

Terms of Reference for the ASPIRE Customer Panel

Lead Officer: Martin Saunders, Head of Customer Access

Purpose of the Panel

The purpose of the panel is to provide assurance to customers and the Board that services are being delivered to agreed standards and to monitor and challenge Stockport Homes (SHG) performance. The panel will hold Stockport Homes to account in meeting the requirements as set by the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH).

The panel supports the delivery of Stockport Homes' business plan theme: 'Excellent services steered by customer voice'.

To achieve this the panel will:

- Ensure that the customer voice is heard on things that matter most to customers through the provision and monitoring of performance information, risk and customer feedback.
- Provide assurance that the commitments in the Customer Charter are met by monitoring SHG's performance.
- Shape the delivery of the Customer Voice and Influence Strategy and monitor the delivery of the strategy's action plan and targets.
- Monitor the outcomes and lessons learnt from customer feedback and complaints and the findings from the Housing Ombudsman.
- Review and challenge customer voice in key customer facing policies.
- Have a range of mechanisms to seek redress where service provision is found lacking.
- Report a summary of the panel meeting's discussions and comments and scrutiny review recommendations to the Customer Focus Committee.

Powers

The panel will have the power to:

- Seek information from officers that it requires to perform its duties.
- Request staff to attend to assist it with its discussions and provide information about service performance and improvement plans.
- Request reports on matters it considers relevant to its areas of responsibility.
- Commission a customer led scrutiny review of a service or area of concern.
- Track actions and recommendations to assist the panel in holding SHG to account.
- Issue a Notice to Act to the Board via the Customer Focus Committee and the Lead Officer in the event of concerns of a persistent service failure or failure to improve within a reasonable timeframe. A majority of the panel's members must vote in agreement to serve the notice.

Recruitment

A role profile for panel members and the Chair has been created in collaboration with customers.

Initial recruitment to the panel, including recruitment of a Chair, will be conducted by Stockport Homes' Governance Manager, Customer Engagement Team Leader and a member of the Customer Focus Committee.

Once established, new members can continue to be recruited on a rolling basis up to a maximum of 15 members and with the aim to maintain the membership at a minimum of six members.

New customers wishing to join will be invited to shadow a panel meeting and to meet the current members followed by an informal interview with the Chair, the Governance Manager and Customer Engagement Team Leader. New members must complete core training before they can become an active member.

Meetings

The panel will meet quarterly as a minimum and at least four times in a calendar year.

Meetings will be held prior to the Customer Focus Committee (CFC) meetings to enable the panel's commentary and conclusions to be shared with the CFC.

Following recruitment, the panel's membership will have the opportunity to shape the timing and meeting arrangements.

Membership

The panel will consist of up to 15 members. There must be a minimum of six members for the panel to operate.

To be a panel member you must:

- Be aged 18+ and a current customer of Stockport Homes. This includes tenants and members of their household, leaseholders and shared owners.
- Have completed the panel's recruitment process and core training about the aims of the panel and the skills, attitudes and knowledge needed to participate.

You cannot be a member if:

- You have current actions against you for breaching your tenancy or lease agreement.
- You have a current Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) case open against you.
- Another member of your household is a member.

Every effort will be made to achieve a diverse and representative membership.

- Members must declare conflicts of interest and act in accordance with the Roles and Responsibilities and follow the Code of Conduct.

A term of membership will be three years and up to two terms or six years in total. After two terms there may be an option to extend membership annually up to a maximum of nine years.

Membership is conditional upon attendance at the panel's meetings. Consideration will be given to those who are contributing to the panel but who become unable to physically attend a meeting. Absence from two consecutive meetings, where there is no underlying reason for the absence, may result in the member being removed from the panel.

Quorum

The quorum for meetings will be 50% of the membership.

Reporting

The panel will report to the Customer Focus Committee quarterly.

The Chair will attend the Customer Focus Meeting.

Following completion of a scrutiny review, a customer who has been involved in the review may report the findings and recommendations to the Customer Focus Committee.

The panel will produce an Annual Report summarising their activities which will be shared with the Customer Focus Committee and Stockport Homes' customers.

Panel Member Responsibilities

The panel and individual members, commits to:

- Upholding the values of Stockport Homes and observing the Code of Conduct.
- Work in partnership with staff and managers.
- Develop constructive relationships with colleagues, customers and the Customer Focus Committee.
- Consider all professional advice and request additional support and clarification whenever necessary.
- Promote equality and diversity within Stockport Homes and act in the best interest of all customers and not in the interests of an individual or group.
- Keep informed of wider developments in social housing and share knowledge and learning as appropriate.
- Represent the panel and SHG at internal and external events, as appropriate.
- Not act in a way that could bring SHG into disrepute. Panel members must not act in anyway, including posts on personal social media accounts, that cannot be justified to the Boards, customers, staff, stakeholders or the wider public.

Support

The panel will be supported by the Customer Engagement Team and administrated by the Governance Team.

Training will be provided to support members to be effective in their roles. Members are expected to complete core training sessions.

Equipment needed to participate in meetings will be provided by Stockport Homes, such as access to a tablet.

The panel may commission an independent mentor or consultant to support their work, subject to availability of resources and value for money considerations.

Panel members are encouraged to become Tpas members within SHG's membership to support them in keeping up to date with events in the social housing sector.

Remuneration

Where out of pocket expenditure is unavoidable, payment will be made to cover all reasonable out of pocket expenses as described in the Customer Expenses Policy. Claims will usually be agreed in advance and must be supported by receipts.

Panel members will be remunerated in recognition of their commitment, skills and experience. Payment will be up to a maximum of £500 per year for panel members and £600 per year for the Chair. Payments will be subject to attendance at meetings and subject to an annual review.

Before joining the panel, customers claiming benefits can be signposted to Money Advice services to support them to determine what the impact, if any, would be on any benefit claims. Customers will have the option to receive payment via BACS or in vouchers.

Leaving the Panel

Members must inform the Governance Manager or Customer Engagement Team Leader if they wish to cease their membership.

A member who is acting against the purpose of the panel, the role and responsibilities or code of conduct may be asked to step down. Those asked to step down may appeal in writing to the Lead Officer. The Lead Officer's decision is final.

Members may request a leave of absence from the panel via the Customer Engagement Team. Requests will be considered on an individual basis and should be for no longer than six months. Payments would be paused in this situation during the absence period.

Review of Effectiveness

The panel must consider its effectiveness annually and how it conducts its business, including:

- Performance against these Terms of Reference.
- The timing and frequency of meetings.
- Its collective performance as a monitoring and assurance body.
- Feedback from the Customer Focus Committee on how it is achieving its purpose and supporting the Board.