



Single Equality Policy

Date Authorised: 22 May 2018

Review Date : 2021

Policy Statement:

Strength is not only in the similarities, but also in the differences.

- 1.1 We are committed to promoting equal opportunities and valuing diversity. We want to ensure that our customers receive culturally sensitive services which recognise issues of discrimination as well as celebrating their diversity.
- 1.2 We recognise that certain groups and individuals are more likely to be discriminated against. This may be on the grounds of race, gender, including transgender, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion and belief, language or other personal attributes. We are committed to eliminating all forms of unfair discrimination and promoting equality.
- 1.3 We believe that valuing diversity means appreciating differences in people and creating a culture that respects these differences. The value that we place on diversity underpins our approach to customer engagement. We are seeking to increase the number and diversity of customers who get involved and offer the resources they need to support their involvement. This will be enhanced by making better use of digital technology and we have developed a revised Customer Engagement Strategy to deliver this.
- 1.4 We will endeavour to recruit Board Members and employ staff who reflect the communities within which we work and will provide them with training and support to implement this policy.

Introduction to Single Equality Duty

- 2.1 As an employer and as a landlord, we have a legal obligation to eliminate discrimination and harassment and to promote tolerance, fairness and diversity. The Single Equality Act 2010 came into force on 1 October 2010. This harmonised and replaced previous equality legislation.
- 2.2 The Act introduced the Public Sector Equality Duty which has three main aims; to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations.

- 2.3 The Act covers discrimination across 9 protected characteristics on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation.

The Regulatory Framework

- 3.1 From January 2018, Homes England has responsibility for maintaining the regulation and register of social housing providers, and for setting out the regulatory framework within which we must operate. The Regulatory Framework includes both the regulatory Standards which providers must meet, and the way in which the Regulator carries out its functions.
- 3.2 The focus of activity is on governance, financial viability and value for money as the basis for robust economic regulation; maintaining lender confidence and protecting taxpayers.
- 3.3 While the Regulator sets consumer standards, the primary responsibility for resolving issues with these is between landlords and their tenants at a local level. They will only intervene in cases of serious detriment that have caused, or are likely to cause, harm.
- 3.4 Their regulatory responsibilities are discharged through an independent Regulation Committee, and within the parameters of the Regulatory Framework.
- 3.5 The Tenant and Empowerment Standard (updated 2017) states that Registered Providers should:
- Provide choice, information and communication that is appropriate to the diverse needs of tenants in the delivery of all standards;
 - understand and respond to the diverse needs of tenants;
 - treat all tenants with fairness and respect;
 - demonstrate that they understand the different needs of their tenants, including in relation to the equality strands and tenants with additional support needs

Embracing Diversity

- 4.1 We recognise the benefits a positive approach to equality and diversity can have. This includes:
- recruiting board members and staff that reflect the customers and communities we work with;
 - understanding the aspirations of our communities to plan future services and make sure that our current services are still relevant;
 - building a positive image for customers and stakeholders;
 - encouraging new business;
 - help to improve staff recruitment and retention; and
 - ensuring our contractors have a positive approach to diversity.
- 4.2 The above will ensure that we are seen as a promoter of equality and diversity, creating a much more vibrant organisation to work for and be involved with, contributing to a motivated workforce and community who feel free of prejudice, fear and harassment.

- 4.3 The Single Equality Policy is supported by an action plan which is monitored on a quarterly basis. The action plan sets out the activities that we need to undertake to achieve our diversity objective.

Governance

- 5.1 Our Management Board is responsible for ensuring that diversity targets are met and is committed to having a representative Board and Committees. We will do this by:
- ensuring the Board and Committees have the appropriate skills and knowledge to deliver our commitments to equality and diversity;
 - having open and accountable recruitment for Board and Committee members;
 - proactively recruiting diversity to the Board and monitoring the diversity make-up of the Board and Committees;
 - removing any barriers that prevent underrepresented groups applying to us as Board Members; and
 - seeking to ensure that our Board reflects the communities that we serve
 - producing an annual diversity report.

Staff and Employment

- 6.1 We are committed to making full use of the talents and resources of all employees and to provide an environment which will encourage vibrant working relationships. To achieve this we will:
- comply with legal obligations under any relevant HR legislation;
 - publish policies and procedures which ensure that individuals receive treatment which is fair and consistent with their skills and abilities;
 - have systems in place where individuals are selected, promoted and treated fairly on the basis of their abilities which are appropriate for the job;
 - ensure that all staff and residents involved in recruitment have received appropriate training;
 - ensure training opportunities for personal development;
 - ensure that all employees doing jobs of equal value will be treated equally and will receive equal pay;
 - publish a Grievance Procedure
 - investigate all incidents of harassment and take appropriate action;
 - provide training for all staff to understand the nine strands of diversity; and
 - explore areas where we may take the initiative, as permitted by law, in 'positive action'.

Excellence in Customer Service

- 7.1 We will make sure that all our services are free from discrimination and easy to access. We will do this by making sure that we:
- assess the impact of any policy or service change;
 - provide or facilitate support for residents where it is needed to maintain their tenancy;
 - provide trained staff so that they can offer residents a variety of communication methods, e.g. translations or interpreters;
 - publish our services to all customers in a fair and accessible way;

- give service providers the right information they need of residents, For example, where appropriate and with their informed consent, telling our repairs staff about a customer's disability before they visit them; and
- provide effective services for disabled people in accordance with our Aids & Adaptations policy.

