

Sovereign Kingfisher

Equality and diversity statement 2009 -2012

This Statement captures the work carried out under the best value review on equality and diversity and outlines the position of SK.

Introduction

Valuing diversity and promoting equality of opportunity are key principles of the SK. We are a diverse organisation with services that include a portfolio of over 7,500 properties including general needs, supported housing, a care home, extra care, key worker accommodation, leasehold, market rent; and a workforce of over 200 people from a wide range of backgrounds, experience and cultures; covering the geographical area of Central Southern England.

We believe that providing high quality affordable housing is an important basis for the fabric of society. In addition, we understand that providing high quality housing allows our customers to access a range of key services such as education and health, and this provides greater opportunity to access employment. Through the services we deliver we want to be more than a social landlord, working with the community in partnership to develop areas in which we work, building cohesive communities with our overall aim to provide a healthy socio-economic environment, and good quality housing and support services to all our customers.

We recognise in order to deliver excellent housing services we must have a good understanding of our customers' needs, recognising that a 'one size fits all' approach does not work. It is important that we understand the diversity of our residents and service users and take a focussed approach to delivering services to meet their needs.

We also recognise the role we play in regard to delivering services as an employer, ensuring that all employees are valued and their needs addressed.

Therefore, the Equality and Diversity Statement does not just set out what equality and diversity means to us, but more importantly it addresses how we value difference and promote community cohesion, covering how we deliver our services to our residents and employment practices to our employees.

The Equality and Diversity Statement has been developed to ensure that our core values are embedded into day to day service delivery, and are central to every aspect of our work. In particular the following core values are felt to be highlighted throughout:

- **Respect**
- **Openness**
- **Integrity**

Our values illustrate that we remain focussed on delivering services that take account of the needs of our residents, customers, stakeholders and employees in the short, medium and long term.

Equality means making sure no-one is disadvantaged in becoming an employee or accessing our services for any reason, such as:

- age;
- disability;
- gender reassignment;
- marriage and civil partnership;
- pregnancy and maternity;
- race;
- religion or belief;
- sex;
- and sexual orientation.

Equality is all about considering everyone's needs fairly.

A fairness focus helps us to see the connections between economic and rural inequality and inequality based on differences such as age, disability, race, gender, sexual orientation, religion and belief.

In other sectors, and not least in Government, there is an increasing move to using fairness as a concept, as highlighted by Sir Trevor Phillips, the Chair of the new Equalities and Human Rights Commission, when he said there should be "a new deal on fairness....which allows everyone's talent to be unleashed, what ever their background".

Diversity means having a mixture of different people. They can be different because of the factors outlined above, for example their age or disability. Accepting diversity means, being open to and responding to people's differences. By doing this we can recognise the talent and potential that people from all different backgrounds have.

1. Scope and purpose of the equality and diversity statement.

1.1 Purpose of the statement.

This statement explains how we understand and interpret equality and diversity. It sets out our commitment to equality and diversity and how we plan to live up to that commitment.

With equality and diversity, we must keep to a variety of requirements set out both in laws and in regulatory requirements. This statement sets out our commitment to go beyond just keeping to these requirements. We aim to improve how we consider equality and diversity in:

- The services we provide;
- The workplace; and
- The communities we serve.

This statement summarises how we will make sure that equality and diversity is part of our organisation at every level and how it will influence how we plan and provide services, recruit and develop staff, and work with the wider community.

We recognise that an effective approach to equality and diversity will not only support excellence in our service delivery but also the sustainability of the communities that we work in and our inventiveness and resources as an organisation.

1.2 Why we need a pro-active approach to E&D

We work to promote an inclusive environment in which we consider the diverse needs of all our staff and customers equally and fairly. We see many advantages to making a strong commitment to promote equality and diversity in our organisation. Some of these are set out below.

- By talking about and acting on the aims in this statement, we can help make sure our customers have the skills and experience needed in one of the most diverse countries in the world;
- Our commitment to equality and diversity will increase how flexible our service is, making it easier for us to adapt to the changing needs of our customers and funders;
- Being recognised as a business that promotes equality and diversity will improve our reputation with our customers, staff and partners. It makes good business sense to set high standards in our approach to equality and diversity.
- By effectively addressing community cohesion issues we can support the wealth and sustainability of the communities that we work in.

1.3 Key drivers

In order to meet our objectives there are a number of key drivers which will assist us in taking equality and diversity forward.

UK and EC legislation on equality and diversity including associated codes of practice.

