

South Western Housing Society
Equality Action Plan 2008 - 2009

1. Introduction

South Western Housing Society has adopted a comprehensive Equality and Diversity policy that provides the framework for our approach to promoting equality and diversity in all that we do.

To support the desired outcomes of this policy, the Society has developed this Action Plan covering the areas of Race, Disability and Gender, setting out the current position for the Society and the actions we propose to take to achieve continuous Improvement in these areas.

2. Context

The Society is a small RSL, owning just over 400 rented and shared ownership properties in small settlements in the South West. We have a modest development programme with a target to reach 700 homes in ownership by 2013. Our average annual number of properties becoming available for letting is typically 20 properties and the majority of our new tenants come to us from the various local authority choice based lettings systems.

There are no formal tenant groups or associations within the Society's tenant base and tenant participation is delivered through local meetings and newsletters.

The Society employs 10 members of staff and has a stable workforce and therefore does not often recruit. The staff complement is evenly split at 50% male and 50% female and this is the same for the Senior Management team. There are currently no members of staff from a BME background.

The organisation is governed by an independent Board of Directors. Membership of the Board can be up to 12 people, although we currently have 9 and are seeking to recruit. We currently have one tenant who is a member of the Board and we aim to increase this to two. The Board gender profile is 6 male and three female. There are no Board members from a BME background, and none with a disability.

3. Disability

3.1 Definition:

A person has a disability if they have a physical or mental condition that has a long-term negative effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Examples:

Physical conditions requiring the use of a mobility aid

Mental conditions such as bi-polar disorder

Learning difficulties

Sensory problems such as blindness or deafness

Long term illnesses such as cancer, Aids, multiple sclerosis.

3.2 What Does the Society Currently Do?

We have:

- A Disabled Adaptations Policy including an annual budget for disabled facilities and small improvements
- An Assisted Decorations Policy and an annual budget to fund it
- An Elderly and Disabled Policy that includes support planning
- A Protection of Vulnerable Adults Policy aimed at preventing abuse
- An Anti-Harassment Policy supporting a strong stance on harassment on grounds of disability
- Equal and open Employment policies and procedures that support a non discriminatory approach to employment for applicants with a disability
- New modern offices with facilities to accommodate staff with mobility problems
- A fair allocation policy, the outcomes of allocations being monitored through the C.O.R.E. return system.

3.3 What is our Level of Knowledge of our own tenants?

The Society carried out a full Status Survey at the end of 2007, the results of which were reported to Board in 2008.

The survey showed the following results:

- 42% of our tenants state that they suffer from long standing illness, disability or infirmity
- the rate of tenants declaring a disability rises with age at 46% between the ages of 60-74 up to 59% of those over 75
- the rate of those declaring a disability is highest in our sheltered accommodation at 72%
- 80% of those declaring a disability said it limited their activities
- of those declaring a disability the following aids were used
 - walking aid 32%
 - wheelchair 8%
 - electric buggy 2%
- 90% of those declaring a disability were satisfied with the overall service compared with 87% for able bodied
- 91% of those declaring a disability considered the service good value for money as opposed to 90% of able bodied
- satisfaction levels for tenant participation are higher at 80% for those declaring a disability than able bodied at 78%
- 3% of tenants indicated they wished to move to different accommodation for health reasons.

In general the Society has slightly higher satisfaction rates from its tenants who have a disability than from those who don't.

3.4 What will we do to improve?

	Date
(i) Consult tenants on this Action Plan	08/09
(ii) Include a box on our repairs satisfaction cards to identify tenants with a disability.	08/09
(iii) As we carry out our major planned replacements we will incorporate the requirements of tenants who have a disability	08/14
(iv) Provide disability awareness training for the Board and staff	08/09

(v) Monitor the outcomes of our lettings and shared ownership sales through CORE and post lettings visits to establish any issues arising	08/09
(vi) Develop our web-site so that it is accessible.	08/09
(vii) Secure a source to produce key documents such as application forms in Braille or audio format or alternative languages	08/09
(viii) Seek to identify tenants who can act as a tenants' voice to advise the Society on matters for consultation.	09/10
(ix) Identify properties that have been extensively adapted for people with a disability in order to inform our letting process.	08/11
(x) Review the action plan to inform the Annual Management Plan for 09/10	08/09
(xi) Promote our approach to disability equality through our web-site and publications such as the tenants' newsletter. Incorporate a method of promoting a positive approach in the newsletter.	08/09
(xii) Seek validation of our revised Recruitment Policy so that we attain the Job Centre Plus accreditation "positive about disabled people"	08/09

4. Gender

The key issues identified for RSL's in its publication "Delivering Gender Equality" are based on four broad outcomes:

- Being an equality exemplar as an employer
- Ensuring that housing is accessible for men, women and those who are transgender
- Developing a greater understanding about the barriers that affect men, women and those who are transgender
- Ensuring that the appropriate stakeholders are involved in the development of new policy and strategy.

