

Railway Housing Association

Policy Statement

Equality & Diversity

1. Statement of Intent

The Association recognises the importance of its role as employer, service provider and purchaser of goods and services in eliminating all forms of discrimination and harassment, and in promoting tolerance, fairness and equality. It also recognises that the aims of the Association's Business Plan – to ensure the viability of current stock and deliver services that are shaped around the needs of residents – will only be achieved by taking into account the diverse nature of our communities.

The Association will aim to ensure that no individual or group is treated less favourably on the grounds of race, nationality or ethnic origin, gender, sexuality, age, disability, marital status or religion. We aim to recognise the needs of individuals and treat each person in employment or through service provision with dignity and respect.

The Association is committed to identifying and removing unnecessary bureaucratic barriers that may prevent equal access to employment and in the delivery of services. We will monitor employment, service delivery and other activities in relation to equality to identify whether our policies and procedures are improving access for communities and individuals who face discrimination and disadvantage.

It is the aim of the Association to promote and demonstrate fairness and equality of opportunity in the provision of services and in the employment of staff; and achieve measurable progress against agreed targets to promote equality throughout the organisation and all of its operations.

The Association will prioritise its efforts according to the demographic context of the communities we serve whilst also fulfilling our obligations under the requirements of relevant statute and codes of practice designed to protect minority groups and promote equality of opportunity.

Challenging targets will be set and monitored by ethnicity, gender and disability in the following areas – lettings, tenant satisfaction, dealing with harassment, Board membership, employment, resident involvement, complaints and procurement.

This policy is supported by a Disability Equality Scheme, Gender Equality Scheme, Race Equality Scheme and an Equalities Action Plan. The schemes and action plan are included within the same equalities framework to ensure that the same priority is given to each strand of equality and focus is not lost by having separate schemes.

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1. Statement of Intent (continued)

In the formulation of new, or the amendment of existing, policies on employment, provision and procurement of services and relationships with other organisations, the Association will aim to ensure that no individual or group is treated less favourably on the grounds of race, gender, sex, sexuality, age, disability, marital status, religion, nationality or ethnic origin. This will be achieved by carrying out equality impact assessments on all policies and procedures.

In order to achieve all of the above aims, in 2008 the Association entered into a three year partnership agreement with Sadeh Lok, a Black and Minority Ethnic (B&ME) housing association with extensive experience in dealing with equality and diversity issues. Sadeh Lok will provide training and other support to help us to address any issues identified and to implement new initiatives.

2. The Association's Context

The Association has very dispersed stock spread over 30 local authority areas. In order to determine the average demographic makeup of the communities that we serve, information from the eleven local authority areas in which we have the most stock was analysed (March 2008). This showed that the average population of these communities is: -

95.9% White British
4.1% Black and Minority Ethnic (B&ME)
51.5% female
22% aged over 60 years
58% aged 16-59 years
20% disabled (15.5% of working age adults have a limiting long term illness)

The current profile of the Association's Board, staff and residents shows: -

- Board membership – 91% White British; 9% B&ME; 36% female; 82% aged over 60 years; 18% aged 16-59 years; and 9% disabled.
- Staff – 97% White British; 3% B&ME; 72% female including 100% of the senior management team; 14% aged over 60 years; 86% aged under 60 years; and 3% disabled.
- Residents – 93% White British; 1.56% BME (5.46% refused or omitted to provide the information); 61% female; 72% aged over 60 years; 28% aged 16-59 years.

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2. The Association's Context (continued)

We will collect and monitor information relating to the gender, ethnic origin and disabilities of all those seeking employment, Board membership and services in order to take appropriate action to ensure that the composition of the Board, staff and residents reflects the communities we serve, and that services are appropriate to meet the needs of those communities. However, as the majority of the Association's stock is older person's accommodation this means that the average age of our residents will not reflect that of our communities.

