

Equality & Diversity Policy



OUR MISSION

To deliver excellent, customer focused and cost effective housing services to all our residents



Please feel free to get in touch with us if:

- You feel this document is not as clear and easy to read as you would expect; or
- You believe that we aren't doing the things that this document says we will do; or
- You just want to talk to someone about this document

Whatever the reason, if you want to talk to us about this document you should contact:

Head of Housing Policy & Diversity on Freephone 0800 195 5552

Approved:	November 2008
Effective from:	November 2008
Due for review:	November 2009

Introduction

- 1.1** Organisations such as ours have both a service-led and a morale obligation to respond to the wide social diversity and to reflect this in our own organisational culture. We must ensure that our policies and practice achieve this.
- 1.2** Sutton Housing Partnership recognises the importance of providing everyone to have the opportunity to access its services. We believe that these should be delivered regardless of a person's race, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, language, HIV status, religion, national or social origin or class. . Social housing households contain higher than average proportions of people who experience discrimination and other social disadvantage. The main groups include: people from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities; lesbians, gay men, bi-sexual people and people who identify as transgender; households headed by women (especially lone parents); people with disabilities; older people; people with HIV/AIDS; people with learning difficulties; people with mental health issues; people suffering from alcohol or substance abuse; ex-offenders; people in contact with the criminal justice services; those experiencing domestic violence or sexual abuse.
- 1.3** In addition to fulfilling our statutory responsibility to promote equality of opportunity in all our activities, we are committed to developing an organisational culture which values people from all sections of the community and the contribution each individual can make

- 1.4** The aim of this policy is to support these commitments by providing a framework for continuous improvement. It covers the procedures and systems established to measure and monitor our performance, both in eliminating discrimination and in implementing good practice. Its objective is to ensure that all staff are able to participate fully and contribute their best to the work of SHP and no one feels excluded from being able to do so.

Policy

- 2.1** It is recognised that SHP has the power to reduce the disadvantages that people experience, by making its services more responsive to communities and individual needs. SHP values the diversity of all communities and wants its services, facilities and resources to be accessible.
- 2.2** We also recognise that our ability to meet these diverse needs is improved by having a diverse workforce which generally reflects populations, and which has the skills and understanding to achieve our objectives. We are committed to valuing the diversity in our workforce.
- 2.3** SHP has a commitment to be an organisation that:
 - Develops services to achieve equality and diversity in all its activities;
 - Has a workforce generally reflecting the population;
 - Understands how valuing diversity can improve our ability to deliver better services;

- Actively consults with all our customers to ensure the delivery of our key priorities;
- Actively consults with different individuals and communities to ensure that services which are provided are responsive and reflect the diversity of need;
- Training, development and progression opportunities are available to all staff. To enable them to achieve organisational goals;
- Provides a supportive, open environment where all employees have the opportunity to reach their full potential;
- Listens to its customers and involves them in the development of services that recognise and value diversity; and
- Believes that both customers and employees have important parts to play in making this happen.

2.4 We will apply this policy in carrying out our statutory and corporate responsibilities. We will also seek to apply it to work undertaken for us by external consultants and contractors.

Links to the Equality & Diversity Strategy

3.1 To achieve the aims of our equality and diversity strategy through this policy, we will take action to address discrimination experienced by particular groups, as well as action to promote and achieve diversity in employment and services.

3.2 The strategy and accompanying action plan reflect the existing and forthcoming EC and UK legal framework and definitions for equality. They therefore refer to equality (for particular groups), whilst also supporting diversity (recognising the needs of individuals). Action will be based on effective use of resources (e.g. by integrating action in different areas wherever possible).

3.3 We aim to mainstream all equality and diversity issues, which will contribute to a change in organisational culture and performance generally in line with our vision and priority objectives.

Commitments - Age

4.1 SHP is committed to opposing unjustified age discrimination. We recognise that age discrimination can affect all age groups and both genders, that age is no indicator of effectiveness in most work activities, that employment decisions should not be based on age alone (with the current exception of retirement ages) and that services should be sensitive to the needs of all age groups. We will work to create an environment where people are judged on their talents, skills and experience, rather than on misconceptions and prejudices about age.

