









EQUALITY & DIVERSITY POLICY

UK legislation relating to this policy:

-  Disability Discrimination Act 1995
-  Race Relations Act 1976
-  Race Relations Act 1976 (Amendment) Regulations 2003
-  Sex Discrimination Act 1975
-  EU Equal Treatment Directive
-  Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003
-  Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003
-  Human Rights Act 1998
-  Revised Code of Practice for Racial Equality 2006
-  Disability Discrimination Act 2005
-  Housing Corp Good Practice Note Supplement 2006
-  The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006
-  The Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007
-  Work & families Act 2006
-  Equality Act 2006

Additional documents/policies referred to in this policy:

-  Residents' Handbook
-  Staff Handbook
-  E&D Strategy
-  E&D Statement
-  E&D Action Plan
-  Bullying & Harassment Policy & Procedure (Internal Policy for Staff)
-  Diversity and Equal Opportunities Action Plan
-  KLOE 31

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Wessex Housing Partnership is committed to fulfilling our statutory responsibilities to promote equality of opportunity in all our activities, and develop a culture that values the contribution of people from all sections of society.
- 1.2 This policy aims to support these commitments by outlining procedures and systems established to measure and monitor our performance in implementing good practice and eliminating discrimination in any form.

2. Policy Statement on Equality and Diversity

- 2.1 The Group is committed to the elimination of discrimination on the grounds of sex, marital status, sexual orientation or preference, colour, race, nationality, religious belief, ethnic origin, disability, age, spent criminal convictions or any other unjustifiable criteria.

- 2.2 We are committed to developing a culture that welcomes and values people from all sections of society, where our workforce represents the communities in which we serve. We therefore seek to recruit and develop staff from as wide a range of backgrounds as possible including ethnic, cultural, religious, age, disability and social, based upon merit and justifiable job requirements.
- 2.3 We believe that everyone is entitled to be dealt with respect and integrity and that no one be disadvantaged by discrimination. Our employment practices, service provision and management operate professionally, fairly and consistently, valuing individuals' contributions.
- 2.4 We recognise that the numbers of people from BME groups in some of our area of operation are low, but we are concerned that people from these groups should not be ignored and consequently our Policy and related procedures and action plans actively promote their involvement.
- 2.5 We will apply these principles throughout the operation of the Group, including seeking to apply them to work undertaken by external contractors, suppliers and organisations working with us.
- 2.6 The Group reviews this policy annually and develops an Equality and Diversity Action Plan to underpin it, setting out clear targets and objectives. This Action Plan incorporates a Framework for Racial Equality, BME Action Plan, Tackling Harassment, Gender and Disability.

3. **Responsibilities and Strategy**

3.1. **Governance**

3.1.1. The Board is responsible for ensuring that the Group's commitment to equality is clearly stated and demonstrated, and that its membership is representative of the communities in which we work

3.1.2. This is achieved through:

- An E&D Diversity strategy, statement and policy which is annually reviewed;
- All Board reports consider equality and diversity implications;
- Board membership is reviewed whenever a vacancy occurs and such vacancies are advertised identifying skills (or representative communities) we are seeking to recruit;
- Equal Opportunities monitoring is included within reports on a regular basis to Remuneration committee;
- The policy meets all of the requirements of the Code for Racial Equality and other relevant legislation;
- Shareholding membership is reviewed to achieve a balanced representation and, if necessary, positive action would be taken to recruit BME Shareholders; and targets are established for Board and shareholding BME membership.

3.2. Staff Structure, Recruitment and Retention

3.2.1. Staff employed by the Group, at all levels, should be representative of the communities in which we work.

3.2.2. This is achieved through;

- Fair and transparent recruitment procedures;
- Operating an Equality & Diversity policy, which will be conveyed on advertisements and application forms. All possible steps will be taken to ensure that vacancies are advertised on as wide a basis as possible.
- Monitoring applicants and appointees to ensure practices do not result in discriminatory outcomes;
- Monitoring staff at different levels across the organisation;
- Provision of training in recruitment best practice; and
- Monitoring turnover and reviewing jobs and activities to ensure requirements of appropriate legislation and best practise are met.

3.3. Training and Development

3.3.1. The Group's commitment to equality is clearly communicated including ongoing training on equality and diversity awareness. This is offered not only for the Board and staff, but also resident representative groups.

3.3.2. Training and development opportunities are made available to all staff to enable them to perform their jobs effectively. This is achieved through:

- A fair and transparent training and development plan; and inclusion of equality and diversity training within the induction process;
- Training and development is reviewed to seek to ensure that all staff are given equal opportunities to progress within the Group;
- Monitoring attendance on training opportunities by BME Board, staff and resident representatives; and
- Monitoring of secondment and development opportunities to ensure practices do not result in discriminatory outcomes.