3. Implementation

3.1 Legislation

The Association will comply with statutory and regulatory requirements. The main pieces are: -

- Civil Partnerships Act 2004
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and Disability Discrimination Act 2005
- Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006
- Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003
- Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003
- Employment Protection (Part-time Employees) Regulations 1995
- Employment Rights Act 1996
- Equality Act 2006
- Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007
- Equal Pay Act 1970, and Equal Pay (Amendment) Regulations 1983
- EU Employment and Race Directives
- Gender Recognition Act 2004
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- Race Relations Act 1976 and Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000
- Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974
- Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (updated 1986)
- Sex Discrimination (gender Reassignment) Regulations 1999
- Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001
- Commission for Racial Equality Code of Practice for employment
- Commission for Racial Equality Code of Practice for Housing

As well as complying with the law, the Association will follow the guidance and good practice recommended by **the Tenant Services Authority**, National Housing Federation, and the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

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3.1 Legislation (continued)

In addition to legislative requirements, we expect employees of the Association to promote the spirit of our Equality & Diversity Policy and to recognise that they have a duty not to discriminate against anyone in carrying out their duties.

3.2 Recruitment and Employment

The Association's commitment to equal access for all is clearly stated in our Recruitment and Selection policy. We aim to have a workforce that is representative of all sections of society and that each employee feels respected and able to give their best.

The Association considers that, in principle, the staff profile at all levels should reflect the population of the areas we work in. A staff profile in respect of age, gender, ethnicity and disability is in place and will be used as a means of identifying under-represented groups within the Association and devise strategies to overcome these gaps.

The Association will: -

- Aim to eliminate unfair discrimination with regards to recruitment and selection procedures, employment, career development and training opportunities so that all employees are judged on merit and ability.
- Ensure that recruitment and employment policies and procedures comply with national equality commission codes of practice.
- Review the recruitment level of under represented groups and take lawful positive action to rectify any imbalance.
- Endeavour, through appropriate training, to ensure that employees making selection and recruitment decisions will not discriminate, whether consciously or unconsciously, in making these decisions.
- When recruiting staff, only request specific qualifications or experience where they are relevant to the job.
- Adopt a consistent, non-discriminatory approach in the advertising of vacancies. Advertising will be carried out in such a way as to ensure the broadest range of applicants, and we will not confine our recruitment advertising to areas or media sources which provide only or mainly applicants of a particular group.
- Advertise all posts internally. All applicants who apply for jobs will receive fair treatment and will be considered solely on their ability to do the job.
- Carry out short listing and interviewing by more than one person.
- Ensure that interview questions are related to the requirements of the job and are not be of a discriminatory nature.

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3.2 Recruitment and Employment (continued)

- 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 'Age Positive', 'Positive About Disabled', 'BME Spark' and 'Cofem' (Careers Opportunities for Ethnic Minorities).
- Remove equal opportunities monitoring forms prior to short listing
- Value and respect the identities and cultures of our employees and encourage all employees to reach their full potential.
- Ensure the workplace is free from discrimination and harassment; and act promptly in response to any complaints of such.
- Make reasonable adjustments to provide a workplace that is accessible to disabled people and, where possible, retain in suitable employment employees who become disabled or ill.
- Provide training and guidance for employees to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities under this policy

The Association has adopted a range of flexible working and leave policies to assist staff in balancing the needs of work and home commitments. Full details are included in the Terms and Conditions.

The Association will value and respect the identities and cultures of all employees and, where practical, will endeavour to meet the needs of those employees who may have particular cultural and/or religious needs. This will include the provision of a prayer room, where possible.

The Association is committed to providing a workplace that is free from harassment, victimisation and discrimination by ensuring that all staff are fully aware of their rights, responsibilities and expectations with regard to their conduct and the principles of this policy. We aim to develop a workplace where harassment is known to be unacceptable and individuals can feel confident enough to bring complaints without fearing prejudice.

The Association will ensure that employees are not subject to less favourable treatment due to their sexual orientation. Employees in same sex relationships will be treated equally and offered the same family-friendly policies as heterosexual couples.

The Association has participated in the Open House Partnership, an initiative funded by the European Social Fund. It aims to increase employment opportunities in the Tees Valley area for B&ME people who are under-represented within the housing sector locally. The participation resulted in a successful one year placement.

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3.3 Access to Services

The Association will ensure that in the provision of its services, no individual or group is disadvantaged in terms of selection for housing, quality of housing or the subsequent service they receive. The specific needs of older and vulnerable people, people with disabilities and from B&ME groups will be taken into account in a manner that promotes equality and inclusiveness.

