

Agenda Item 14

Housing Review Board

10 September 2009

EC



Equality and Diversity Commitments for the Housing and Social Inclusion Service

Summary

The Equality and Diversity Commitments for the Housing and Social Inclusion Service (**annex 1**) have been drawn up in response to comments from the Audit Commission and is intended to replace our existing Racial Equality Policy for Rented Housing.

The Audit Commission inspection of housing management services (September 2007) recommended that we improved the sensitivity of the service to the diversity of tenants. The implementation of the proposed Equality and Diversity commitments is designed to achieve this.

Recommendation

That the Equality and Diversity Commitments for the Housing and Social Inclusion Service are agreed, adopted and promoted to staff and customers.

a) Reasons for Recommendation

To meet the Audit Commission inspection recommendations and improve the sensitivity of the service to the diversity of tenants.

b) Alternative Options

We do not meet the Audit Commission inspection recommendations.

c) Risk Considerations

Our service is not sensitive to the diversity of tenants.

d) Policy and Budgetary Considerations

These are set out in the report.

e) Date for Review of Decision

Biannually.

1 Background information

1.1 The Racial Equality Policy for Rented Housing was drawn up in March 2005. A copy can be found on our website at http://www.eastdevon.gov.uk/racial_eq_rentedhousing_policy.pdf
This policy now requires updating.

1.2 The Audit Commission inspection of housing management services recommended that we improved the sensitivity of the service to the diversity of tenants by:

- meeting the CRE/CHR standard for housing (see below)
- adopting a more systematic approach to assessing and meeting diverse needs

- ensuring that all staff, councillors and active tenants receive more sophisticated training on diversity.
- 1.3 CRE stands for Commission for Racial Equality, and CHR stands for Centre for Housing Research. The CRE has now been disbanded and replaced by the Equality and Human Rights Commission.
- 1.4 The Audit Commission report commented that:
- weaknesses outweigh strengths in the approach to diversity
 - there has been a slow corporate approach to embedding equality and diversity
 - no assessment has been made as to whether we meet the updated CRE standard for housing management
 - there is little awareness of the needs and requirements of all its tenants
 - corporate racial equality and gender equality policies and procedures are in place but there is little evidence of their application in the service
 - the racial equality policy for housing only focuses on the lettings service
 - there are few opportunities for more expert training such as disability awareness.
- 1.5 Since the Audit Commission inspection there have been several significant steps taken to address many of these areas such as:
- more in-depth training on diversity for all housing staff
 - wider implementation of corporate policies
 - we have commenced our tenant profiling exercise and are beginning to gather more sophisticated information on many of our tenants
 - we have started to undertake Equality Impact Assessments on all our key policies and activities.

2 How the Equality and Diversity Commitments have been drawn up

- 2.1 Guidance indicates that wherever possible equality and diversity issues should be seen as a corporate matter. There should be clear and demonstrable links between corporate policy and practice and the housing service. The Head of Organisation Development advised that we should not have separate housing policies for these issues, but instead draw up a list of commitments which the housing service will adopt and act upon.
- 2.2 It was felt that the commitments should cover a much broader remit than just racial equality as it is recognised that there are now seven strands of diversity:
- age
 - disability
 - gender
 - race
 - religion or belief
 - sexual orientation
 - transgender
- 2.3 In 2009 there will be a new Equality Bill bringing together the different strands of diversity within one piece of legislation. When it has passed through Parliament the Equality Act will apply to England, Wales and Scotland.
- 2.4 In drawing up these commitments we have looked at what we are already doing and taken good practice guidance and advice from the following documents:
- Code of Practice on Racial Equality in Housing published in 2006 by the Commission for Racial Equality (now replaced by the Equality and Human Rights Commission)
 - Housing Practice – Equality and Diversity – published by Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) April 2009
 - CIH Practice Brief – Equality, Diversity and Good Relations in Housing - April 2009

- Audit Commission Housing Inspectorate Key Lines of Enquiry - Diversity

3 How will these commitments affect our service

- 3.1 We are already acting on many of these commitments. However, it will be important that all staff are made aware of the commitments and all housing teams ensure that they are being implemented.
- 3.2 We may need to take extra steps to ensure that we are correctly monitoring and reporting equality and diversity issues.
- 3.3 It will be important that the information being gathered by the current tenant profiling work currently is fully used. This should give us a much better idea of the diversity and needs of our current tenants.

4 Recommendation

We are recommending that the Equality and Diversity Commitments for the Housing and Social Inclusion Service set out in the annex are agreed, adopted and promoted to staff and customers.

Legal Implications

The legal observations are set out within the report.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications.

Consultation on Reports to the Executive

Draft Equality and Diversity Commitments document passed to Tenant Champions of the Housing Strategy Unit for comment.

Background Papers

- Racial Equality Policy for Rented Housing March 2005
- Housing and Social Inclusion Service Managers' Statement on Diversity (attached as Appendix 1 of the Equality and Diversity Commitments).

Emma Charlton ext 2982
Housing Projects Officer

Housing Review Board
10 September 2009