

Equality and Diversity Commitments for the Housing and Social Inclusion Service

We aim to provide a decent home for all. (Housing Strategy).

We seek to 'match the right people with the right home' (Systems Thinking purpose). We work to ensure that all our tenants and leaseholders receive an efficient and effective housing management service (Housing Customer Charter).

We welcome diversity and aim to prevent and eliminate any discrimination or harassment in all areas of our service. We strive to ensure that people are offered equal opportunities regardless of age, race or ethnicity, religion or belief, disability, gender and marital status, gender identity or sexual orientation.

'Equal opportunities' means that everyone is treated fairly, and has equal access to services.

'Diversity' means respecting everyone as an individual, irrespective of any group they may belong to.

The 'Managers Statement on Diversity' (Appendix 1) states that:

'We genuinely welcome diversity amongst our staff and service users and wish to celebrate the differences in people. We believe in valuing everyone – this means behaving in an acceptable way in all our work, clearly promoting and demonstrating respect, understanding and fairness to all.'

We operate within the legal framework (Appendix 2) and the corporate policies and strategies of East Devon District Council (Appendix 3) including the Disability Equality duty, the Gender Equality duty and the Race Equality duty (Appendix 4). We will follow guidelines produced by organisations such as the Equality and Human Rights Commission, the Audit Commission, the EU Race Directive and the Chartered Institute of Housing.

We also have specific policies and statements for the Housing and Social Inclusion Service and our tenant groups (Appendix 5). This list of commitments builds from, and replaces, our previous Racial Equality Policy for Rented Housing 2005.

It is our clearly stated intention to 'stamp out' both direct and indirect discrimination if and whenever it occurs.

Direct discrimination – treating a person less favourably than another due to their age, race or ethnicity, religion or belief, disability, gender and marital status, gender identity or sexual orientation.

Indirect discrimination – occurs where a condition is applied to all persons but gives one group an advantage over another, either intentionally or not.

It is possible that a situation may arise in which discrimination inadvertently occurs. This possibility is mitigated through our robust commitment to the equality impact assessment process.

Background

East Devon has a high proportion of people over retirement age but only a very small black and ethnic minority population (0.7% - 2001 census). This mix is reflected in our tenant profiling work which indicates that 0.6% of tenants are non white British/Irish.

Within our own workforce we have just less than 1% of staff who come from BME communities (figures taken from BV17a).

It is very important that we know who our residents and potential residents are, their needs and aspirations. We are therefore currently undertaking a 'tenant profiling' exercise to gather as much information as possible about the makeup of our residents. We will use this to ensure that no individuals or groups are treated less fairly or miss out on important services.

A. Governance

The housing management (landlord) services are overseen by the Housing Review Board.

Within the Housing and Social Inclusion Service we will:

- expect all our employees, elected members, volunteers and partners to abide by the principles within the corporate policies and ensure that people are offered equal opportunities regardless of age, race, religion or belief, disability, gender or sexual orientation.
- hold elections for tenant representatives of the Housing Review Board, publicised and open to all tenants.
- where possible ensure that the Housing Review Board reflects the different groups and communities within East Devon.
- ensure that Housing Review Board members and other leaders of the service are aware of their responsibilities under the various government acts.
- provide information on the monitoring of equality and diversity issues to the Housing Review Board on an annual basis.
- ensure that Housing Review Board meetings are held in venues which are accessible to all.
- carry out equality impact assessments on all new housing policies and ensure that all policies and procedures state clearly that all people will be treated equally.

B. Provision of housing

- We will carry out regular housing needs assessments within the district to ensure that our information about housing requirements of all groups is robust and up to date.
- We will endeavour to avoid indirect discrimination in our Housing Allocation Policy by including a wide variety of ways in which applicants can demonstrate eligibility.

C. Service Delivery

Our Housing Customer Charter sets out how we will deliver the housing service. We will take steps to ensure that no one receives a poorer service because of age, race, religion or belief, disability, gender or sexual orientation.

Within our housing advice, homelessness and allocation functions:

- We will promote equal opportunities, including good race relations, whilst carrying out our housing advice and homelessness functions.
- We will not discriminate against anyone on diversity grounds in the way we provide or allocate council accommodation, accept an application for housing, or nominate to other housing providers.
- We will ensure, and monitor, that applicants from all groups are offered lettings in proportion to the group's representation among all applicants and that, as far as possible, properties are available to meet their needs.
- We will work with Devon Home Choice to make sure that people with disabilities have equal access to the Choice Based Lettings system.
- We will ensure people from all groups are well informed about our homelessness services.
- We will monitor homelessness acceptances and those threatened with homelessness to ensure that no groups are significantly over-represented.
- We will research the number of people from different groups who are likely to be at risk of homelessness.
- We will ensure that our Homelessness Strategy and Housing Strategy address the needs of individual groups.
- Where a tenant fears for their safety due to discrimination or harassment we will arrange for them to be moved to safe temporary accommodation. We will endeavour to resolve the situation so that the tenant can return home but will look to offer a permanent transfer if there is no prospect of a safe return.

