

Equality and diversity policy

JUNE06

1 STATEMENT OF POLICY

- 1.1 The Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) is committed to the values of equality of opportunity in our treatment of our service users, our staff and contractors. HOS accepts and values difference.
- 1.2 HOS is opposed to all types of discrimination and is committed to ensuring that our service is of benefit to all sections of the community. HOS will take all necessary action to address any discrimination.
- 1.3 We aim to ensure that HOS does not discriminate against any service user, job applicant, member of staff or contractor, either directly or indirectly, on the grounds of:
- gender (including sex, marriage, gender re-assignment);
 - race (including ethnic origin, colour, nationality and national origin)
 - disability;
 - sexual orientation;
 - religion or belief;
 - age;
 - carer status;
 - or any other individual difference that could result in less favourable treatment and unlawful or unfair discrimination.
- 1.4 The above list is not intended to be exhaustive or limited to only encompassing those covered by legislation). We are committed to ensuring HOS is an organisation free from any unwanted conduct, including harassment and bullying that violates the dignity of any worker or stakeholder. The Dignity at Work Policy sets out our approach towards promoting an environment where everyone is treated fairly and with respect.

2 RESPONSIBILITY

- 2.1 The Board of Independent Housing Ombudsman Ltd is responsible for approving the Equality and Diversity Policy.
- 2.2 The Ombudsman has overall responsibility for:
- implementing the policy;
 - ensuring that it is understood by and adhered to by all staff;
 - updating the policy in line with the law and best practice;
 - monitoring equal opportunities in service delivery and employment matters.
- 2.3 Every employee has an individual responsibility to abide by HOS's Equality and Diversity Policy.

3 COMMUNICATING THE POLICY

- 3.1 This policy document will be made available to service users, applicants for employment, staff and contractors through:
- HOS website;
 - complainants information packs;
 - recruitment information packs;
 - staff induction procedures;
 - suppliers information packs.

- 3.2. HOS is committed to providing training for all staff so that the Equality and Diversity Policy is effectively applied. Provision will be included in the training plan to update staff at regular intervals. Staff will be required to attend.

4 POLICY DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1 We are committed to promoting equal opportunities and diversity and we will keep our policies, procedures and practices under review.

- 4.2 We will ensure we comply with all our statutory requirements. In addition, full account will be taken of guidance published from time to time by the statutory bodies responsible for equal opportunity.

- 4.3 Any extension of legislation designed to promote equality of employment opportunities is automatically incorporated into this policy.

5 POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

5.1 Service Delivery

- 5.1.1 We are committed to enabling equality of access to our services and will reflect this in our promotions policy. We will promote awareness of the Service, advise all member landlords to include us in their published complaints procedure and to display our posters, leaflets and their membership certificates.

- 5.1.2 HOS will publish general information about access to the Service in a range of community languages, as advised from time to time by the Commission for Racial Equality or other bodies as appropriate, in Braille and on audio tape. We will also provide or commission qualified interpreters as necessary.

- 5.1.3 HOS will do whatever is reasonable to ensure that there is equality of access to its services for people with disabilities. We undertake to make any reasonable adjustments to our premises to support this aim.

5.2 Employment

- 5.2.1 We respect and value the contribution of a diverse workforce to the delivery of our business aims. Our commitment to equality and diversity will:

- assist in effective recruitment, selection and retention;
- facilitate an environment in which everybody makes the most of his or her diverse talents and backgrounds in order to contribute fully to our success;
- provide greater job satisfaction;
- develop staff to higher levels of performance;
- ensure that staff behave in a way that shows respect for the differences between individuals and realise how those differences impact on what we do and how we do it;
- develop a working environment where discrimination is known to be unacceptable and where individuals can feel confident enough to bring complaints without fearing prejudice or reprisals.

- 5.2.2 Our commitment to these principles will be reflected in our Human Resources policies and procedures, including:

- recruitment and selection;
- induction and probation;
- training and development;
- appraisal;

- capability and disciplinary;
- dignity at work, grievance and whistle blowing.

5.2.3 Some staff and job applicants may have particular religious observance needs (e.g. the opportunity to observe prayer time or other religious festivals or ceremonies). Whenever it is practicable to do so, HOS will endeavour to meet such needs. If it is not practicable to grant a request on any of these grounds (e.g. because of pressing work commitments) a reasoned explanation will be provided, in writing.

5.2.4 HOS will do whatever is reasonable to ensure that there is equality of access to employment opportunities for people with disabilities. We undertake to make any reasonable adjustments to working arrangements or premises to support this aim.

5.3 *Contractors*

5.3.1 Agents or potential agents of HOS, including private contractors, will have their attention drawn to our Equality and Diversity Policy. We reserve the right to require information from contractors with regard to the operation of their respective equal opportunities policies prior to entering into any contractual relationship or arrangement with them.

5.3.2 HOS will require all those tendering or bidding for our services, seeking to renegotiate their contracts, or otherwise working for or supplying the company to demonstrate their commitment to, and application of, equal opportunities policies.

6 **MONITORING**

6.1. The operation of the Equality and Diversity Policy will be monitored regularly to see if we are achieving our aims and find ways of improving our service.

6.2 Service users, job applicants and employees will not be obliged to complete the monitoring forms and this will not impact on their case or their application for employment.

6.3 *Service delivery*

6.3.1 HOS will invite all complainants whose cases we investigate to complete a questionnaire indicating their race, colour, gender, sexual orientation, disability, household composition and age.

6.3.2 Their answers will be kept separate from their complaint and will be completely confidential. They will be used for statistical purposes only and will be analysed using comparable data.

6.3.2 The statistics will be analysed and published in the Ombudsman's Annual Report. From time to time the Ombudsman may commission more detailed research on the information collected.

6.4 *Employment*

6.4.1 We will regularly monitor the composition of the following groups on a confidential basis:

- respondents to advertised vacancies;
- successful applicants (external and internal);
- staff in post;
- staff receiving merit awards;
- staff being promoted;

- staff allocated training;
- staff subject to the grievance, capability or disciplinary procedures;
- leavers.

- 6.4.2 With appropriate consents, we will collect information on gender, race (ethnicity as recommended by Commission for Racial Equality), disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief, age or any other individual difference that could result in less favourable treatment.
- 6.4.3 HR staff prepare monitoring reports in respect of employment and these will be reported to the Board annually.
- 6.4.4 We will carry out an annual staff satisfaction survey and take account of comments made at exit interview.
- 6.4.5 Wherever possible (without compromising our undertaking to respect the confidentiality of individuals) the results of these surveys will be included in assurance reporting to the Ombudsman and the Board and will be available on request from HR staff.

7 COMPLAINTS

- 7.1 Complaints about inappropriate (e.g. racist or sexist) behaviour by staff towards service users, colleagues or contractors will be dealt with under HOS's disciplinary procedure. All complaints will be treated seriously and investigated with all possible speed, confidentiality and sensitivity. If a complaint about a member of staff is substantiated it will be dealt with as misconduct under those procedures.
- 7.2 Staff or service users who believe they have witnessed acts of discrimination, abuse or harassment should draw it to the attention of an appropriate manager immediately.
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