

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY POLICY

1. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES STATEMENT

1.1 English Rural Housing Association is committed to providing equality of opportunity and treatment for all, respecting the needs of all residents and partners in service delivery, employment and community participation. We are committed to embedding diversity into the core of our business operation to ensure that nobody applying for housing, employment or contract will be discriminated against due to their race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, marital or civil status, disability or age. We will apply these principles in carrying out our activities and we will seek to apply them to work undertaken for us by external contractors and to organisations working in partnership with us

2. LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

2.1 The Association aims to ensure that we meet our obligations and responsibilities both as an employer and as a service provider as set out in the relevant statutory framework. We aim to comply with the Tenant Services Authority Regulatory Code and statutory housing management guidance, the Commission for Racial Equality's "Code of Practice in Rented Housing" and DTLR/Housing Corporation's "Tackling Racial Harassment: Code of Practice for Social Landlords". As an employer we are committed to ensuring that all relevant statutes, statutory instruments and EU Directives are adhered to, to include but not limited to the Equal Pay Act 1970, Sex Discrimination Act 1975, Race Relations Act 1976 - as amended by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and Equality Act 2006.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICY

3.1 The Association will seek to create a Board of Management with experience, knowledge and understanding of the needs of the communities that it serves. The Board and sub-committees have a responsibility to ensure that both employment and service delivery take equality and diversity aims and commitments into account when making decisions.

3.2 The Association's Management Team has a responsibility for ensuring that this policy underpins all aspects of our operation in the decisions and recommendations that it makes and through the implementation of an Equality and Diversity Scheme and Action Plan.

3.3 All employees have a responsibility to uphold and promote the principals of this policy and ensure that they are put into practice when carrying out their respective roles.

- 3.4 Job vacancies will be advertised in a way that does not discourage disadvantaged groups from applying. All job applicants will be made aware of the Equal Opportunities Policy. Proper access for residents and employees with disabilities will be provided in work places. Special needs of employees with disabilities will be met wherever practicable, including providing adapted equipment and changes of working methods to help meet their needs. It is a condition of employment with the Association that all employees adhere to the Association's equal opportunities and harassment principals. The Association's Disciplinary procedure will be followed in the event of any breaches by staff to the Association's policy. The Association will adhere to equal opportunities legislative requirements when recruitment and employing staff members.
- 3.5 Contractors employed by the Association are expected to uphold the principals of this policy. The policy will be included in information supplied to contractors as an expression that we will not tolerate any racial, sexual or other harassment by contractors or their employees. Any report of such behaviour will lead to a review of the status as a preferred contractor. The Association will take steps to terminate any contractual relationship it may have with any organisation which discriminates against any person or organisation on the grounds of race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, status, disability or age or race, gender, religion, disability, or for other reasons, or which tolerates discrimination or harassment by its employees or by organisations over which it is in a position to exercise control. Contractors are expected to comply with current legislation in relation to Health and Safety and Discrimination.
- 3.6 Any harassing conduct by residents impacting on their development or those who have the rights or necessity to enjoy the usage of it is construed as a serious breach of the Associations Tenancy Agreement and shared ownership lease. Such a breach may lead to the Association to commence legal proceedings against the party who is responsible. In instances where there is sufficient evidence of a genuine case of harassment, and with the agreement of the victim, the Association will take legal advice about taking Court Action against the perpetrators and will not hesitate to take appropriate action to put a stop to the harassment. In very serious cases this may lead to the loss of a residents Tenancy and/or a significant claim for damages against the perpetrator. The Association will encourage victims to report incidents of harassment to the police and may refer such victims to support agencies. The Association will keep confidential records of all incidents of harassment and attacks, together with the action, if any, taken by the Association. Any repairs, including the removal of graffiti, required as a result of harassment will be processed as a priority. The Association's Anti-Social Behaviour Policy provides further guidance on this subject.
- 3.7 If personal equipment is used on a permanent basis it should be submitted to an annual portable appliances check.

4. MONITORING AND REPORTING

- 4.1 A detailed report of which will be circulated to the Board for deliberation. The report will pay particular attention to the types of households within the Association's properties and how the Association continues to ensure that the needs of all households are considered and accommodated wherever possible. The Association will continue to monitor the disability needs of residents in the annual satisfaction survey.
- 4.2 Data on the allocation of the Association's homes will be submitted to the Continuous Recording System (CORE) and the annual summary on allocations will be circulated to the Board of Management.
- 4.3 The Association will look to accommodate the employment needs of staff and Board Members whose work is affected by a disability or specialist requirement. The annual appraisal process will provide an opportunity to identify any unmet needs and ensure steps are taken to accommodate them if appropriate.

Job applications will be encouraged to include disability and equality information in their submission, and where this is provided an appropriate confidential summary will be collated. Data on staff ethnicity will be circulated to the Board of Management as part of the Regulatory and Statistical Return Survey.

The Remuneration Committee will uphold the principals of this policy when reviewing and agreeing terms of employment.

5. COMMUNICATING THE POLICY

- 5.1 All staff will be introduced to this policy and their rights and responsibilities under it.
- 5.2 The policy will be issued as part of standard tender information supplied to consultants, external contractors or suppliers.
- 5.3 A summary of the policy will be detailed in the residents' newsletter, with details on how residents can request the full copy.
- 5.4 The policy will be made available in alternative formats on request.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 This policy has been drafted to reinforce the Association's commitment to accommodating and promoting the needs of all individuals across our organizational objectives. As a specialist Rural organisation the policy will be interpreted alongside our key activity of providing affordable housing for local households in rural communities. Because of the specialist nature of our aims we recognize that this will impact on the way we compare with

industry partners. Nonetheless, we are committed to the principals of equality and diversity.

6.2 The Association is also committed to contributing towards the equality and diversity aims of our regulator, the Housing Corporation, which are detailed in their Rural Strategy as the follows:

- the relative isolation of some BME (Black, Minority and Ethnic) households in rural areas;
- the implications of very specific 'local needs' access policies;
- the consequences of an aging population;
- the provision of housing for people with disabilities.

6.3 This policy has been drafted alongside the Association's Disability and Equality Scheme and Action Plan. Which details a programme of how Disability and Equality issues affecting the Association are to be better understood, and what measures are to be taken to ensure Disability and Equality needs are integrated to the very core of our operation.

DEFINITIONS:

'Equal opportunity' - refers to the elimination of unlawful and unfair discrimination against particular groups, e.g. people from minority ethnic backgrounds, people with disabilities etc. Equal opportunity is concerned with ensuring the equal treatment of different groups of people in the community.

'Diversity'- refers to the broad range of visible and non visible differences that characterise people. Diversity is concerned with individuals and embraces and values the unique contribution they can make.

'Harassment' - is a deliberate act committed against people because of their race, religion, gender, disability or for other reason. It can take the form of physical attack, but graffiti and verbal abuse are also types of harassment. English Rural condemns all forms of harassment whether perpetrated by its tenants, its employees or agents.