We will: -

- Survey all residents regarding their specific communication needs and use the IT system to 'flag' instant access to information for staff involved in service delivery
- Use large font size in the resident's newsletter
- Ensure that the reception area to the office is fully accessible to wheelchair users
- Ensure that the needs of our diverse communities are identified and taken into account in the planning and delivery of housing services
- Ensure that information we provide is accessible to service users by using languages and/or formats that they can understand
- Provide an accessible service by removing or altering physical barriers to access
- Deliver services without discriminating against, stigmatising or patronising people. Every customer will be treated in a professional manner with courtesy and respect.
- Offer the service of an interpreter, as required
- Ensure the availability of hearing loop systems in our reception area and a portable loop for meetings and interviews elsewhere
- Monitor access to, and satisfaction with, services to ensure everyone is being treated fairly
- Give careful consideration to complaints from minority groups to ensure that our policies and practices do not disadvantage or discriminate against them

The Association will ensure that the lettings policy and procedure will not discriminate directly or indirectly in relation to race, ethnic origin, nationality, religious belief, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, or disability. All tenancies will be let in an open and accountable way that prevents discrimination and gives equal access to all groups of applicants. We will maintain effective monitoring and review systems to prevent discrimination.

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3.4 Resident Involvement

Through its Resident Involvement Policy, the Association aims to offer a range of consultation and involvement techniques to ensure that all residents have the opportunity to participate. We currently consult and involve residents through newsletters, satisfaction surveys, residents' meetings, questionnaires, focus groups, armchair monitors, editorial panel and Board membership.

Feedback from residents is used to improve and shape services. The information will be analysed by ethnicity, gender and disability to help ensure that services are being provided in appropriate ways and to the equal satisfaction of all minority groups.

We will: -

- Monitor the profile of the members of our resident involvement initiatives and take appropriate steps to strive to ensure that this reflects the makeup of the communities that we serve.
- Consult minority groups to ensure services provided meet their needs and ensure that involvement opportunities promote the full and active inclusion of all groups.
- Discourage residents from voicing discriminatory views in our offices and at public meetings.
- Endeavour to use appropriate means of communication that reflects the diverse communities within which we operate.
- Reimburse transport, child care and any other reasonable costs to help remove any barriers to residents becoming involved

The effectiveness of each method used to consult and involve residents will be measured using impact assessments. The results of these impact assessments will be reported to the Board and publicised to residents.

3.5 Harassment and Domestic Violence

The Association's Harassment, Racial Harassment and Domestic Violence policies clearly state that we will not tolerate harassment based on race, gender, disability, religion, age or sexual orientation.

The Association will: -

- Publicise our firm stance against harassment and domestic violence
- Take swift action against the perpetrators of harassment and domestic violence
- Take a victim-centred approach and respect the wishes of the victim at all stages
- Ensure that staff work within agreed timescales

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3.5 Harassment and Domestic Violence (continued)

- Treat all complaints and information confidentially
- Take legal action against the perpetrator, where appropriate
- Check that the victim is satisfied with the action taken by the Association
- Report any incidents to the Board
- Work with local authorities and other agencies to ensure support, advice and information is provided for the victims of harassment and domestic violence
- Work to ensure an effective degree of multi agency co-operation and information exchange in tackling harassment and domestic violence
- Provide the option of a priority transfer to victims of harassment and domestic violence, in addition to taking action against the perpetrator
- Do what we can to ensure that harassment does not take place in our communities and that residents feel comfortable reporting any incidents to us

3.6 Resident Satisfaction Levels

The Association aims to achieve comparable satisfaction levels for residents from all sections of our communities.

Information gathered during consultation and involvement will be used to ensure that services are being provided to the equal satisfaction of all minority groups.

3.7 Procurement of Services

In the procurement of goods and services, the Association recognises its responsibility to ensure that there is no discrimination in the allocation of work and to promote equality issues.

We will: -

- Review our procedures on selection of contractors, consultants and suppliers, and on contract compliance to ensure that BME and other minority contractors are not affected.
- Ensure that our contractors, consultants and suppliers have equality and diversity policies in place and demonstrate a commitment to equality and diversity in both provision of services and their employment practices. These will be used as criteria for award of contracts or work and as a condition for doing business.
- Develop standard contract arrangements with contractors, consultants and suppliers which meet equality and diversity principles.
- Support local initiatives that aim to promote the employment of companies owned by people belonging to minority groups.

