



Annual Report 2023-24

This year we finalised our review of the damp and mould service and also reviewed Cottsway's approach to estate inspections - we're thankful for the help of the Cottsway staff involved.

We've continued on our journey of learning more about scrutiny, customer involvement and housing generally and have enjoyed taking part in webinars, conferences and our ongoing IT training.

We've also had fun attending external events like the annual play days during the summer holidays and hope to continue this in 2024-25.

We look forward to working with Cottsway to help improve services, monitoring our past recommendations and giving residents a voice in the year ahead.

Vanda White (Chair)

Gill Browning (Member)

Paul Jamieson (Member)

Carole Scott (Member)



ACTIVITIES OVER THE YEAR

Damp and mould service review

We're proud to have completed this review since our last annual report - especially when the issue of damp and mould is rightfully in the spotlight. Some of us have personal experience of it and we were determined to do a thorough job by:

- Looking at how cases are reported, what information is gathered and when inspections take place.
- Holding a workshop to discuss how damp and mould came to be in the public eye and learn what help Cottsway offer to affected households.
- Sending a survey to all customers who had reported damp and mould in January and February 2023 - after Cottsway changed their procedure - and carried out a follow up survey with five customers who agreed to give us more in-depth feedback.
- Drew up a detailed customer journey map to identify where improvements were needed
- Interviewed senior staff from the Assets team about the challenges of managing damp and mould in customers' homes.

We made 13 recommendations for service improvements and were pleased that Cottsway took many onboard straight away.

We'll keep monitoring progress on our recommendations in the year ahead, but in the meantime you can view a summary of our report online at:

- www.cottsway.co.uk/scrutinygroup

Estate inspection review

We started our estate inspection review in January and completed it in June.



We wanted to make this a light touch review focusing on the procedures in place, how closely those procedures are adhered to and whether there is consistency and clear communication by Cottsway staff in relation to estate inspections. To do this we:

- Carried out a desktop review of other landlords' estate inspection programmes and how they promote customer participation and feedback.
- Reviewed Cottsway procedures and documentation and accompanied two neighbourhood housing officers on inspections at different sites to see how the procedures work in practice.
- Surveyed the Neighbourhood Housing Officers and their managers, which provided a lot of engaged feedback and suggestions for improvements.

We made 19 recommendations aimed at improving clarity, communication and consistency for customers. Read a summary of our report at:

- www.cottsway.co.uk/scrutinygroup

Training and conferences



Gill attended the Tpas National Scrutiny Club meeting in February where they looked at the new Consumer Standards, the Housing Ombudsman's new statutory scheme, Tenant Satisfaction Measures and Awaab's Law (dealing with damp and mould).

We also attended:

- Two IT training sessions at Cottsway.
- Tpas' Engagement Conference (July 2023)
- Tpas' Scrutiny Club meeting; and
- Took part in a consultation for the Better Social Housing Review.

Membership and meetings

Katie left the group in September and Paul joined in December. We now meet in-person every six weeks with all other meetings held online. It's great to see everyone face-to-face again!

We held a Scrutiny Liaison Group meeting in June 2023 along with Board members and housing staff. Our November 2023 meeting had to be cancelled but we did meet again in April 2024. Our Chair Vanda also attended Customer Committee in October 2023.

Out and about

Several members of the group attended three Oxfordshire Play Association play days (Witney, Eynsham and Chipping Norton) last summer. Since then, Carole has taken lead on social media and increased our posting on our Facebook page. The page now has 95 followers and we'd love to have more.



In other news

We reviewed and updated our Terms of Reference as well as Cottsway's self-assessment of how well it meets the terms of the Together with Tenants' Charter (National Housing Federation). Our Chair Vanda also contributed to the foreword in Cottsway's Annual Report.

Following feedback from Carole and Vanda, Cottsway has reviewed and updated the inspection process for Positive Input Ventilation pumps to include new service records.

LOOKING AHEAD TO 2024-25

Reviewing our past recommendations

We will be looking at recommendations from our previous reviews to establish how well they have been implemented and how effective they've been in improving services. Our findings will be published at the end of 2024-25.



Our aim is to close the feedback loop for all scrutiny reviews carried out in the last 3 years. This includes our:

- Void standard review
- Anti-social behaviour review
- Communal repairs review
- Damp and mould service review; and
- Estate inspection review.

If you have any comments about how our previous reviews and the recommendations we have made have affected you, or the services you receive from Cottsway, please email:

- scrutiny@cottsway.co.uk

Always learning more



We will be attending Tpas' National Tenant Scrutiny Conference in October and are also arranging visits to other local scrutiny groups. This is a great way for us to exchange ideas and learn more about best practice.

Recruitment

We were so pleased to recruit a new member this year, and we hope to recruit another new member shortly.



If you're interested in joining us to make positive changes for Cottsway customers, as well as making new friends and learning new skills, please get in touch. Support, expenses and a laptop are provided.

Alternatively, if time is a constraint, you can simply register to be contacted by us from time to time to share your views.

For more details about what's involved, see:

- www.cottsway.co.uk/scrutinygroup

Social media

Follow us on Facebook where we will keep you updated on our activities:

- www.facebook.com/CottswayScrutinyGroup

You can also join Cottsway's closed Facebook group:

- [Communities@Cottsway](https://www.facebook.com/Communities@Cottsway)