

Equality and Diversity Policy

(This policy should be read in conjunction with The Housing Ombudsman's Dignity at Work Policy).

The Housing Ombudsman is committed to the values of equality of opportunity in our treatment of our service users, our employees and contractors. The Organisation accepts and values difference.

We oppose all types of discrimination and we are committed to ensuring that our service is of benefit to all sections of the community. The Organisation will take all necessary action to address any discrimination, harassment, bullying or victimisation.

We aim to ensure that The Organisation does not discriminate against any service user, job applicant, employee or contractor, either directly or indirectly, on the following protective characteristics:

- gender (including sex and gender re-assignment)
- race (including ethnic origin, colour, nationality and national origin)
- disability
- sexual orientation
- religion or belief
- age
- marital or civil partnership status
- pregnancy and maternity
- membership or non-membership of a trade union
- any other individual difference.

The above list is not intended to be exhaustive or limited to only encompassing those covered by legislation. We are committed to ensuring that the organisation is free from any unwanted conduct, including harassment, bullying or victimisation 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.

This policy document is also available to service users, applicants for employment, employees and contractors through:

- the Housing Ombudsman website
- complainants information packs
- recruitment information packs
- staff induction procedures
- suppliers' information packs

The Organisation is committed to providing any necessary training for you so that the Equality and Diversity Policy and Dignity at Work Policy are effectively applied.

Provision will be included in the learning and development plan to enable us to update you at regular intervals.

Policy Development

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

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

Policy Implementation

Service Delivery

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.

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

The Organisation 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.

Employment

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 you can make most of your diverse talents and backgrounds in order to contribute fully to our success
- provide greater job satisfaction
- develop you to higher levels of performance
- ensure that you 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, harassment, bullying or victimisation is known to be unacceptable and where you can feel confident enough to bring complaints without fearing prejudice or reprisals.

Our commitment to these principles and our vision and values will be reflected in our employment policies and procedures, including:

- recruitment and selection
- induction and probation

- training and development
- performance management/appraisals
- disciplinary and grievance
- dignity at work
- whistle-blowing.

The Organisation 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.

Agents and Contractors

Agents or potential agents of the organisation, including private contractors, will have their attention drawn to this policy. We reserve the right to require information from contractors with regard to the operation of their respective equality and diversity policies prior to entering into any contractual relationship or arrangement with them.

The Organisation will require all those tendering or bidding for our services, seeking to renegotiate their contracts, or otherwise working for or supplying us to demonstrate their commitment to, and application of, equality and diversity policies and procedures.

Monitoring

The operation of this policy will be monitored regularly to see if we are achieving our aims and if necessary, find ways of improving our service. Service users, job applicants and you, as our employees, will not be obliged to complete the monitoring forms and this will not impact on your case or your application for employment.

Service delivery

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

Completed questionnaires 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.

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.

Employment

We will monitor the composition of recruitment applicants and employees on a confidential basis.

With appropriate consents, we will collect information on gender, race (ethnicity as recommended by the Human Rights and Equality Commission), disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief, age, marital or civil partnership status, pregnancy and maternity or any other individual difference that could result in less favourable treatment.

People and Development, supported by Performance and Planning will prepare monitoring reports in respect of employment and these will be reported to the Ombudsman and Board as and when required.

Complaints

Complaints about inappropriate conduct e.g. discrimination, harassment, bullying or victimisation by employees towards service users, colleagues or contractors will be dealt with, as appropriate to the circumstances, under the organisation's grievance or disciplinary procedure. All complaints will be treated seriously and investigated with all possible speed, confidentiality and sensitivity. If a complaint about an employee is substantiated following an investigation, it will be dealt with as misconduct under those procedures.

Employees or service users who believe they have witnessed acts of discrimination, harassment, bullying or victimisation should immediately draw it to the attention of an appropriate manager.