Lettings and Access to Housing

8.1 We recognise that certain groups are underrepresented in housing. We will make sure that our staff understand the housing needs of different groups of people and provide access to housing which is suitable to their needs. We will do this by:

- having regard to the Equality and Human Rights Commission Guidance for Social Housing Providers;
- setting fair targets for housing to reflect the communities in which we work;
- monitor the use of the choice based lettings scheme to ensure it offers fair access;
- providing or facilitating aids and adaptations to support residents to maintain their independence for as long as possible; and
- adopt development design standards for new homes that meet the changing needs of current and future residents.

Access to Information and Advice

9.1 We know that if different groups are not able to access information, services or buildings, they will be disadvantaged. By knowing our customers, we will be in a much more informed position to provide services to meet their needs. Our aim is that there are no barriers to different groups accessing information and advice about our services. We will:

- profile our residents to understand their communication needs;
- make information available in a wide range of formats;
- make sure that our communications are accessible and meet best practice;
- make sure that information and advice is sensitive to different needs;
- ensure all our existing buildings comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2004 (DDA)

Customer Engagement

10.1 Customer Engagement makes sound business sense. We believe that by involving residents from different groups we can shape service delivery that is designed and delivered around their needs. We offer a number of opportunities for residents to get involved and influence decisions made about the management of their homes, which includes:

- Virtual Scrutiny Panel;
- Rosebery Residents Facebook Group;
- Estate Champions;
- Mystery Shopping
- Customer Satisfaction Surveys
- Focus groups
- Online Surveys

Virtual Scrutiny Panel

- 11.1 Our Virtual Scrutiny Panel scrutinise customer facing service areas to ensure the impact of changes to service delivery do not directly or indirectly discriminate against an individual or group across all of the protected characteristics
- 11.2 We will ensure all panel members have access to training and guidance notes to enable review of policies.
- 11.3 We will continue further training to strengthen customer involvement and the empowerment of our residents, making sure that information is available in a range of formats.

Customer Satisfaction and Complaints

- 12.1 As well as involving residents in reviewing services, we also welcome feedback on the delivery of our services from customers. Our aim is to provide a service that can respond quickly to customer feedback and understands the differences in customer satisfaction across all the diverse groups that we serve. This will enable us to provide an excellent service to meet their specific needs .
- 12.2 We will do this by:
 - carrying out regular customer service satisfaction surveys and use this information to inform our Business Plan and service development;
 - monitoring satisfaction on the nine strands of diversity (where information supplied and subject to General Data Protection Regulation); and
 - developing a range of methods to measure satisfaction that take account of the needs of different groups.

Dealing with Harassment and Violence

- 13.1 Our aim is to be an organisation where customers and staff can live and work without fear, prejudice or intimidation. We will do this by:
 - providing staff with access to free confidential advice and counselling;
 - reinforcing our Respect Agenda and having a zero tolerance towards harassment in the workplace;
 - work towards eliminating harassment in our communities;
 - ensure there is support for victims via signposting to local partner agencies;
 - regularly review our Anti-Social Behaviour policy which includes harassment, hate crimes and domestic violence;
 - respond promptly and effectively to incidents of hate crimes and domestic violence;
 - monitor our performance in dealing with harassment, hate crimes and domestic violence and use this information to improve our services;
 - provide staff with training and ensure they are clear on their responsibilities in relation to hate crimes and domestic violence; and
 - take prompt and effective action against perpetrators.

Procurement and Supply Diversity

14.1 We use contractors, consultants and other suppliers. We have a responsibility to make sure that we give out this work fairly and that our partners promote equality. To make sure we do this we will:

- ensure our contractors comply with our Single Equality Policy;
- ensure that contractors who provide services in people's homes are aware, of and are sensitive to, different diverse needs;
- regularly review our selection of contractors and ensure our tendering process is fair, open and transparent;
- ensure contractors from different diverse groups have equal access to our business;
- work with local authorities and other stakeholders to ensure equality and diversity underpins all of their work;
- support local businesses and have a positive impact on communities.

Reasonable Adjustments

15.1 Equality law states that organisations have a duty to make reasonable adjustments. Service providers must take positive steps to ensure that disabled people can access services. This goes beyond simply avoiding treating disabled people less favourably for a disability related reason.

15.2 The law states that organisations must provide reasonable adjustments by changing the way services are delivered, providing extra equipment and/or removing physical barriers. In addition to this statutory duty, we recognise that some people with developmental needs, for example people with Autistic Spectrum Disorders who do not have a co-existing learning disability or mental health condition, may require sensitive adjustments to service delivery.

15.3 We retain the discretion to make further reasonable adjustments to any policies, procedures or services in the event that a disabled resident makes a request to them for a reasonable adjustment. When considering a request for a reasonable adjustment, we will consider:

- the effect of the disability on the individual disabled person;
- the effectiveness of any proposed steps;
- the extent to which it is practicable to take the steps;
- the financial and other costs of making the adjustment.

15.4 Any decision that we make, on an individual case by case basis, is not binding in future cases.