Our equality and diversity work fully reflect the UK and EC legal framework and definitions for equality. We have also incorporated the key proposals of the 2009 Equality Bill.

Audit Commission's Key Line of Enquiry on diversity

We are using the diversity Key Line of Enquiry (31) to provide a benchmark for our services and employment practices in terms of equality and diversity. We are aiming to achieve the standards of an excellent organisation in terms of equality and diversity. This will support us to achieve excellence across the organisation as a whole.

Commission Racial Equality (CRE) Code of Practice on Racial Equality in Housing (England) - Statutory

Our have included an assessment of our policies, practices and performance in respect of the CRE Code of Practice on Racial Equality in Housing. We have incorporated key aspects of the Code into the Action Plan.

2. The statement context

2.1 Introduction

As a provider of social housing and an employer we must demonstrate how we comply with the statutory requirements set out in the following pieces of legislation:

- Race Relations Act 1976
- Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000

- Race Relations (Amendment) Regulations 2003
- Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (as amended 1986)
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and 2005
- Employment (Equality) Age Regulations 2001
- Equal Pay Act 1970
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Civil Partnerships Act 2004
- Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006
- Equality Act 2006
- EU Directives 2000 on combating discrimination and any relevant guidelines issued under these Acts.

In addition we must illustrate how we are responding to good practice guidelines issued by the Tenant Services' Authority, Audit Commission, the National Housing Federation, the Equality and Human Rights Commission and other relevant organisations, to implement effective equality and diversity practices.

2.2 Equality and Diversity aims

We aim to be a leader in promoting equality and diversity, going beyond the expectations of customers, staff and other organisations. We are also committed to setting challenging targets to improve our approach to equality and diversity. This will allow us to monitor our performance and make sure we continue to improve. To achieve this, the statement sets out four aims.

- To be inclusive;
- To promote community cohesion;
- To meet diverse needs;
- To promote ownership and awareness of equality and diversity.

Aim 1 – to be inclusive

Making sure all customers and staff feel valued, included, benefit from the work of the organisation and have opportunities to take part.

We will achieve this aim in two ways. First, we will make sure all residents have a chance to be involved in shaping our services. Second, we will make sure our residents have access to key opportunities. Some of our residents may have difficulties accessing mainstream services, and we aim to support them to overcome these barriers as well as responding to their individual requirements.

Our staff bring a variety of skills and knowledge to the organisation. We aim to be open and creative in how we get the opinions of our staff, and how we include them in developing our services, in order to ensure that they feel valued and included.

Outcomes

- Our residents are active and valued members of their local community;
- Residents have opportunities to use resources in the wider community that promote their overall independence;
- People in the communities we work in understand the skills and abilities of our residents. We challenge the negative views some people have about our residents;
- All residents and staff have the opportunity to be involved in shaping our services;

- Our organisation is recognised as a supportive and fair employer that values the contribution of all staff;
- Our recruitment, selection and staff development processes and decision making are fair and open; and have succeeded in developing a diverse workforce.

Aim 2 – promote community cohesion

Working in partnership with customers, staff and the wider community to promote positive relationships and reduce discrimination.

Our staff and customers have an important role to play in improving the communities in which we provide services. We aim to be a leading organisation in promoting positive relations with and within the community.

Many of our customers belong to groups that are often discriminated against. Our staff will work together with other people and groups in the community to help reduce discrimination.

We will promote positive relations between people from different groups and tackle myths, misinformation and extremism that can undermine the sustainability of local communities.

Outcomes

- We effectively tackle allegations of discrimination or harassment, for any reason, made by or against staff or residents.
- We are a key agency in promoting good relations amongst the different groups in the communities that we serve.
- We are a key agency in developing and maintaining the health and prosperity of the local communities that we serve.

Aim 3 – meet diverse needs

Making sure that we can meet the diverse needs of our staff and customers.

Our residents have a wide variety of backgrounds, personal circumstances and needs.

We aim to be aware of these differences, and make sure that we consider them when working to support our residents.

Being flexible in how we communicate is an important part of meeting diverse needs. We aim to find the best way to communicate with each individual, and to provide information about the organisation in a variety of formats.

We will tailor our services where possible to the needs of different communities.

We aim to be responsive to the needs of our diverse workforce. We also aim to use the wide range of experience and skills that this diversity brings to improve our services. We aim to look for further opportunities to develop a diverse workforce.

