



Equality & Diversity Strategy

This strategy sets out the action we will take to improve equality and diversity. It covers every aspect of our business but can only succeed if it implemented and monitored effectively.

The aims of the strategy

This document should be read with our equality and diversity policy. It is intended to:

- guide managerial action;
- focus energy, attention and resources; and
- help all staff, tenants, leaseholders and members of client co-operatives understand what is intended to happen and why.¹

Our equality and diversity policy says: “In working to eliminate discrimination, unfairness, inequality and disadvantage we will take practical action developing initiatives and interventions to promote and value diversity at all levels of the organisation. As an organisation we actively recognise and manage diversity in the workplace in a strategic way, looking at innovative ways of changing the organisational culture and empowering the workforce..” This statement represents the basis of the following strategy which is intended to focus on our work with people from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups for the next year and form the basis of a new strategy developed with and by people from those groups in the future.

Some key definitions

Direct discrimination is defined as treating a person less favourably than another because of their gender, race, sexuality, disability etc

Indirect discrimination consists of applying ... a requirement or condition which although applied equally to everyone, is such that a considerably smaller proportion of a particular gender, racial group etc can comply with it than others and cannot be shown to be justifiable...

Harassment occurs where one person (A) subjects another person (B) to unwanted conduct which has the purpose or effect of violating B’s dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment to B, and this action is carried out because of B’s gender, racial group, sexuality, disability etc.

¹ From Black and Minority Ethnic Housing Strategies – B. Blackaby and K Chahal

Victimisation occurs where person is treated less favourably because he or she has brought or intends to bring proceedings under equality legislation. It also protects those that give evidence in connection with such proceedings.

Institutional racism – “...the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people.”

Racist incident – “A racist incident is any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person.”²

Black and minority ethnic (BME) refers to a person or group of people who have a different culture, religion or language to the main one in the place or country they live in.³

For precision we use the census classifications:

White : British
White : Irish
White : Other
Mixed : White & Black Caribbean
Mixed : White & Black African
Mixed : White & Asian
Mixed : Other
Asian / Asian British : Indian
Asian / Asian British : Pakistani
Asian / Asian British : Bangladeshi
Asian / Asian British : Other
Black / Black British : Caribbean
Black / Black British : African
Black / Black British : Other
Chinese
Other

These are reduced in our monitoring to:

Ethnic Origin
White – except White Irish
White – Irish
Mixed
Asian / Asian British
Black / Black British
Chinese or other ethnic group

² The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry – Sir William Macpherson of Cluny

³ From Quest-net

We use these broader classifications for ethnicity because of the relatively small scale of our operations as the broader classifications result in more statistically valid sample sizes.

Background to the strategy

As a secondary housing co-operative we work within the internationally recognised co-operative principles, the first of which states:

"Membership of a co-operative society should be voluntary and available without artificial restriction or any social, political, racial or religious discrimination to all persons who can make use of its services and are willing to accept the responsibilities of membership."

As a registered social landlord we have further responsibilities to achieve the highest standards of equality and diversity:

- because of the legal and regulatory framework in which we work;
- because of the moral responsibility we have to work towards a just and tolerant society;
- because it makes good business sense⁴.

Responsibilities for implementation and review.

The board of management has overall responsibility for monitoring performance, ensuring compliance with the strategy, challenging existing practice and reviewing strategy.

The senior management team have the responsibility for implementing procedure, assigning responsibility, ensuring consistency and disseminating best practice.

In order to co-ordinate the implementation of this strategy the senior management team shall appoint an equality and diversity officer from amongst their number. The senior management team will ensure that the equality and diversity officer has the time, resources, commitment, knowledge and expertise to coordinate the implementation, monitoring and review of this strategy.

