



# EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY (VALUING DIFFERENCES) POLICY

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## 1. Introduction

- a) Westfield Housing Association recognises that it has both a business case and a moral obligation to respond to the wide social diversity in contemporary society and to reflect this in our own organisational culture.
- b) Housing association households contain higher than average proportions of people who experience discrimination and other social disadvantage. The main groups include: people from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities; lesbians, gay men, bi-sexual people and people who identify as trans-gender; households headed by women (especially lone parents); disabled people; older people; people with HIV/AIDS; people with learning difficulties; people with mental health issues; people suffering from alcohol or substance abuse; ex-offenders; people in contact with the criminal justice services; those experiencing domestic violence or sexual abuse.
- c) In addition to fulfilling our statutory responsibility to promote equality of opportunity in all our activities, **we are committed to developing an organisational culture which values people from all sections of the community and the contribution each individual can make.**
- d) The aim of this policy is to support these commitments by providing a framework for continuous improvement.
- e) The purpose of this policy is to provide diversity and equality to all in employment, irrespective of their gender, race, ethnic origin, disability, age, nationality, national origin, sexuality, religion or belief, marital status and social class. We oppose all forms of unlawful and unfair discrimination.

- f) All employees, whether part time, full time or temporary, will be treated fairly and equally and with respect.
- g) Selection for employment, promotion, training or any other benefit will be on the basis of aptitude and ability.
- h) All employees will be helped and encouraged to develop their full potential and the talents and resources of the workforce will be fully utilised to maximize the efficiency of the organisation.

## **2. Equality and Diversity Policy Statement**

- a) It is recognised that Westfield Housing Association has the ability to reduce the disadvantages that people experience by making its services more responsive to all communities and individual needs. The Association values the diversity of all communities and wants its services, facilities and resources to be accessible to all.
- b) We also recognise that our ability to meet these diverse needs is improved by having a diverse workforce which generally reflects the local population, and which has the skills and understanding to achieve our objectives.
- c) The Association has a commitment to be an organisation that:
  - develops services to achieve equality and diversity in all its activities;
  - has a workforce generally reflecting the local population;
  - understands how valuing diversity can improve our ability to deliver better services;
  - consults with all our customers to ensure the delivery of our goals;
  - consults with different individuals and communities to ensure that services provided are responsive and reflect the diversity of need;

- provides all employees with the training and development they need to enable them to achieve organisational goals;
  - provides a supportive, open environment where all employees have the opportunity to reach their full potential;
  - listens to its customers and involves them in the development of services that recognise and value diversity; and
  - believes that both customers and employees have important parts to play in making this happen.
  - every employee is entitled to a working environment which promotes dignity and respect to all. No form of intimidation, bullying or harassment will be tolerated.
  - breaches of our Equality and Diversity (Valuing Differences) Policy will be regarded as misconduct and could lead to disciplinary action.
- d) We will apply this policy in carrying out our statutory and corporate responsibilities. We will also seek to apply it to work undertaken for us by external consultants and contractors.

### **3. Equality and Diversity Strategies**

- a) Our overall Strategy for Equality and Diversity is to ensure that our Equality and Diversity Policy is applied fully, fairly and consistently as an integral part of our staffing and business processes and of the services we provide.
- b) It recognises that all people are different and aims to ensure that we treat each individual with dignity and respect.
- c) In addition, we recognise that some kinds of difference, discrimination or disadvantage are widely shared and experienced; we also, therefore, need equality and diversity strategies specific to particular groups of people.

- d) To achieve the commitment of our policy we will take action to address discrimination experienced by particular groups, as well as action to promote and achieve diversity in employment and service delivery.
- e) The strategies reflect the existing and forthcoming EC and UK legal framework. They, therefore, refer to equality (for particular groups) while also supporting diversity (recognising the needs of individuals).
- f) We wish to achieve an understanding of all equality and diversity issues that will, in turn, contribute to a change in organisational culture and performance generally.