Outcomes

- All existing and future residents are treated fairly when accessing or receiving services;

- Services are tailored to residents' individual needs through mainstream services and by using links with specialist support agencies;
- We recognise individuals' needs when providing services and employment, and seek to make any changes to our services that are needed;
- We monitor and respond to the changing needs of our residents, staff and the wider communities in which we work in;
- We provide information on services and policies in a format appropriate to the audience they are aimed at;
- The way we communicate is responsive to the individual needs of staff, residents and the wider community.
- We underpin our work with an effective Customer Records Management system that allows us to identify and respond to specific needs.
- We have a reputation for excellence as an organisation that responds to the diversity of residents, staff and wider local communities.

Aim 4 – promote awareness and ownership of equality and diversity.

Making sure people are aware of equality and diversity within and outside the organisation. Making sure individuals understand their roles and responsibilities.

We want all staff and customers to share the vision of this strategy of 'Fairness' throughout the organisation in everything that we do, and to actively promote equality and diversity. We will train our staff and contractors so that they understand the needs of our residents. We will ensure customers understand and accept all types of people, and have the skills to be successful in a diverse environment.

We are aware of our legal and regulatory duties in relation to equality and diversity, and we aim to make sure all staff and customers are aware of their responsibilities under the law.

We will work with the Board, Senior Management and all staff to ensure that there is clear and consistent leadership in the promotion of equal opportunities and diversity. This will help to ensure that our policies and strategies are written and developed with regard to the diverse needs of our communities.

This will involve regular Board reporting on equalities' performance and a series of initiatives to involve staff in ongoing equalities' work, particularly in the context of emerging legislation and best practice. This is particularly important in linking the business case for equality and diversity with corporate planning, development, asset management and procurement as well as the traditional equality and diversity agendas of housing management and human resources.

Outcomes

- The business case for our work on equality and diversity is recognised and promoted by the Board, Senior Management and all staff.
- Key organisational meetings receive regular equality and diversity reports and demonstrate effective challenge and support to the development and implementation of the equality and diversity policy;
- Our customers, staff, partners and contractors are aware of our strategy and policies on equality and diversity;
- Equality and diversity runs through the work of SK including business planning, asset management and "non-traditional" areas of equalities work

- Staff at all levels understand their individual responsibilities relating to equality and diversity when acting on our behalf;
- Staff at all levels (including contractors) are aware of the diverse needs of our customers;
- Staff will receive training on equality and diversity issues to ensure they have the necessary knowledge and tools to carry out their roles;
- We promote our work on equality and diversity both within and outside the organisation.
- We use Equality Impact Assessments as part of our routine system of service performance improvement throughout the organisation;

3. Equality legislation and good practice

3.1 Best Value review – Equality and Diversity

The BV review analysed the following policies and documents:

- Equality and Diversity Policy 2008
- Equality and Diversity Action Plan 2008 - 2009
- Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan
- Gender Equality Scheme and Action Plan
- Diversity Key Lines of Enquiry
- CRE Code of Practice on Racial Equality in Housing
- Equality Impact Assessments
- 2008 Kingfisher Status Survey and Ethnicity Breakdown report
- Performance Indicators

The key findings are set out in Performance against Key Drivers in 3.2 below.

3.2 Performance against the key drivers

This section sets out how we are complying and performing against equality and diversity legislation and regulations.

3.2.1 Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000

Our initial response to the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 was to incorporate our statutory responsibilities and best practice in race equality within related documents and policies including the CRE Code of Practice in Housing and the Diversity Key Line of Enquiry.

However, we recognise that in order to ensure that a robust approach is undertaken to address race equality it is important to have a clear set of actions addressing how we will meet our responsibilities and provide excellent services.

In response our race equality actions have been reviewed and incorporated into the equality and diversity action plan.

3.2.2 CRE Code of Practice on racial equality housing (England) - statutory

Progress against the code of practice was assessed as part of the Best Value review of equality and diversity with subsequent actions incorporated into the equality and diversity action plan.

3.2.3 Religion

The Equality Act 2006 and Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulation 2003 have been introduced to address unlawful discrimination and harassment on the grounds of religion and belief.

Specific actions are included in the equality and diversity action plan.

3.2.4 Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and Disability Act 2005

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 has been amended and the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 came into force in December 2006. The revised DDA places a duty on public authorities to promote disability equality and produce a Disability Equality Scheme

We have made reasonable adjustments to the way we provide services and facilities to ensure they are accessible to disabled people. This has included:

- Ensuring most of our office buildings are accessible.
- Making our leaflets and documents available on audio tape, and large print and Braille
- Using dyslexia friendly buff paper and clear print for all letters

We have produced a comprehensive Disability Scheme and Action Plan with defined actions which are being systematically implemented across the organisation.