Strategic objectives

Values and Principles

We will demonstrate that improving equality and embracing diversity is a core value of our activity by integrating it into all our policies, procedures and day to day decisions and practices by:

- making a public commitment to empowering all minority groups and combating discrimination;

⁴ From Race Equality and Diversity, Good Practice Note 4 – Housing Corporation

- conducting research to get factual information of the situation of minority groups to inform the development of policies and procedures and ensure they flexibly reflect real need;
- reviewing our mission statement and corporate plan in line with our commitment to achieve equality;
- identifying and publicising examples of good practice and incorporating them in policies and procedures;
- placing equality and diversity issues at the heart of service reviews;
- identifying local partnerships which we, and our client co-operatives, can support to promote equality and diversity.

Governance

We will ensure that our board of management structures and membership reflect the communities we serve and our commitment to diversity by:

- ensuring that the Society's membership policy is fair and addresses equality issues and that elections to the Board of management are conducted in compliance with the Society's rules;
- annually reviewing the composition of the board and using census data as a comparator to ensure that membership reflects the communities we serve;
- ensure that board members receive adequate training in equality and diversity issues.

Recruitment, selection and employment

We aim to have a workforce that reflects the communities we work in, with staff members from all sections of Society fairly represented at all levels by:

- ensuring that the recruitment process is clear and unambiguous and complies with the equal opportunities elements of our recruitment policy;
- reviewing the recruitment process for each post to ensure that direct or indirect discrimination have not played a part in it;
- providing training, staff support mechanisms and career opportunities to allow us to take full advantage of the diversity in our workforce;
- training staff in equality and diversity issues.

Involvement and co-operatives

We will positively encourage all tenant/members to participate in the management of the housing we provide and manage by:

- specifically consulting minority groups to ensure we get a useable number of responses to ensure that our services to their specific needs;
- creating mechanisms for consultation, involvement and participation in the tenant participation strategy that are accessible to all tenant/members;
- taking steps to actively promote BME participation by translating information, targeting involvement work and providing training;
- promoting the benefits of participation to all members of co-ops;
- promoting the requirements and benefits of proactively involving minority groups to co-operatives through training and in our day to day work;

- monitoring tenant/members' participation and taking action where minority groups appear to be under-represented;
- ensuring policies are helping (not frustrating) tenants from minority groups who wish to become and stay involved.

Access to housing

We will allocate homes in an open and accountable way by:

- complying with all legal and regulatory requirements in our lettings policies and procedures;
- advertising access to our housing as widely as possible and targeting referral agencies with close links to local minority communities;
- making the lettings process open and transparent to ensure equal access to all groups;
- undertaking training of everyone involved in the lettings process to ensure anti-discriminatory service delivery;
- monitoring applications, nominations and transfers in comparison with census, local authority housing needs and our own data;
- taking action to ensure that equality and diversity is reflected in the lettings and transfer that we do.

Development and Regeneration

We will take into account the needs of different communities when considering new developments and regeneration initiatives by:

- working with local authorities and other agencies to assess the housing needs and aspirations of different communities;
- consulting with different local groups to explore the physical and cultural dimensions of location and design issues.

Contractors, consultants and suppliers

We will make respect for people a central theme when appointing and using contractors, consultants and suppliers by:

- using the construction clients charter to require building contractors to treat their workers in accordance with the respect for people program;
- requiring them to provide information about their staffing and policies for dealing with harassment and customer satisfaction;
- requiring them, where appropriate, to have similar equality and diversity policies to us (for example employment agencies), and developing good practice with them where this is inappropriate (small building firms);
- making it clear that we will not tolerate any form of discrimination by our contractors;
- ensuring that our procedures for selecting contractors and monitoring contract compliance do not indirectly discriminate against any minority led contractor⁵;
- establishing links with organisations representing minority led contractors to ensure that procurement opportunities are made available to their members.

⁵ We follow the LEOF definition of a minority led business as being at least 51% owned by people from a minority community.

Housing Management and Maintenance

We will make our management and maintenance services responsive to the needs of our, and our client co-operatives', minority communities by:

- providing services that are appropriate and of comparable quality to all groups in need;
- proactively publicising services to minority groups;
- encouraging tenant/members to make clear preferences to enable us to provide a fair, equitable and culturally sensitive service;
- developing comprehensive monitoring of all aspects of service delivery and satisfaction with services based to ensure that they meet our commitments to equality and diversity.
- Setting targets address any issues of lower satisfaction, under-representation amongst minority communities.