#### **4. Age**

- a) Westfield Housing Association is committed to opposing unjustified age discrimination. We recognise the need for our own strategy to be in line with the EC Directives and UK legislation on discrimination in employment and vocational training. We recognise that age discrimination can affect all age groups and both genders, that age is no indicator of effectiveness in most work activities, that employment decisions should not be based on age alone and that services should be sensitive to the needs of all age groups. We will value people regardless of age. We will seek to ensure that our employment policies are relevant and fair to all age groups. We will work to create an environment where people are judged on their talents, skills and experience, rather than on misconceptions and prejudices about age.
- b) To achieve these aims we will:
  - remove age related criteria in our employment practices;
  - provide recruitment, promotion and training on the basis of need and regardless of age;
  - work with other agencies and community organisations to eliminate age discrimination;
  - work to ensure that older workers are enabled to leave the organisation with dignity and flexibility in timing and working arrangements;

- ensure that services are not unfairly allocated on the basis of age.

## 5 Disability

- a) Westfield Housing Association is committed to achieving disability equality by eliminating both unlawful discrimination on the grounds of disability and the disadvantage experienced by people with a disability, wherever reasonably possible.
- b) We recognise that people with a disability are disadvantaged both by an environment and by social attitudes, which reflect principally the needs of non-disabled people. We further recognise that improvements in the operation of our services can reduce this disadvantage.
- c) To achieve our aims we will:
  - recognise our responsibilities under the Equality Act, Disability Discrimination Act, EC Directives and other legislation and follow the relevant Codes of Practice for employment, premises and services;
  - seek to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage their participation in public life;
  - strive to provide services that are relevant to the needs of people with a disability, ensuring that appropriate staff understand the support needs for various impairments;
  - make sure that all our services and all documentation are accessible and available to disabled people;
  - whenever possible modify our procedures or equipment to make full use of an individual's ability and adapt our facilities as necessary to accommodate people with a disability;
  - review our premises, services and processes to make sure statutory requirements are met;

- ensure that we have an up-to-date record of all our adapted properties;
- continue employing, whenever practicable, staff who become disabled during their employment and assist in their re-training;
- guarantee people with a disability an interview for any employment vacancy for which they meet the minimum essential criteria.

## **6 Recruitment and Selection**

It is the Association's policy that all recruitment decisions will be based completely on the merits and abilities of candidates alone and no other criteria will be used. In order to achieve this, equality and diversity practices will be integrated into every stage of the recruitment and selection process.

A fair recruitment process will remove barriers to the employment of people of different backgrounds. This will enable the Association to raise the standard of their intake and therefore increase the opportunity of a more diverse workforce.

To highlight the Association's commitment to promoting equality and diversity from the beginning of the employment relationship, all job vacancies will be aimed at as wide a group as possible and any advertisement for a vacancy within the Association will state that an equality and diversity policy is in place.

## **7. Employment**

- a) Westfield Housing Association aspires to a diverse workforce which has the skills and understanding to achieve our goals by the provision of a quality service responsive to individual and community needs.
- b) We are committed to ensuring that all people are treated fairly and without unlawful discrimination. As an employer, we aim to ensure that all employees treat each other with

dignity and respect.

- c) The abolishment of the default retirement age is part of the Equality Act as it falls under the protected characteristic of age. Therefore, an employee can be employed until they decide they wish to retire and so the choice is solely that of the employee.
- d) We aim to develop a working environment where harassment is known to be unacceptable and where individuals can feel confident enough to bring complaints without fearing prejudice.
- e) To achieve our aims we will:
  - provide full and fair consideration to all job applications;
  - provide sufficient training and support to meet all our employees' needs in recognising and discharging their work responsibilities;
  - assist all our employees to realise their full potential by ensuring that they receive fair consideration of their training and career development needs and promotion opportunities;
  - whenever possible, modify employment practices and procedures to reduce barriers experienced by members of disadvantaged social groups in seeking, and undertaking, employment.

## **8 Gender and Gender Re-assignment**

- a) Westfield Housing Association is committed to achieving gender equality. We recognise our duties under the Sex Discrimination and Equal Pay legislation and related Codes of Practice and undertake to strive for gender equality in service provision and employment.
- b) To achieve our aims we will:

- strive to create an environment which is free from harassment and sexist language and behaviour;
- maintain our current equality in representation in our governance structure and at all levels within the staff body;
- ensure that adequate provision is made for the victims of domestic violence including advice and support that recognises the particular barriers to communication with such victims;
- work with other agencies and community organisations to promote gender equality and eliminate disadvantage.

