**Alliance Scrutiny Panel: Terms of Reference**

**Introduction**

The Panel will play a critical friend role in ensuring that Alliance services are delivered to the highest standards.

The Panel has no executive powers. The Board has overall decision making powers, through its legal constitution. The Board of Alliance Homes will support the work of this Panel and ensure members are adequately resourced to complete their duties as outlined in this document.

The Government supports the role of Scrutiny Panels in holding their landlord to account. This is expressed in the Regulatory Standards produced by the Homes and Communities Agency in April 2012

These terms of reference lay out our methodology and expectations of how we will work with Alliance Homes to improve services and how our work is incorporated into their governance structure. They also outline some of the support that Alliance Homes will give the Panel to enable success as a scrutiny panel.

The Terms of Reference will be signed by each Panel member and an Alliance Homes representative.

# 1 Aims of the Panel

1. To provide an opportunity for tenants to scrutinise and inspect services including specific service standards
2. To measure performance and improvements against other landlords, national standards and local service promises in the service area being scrutinised
3. To support co-regulation and good governance at Alliance Homes, making sure information is available and transparent which enables customers to hold Alliance Homes to account.
4. To ensure non-involved customers have the opportunity to have their views heard and their views are brought to the attention of Alliance Homes at the highest level, including making recommendations where performance is not satisfactory.
5. To support Alliance Homes to take corrective action where performance or standards are not being met
6. To support customers to develop an understanding and influence the business issues and environment within which Alliance Homes operates
7. To investigate and suggest value for money for services provided
8. To seek continuous improvement in all areas of Alliance Homes work
9. To ensure that where assurance is not given that tenants have power to report to the regulator
10. To consider areas that Alliance Homes would like to have scrutinised by the Panel, but to decide on behalf of tenants, which areas will be scrutinised. (Decisions on services to be scrutinised will include performance data; satisfaction data; complaints and compliments; feedback from involved tenants; community call for action and experiences of the wider customer base).
11. To enable all customers to suggest areas for scrutiny
12. A coordinator from this Panel will attend the Customer Services Committee as a co-optee to feed the activities of the Panel into the Board sub-committee and also to feedback on Board and other involvement group activity to the Panel
13. A separate coordinator from this Panel will act as Project Manager for service scrutiny
14. The Panel will work in partnership with the senior staff and Board, but will ensure it remains independent in its views on services
15. The Panel will meet collectively at least monthly to plan scrutiny activities, swap information, allocate tasks and review delivery, whilst scrutiny work will be carried out by sub groups of the Panel in between these times.
16. The Panel will be supported by the governance structure established for Alliance Homes when attending Board, taking reports to Committee and in its meetings with Board and senior managers.
17. Training needs will be identified at least annually and supported through the Alliance Academy.

**2. Membership of the Panel**

1. The panel will consist of up to 15 customer members who will meet the requirements in the Role Profile which describes the duties of Panel Members/ Panel Members will serve a term of two years and a maximum of six years. At the end of the three years, members will be able to reapply. Panel Members will serve no more than a six year term.
2. The Panel do not wish to lose the skills of trained members and so they will adopt an approach where only one third of panel members will end their term at any one time. Year 1 = 5 members will stand for re-election; Year 2 = 5 members will stand for re-election; Year 3 = 5, members will stand for re-election. Mid-term appointments will step into the shoes of the former person as an interim appointment. Once an order is agreed for members to stand down and be re-elected; the order of future renewal will be based on time served. Straws will be drawn in the first year to enable this process to be spread over three years.
3. Panel Members will look favourably on any customer interested in supporting their work and will encourage shadowing and support through existing members.
4. The Panel do not wish to exclude anyone, but members who think they may have a conflict of interest with the subject being scrutinised, or part of that scrutiny, may be asked to step down from some parts of the service review being undertaken.
5. Panel Members will sign a Code of Conduct and Confidentiality Agreement

**3. Recruitment to the Panel**

1. The panel will be recruited with support from the Customer Engagement Team.
2. Recruitment processes will be transparent, and selection will be based on objective criteria according to the role profile of the Panel members. Alliance Homes accepts that it has a responsibility to train and support tenants so that they have the required level of skills and knowledge to meet the selection criteria.
3. The position of co-ordinators will be elected annually by secret ballot, following a request for Panel members to nominate themselves for the positions available. If more than one member competes for the same post of co-ordinator, those interested will be required to make a short presentation to the Panel about how they will approach the role and how they will act in the interests of the Panel.
4. Have access to independent advice and support.

**4. Equality and Diversity**

1. The Panel will aim to ensure they are representative of the customer profile, having regard to the strands of diversity. The Panel will encourage applications from all residents.
2. The Panel will consider the impact of service equality in all aspects of their work.
3. The Panel will work with diverse residents or their representatives and community leaders, to ensure the improvements recommended are fair for all residents.

# 5. Methodology for scrutiny and service review

This is outlined at **Appendix One**.