3.4. Service Delivery

3.4.1. Wessex Housing Partnership ensures that all applications for, and allocations of, accommodation and all other resident service functions are dealt with fairly and equally and that no individual or group of individuals receives less favourable treatment.

3.4.2. The Group ensures that the service it provides meets the needs of the communities in which we work, does not discriminate against any section of the community and that access to those services is equal to all. This is relevant to all of the Group's activities.

3.4.3. This is achieved through:

- E&D action plan;
- Establishing targets for allocations which includes a target for letting to BME households and monitoring against these targets
- Monitoring the quality of accommodation offered to ensure practices do not result in discriminatory outcomes;
- An allocation policy that is clear and transparent, prioritises lettings on the basis of housing need and does not require a local connection to qualify for housing;
- Offering information regarding access to housing and our services in other languages and an appropriate format on request including provision of a translation service;
- Monitoring services provided to ensure practices do not result in discriminatory outcomes.
- A procedure for dealing with resident harassment;
- A Tenant & Leaseholder Partnership Agreement and Action Plan (Succeeding Together) setting out a framework and structure of opportunity for participation and involvement at all levels of the organisation.
- Involving all groups in the community in the identification of range and types of homes needed, home improvements as well as design issues and local facility issues.
- The Residents Handbook and all other relevant publications highlight Wessex Housing Partnership's commitment to Equality and Diversity.
- Equality impact assessment framework
- Clear non-discriminatory policies and procedures.

3.5. External Relationships

3.5.1. The Group works in partnership with a number of other organisations in order to achieve its objectives. Our role with these other organisations is to support and promote equality objectives.

3.5.2. This is achieved through:

- An approved list of contractors that includes an E&D commitment as part of the review and approval process;

- A statement of Wessex Housing Partnership's commitment to E&D and our expectations of contractors and their staff for tendered contracts;
- Partnership working with Borough Councils in geographical areas of operation on the Housing Needs Register and Common Allocations Policy;
- A fair and transparent tender procedure;
- The Group encourages all organisations and agencies with which it deals in the provision of residents' services to operate with a commitment to equality and diversity.

4. **Monitoring, Performance and Targets**

4.1. Introduction

- 4.1.1. An essential part of the Group's policy is monitoring to ensure that its aims and obligations are met.
- 4.1.2. Monitoring allows both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the Group's housing provision and employment practices on a regular basis. For housing applications and lettings, including transfers and nominations, monitoring is undertaken at various stages of the process and a detailed analysis is reported annually to the Board. Analysis of the Group's work force, applicants and training opportunities are reported regularly to the appropriate Remuneration Committee.
- 4.1.3. Progress against the Diversity and Equal Opportunities Action Plan is reviewed and reported to the Board annually.

4.2. Performance Indicators

- 4.2.1. In order to assess the effective operation of the Group's Equality & Diversity policy the Group keeps records of all those who apply for housing and employment. These records involve recording the following information for all applications:
1. Ethnic origin based on the NHF'S CORE statistics classifications;
 2. Gender; and
 3. Disability.
 4. Age (for recruitment only).
- 4.2.2. The records differentiate between the applications at Key Stages in the housing or recruitment or employment processes, i.e.:
1. At the time of the application;
 2. At the time of rehousing;
 3. The type of accommodation in which applicants have been housed;
 4. The length of waiting time prior to housing;

5. At the time of shortlist for interview;
6. At the time of appointment;
7. The level of employment take up; and
8. During employment, for the provision of secondment and development opportunities.

4.3. Monitoring, Performance and Targets

- 4.3.1. A comprehensive set of key performance indicators outlined in the E&D statement measure the effectiveness of the Group's E&D work.

5. Implementing the Policy

- 5.1 The main responsibility for achieving change lies with the Groups Boards and the Senior Management Team, but does involve all Group employees participating.
- 5.2 The Group Managing Director has lead responsibility for implementing and monitoring E&D, with support from the Group Equality and Diversity Champion (a Board member), and the Challenge Group (Diversity and Equality is one of its remits), but all employees have a responsibility to work from it in all areas of their work.
- 5.3 Each member of the Executive Management Team, and all employees with supervisory duties, have responsibility for implementing, monitoring and promoting this policy.
- 5.4 The Head of HR advises on all equality and diversity issue relating to staffing and employment.
- 5.5 Managing Directors advise on all equality and diversity issues relating to housing.
- 5.6 The Challenge Group will monitor this policy to check it is being implemented across the organisation.
- 5.7 Employees, who do not follow the requirements of the Equality and Diversity policy, will generally be dealt with under the Disciplinary procedure.

7. More Information

7.1 For more information about this policy or for help and advice on how to implement it, contact:

Luke Bingham (Assistant Managing Director) / Kate Tuttle (Head of HR)