Councillor with responsibility for housing prior to a final Action Plan being developed, detailing the actions agreed for implementation in the future.
- 4.3 The implementation of the action plan will be monitored and reported back to the Tenant Voice Group.
- 4.4 This is the Panels second scrutiny exercise. For some of the members of the panel it has been their first scrutiny. There have been some tricky times during this scrutiny where some members have had to back away due to illness or family commitments but their input at the start of this process was invaluable.