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**Customer Scrutiny Panel: 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 group wide Customer Scrutiny Panel.
   2. The roles and responsibilities of the Customer Scrutiny Panel have been designed around the following factors:

* The stated ambition for scrutiny to be an entirely separate and independent function
* 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 panel members | Up to 12 members (including representationfrom Aster Living) |
| Membership | Will be open to all tenants, leaseholders and shared owners |
| Quorum | 50% members present plus the Chair or acting Chair |
| Frequency of Meetings | At least four times every calendar year |
| Appointments to the Customer Scrutiny Panel | The Customer Scrutiny Panel can appoint and remove members subject to the approval of the Group Services Director and Regional Director. |
| Chair | It is intended that the Customer Scrutiny Panel will be chaired by a customer. However this will be a decision for the Customer Scrutiny Panel.  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. The Customer Scrutiny Panel has an important role, with the primary focus being on scrutiny.
   2. The outcomes of the Customer Scrutiny Panel are contained within four 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**
* **Scrutinising our housing, community and other related services**

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| **Shaping our housing, community and other related services** | |
|  | 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 lead will be the Customer Scrutiny Panel) |
|  | Involvement in consultation activities (other activities that members may be involved in) |
| **Monitoring our housing, community and other related services** | |
|  | Monitor against standards to ensure that they are achieved, and agree remedial action |
|  | Monitor improvement plans against delivery (it will depend on the source of improvement plan whether the lead will be the Customer Scrutiny Panel) |
| **Reviewing our housing, community and other related services** | |
|  | Prioritise service improvement activities to be completed |
|  | Commission specific scrutiny exercises e.g. mystery shoppers, tenant inspectors |
|  | Review feedback from scrutiny exercises and make recommendations for future improvements to relevant service area |

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| **Scrutinising the service** | |
|  | Scrutinise access and customer care service standards |
|  | Develop an annual scrutiny plan based on customer board insight and other relevant data sets |
|  | Scrutinise outcomes arising from strategic consultations making recommendations to Aster Communities and Synergy Board |
|  | Scrutinise expenditure against budgets to ensure VFM |
|  | Control of delegated scrutiny budgets |
|  | Scrutinise learning/outcomes from complaints |

1. **Relationship to our Governance Structure and the Customer Scrutiny Panel** 
   1. The responsibilities of the Customer Scrutiny Panel will be delegated by the Aster Communities and Synergy Boards.
   2. There will be facilitated meetings and events between representatives from Aster Communities and Synergy Boards, Customer Board members and Customer Scrutiny Panel members; the meetings being focussed on sharing success and areas for improvement. These meetings will happen twice a year.
   3. The Customer Scrutiny Panel will operate across the group, but it is anticipated that there will be concentration on Aster Communities, Aster Property and Aster Living activities.
2. **Membership**
   1. The group wide Customer Scrutiny Panel aims to cover all the geographical areas Dorset, Hampshire, Wiltshire, Somerset, Cornwall and Devon. The Customer Scrutiny Panel will have a maximum of 12 members and all will be customers.
   2. There are circumstances where it would be appropriate for the removal of a Customer Scrutiny Panel member by the Customer Scrutiny Panel. These are similar to those circumstances that apply to the Aster Communities Board members.
3. **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 Customer Scrutiny Panel, unless at least one half of the members of the panel are present. This must include the Chair or in the Chairs absence a member acting with agreement of all in a Chairs capacity. This is described as a quorum.

* 1. The panel should try to make decisions that everyone at the meeting agrees to. 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.

7.3 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 Scrutiny Panel members.
2. **Code of Conduct**
   1. There is a separate Code of Conduct.
   2. Customer Scrutiny Panel members 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 Scrutiny Panel 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 Customer Scrutiny Panel appraisal process.
   4. There will be a mechanism in place to ensure that good practice and learning arising from the work of the Customer Scrutiny Panel.
4. **Support** 
   1. The Customer Scrutiny Panel will be provided with administration support from the Customer Involvement and Community Development Team.
   2. There will be a regular appraisal process for members of the Customer Scrutiny Panel. 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 Scrutiny Panel members will not be paid.
   2. Expenses will be reimbursed for things like travelling, child care costs and caring responsibilities.
6. **Equality and Diversity**
   1. Customer Scrutiny Panel 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.