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3.7 Procurement of Services (continued)

- Remove contractors, consultants and suppliers from our Approved List if they fail to comply with these requirements and/or relevant equality legislation.

Complaints about our contractors, consultants and suppliers will be closely monitored. The Association will expect such organisations to take prompt and appropriate action against any member of their own workforce found to be in breach of equality and diversity requirements.

3.8 Governance

The Association's Board will aim to: –

- Have a composition with a diverse range of backgrounds, skills and experience that is broadly reflective of the communities we serve.
- Have a recruitment policy for appointment to the Board that is fair, transparent and conforms to equality principles, including positive action where there is under-representation
- Include a positive statement regarding under-representation of minority groups on advertisements for Board members
- Send advertisements for vacancies to local Race Equality units and B&ME websites
- Have training and support programmes for new and existing Board members to assist them in leading the promotion of equality and diversity
- Ensure that all Committees adhere to the principles of this policy
- Ensure that all working practices and business activities reflect the principles of equality and diversity.

The Board will receive regular monitoring reports on the performance of the Association in relation to equal opportunity matters, and maintain an up-to-date awareness of developments in equal opportunities issues to ensure actions and decision are well informed. In particular, the Board will monitor progress of the Equalities Action Plan.

3.9 Complaints

The Association is committed to providing a quality service, which meets the needs of our customers. However, sometimes things go wrong and when this happens we need to know about it to help us to improve our service. We are committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and reasonably and aim to resolve complaints effectively and as quickly as possible.

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3.9 Complaints (continued)

The Association will ensure that our complaints procedure is accessible to all groups. Complaints will be monitored by ethnicity, gender and disability to ensure that minority groups are not being treated unfairly.

The Association will: -

- Provide each resident with a copy of the complaints policy and procedure.
- Ensure that staff work within the agreed time-scales of the complaints procedure.
- Treat all complaints seriously and confidentially
- Accept complaints made verbally or in writing from the complainant or someone acting on their behalf
- Investigate every complaint (anonymous complaints will be investigated to determine whether the complaint is justified and should be investigated further).
- Keep complainants informed of progress and the outcome of any investigations.
- Try to resolve the complaint at the initial point of contact with the customer or at the earliest possible stage of the complaints procedure.
- Consider claims for compensation from complainants who have suffered financial loss.
- Co-operate fully with any investigation carried out by the Ombudsman.

3.10 Asset Management

The Association will be sensitive to the needs of all communities. It will work in liaison with local authorities to ensure that new developments promote balanced and sustainable communities and that the location and design of homes will not affect adversely or discriminate against, directly or indirectly, the needs of any particular community or group.

The Association's Disabled Adaptations policy aims to provide an individualised solution to the problems of a person experiencing a disabling environment, by providing adaptations that are delivered sensitively, fit for the purpose identified by the disabled person and within a specified time scale.

The Association will: -

- Have an annual budget for funding adaptations and will actively seek partnership agreements with Local Authorities for joint funding.
- Fit minor adaptations (grab rails and lever taps) during the refurbishment of sheltered accommodation
- Provide assisted bathing facilities within sheltered schemes wherever possible.

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3.10 Asset Management (continued)

- When carrying out programmed improvement works and where the construction and design of the building allows, offer a 'wet floor' shower facility instead of an over bath shower. The Association will also endeavour, wherever possible, to use a design which facilitates the installation of a bath on change of tenancy.
- Seek to match previously adapted properties to the needs of applicants on the waiting list
- Maintain any existing adaptation or equipment (provided with our agreement) that is still needed to meet the needs of the disabled person for whom it was provided
- Remove on request equipment, such as stair lifts that are no longer needed due to bereavement or a permanent change in the household.

4. Training

All employees, Board members and members of the Residents Focus Groups will receive training to ensure that they understand and implement all aspects of this policy. The training will ensure that they have an appropriate knowledge of equality and diversity that relates to their role and responsibilities and help them to recognise the diverse needs of people and deliver high quality customer service.

5. Monitoring

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

6. Responsibility

The Chief Executive is responsible for the effective implementation of this policy.

7. Review

This policy, together with the accompanying schemes and action plan, will be reviewed annually in consultation with residents and staff.

This policy applies to the beneficiaries of Joseph Hornby Stockdale Almshouses.

This policy can be made available on request in other languages, large type, Braille or in audio format.

March 2009