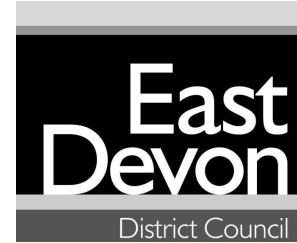


Agenda Item: 15

Housing Review Board

25 June 2009

jg



Diversity update

Summary

This report provides an update for the Housing Review Board on the improvements we have been making in terms of implementing good practice in relation to equality and diversity issues. The report sets out the diversity statement devised by service managers and cascaded to staff through further diversity training.

Diversity is the acknowledgement and respect of differences within and between groups of people. Equality is the framework that enables opportunity, access, participation and contribution that is fair and inclusive. It is important that as a housing organisation we demand respect for differences in people and champion fair and equal access to our services for all.

Recommendation

That the Diversity Statement be adopted and implemented within the Housing and Social Inclusion Service.

a) Reasons for Recommendation

To improve our Service approach to equality and diversity in accordance with good practice.

b) Alternative Options

Not to adopt changes to meet good practice expectations.

c) Risk Considerations

Non compliance with legal requirements and criticism for not following good practice.

d) Policy and Budgetary Considerations

These are set out in the report.

e) Date for Review of Decision

Annually review of policy and diversity statement.

1 Background

1.1 We have given commitments in our Housing Customer Charter/Housing Strategy to treat customers fairly and equally.

1.2 There is a similar commitment in the Corporate Strategy around providing excellent service for our customers and the theme is continued in our Tenant and Council Partnership Agreement (Tenant Compact).

- 1.3 Our culture and values as a service/organisation have a big influence on how we approach diversity in our day to day work. This affects how we treat our customers, colleagues and stakeholders.
- 1.4 We say that we value diversity and are prepared to meet the diverse needs of our service users – we must live up to this aspiration if we are to be considered a good housing organisation.
- 1.5 As a general observation I would say that historically in housing we have focussed on property issues, but only recently paid more attention to the people issues. We need to achieve a good balance between the two themes.
- 1.6 We have undertaken basic level diversity training, but we recognised the need to undertake more advanced training/awareness at all levels in housing (members/tenants/staff). This has now been completed.
- 1.7 We have studied good practice in the housing sector and produced an action plan as part of our preparations for the housing inspection.
- 1.8 The Audit Commission inspected our housing management services and commented in their report as follows in relation to diversity:
- Weaknesses outweigh strengths;
 - Slow corporate approach to embedding equality and diversity;
 - Little awareness of needs and requirements of tenants;
 - Not assessed if we meet the CRE standard;
 - Diversity of active tenants limited, struggle to involve younger tenants;
 - Some services tailored to needs of older tenants and rural issues;
 - Need to move to Equalities Standard level 2;
 - Racial Equality policy focus on lettings only;
 - Inadequate diversity monitoring;
 - Communications not well tailored to the needs of tenants;
 - Repairs staff do not have access to a database of tenants needs;
 - More expert training required for example disability awareness.

Some examples of good practice are also stated in the report.

- 1.9 The Audit Commission recommendation following the inspection and contained in our Delivery Plan is shown below:

<p>1.3 Improving the sensitivity of the service to the diversity of tenants by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • meeting the CRE /CHR standard for housing; • adopting a more systematic approach to assessing and meeting diverse needs; and • ensuring that all staff, councilors and active tenants receive more sophisticated training on diversity. 	<p>Update our existing policy to comply with current standards.</p> <p>Complete the Tenant Profiling exercise.</p> <p>Organise and deliver advanced diversity training for members, tenants and staff</p>
---	---

- 1.10 We must be influenced by the name of our Service which includes the social inclusion tag – so we should be showing a lead on diversity issues.
- 1.11 I want to make progress on these recommendations to be recognised as a good/excellent housing service, and this will not happen unless we address these concerns.

2. Managers statement on diversity

- 2.1 Prior to the training for all staff the Service managers underwent training, and as part of the exercise produced a statement on how we expected to see diversity issues addressed within the Service. This is set out below:

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.

3. Agreed actions following diversity training

- 3.1 Having rolled out diversity training we agreed a set of actions to be embedded in the Service. These are set out below:

- 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.

- 3.2 It is felt that these actions will help in creating a better understanding of diversity and reinforce the statement we are trying to implement.
- 3.3 This approach is also consistent with the values we adopted some time ago and are set out in our Housing Customer Charter. These state that in delivering a Housing and Social Inclusion Service we value:
- Openness
 - Honesty
 - Trust
 - Courage, passion and enthusiasm for housing, people and communities
 - Tenant and Leaseholder views and opinions
 - Partners contributions towards achieving Service aims and targets
 - Well trained, communicative staff
 - Good quality performance and customer focused improvement
 - High standards of customer care

4. Updating the Racial Equality Policy and tenant profiling

- 4.1 As part of our compliance with good practice we are updating our existing policy which was adopted in March 2005 (on the website). This concentrated heavily on the allocation/new tenant aspects of the service and was not as detailed in respect of existing tenants. The updated document will be reported to a future meeting of the Board.
- 4.2 The tenant profiling exercise will enable us to with improvements needed in terms of awareness of tenants needs and having a database of information on tenants to allow us to tailor services to meet tenants' specific and individual requirements.
- 4.3 In conclusion it is vital that officers, tenants and members demonstrate an appreciation of diversity and equality issues. We need to live by the principles set out above and in our various policies to ensure that service users have equal access to housing services, and are treated fairly.

Legal Implications

There are no legal implications requiring comment.

Financial Implications

The financial implications are minimal and can be met from existing budgets.

Consultation on Reports to the Executive

None.

Background Papers

- ❑ Audit Commission report on the inspection of housing management services, December 2007.
- ❑ Self-assessment against the Key Lines of Enquiry.
- ❑ EDDC Racial Equality in Housing Policy March 2005.
- ❑ Corporate policies on equality and diversity, acceptable behaviour.

John Golding
Head of Housing and Social Inclusion