**6. Support provided by the Alliance Homes**

1. Alliance Homes will provide the resources for the Panel to meet, and provide transport and expenses in accordance with the expenses policy.
2. Alliance Homes will provide full access to internal data, survey results and comparative benchmarking data, subject to relevant Data Protection policies. It will also provide access to staff to aid the enquiries for the service scrutiny being considered.
3. The Panel will support the Board and the organisation. A quarterly meeting will be held between no more than 2 representatives of the Panel, a representative of the Executive Team, and a nominated Board Member to discuss issues of mutual interest on scrutiny and strategic and operational matters of importance for Alliance Homes.
4. The Company Secretary will facilitate the route to the Board for the Panel.
5. The Customer Engagement Team will support and facilitate the day to day arrangements for the delivery of the scrutiny report by the Panel.
6. The Panel will present their draft findings to Officers to enable final feedback on their report prior to concluding their findings for Customer Services Committee (“the Committee”).
7. The Panel will present their reports in detail to the Committee for decision; the reports will then be presented to Board for information.
8. The Panel may attend the Board to observe the progress of the report. In the event of any disagreement by the Committee of recommendations made by the Panel, the Panel may ask to address the Board on those matters. Committee and Board dates are agreed in advance and will inform the Scrutiny Planner for each service review.
9. The Committee may ask questions on the report presented and will request officers to write an action plan within 4 weeks to expedite recommendations made. The report and action plan will be presented to the Board
10. The Executive Team will finalise the detailed action plan with the Panel and monitor delivery of the plan and inform Board and the Panel (or their representatives) of progress.
11. The Panel will consider requests from Alliance Homes to scrutinise specific services, with their reasons, alongside other topics for the next service scrutiny. The final decision on which service to scrutinise will be taken by the Scrutiny Panel.
12. Customers may also approach the Panel to suggest services that display evidence of weakness or failure or a collective group of residents may make a “call for action” by the Panel.
13. The Panel will publish their plans for a service scrutiny and the results of their scrutiny in the Alliance Homes newsletters, annual reports and on their website and keep this information refreshed.
14. Alliance Homes will support an annual review of training needs of the Panel members after induction. There will be a mechanism in place to capture good practice and learning arising from the work of the Panel.
15. The Panel will be provided with administration support and expenses through the Alliance Homes Community Engagement Team.

**7. Monitoring the delivery of actions**

1. The Panel will agree/seek to negotiate the timetable for actions as a result of scrutiny.
2. The Panel may enlist the support of other resident groups to help them monitor whether the actions are being undertaken to the timetable agreed and quality promised, or they may choose to do this work themselves.
3. The Panel will revisit the action plan formally with senior officers every 12 months and/or on completion of the action plan.
4. The Board will monitor the delivery of agreed actions through the Customer Services Committee.

**8. Disputes between the Panel and the Landlord**

There are ample opportunities for conciliation during the presentation of scrutiny findings and the agreement of actions by the Board.

Discussions between Board / Committee, Officers and the Panel will be the first step if a serious disagreement occurs. Time will be allowed for an amicable resolution.

If this is unsuccessful, Alliance Homes and the Panel will:

* agree on a mutually trusted independent expert who will come to the organisation to review and comment on the issue in dispute
* enable the expert to mediate between both parties to improve relations and to reach a compromise
* enable the expert to review the support provided by the Panel to Alliance Homes and vice versa and suggest reasonable compromises, based on their experience of working with other scrutiny groups and landlords

**9. Review of this agreement**

* This agreement is subject to review in 2015, or earlier if there is an urgent need to enable the Panel or the Board and Staff at Alliance Homes to conduct their business
* All parties will sign the revised agreement.

**Signed Print name Title**

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*On behalf of Alliance Scrutiny Panel*

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*On behalf of Alliance Homes*

Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ 2013

**Appendix One – Methodology for Scrutiny**

Speak Easy

* The Panel may ask the Speak Easy volunteers to support them by completing this function to complete reality checks on services and to complete telephone surveys to recent service users

“100 Club”

* The Panel may ask tenants who have volunteered as Hot Spotters, for Estate Walkabouts or other task and finish volunteering to support them by completing this function

Involved Customer Groups at Alliance Homes

* The Panel may make use of existing involved groups to support their work, when the services being reviewed already have a group.

Performance monitoring

* The Panel will monitor Alliance Homes performance in the service area under scrutiny, including the performance of contractors.
* The Panel will receive reports on performance and benchmarking data to aid their review of Alliance Homes performance.

Interviewing staff and customers

* In order to form a full picture of a service, the Panel will hold discussion groups with staff and customers. The Panel will gather views and check how widely understood certain aspects of a service are and engage in discussions on the strengths and weaknesses of services and existing plans for improvement

Reviewing information

* The Panel will look at a number of existing information sources during a service review. For example, satisfaction surveys; complaints and compliments; policies, leaflets, landlord website and procedures; internal action plans and internal audits; the Panel may also carry out its own customer surveys to identify any service failures or demands from residents.
* The Panel will review good practices in place, those planned and delivered by other landlords.
* The Panel may ask to visit other landlords to see how services are operating where research suggests they are excellent services which are transferrable.

**All of these requests will be made through the Community Engagement Team prior to any, or as alternative to, direct contact**