4.2 To achieve our aims we will:

- Remove age related criteria in our employment practices, subject to present retirement ages;

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- Provide recruitment, promotion and training on the basis of need, regardless of age;
 - Work with other agencies and community organisations to eliminate age discrimination;
 - Work to ensure older workers are able to leave the organisation with dignity and flexibility in timing and working arrangements.

Commitments - Disability

5.1 SHP is committed to achieving disability equality by eliminating both unlawful discrimination on the grounds of disability and disadvantage experienced by people with disability, where ever reasonably possible. We recognise that people with a disability are disadvantaged both by the environment and by social attitudes, which reflect principally the needs of non-disabled people. We recognise that improvements in the operation of our services can reduce this disadvantage.

5.2 To achieve our aims we will:

- Strive to provide services that are relevant to the needs of people with disability.
- Make sure that all our services and documentation are accessible and available to people with a disability.
- Whenever possible modify our procedures or equipment to make full use of an individual's ability and adapt our facilities as necessary to

accommodate people with a disability.

- Regularly 'audit' our premises, services and processes to make sure DDA requirements are met.
- Train all employees in awareness and confidence to support people with a disability where needed.
- Continue employing, when ever practicable, employees who become disabled during their employment, and assist in their re-training
- Guarantee people with a disability an interview for any employment vacancy for which they meet the essential criteria.

Commitments - Employment

6.1 SHP aspires to a diverse workforce that has the skills and understanding to achieve our objectives by the provision of a quality service responsive to individual and community needs.

6.2 We are committed to ensuring that all people are treated fairly and without unlawful discrimination. As an employer, we aim to ensure that all employees treat each other with dignity and respect.

6.3 We aim to develop a working environment where harassment is known to be unacceptable and where individuals can feel confident enough to bring complaints without fearing prejudice. We will deal with harassment by having strong policies and procedures to prevent it.

6.4 Any breaches of the policy will be dealt with through the SHP disciplinary procedure.

6.5 To achieve these aims we will:

- Provide full and fair consideration to all job applications
- Require all our employees, board members and residents involved in recruitment and selection to undergo relevant training and show appropriate competency before taking part in the selection process.
- Maintain records in recruitment, selection, and training and promotion procedures to ensure that they are fair and reflect current best practice.
- Provide sufficient training and support to meet all our employees' needs in recognising and discharging their work responsibilities.
- Assist all our employees to realise their full potential by ensuring that they receive fair consideration of their training and career development needs and promotion opportunities.
- Committed to eliminating discrimination and encouraging diversity amongst our workforce.
- Whenever possible modify employment practices and procedures to reduce barriers experienced by members of disadvantaged social groups in seeking, and during, employment.
- Develop vigorous harassment, bullying and dignity at work processes which

can operate within a safe and open environment.

6.6 We wish to create an environment where employees, both women and men, are free to share their needs and concerns as carers and are not disadvantaged in the workplace by doing so. We acknowledge that there is no one view of what constitutes caring responsibility though it may include caring for children, a person with a disability and older people.

6.7 To achieve our aims we will:

- Develop an organisational culture, which provides a supportive environment for carers, where work and carer balance requirements are recognised and supported in all areas and all levels;
- Within the constraints of effective service delivery, make the best possible use of flexible working practices to support carers in our workforce;
- Promote awareness of what flexibilities there are in our working practices, which can be used to support carers.

Commitments - Gender

7.1 SHP is committed to achieving gender equality. We recognise our duties under the Sex Discrimination and Equal pay legislation and code of practice and undertake to strive for gender equality in service provision and employment.

7.2 To achieve our aims we will:

- Strive to create an environment which is free from harassment and sexist language and behaviour;
- Set targets to maintain the gender mix at a senior level;
- Work with other agencies and community organisations to promote gender equality and eliminate disadvantage;
- Create a flexible working environment where work and home balance requirements are recognised and supported in all areas and levels.

Commitments - Race

8.1 SHP is committed to achieving racial equality. We recognise our duties under the Race Relations Acts and related Codes of Practice and undertake to strive for racial equality in service provision and employment and to promote good relations between all racial groups and organisations.

8.2 SHP, as part of its responsibility for housing under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, has developed and published a Single Equality Scheme which covers Race Equality and informs all the organisation's actions. In particular:

- To tackle unlawful racial discrimination;
- To promote equality of opportunity;
- To promote good relations between people from different racial groups.

