

RAILWAY HOUSING ASSOCIATION

DISABILITY EQUALITY SCHEME

1. Commitment

The Association is fully committed to achieving disability equality, by eliminating both unlawful discrimination on the grounds of disability and the disadvantages experienced by people with a disability, wherever reasonably possible.

To achieve this aim the Association will: -

- recognise our responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Acts 1995 and 2005 and will follow the relevant codes of practice for employment, premises and services;
- strive to provide services that are relevant to the needs of disabled people;
- ensure all our services, employment opportunities, publications and premises are accessible and available to disabled people;
- provide awareness training for all staff and Board members
- consult with disabled people

This Disability Equality Scheme sets out our plans for making equality happen for disabled people, both in terms of the services we provide and employment opportunities. It will demonstrate how the Association plans to: -

- Promote equality of opportunity for disabled people
- Eliminate disability discrimination
- Eliminate disability-related harassment
- Promote positive attitudes towards disabled people
- Take steps to meet disabled people's needs, even if this requires more favourable treatment

2. The Disability Discrimination Acts

The Disability Discrimination Act (1995) was introduced in order to improve opportunities for disabled people. It is unlawful to discriminate against a person on the grounds of disability. Organisations must also make 'reasonable adjustments' to ensure that the person can access services and employment.

In 2005 a new Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) extended and amended the 1995 Act. This introduced the Disability Equality Duty that requires all public bodies to promote equality of opportunity for disabled people.

The requirement of the DDA to make reasonable adjustments recognises that equality of opportunity cannot be achieved by treating disabled and non disabled people in the same way. The Disability Equality Duty recognises this and requires that regard is given to treating disabled people more favourably. This is distinct and unique in equality law.

The DDA 2005 places a specific duty on public bodies to publish a Disability Equality Scheme (DES) that sets out the action that will be taken to meet these requirements. Although the Association is not required by law to publish a DES, it is considered good practice for Housing Associations to publish their own schemes.

RAILWAY HOUSING ASSOCIATION DISABILITY EQUALITY SCHEME

3. Definition

The Association's approach to disability equality is based on the 'Social Model of Disability'. This was developed by disabled people as an alternative to the traditional medical approach. It asserts that the exclusion and deprivation experienced by disabled people is not the inevitable result of their disability but rather stem from attitudinal and environmental barriers. Disabled people have the right to services and employment opportunities and it is the responsibility of organisations to recognise and remove any barriers. Typical barriers include – physical access to buildings, inaccessible information, attitudes and knowledge of managers and staff.

4. Implementation

4.1 Service Delivery

The Association is aware that all residents, customers and potential customers may experience barriers to accessing information and services, particularly people who are disabled. Access will be ensured by providing information in plain language in all publications; providing information in alternative formats and languages, on request; and providing hearing impairment loops, where practicable.

The Association asks residents to identify their access needs and is therefore aware of residents' preferences for accessing services. These include alternative formats, nominated representatives, and specific home visit arrangements.

This information is used to ensure that our services are being fairly and effectively delivered. Where there is a direct service impact the relevant computer system is flagged to alert both staff and maintenance contractors. This information is held and used with the customer's consent.

However, we do not currently monitor the results of satisfaction surveys to ensure that satisfaction levels for disabled people are equal to those of non disabled people. This has been included in the Equalities Action Plan.

We will: –

- Recognise our responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and 2005, other relevant legislation and relevant codes of practice for employment, premises and services.
- Strive to provide services that are relevant to the needs of disabled people, making 'reasonable adjustments' whenever possible to ensure participation/access.
- Make sure all of our services, documentation and premises are accessible and available to disabled people.
- Adapt properties in accordance with our Disabled Adaptations policy to meet the needs of our residents.
- Whenever possible, modify our procedures or equipment to make full use of an individual's ability and adapt our facilities, as necessary, to accommodate disabled people.

RAILWAY HOUSING ASSOCIATION DISABILITY EQUALITY SCHEME

4. Implementation

4.1 Service Delivery

We will: –

- Audit our premises, services and processes to make sure DDA requirements are met.
- Train managers and staff to increase awareness and confidence to support disabled people.
- Consult with disabled people and representative organisations to help improve our performance

4.2 Employment

The Association has a duty as an employer to work towards eliminating unlawful discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity in employment. A fundamental part of this process involves reporting on the composition of our workforce, including by disability.

We will: -

- Ensure that recruitment and employment policies and procedures comply with national equality commission codes of practice.
- Make reasonable adjustments to provide a workplace that is accessible to disabled people and, where possible, retain employees who become disabled or ill in suitable employment.
- Give full and fair consideration to people with disabilities and interview any applicant with a disability who meets the essential criteria of the person specification for the post.
- Retain registration and membership with positive action schemes including 'Positive About Disabled'

4.3 Governance

The current profile of the Association's Board shows that 9% are disabled. The Association will analyse this profile and identify appropriate actions to address any disability inequalities.

4.4 Harassment

The Association's Harassment policy and Domestic Violence policy state that any form of harassment, including that on the grounds of disability, will not be tolerated. The Association will: -

- Publicise these policies,
- Provide training for front line staff on identifying and dealing with harassment, including domestic violence
- Set and monitor targets for the level of satisfaction that victims of harassment and domestic violence have with the Association's response

RAILWAY HOUSING ASSOCIATION DISABILITY EQUALITY SCHEME

4.5 Resident Involvement

The Association will collect and analyse information on the disability of those residents involved in 'Resident Involvement' forums and set targets to ensure that the profile of these groups reflects the disability profile of our current residents.

We will also analyse the STATUS (Satisfaction) survey by disability and recommend actions to address any inequalities identified.

4.6 Procurement

The Association will require contractors, consultants and suppliers to provide evidence of their commitment to disability equality or to adopt the principles of the Association's Equality and Diversity policy.

5. Training

All staff will receive equality and diversity training appropriate to their roles and responsibilities.

6. Equality Impact Assessments

The Association will carry out equality impact assessments, as a means to identifying whether an existing or proposed policy or service affects, or is likely to affect, different equality groups. The assessment will identify and analyse barriers faced by disabled people which may prevent fair access to our services or employment opportunities. A fundamental part of this process will be consultation with disabled people.

Where an adverse affect is identified which cannot be justified objectively, alternative actions will be considered, in order to promote equality of opportunity more effectively or lessen the adverse impact.

7. Equalities Action Plan

The Disability Equality Scheme is supported by the Equalities Action Plan, which includes action points for all strands of equality. The rationale for taking this approach is to minimise duplication and overlap between equality documents and provide a single focus for equalities.

Performance against specific targets will be monitored bi-annually by the Board and the plan will be reviewed annually in consultation with staff and residents.

8. Responsibility

The Chief Executive and the Senior Management Team are responsible for ensuring the effective implementation of this scheme.

9. Monitoring

Progress will be monitored against the Equalities Action Plan and will be reported bi-annually to the Board. The results will be publicised to residents.

10. Review

The scheme will be reviewed and updated annually, taking into account consultation with staff and residents and any guidance issued by the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

March 2009