3.2.5 Gender Equality

The Sex Discrimination Act 1975, Equal Pay Act 1970, Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations 1999 and related codes of practice require organisations to set out how it will actively address gender equality and service provision in employment, including transgender equality.

We have produced a Gender Equality Scheme and Action Plan and continue to monitor the effectiveness of our actions.

3.2.6 Sexuality

The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulation 2003 recognises that people face discrimination due to their sexuality and life choices and we are committed to working with our service users and employees to address this issue.

We have incorporated actions for addressing sexuality discrimination in the equality and diversity action plan.

3.2.7 Age

The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006 has been introduced to tackle age discrimination in employment.

In response to the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006 to address age discrimination we have devised specific actions to be incorporated into the equality and diversity action plan.

3.3 Audit Commission's Key Line of Enquiry (31) on diversity

We have carried out an assessment of our services against the diversity key line of enquiry (KLOE 31).

The diversity KLOE sets a series of questions and statements looking to judge how good the service is in terms of diversity. The purpose of the diversity KLOE is to ensure that services address the different needs that customers have. The KLOE covers the following areas:

- Corporate culture and governance
- Access to customer services
- Service user involvement
- Partnerships
- Harassment and domestic abuse

The assessment of our performance against the KLOE shows that we are stronger in some areas than in others. Our strongest areas are:

- Harassment and domestic abuse

Weaker areas of performance in terms of the diversity KLOE are:

- Access and customer care
- Service user involvement
- Partnerships
- Corporate culture and governance

We have incorporated clear actions and targets into the equality and diversity action plan for progression on the weaker areas of the diversity KLOE.

3.4 Customer Communication Policy

Our Customer Care Policy has been reviewed to better reflect how we communicate with our service users, stakeholders and employees. The policy addresses how we communicate with people and those who do not speak English and require translation and interpretation services. We have also set out how our service users, stakeholders and employees can obtain information in different formats e.g. Braille or large print.

In order to ensure that we continue to improve how we communication as a business we have incorporated key actions into the equality and diversity action plan.

We aim to use Plain English in all our published documents.

3.5 Targets

We have developed a number of performance indicators and targets for equality and diversity in employment and service provision. The table below shows the areas to be included for future monitoring.

Performance indicator
Lettings
Percentage of ethnic minority lets
Employment

The percentage of employees who classify themselves as from an ethnic minority
The percentage of employees who classify themselves as disabled
The percentage of male employees
The percentage of female employees
The percentage of senior staff who are women
Racial harassment
Number of reported incidents of racial harassment
Percentage of cases dealt with within 8 weeks
Customer satisfaction
Satisfaction of ethnic minority tenants with the overall service provided by the landlord

3.9 Raised staff and resident awareness of the importance of equality and diversity

We have raised staff and resident awareness of the importance of equality and diversity to the organisation through an Equality and Diversity workshop facilitated by Professor Richard Tomlins of Cohesia Limited a consultant specialising in the field of equality and diversity at Government level.

3.10 The Business Needs

We recognise the importance of equality and diversity throughout all aspects of our business. In order to achieve the goals and ambitions of our business plan we recognise that equality and diversity must be at the heart of our thinking in all areas.

Therefore as we continue to grow and expand we will ensure that we take into consideration the needs and aspirations of our service users at both the strategic and operational levels.

3.11 What our residents want and expect

Our residents support this equality and diversity statement, and have emphasised the importance of this being the responsibility of all departments and employees across the organisation. Our residents believe that this will ensure that equality and diversity issues are discussed and implemented at both the strategic and operational levels.

In addition our residents require us to put more initiatives in place to enable them to communicate more regularly about common issues with a view to embracing equality and diversity. We will continue to work with our residents with a view to facilitating these initiatives.

4. Taking equality and diversity forward

4.1 Introduction

The previous sections of this statement set out the background, context and our aims in terms of equality and diversity. This section sets out what we need to do to ensure we continue to move forward and meet our aims and objectives over the next three years.

4.2 Main issues and concerns

We have made significant improvements in the way we have approached and addressed equality and diversity across the organisation through the Best Value review. However, we recognise that despite our improvements, we still have a number of challenges which we face, and must address in order to meet all of our equality and diversity aims and objectives and deliver consistent excellent services.

The Best Value review highlighted six key major areas to progress in terms of equality and diversity as follows:

- Corporate culture and governance
- Access to services
- Consultation and service user involvement
- Service delivery and customer care
- Partnerships and community cohesion
- Employment and training

The Equality and Diversity Action Plan has been designed to address these six major areas.