Within our repairs and maintenance service:

- We will make sure that all tenants receive an equal service and monitor satisfaction with repairs across all groups.
- We will ensure tenants from all groups are given access to the repairs service.
- Repairs needed as a result of harassment or antisocial behaviour will be given priority in line with their seriousness.
- We will actively promote our ability to work with Social Services to provide aids and adaptations to tenant's homes to enable them to remain living independently.
- We will establish a database of council properties that have been adapted for people with disabilities.

- We will treat seriously any complaints by tenants who believe that their repair was carried out with less care because of a diversity issue.
- We will make sure our contractors and subcontractors are aware of their duties regarding equal opportunities, have appropriate policies in place and that staff are given training on these issues.
- All tenders and contracts will make reference to equality and diversity issues.
- Racial equality considerations will be included within our procurement processes, and we will ensure that our contractors can meet the required standards.
- An equality impact assessment will be undertaken for any major procurement process.

Within our housing management service:

- We have Tenancy Sustainment Officers who work to support new and vulnerable tenants.
- We have an antisocial behaviour and harassment statement which is robust and up to date.
- We will ensure that tenants and other residents are aware of our antisocial behaviour policies.
- We will not tolerate harassment or antisocial behaviour towards any residents, employees or representatives.
- Our tenancy agreements have clauses covering antisocial behaviour and harassment, and we will take prompt action when there is a breach of these tenancy conditions.
- We will support any victims of antisocial behaviour, harassment, or prejudice due to a diversity issue and work with other agencies to reduce such incidents.
- We monitor all complaints regarding antisocial behaviour and harassment and ensure that no groups are significantly over-represented.

Within our rental service:

- We will ensure that all tenants are aware of their legal rights.
- We will take steps to promote benefit entitlements to all groups.

Within our sheltered services:

- We will take action to ensure that the needs of all groups for supported housing and related care services are considered and that no groups are under or over-represented within our sheltered housing.

D. Tenant Involvement

The Tenant and Council Partnership Agreement sets out how tenants can have a voice in the housing services and be involved in decision making at all levels. We encourage all tenants to be involved at a level that suits them.

We will ensure that:

- the Tenant and Leaseholder Customer Panel have an up to date Code of Conduct and Equal Opportunities statement which it acts upon.
- all Tenant Associations have an equal opportunities clause within their constitutions
- there are a wide range of opportunities and ways to be involved with the housing service.
- minority groups are encouraged to get involved with the housing service and specific steps are taken to enable this to take place.

E. Communication

We work to ensure that our services are equally accessible to all regardless of age, race or ethnicity, religion or belief, disability, gender and marital status, gender identity or sexual orientation.

- We aim to provide a service that meets the needs of all our tenants and are currently carrying out a tenant profiling exercise to find out more about each household and its specific needs.
- We produce a 'welcome pack' for all new tenants, including our Tenant Handbook which sets out our commitments to equal opportunities and diversity issues.
- We aim to ensure that information about our services reaches all groups within the community and we will use information from our tenant profiling exercise to target specific groups if this is found to be necessary.
- We have housing offices at Council Offices, Knowle, Sidmouth and Exmouth Town Hall.
- We are aware that these venues may not be easily accessible to all (for example it is necessary to walk up a steep hill to our Sidmouth offices) so we hold surgeries and drop in sessions at various venues across the district throughout the year.
- If tenants cannot access information or advice by any other means we will arrange for a home visit.
- The timescales for answering letters, emails and attending meetings are set out in the Housing Customer Charter.
- We produce all our newsletters and key documents in large print and audio versions. All of these are also available on our website www.eastdevon.gov.uk.
- We have some of our documents available in braille.

- We will use Language Line or provide interpreter facilities or information in a different language if required.
- We will continue to advertise the availability of these other forms of communication.
- We are aware of a number of tenants who require information in these forms and are undertaking a tenant profiling exercise to expand our database of tenants with different communication needs.
- We take steps to hold our meetings in disabled and friendly venues.
- We work under the EDDC corporate data protection policy and will use confidential information only for the purposes for which it has been collected.

F. Conduct of staff

We have drawn up a 'Managers Statement on Diversity' (Appendix 4) which we expect all staff to be aware of and act on.

We will ensure that:

- all our staff receive training on equality and diversity.
- all our staff are trained to recognise that prejudice and stereotyping can influence service delivery and act to avoid this.
- the staff of all contractors carrying out work on our behalf have received training on equality and diversity and are aware of their obligations.
- our staff are aware of local agencies and services that can support victims of harassment, and direct tenants to these services where necessary.

G. Monitoring

As already stated we will monitor:

- the allocation of our properties to ensure that applicants from all groups are offered lettings in proportion to the group's representation among all applicants.
- homelessness acceptances and those threatened with homelessness to ensure that no groups are significantly over-represented.
- complaints regarding antisocial behaviour and harassment.
- our sheltered housing service to ensure that no groups are under or over-represented.
- satisfaction with repairs to ensure this is similar across all groups.

Our Communications and Improvement Team collect information on racial incidents (in line with the previous BVPI 174). Numbers of incidents are small and we usually average about one racial incident per year within the whole of the Council's operations.