## 9. Race

- a) Westfield Housing Association is committed to achieving racial equality. We recognise our duties under the Equality Act, Race Relations Acts and related Codes of Practice and undertake to strive for racial equality in service provision and employment and to promote good relations between all racial groups and organisations.

To achieve our aims we will:

- provide services relevant to people's needs and which respect their cultural and social identities;
- make sure that our services are accessible and available to all members of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups;
- strive to have a representative workforce that can sensitively address the needs of all communities;
- work with other agencies and community organisations to promote racial equality and eliminate racial disadvantage and racial harassment;

- strive to create an environment which is free from racial harassment and racist behaviour.

## **10. Religion and Belief**

a) We recognise the need for our own strategy to be in line with the EC Directives and UK legislation on discrimination in employment and vocational training. Our strategy is to tackle unlawful discrimination and harassment on the grounds of religion and belief and to promote good relations between people of different religions and beliefs.

b) To achieve our aims we will:

- strive to create an environment which recognises and respects religion and belief and is free from unlawful discrimination or harassment;
- develop employment practices and services in ways which recognise and respect religion and belief;
- improve the understanding of religion and belief amongst our staff and contractors so that they can sensitively address the needs of individuals and of different faith communities;
- work with other agencies and community organisations to promote understanding and good relations between people of different faith communities;
- recognise that, whilst separate from our Race Strategy, our actions for religion and belief will be broadly similar in principle;
- follow Government guidance on applying the relevant UK legislation.

## **11. Sexuality/Sexual Orientation**

a) Westfield Housing Association recognises the very real discrimination that people face in

their lives due to their sexuality and life choices and we are committed to working to remove this unfair treatment. We recognise the need for our own strategy to be in line with the EC Directives and UK legislation on discrimination in employment and vocational training.

b) We want to create an environment where lesbians, gay men, and bisexual people are free from unfair treatment and harassment and feel safe to be open about their sexuality and difference, if they so choose.

c) To achieve our aims we will:

- ensure the equal application of all terms and conditions of service irrespective of any employee's sexuality;
- ensure that our service delivery policy and procedures are not based on the assumption that everyone is heterosexual, for example by recognising the rights of same-sex partner relationships to equality in tenure rights;
- adopt procedures that ensure a rapid and comprehensive response to allegations of harassment.

## **12. Marriage and Civil Partnership**

The Equality Act protects employees who are in a civil partnership, or marriage, against discrimination. Gay or lesbian couples are able to get married or register their civil partnership which gives them the same rights as other married couples.

The Association is committed to ensure we do not discriminate those couples.

To achieve our aims we will:

a) Ensure recruitment and selection policies do not discriminate on the groups of civil partnership, marriage or sexual orientation.

- b) Ensure tenant selection procedures do not discriminate on the same groups as above.

### 13. Pregnancy and Maternity

The Equality Act makes it unlawful to discriminate, or treat employees unfavourably because of their pregnancy or because they have given birth recently, are breastfeeding or on maternity leave.

The Association is committed to ensure a woman is not treated unfavourably because of her pregnancy, pregnancy related illness or when she exercises her right to maternity leave.

To achieve our aims we will:

- a) Provide full and fair consideration to all job applicants who meet the minimum criteria.
- b) Ensure we do not discriminate any employee in:
- determining pay
  - training and development
  - selection for promotion
  - discipline and grievances
  - redundancy selection.

### 14. Responsibilities

a) **All Staff**

- All staff have a responsibility to ensure that this policy and associated strategies are put into practice. We expect a personal commitment from all employees in making it effective and in setting an exemplary standard for others to follow.
- Additional and specific responsibilities apply to those who manage staff and to those who are involved in recruitment, promotion, training and development.
- All members of staff have a contractual responsibility to:

- make sure that they understand the values and benefits of equality and diversity;
- familiarise themselves with this policy, follow it, and ensure that any staff for whom they are responsible do so as well;
- draw to the attention of the Chief Executive any instances of apparent discrimination or any perceived problem in relation to employment or to the provision of services. This may involve use of the Association's Grievance Procedure.

b) **Board and Chief Executive**

The Board has corporate responsibility for ensuring that this policy underpins all aspects of our work. The Chief Executive has responsibility for developing the organisational culture in which this policy can operate effectively and for ensuring that it is implemented.