5. What Does the Society Currently Do?

5.1 The Society has:

- a recruitment policy to ensure transparency and fairness in recruitment
- an Anti-harassment and Bullying policy to ensure no one in the work place is harassed or bullied
- a family friendly policy that covers maternity, paternity, adoption, and parental leave and flexible working such as job share
- an Allocation policy to ensure fairness and transparency in lettings

- a Domestic violence policy that sets out the approach the Society will take in this area
- a Tenant Participation policy where the Society will pay for expenses such as child care for tenants to attend meetings
- a Board member expenses policy that supports Directors who have child care or other caring responsibilities
- a Pay strategy where all members of staff are treated and rewarded fairly and equally
- a continuing education policy where the Society can support staff who wish to develop through external education and learning.

5.2 What will the Society do to Improve

	Date....
(i) We will review our HR policies, including Recruitment, Family Friendly policies to ensure they are up to date with current equalities legislation	08/09
(ii) We will seek to recruit members of the Board of Directors in areas that are under-represented	08/09
(iii) We will review our allocation policy to ensure that transgender applicants and tenants are incorporated into the policy.	08/09
(iv) Promote joint tenancies for couples	08/09
(vi) Incorporate gender issues into awareness training for staff and members of the Board of Directors	09/10
(vii) Publicise our approach through our web-site and publications such as the tenants newsletter	08/09
(viii) Review our Domestic Violence and Harassment policies.	08/09
(viii) Review the action plan to inform the Annual Management Plan for 09/10.	08/09

6. Race Equality

- 6.1 The Society's approach to race equality is expressed through its Equality and Diversity Strategy and this action plan seeks to identify specific actions that will help us improve in the area of Race Equality.

The Society owns housing stock in small market towns and villages in the South West region where the last census figures reported a 2% figure for residents of B E backgrounds. The Society lets around 20 vacant properties a year, most of which are let through the various choice based lettings schemes operated by local authorities. For newly developed housing the Society is generally required to assist the local authority by giving 100% of first lettings to Council nominees.

From the recent status survey, the Society's tenant make up is described as 98% white British and 2% other white.

With a staffing complement of 10, the Society does not often recruit and has a stable staff population.

6.2 What Does the Society Do Now?

The Society has:

- An Equality and Diversity Policy
- Adopted the Code of Practice from the Commission for Racial Equality
- Provided training to staff and the Board in race equality
- An Anti-Harassment policy that sets out our approach to racial and other forms of harassment
- An Anti-Harassment and Bullying policy covering harassment in the work place
- A Code of Conduct for Contractors requiring them to abide by the principles of our Equality and Diversity policy
- A recruitment and selection policy ensuring fairness and transparency in recruitment
- Monitoring for ethnicity in applications received for vacant posts against out comes
- Monitoring for ethnicity on the Society's response repairs satisfaction cards
- Monitoring the outcomes of our lettings through the Core system
- Monitoring the outcome of our shared ownership sales through the Core system
- Performance reporting to Board
- Tenant participation meetings open to all held in all of the main areas where we have housing

6.3 What does the Society need to do to improve

	date
(i) Ensure that our web-site is available in alternative languages	08/09
(ii) Procure a source for translating documents if required	08/09
(iii) Review our Allocation policy to ensure it reflects best practice.	08/09
(iv) Review our recruitment and Selection policy and procedure to ensure it reflects best practice.	08/09
(v) Publicise our approach to race equality in our newsletter and on our web site	08/11
(vi) Ensure our contracts for repairs and other services contain measures that ensure our contractors employ our approach to race equality	08/09
(vii) Monitor the action plan prior to considering our Corporate Plan and Annual Management plan for 2009/10	09/10

7. Impact Assessments

The Society has limited resources as a small organisation that will enable it to carry out full impact assessments across its policy framework. In reviewing a new or existing policy or service the Society will seek to answer the basic questions below to inform the equalities implications for the report to the Board.

1. Is there clear evidence that the new or existing policy or service will meet or is meeting the needs of its users?
2. Will it meet the needs of all potential users or will some potential users not be able to access the service?
3. Is there likely to be a significant equality impact from a new or existing policy or service?
4. Can the policy or service be amended to remove any possible or actual unfair or worse service for any groups or individuals?
5. Will the service or policy help promotes equality?
6. Does the Society know enough about the impact of its policy or service?