Information on monitoring of equality and diversity issues will be provided to the Housing Review Board on an annual basis.

H. Complaints

We will deal seriously with anyone who acts in a discriminatory way towards our residents, staff or other representatives.

We encourage anyone who has good reason to believe they are receiving a different level of service due to their age, race, religion or belief, disability, gender or sexual orientation, or who feel they are a victim of a 'hate' incident to contact our Complaints Officer on 01395 516551.

Appendix 1

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL HOUSING AND SOCIAL INCLUSION SERVICE MANAGERS' STATEMENT ON DIVERSITY

We genuinely welcome diversity amongst our staff and service users and wish to celebrate the differences in people.

We believe in valuing everyone – this means behaving in an acceptable way in all our work, clearly promoting and demonstrating respect, understanding and fairness to all.

This statement shall be applied to our relationships with tenants, leaseholders, other service users, colleagues and members.

We will not tolerate discriminatory behaviour, stereotyping, unacceptable behaviour or lack of respect for, or from, colleagues or service users.

We will challenge such behaviour and support and empower staff who challenge unacceptable behaviour.

We will promote a service culture which values diversity, openness, honesty and exceptional customer care.

Repeated or extreme cases of unacceptable behaviour will be dealt with through the disciplinary procedure.

Agreed actions following diversity training

- All staff to feel empowered and supported in challenging unacceptable behaviour and attitudes, rumours and disrespect.
- A protocol/code of conduct for tenant representatives will be updated and published to clarify the standards that can be expected from active tenants.
- Tenant representatives will be afforded similar status to Council members.
- Work shadowing will be encouraged to aid the understanding of housing roles and breaking down barriers that may exist between teams.
- Managers will occasionally attend other team meetings in an effort to improve communications.
- An occasional information forum/question & answer event will be held for all staff to improve communication within the service.

27/01/09

Appendix 2

Strand	Relating Acts	Purpose of Act
Age	Equality Act 2006	Prohibits discrimination or victimisation related to age
Race	Race Relations Act 1976 Race Relation (Amendment) Act 2000 Equality Act 2006	Eliminates unlawful discrimination Promotes equality of opportunity Promotes good relations between people of different racial groups
Religion or belief	Racial/Religious Hatred Act 2006 Equality Act 2006	Housing organisations can take action over political and religious extremism It is unlawful to stir up hatred due to religious belief Prohibits discrimination or victimisation based on faith or religious belief
Disability	Disability Discrimination Act 2005 Equality Act 2006	Organisations must have due regard and take steps to accommodate disabilities Eliminates unlawful discrimination and harassment of disabled people Improve equality of opportunity for disabled people
Gender	Sex Discrimination Act 1975	Eliminates unlawful discrimination Prohibits discrimination or victimisation based on gender Promotes equality of opportunity between men and women
Sexual Orientation	Civil Partnerships Act 2004 Equality Act 2006	Prohibits discrimination or victimisation related to sexual orientation Legal recognition of relationships

Appendix 3

EDDC Corporate equality and diversity policies and strategies	
Acceptable Behaviour Policy	
Data Protection Policy	
Disability Equality Scheme and Policy	
Equality and Diversity Policy	
Equality Scheme Policy and Statement	
Gender Equality Scheme and Policy	
Race Equality Scheme Policy	http://www.eastdevon.gov.uk/race_equality_scheme
Employee Code of Conduct Policy	
Code of Conduct for Councillors	http://www.eastdevon.gov.uk/code_of_conduct_2007.pdf

Appendix 4

The Disability Equality Duty requires all public bodies to actively look at ways to ensuring that disabled people are treated equally.

The Gender Equality Duty places the legal responsibility on public sector organisations to promote equality between men and women and eliminate unlawful sex discrimination. They must also demonstrate that they actively promote equality between men and women. They have a duty to publish a **Gender Equality Scheme** to show how they will meet their general and specific duties and setting out their gender equality objectives.

The Race Equality Duty gives public authorities a statutory duty to promote race equality. The aim is to help public authorities to provide fair and accessible services, and to improve equal opportunities in employment. **The Race Equality Scheme** gives a framework to assist public authorities plan, deliver, evaluate and report on their services to meet the requirements of the Race Equality Duty.

Appendix 5

Housing and Social Inclusion Service equality and diversity documents	
Antisocial Behaviour Statement	http://www.eastdevon.gov.uk/google/anti-social_behaviour_statement.pdf
Housing Customer Charter	http://www.eastdevon.gov.uk/google/housing_customer_charter_website_version.pdf
Managers statement on Diversity	Attached as Appendix 1
Safeguarding Older People Policy	http://www.eastdevon.gov.uk/google/safeguarding_older_people_policy.pdf
Tenant and Leaseholder Customer Panel Code of Conduct	http://www.eastdevon.gov.uk/google/code_of_conduct.pdf
Tenant and Leaseholder Customer Panel Equal Opportunities Statement	http://www.eastdevon.gov.uk/google/equal_opps_statement.pdf