8.3 To achieve our aims we will:

- Provide services relevant to people's needs, which respect their culture and social identities;
- Make sure our services are accessible and available to all;
- Strive to have a representative workforce that can sensitively address the needs of all communities;
- Work with other agencies and community organisations to promote racial equality and eliminate racial disadvantage and racial harassment;
- Strive to create an environment that is free from racial harassment and racist behaviour;
- Set targets for the employment of BME people at all levels.

Commitments – Religion/Faith

9.1 We recognise the need for our policy on religion to be in line with the Employment Equality (Religion and Belief) Regulations 2003. Our policy is to tackle unlawful discrimination and harassment on grounds of religion and belief and to promote good relations between people of different religions and beliefs.

9.2 To achieve our aims we will:

- Strive to create an environment which recognises and respects religion and belief and is free from unlawful discrimination or harassment;

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- Develop employment practices and services in ways which recognise and respect religion and belief;
 - Improve the understanding of religion and belief among our staff so that they can sensitively address the needs of individuals and of different faith communities;
 - Work with other agencies and organisations to promote understanding and good relations between people from different faith organisations.

Commitments – Sexuality

10.1 SHP recognises the very real discrimination that people face in their lives due to their sexuality and we are committed to removing this unfair treatment.

10.2 We want to create an environment where lesbians, gay men and bisexuals are free from unfair treatment and harassment and feel safe to be open about their sexuality and difference, if they choose to do so.

10.3 To achieve our aims we will:

- Develop policies and procedures to end unfair treatment and harassment of lesbian, gay and bisexual staff;
- Consult agencies and community organisations for lesbian, gay and bisexual people on the services we provide and where appropriate develop services to meet the needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

Responsibilities

11.1 All employees have a responsibility to ensure that this policy is put into practice. We expect a personal commitment from them to make it effective and to set an exemplary standard for others to follow.

11.2 Additional and specific responsibilities apply to those who manage others and to those who are involved in recruitment, training and development.

11.3 All employees have a contractual responsibility to:

- Make sure they understand the values and benefits of equality and diversity;
- Familiarise themselves with this policy, follow it and ensure that any employees they are responsible for do so as well;
- Draw to the attention of their line manager any instances of apparent discrimination or any perceived problem in relation to employment or to the provision of services.

11.4 The Board has a corporate responsibility for ensuring that this policy underpins all aspects of our work. Board members will take the lead in promoting equality and diversity, ensuring equalities issues are given due consideration in policy decisions and in monitoring the services we provide.

11.5 The Chief Executive and Directors are responsible for actively supporting and assisting the equalities work by monitoring our performance, agreeing necessary action and maintaining a commitment to our equalities work.

11.6 Managers have an essential role in delivering this policy. They are:

- To be pro-active in developing a service led approach to equalities development;
- To ensure employees are adequately trained to meet the requirements of this policy;
- To establish and maintain appropriate consultation with minority group customers;
- To work within the framework of the local government equalities standard. 5
Implementing the policy.

11.7 We have a strategic framework for equality and diversity. This provides for leadership of the strategy by the Board and the Executive Management Team (EMT) from the top, whilst also enabling and encouraging initiatives and development within the organisation. The Equality and Diversity Action Plan sets out the actions we need to undertake to achieve the aims of this policy. SHP has made a corporate commitment to the Local Government Equality Standard, which is a tool to put equality and diversity at the centre of policy and practice at all levels.

11.8 To ensure the policy and the action plans are implemented the Equality and Diversity Committee will monitor and lead on equality and diversity issues within the organisation the membership is from a cross section of managers, trade union representation and equalities champions. The Board Equality and Diversity Strategy Committee will meet at least quarterly and

will be supported by the Executive Director with lead responsibility for equality and diversity.

Communicating the Policy

12.1 In order to communicate our equality and diversity policy we will:

- Include our equality and diversity policy with all tender information and contracts for work undertaken for us by external organisations and individuals;
- Make our equality and diversity policy available on the intranet and on our website;
- All our policies, including those relating to Equality and Diversity, will be monitored for clarity and plain English. We will arrange for them to be made available in translation and/or in another medium where required.

Monitoring the Policy

13.1 Equality and diversity targets will be set annually and monitored by the Equality & Diversity Committee and report to EMT and the Board Equality & Diversity Policy Committee. All the key targets will be included in SHP's Performance Plan.

