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**Customer Board: Terms of Reference**

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| **January 2013** |

1. **Introduction** 
   1. The merger between Aster Group and Synergy Housing presented a great opportunity to review the involvement structures within each organisation, consider best practice in the sector and develop a refined, fit for purpose involvement structure for the merged organisation.
   2. Customers from each organisation, over a period of eight months, developed a new structure, taking the best from their respective organisations. This was approved by Aster Communities and Synergy Boards in August 2012.
2. **Our Involvement Structure** 
   1. The involvement structure introduces a Customer Board for each region.
   2. The roles and responsibilities of the Customer Board have been designed around the following factors:

* Ensuring regulatory standards are met
* Being transparent and accountable
* Learning from the champion models that the working group explored in their meeting in May
* Ensuring that value for money is at the heart of current and future delivery
* Wanting to strengthen and build on current practice within both organisations
* Having customers at our heart

1. **Overview**

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| Number of Board members | Up to 6 customer members (including a representative from Aster Living), 1 independent member and a Regional Director.  Each Customer Board will have the option to reserve an additional place for a local authority member. |
| Membership | Will be open to all tenants, leaseholders and shared owners |
| Quorum | 50% members present plus a Regional Director |
| Frequency of meetings | At least four times every calendar year |
| Appointments to the Customer Board | The Customer Board can appoint and remove members subject to the approval of the Aster Communities Group Services Director and Regional Director. |
| Chair | It is intended that the Customer Boards will be chaired by a customer. However this is a decision for the Customer Boards.  The Chair will normally serve a three year term but will not serve more than two consecutive terms. |
| Term | Maximum membership will be for a period of 9 years. However, to ensure that not all members will stand down at one time, two Customer Board Members will have an initial membership of 1 year, two Customer Board Members will have a membership term of 2 years and two Customer Board members will have a membership term of 3 years. These will be drawn by lots. |

1. **Roles and responsibilities – what they will do** 
   1. Customer Boards are in place to ensure that customers are at the heart of our business and have been designed so that they have an influential, empowering and pivotal position within our governance structure. They are part of our governance structure with delegated decision making responsibilities.

The outcomes of the Customer Boards are contained within three main areas:

* **Shaping our housing, community and other related services**
* **Monitoring our housing, community and other related services**
* **Reviewing our housing, community and other related services**

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| **Shaping our housing, community and other related services** | |
|  | Input into the organisational business plan/corporate plan to reflect customer priorities |
|  | Input into strategy development and make recommendations to Aster Communities /Synergy Board |
|  | Ensure customer involvement has taken place in relevant strategy and policy formulation |
|  | Propose annual key performance targets to Housing Leadership Team |
|  | Input into the budget setting process |
|  | Approve delegated policies from Aster Communities Board and Synergy Board |
|  | Recommend approval of policies to Aster Communities Board and Synergy Board |
|  | Consider and approve actions arising from service reviews |
|  | Ensure appropriate action is being taken as a result of strategic customer consultation making recommendations to appropriate body (it will depend on the specific consultation as to whether the Customer Boards will implement appropriate action) |
|  | Involvement in consultation activities |
|  | Sign off customer annual report |
|  | Agreement of service standards |
|  | Control over some local budgets |

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| **Monitoring our housing, community and other related services** | |
|  | Monitor against standards to ensure that they are achieved, and agree remedial action |
|  | Monitor performance of local services (all KPIs) |
|  | Monitor complaints and compliments, taking action as required |
|  | Monitor improvement plans against delivery (it will depend on the source of improvement plan whether the lead will be Customer Boards) |
|  | Monitor outcomes from involvement activities, i.e. neighbourhood panels |
| **Reviewing our housing, community and other related services** | |
|  | Input into reviews of strategy |

1. **Relationship to our Governance Structure and the Customer Board**

5.1 The responsibilities of the Customer Boards will be delegated by the Aster Communities and Synergy Boards.

5.2 There will be facilitated meetings and events between representatives from Aster Communities and Synergy Boards, Customer Board members and Customer Scrutiny Panel; the meetings being focussed on sharing success and areas for improvement. These meetings will happen twice a year.

1. **Membership**
   1. The five Customer Boards will cover the geographical areas of Dorset, Hampshire, Somerset, Devon and Cornwall and Wiltshire.
   2. There are circumstances where it would be appropriate for the removal of a Customer Board member by the Customer Board. These are similar to those circumstances that apply to the Aster Communities and Synergy Board members.
2. **Meeting Procedures**

7.1 The order of business at meetings is:

* In the absence of the Chair and the vice Chair the Board must elect a member present to chair the meeting
* To receive any declarations of interest
* To approve the written minutes of the last meeting, which will then be signed by the Chair as a correct record
* To consider matters arising from the minutes not already covered in the agenda for the meeting.
* To deal with the agenda before the meeting. Agendas will be set in accordance with the forward plan and members are able to request that future items be added.

7.2 No business will be done at any meeting of the Board, unless at least one half of the members of the Board and the Regional Director are present at the start of the meeting. This is described as a quorum.

* 1. The Board should try to make decisions that everyone at the meeting agrees with. However, if they cannot agree, they can take a vote, and make a decision based on the option that more people vote for.

7.4 Where there is no quorum within 15 minutes of the scheduled start time of the meeting (or if during the meeting the Chair states that there is no longer a quorum) the meeting will stand adjourned to a date and time fixed by the Chair, although the Chair can agree for the meeting to proceed on an informal basis and include any actions requiring a decision as recommendations to the next meeting.

7.5 Appropriate conduct during meetings is very important. All Members should pay due regard at all times to the Code of Conduct generally, and in particular to those provisions concerning conduct at meetings.

1. **Role Description**
   1. There is a role description and person specification for Customer Board members.
2. **Code of Conduct**
   1. There is a separate Code of Conduct.
   2. Customer Boards will have access to information which is business sensitive and all members will be required to maintain confidentiality at all times. Members will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement.
3. **Training**
   1. Training to build capacity and skills will be available to support members of the Customer Boards to achieve their objectives. Where possible, new members will be mentored by existing members. A training programme will be developed, delivered and regularly reviewed.
   2. There will be an induction process for all new members, which will identify training and development needs.
   3. After that, training will be planned based on the outcomes from the annual Board appraisal process.
   4. There will be a mechanism in place to ensure good practice and learning arising from the work of the Customer Boards.
4. **Support** 
   1. The Customer Board will be provided with administration support from Aster Communities and Synergy Housing.
   2. There will be a regular appraisal process for members of the Customer Board. There will also be an annual assessment of collective and individual skills and competencies so that a development programme may be devised to ensure continuous improvement and effective governance.
5. **Expenses and Payments** 
   1. Customer Board members will be paid.
   2. Expenses will be reimbursed for things like travelling, child care costs and caring responsibilities.
6. **Equality and Diversity**
   1. Customer Board members will work within the Aster Group’s values and its Equality and Diversity Strategy.
7. **Review**

The Terms of Reference will be reviewed annually.