Racial incidents and harassment

We are committed to tackling racial and other forms of harassment and racist behaviour in whatever form it takes, we will achieve this by:

- publicising our racial harassment and anti-social behaviour policies;
- encouraging complaints and dealing with them sensitively;
- taking preventative action to stop harassment; possibly as part of a partnership;
- taking swift action against perpetrators with the overriding objective of making the harassment stop;
- supporting victims;
- monitoring incidents and reviewing policies and procedures in the light of them;
- publicising action taken against perpetrators.

Monitoring

We recognise the importance of monitoring processes and outcomes to:

- ensure that we comply with our equality and diversity policy and strategy; and
- that we are meeting the targets that are set in our equality and diversity action plan; and
- to highlight areas of concern that might need further investigation.

Monitoring reports will be reviewed by individual service teams and the senior management team. Appropriate reports will be submitted to the Housing Services Sub-Committee and there will be an annual equality and diversity monitoring report submitted to the Board of Management.

In monitoring equality and diversity we will a variety of comparison data, including but not necessarily limited to:

- 2001 Census data for Greater London, the South-East or for a particular local authority area as appropriate.
- Information from local authorities on the make up of their housing waiting lists;

- Benchmarking data available from the Housing Corporation, Housemark or other sources.

Our bi-annual STATUS survey will include a detailed diversity analysis of our residents that will enable us to build an accurate picture of our resident profile. The responses in the full STATUS survey will be analysed on the basis of ethnic origin and disability to identify if these groups have different levels of satisfaction with aspects of the service that we provide. We will use the results of this monitoring to target action to rectify any discrepancies.

We will continue to make efforts to get all residents to complete a communications and special needs survey. This will further improve our knowledge of our resident profile and allow staff to be aware of any special communication or other needs of residents.

The following front line service satisfaction questionnaires will also be monitored in terms of equality and diversity – particularly BME monitoring:

- Reactive repairs;
- Complaints handling;
- Anti social behaviour handling;
- New tenant survey;
- Arrears handling;
- Housing applicants;
- Major repairs & cyclical works.

These areas will also be monitored in detail:

- Governance (composition of the board of management)
- Human resources
 - Applicants for employment
 - Staff on the payroll
 - Staff on the payroll by salary grade
 - Staff joining and leaving the Society's employ
 - Temporary staff awarded permanent contracts
 - Existing staff awarded new contracts at a higher salary grade
 - Staff subject to disciplinary action
 - Staff supported in long term training
 - Staff refused training requests
- Lettings
 - Nominations and lettings
 - Tenants waiting for transfers & length of time on the transfer list
- Aids & Adaptations (number requested / completed).
- Arrears management
 - Notices served
 - Evictions carried out
- Complaints (source and nature of complaint)
- Anti-social behaviour
 - Notices served
 - Evictions carried out
- Contractors, consultants and suppliers.

- Proportion supplying equality policy statement
- Composition of workforce

Finally in our role as managing agent to independent client co-operatives, we shall assist them if required in monitoring all of the above in respect to their particular co-operative and shall provide advice and guidance on dealing with any issues that arise.

Related Policies and procedures

This strategy is integral to all our work. However it is closely linked to the following documents:

- equality and diversity policy;
- equality and diversity action plan
- code of conduct for board members and staff;
- recruitment policy and procedure;
- communications Strategy;
- lettings Policy;
- racial and other harassment policy; and;
- tenant participation strategy.

Action Plan

We will draw up an action plan addressing issues relating to equality and diversity. Progress towards implementing the action plan will be monitored regularly by the SMT and the action plan will be formally reviewed and updated annually by the Board of Management

Stephen Brown
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12 October 2006

Approved by the Board of Management at their meeting on 23 October 2006