4.2.1 Corporate culture and governance

This is our leadership in terms of equality and diversity issues. We recognise that as a social housing provider and employer we have a responsibility to make a difference to equality and diversity amongst our residents, service users and employees.

The key challenges facing us in this area are:

- Making people – our staff, our customers and our stakeholders – aware of our equality and diversity strategy
- Promoting our commitment to equality and diversity issues to our staff, our customers and our stakeholders
- Having positive action programmes in place to ensure our staff reflect the local community
- Carrying out a comprehensive on-going programme of equality impact assessments to ensure our policies and procedures do not have a negative impact on anyone
- Setting targets in all service areas for equality and diversity
- Keeping up to date with new legislation on good practice on equality and diversity

4.2.2 Access to services

This is how we are providing our services so that they are accessible to all our residents. To do this we need to have a clear idea of who our residents are, what services they expect from us, and how they prefer to access those services.

The key challenges we face in this area are:

- Compiling good quality resident data and updating it so that we have a clear understanding of who are residents are.
- Having systems in place that enable staff to access data about individual residents easily
- Having a clear idea of how each of our residents would prefer us to communicate with them – this includes language, literacy, visual and hearing impairment, learning disabilities etc.
- Ensuring that translation and interpretation services are available and all our staff know how and when to use these services

4.2.3 Consultation and service user involvement

This is how we seek the views of all our service users including those that are hard to reach or are in specific and minority groups, and uses these views to develop and improve the services we provide.

The key challenges in this area are:

- Establish appropriate formal and informal consultation mechanisms with residents
- Set diversity targets for resident involvement
- Monitor resident involvement by diversity
- Provide training and information packs for resident associations and other service user involvement groups
- Ensure that under represented groups are able to get involved.
- Receive positive feedback from all sections of the community about their ability to influence our decisions.

4.2.4 Service delivery and customer care

This is how we deliver services to our customers that meet all their needs and does not discriminate or exclude in anyway.

The key challenges in this area are:

- Carrying out equality impact assessments and implement required changes as result of those assessments
- Set service delivery targets for equality and diversity
- Put in place action plans to meet identified service delivery targets
- Ensure there are systems in place to monitor equality and diversity service targets
- Influence our contractors and partners to address and monitor equality and diversity in all contracts and partnering arrangements

4.2.5 Partnerships and community cohesion

This is how we involve various communities, other agencies and partners in our equality and diversity work. It also looks at what we do as an organisation to promote community cohesion.

The key challenges in this area are:

- Work with community organisations to tailor services to local needs.
- Understanding cultural issues of any significant minority groups
- Using our position to influence and promote community cohesion.
- Developing local supply chains and the use of local labour

4.2.6 Employment and training

Employment and training is how we can ensure our employment and recruitment practices are free from discrimination and how we can ensure the staff delivering the service reflect and understand the community they serve.

The key challenges in this area are:

- Carrying out equality and diversity training and linking it to service improvements
- Monitoring employment equality targets
- Putting in place positive action initiatives to help us achieve our employment equality targets

5. Monitoring and review arrangements

5.1 Effective monitoring

We recognise that to progress our equality and diversity agenda and adopt a mainstreaming approach across all its services we have to put in place effective monitoring and reviewing procedures, including:

5.1.1 The Challenge Group

The Challenge Group will be responsible for ensuring the Equality and Diversity action plan are progressed and implemented. The membership and terms of reference of the group will be revised to reflect our current responsibilities and targets.

Progress of the equality and diversity action plan will be reported to the Board by the Challenge Group on an annual basis.

5.1.2 Equality and diversity targets and performance indicators

We will monitor our progress on equality and diversity as an organisation using various performance indicators.

We will continue to develop more local performance indicators as we further our equality and diversity work.

5.1.3 Reports to Board

We will report our progress on equality and diversity to the Board annually. The report will give details of:

- Our performance on the key targets and performance indicators listed above
- Performance against the action plan
- Recommendations for service improvements and strategies for dealing with issues.

The reports will be published on the intranet and the website.

5.1.4 Reviewing the strategy and action plan

Our Board, Managing Director and senior management team are responsible for putting our equality and diversity strategy into practice. We will also work to gain the support and co-operation of our residents and partner organisations in doing so.

Linked to this statement is an action plan, based on the six areas highlighted in the Best Value review of equality and diversity, which sets out how we will achieve our aims. We will develop a new action plan each year.

Luke Bingham
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July 2010