13.2 A report will be provided to board (and published on the internet) on a half yearly basis giving details of:

- The performance in terms of the key targets and performance indicators listed above;

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- Performance in terms of action plans;
 - Recommendation for service improvements and strategies for dealing with issues.

Policy Development and Review

14.1 This policy is designed to encourage practical changes. We therefore expect to update it in the light of experience from applying it in practice and as a result of changes in legislation or our own internal organisation and policies. We will consult fully with employees, stakeholders and customers on any changes and will ensure we communicate any changes.

14.2 In addition, a major and fundamental review of this policy will take place at least every three years.

Appendix 1 – Legislation & Codes of Practice

Our equality and diversity conforms to current equality legislation and codes of practice including:

- Age Discrimination Act (Oct 2006)
- Civil Partnership Act 2004
- Disability Discrimination Act (1995; 2005)
- Equality Act 2006
- The Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007 (guidance on the legislation can be obtained from the Equality and Human Rights committee)
- Equal Pay Act (1979)
- Employment Rights Act 1996
- Employment Act 2002
- Human Rights Act (1998)
- Local Government Act 2000
- Race Relations Act (1976) Amendment (2000)
- Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006 13 Regulations 2003 on (Employment) Age, Religious/Beliefs and Sexual Orientation
- Sex Discrimination 1975 and 1986, Amendment Act 1999
- Commission for Racial Equality's Code of Practice in Rented Housing
- Office of Deputy Prime Minister's Code of Practice for Social Landlords on tackling racial harassment.

Appendix 2 – Glossary of Terms

Disability

A disabled person is described in the Disability Discrimination Act of 1995 as one who has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Diversity

Diversity is about recognising, valuing and taking account of people's different backgrounds, knowledge, skills, and experiences, and encouraging and using those differences to create a productive and effective workforce.

Ethnicity

A strict definition of an ethnic group is a group regarded as a distinct community by virtue of certain essential characteristics – a shared history which distinguishes it from other groups and a cultural tradition of its own. Sikhs and Gypsies are examples. However, it has come to have a broader meaning and the expression 'ethnic monitoring' is used in reference to groups defined by colour, race or national origin as well.

Gender

The word 'gender' is often used in place of the word 'sex' in equality issues. 'Gender' does not appear in legislation (except for 'gender re-assignment' - see below) but 'sex discrimination' and 'gender discrimination' are generally interchangeable.

Gender Reassignment

Gender re-assignment is a process undertaken under medical supervision for the purpose of reassigning a person's sex by changing physiological or other characteristics of sex. The Sex Discrimination Act was extended in 1999 to make it unlawful to discriminate in employment on the grounds of an employee intending to, undergoing or having undergone, gender reassignment.

Genuine Occupational Requirements

The Sex Discrimination Act and the Race Relations Act and the Religion or Belief Regulations and the Sexual Orientation Regulations allow for circumstances where a person's sex, racial group, religion or sexual orientation is a genuine requirement for a particular job.

Harassment

Behaviour which is unwelcome or unacceptable and which results in the creation of a stressful or intimidating environment for the victim amounts to harassment. It can consist of verbal abuse, racist jokes, insensitive comments, leering, physical contact, unwanted sexual advances, ridicule or isolation.

Liability

Employers have legal liability for any act of discrimination (including harassment) carried out by their employees unless the employer can show that they have taken all reasonably practicable steps to prevent it.

Quotas

It is unlawful to select a person for a job on the basis of their gender or race in order to achieve a fixed quota of employees of that gender or race.

Sexual orientation

Whether a person is attracted to people of their own sex, the opposite sex or both sexes. Assumptions and perceptions of a person's sexual orientation are also covered by law.

Targets

These can be percentages of underrepresented groups that employers aim to achieve in the make up of their workforce as part of their equality action plan. It is unlawful to use a target as a reason for selecting someone, but it is not unlawful to take steps to get more qualified applicants from particular groups (see 'Positive Action' in Employment Practices section).

Transsexual

A person with gender dysphoria who feels a consistent and overwhelming desire to live their life in the gender that is opposite to that assigned to them at birth.

Victimisation

If a person has made or is making an accusation of discrimination in good faith, it is unlawful to discriminate against them for having done so, or because they intend to do so or it is suspected that they intend to do so.



Putting Customers First
Making Services Accessible To All
Achieving Value For Money
Providing Quality Homes
Creating Safe, Welcoming Neighbourhoods
