

SOUTH WESTERN HOUSING SOCIETY

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY POLICY

1. STATEMENT OF POLICY

1.1 The Society recognises that staff are key to its success and is aware that it operates in a multi-cultural and diverse society. The Society acknowledges its statutory and moral obligations to ensure equality of opportunity to all groups, and has a policy for this purpose which demonstrates its commitment irrespective of:

- Colour
- Nationality
- Disability
- Religious belief
- Gender reassignment
- Marital status
- Political affiliation
- Race
- Ethnic or national origin
- Age
- Gender
- Sexual orientation
- Responsibility for dependants
- Health including HIV+ status

1.2 The Society's aim is that the composition of our residents, Board and staff should reflect that of the communities in which we operate. Our targets will be to ensure that in the services we deliver and in our Governance and staff arrangements we reflect the expected diversity from the most up to date Census figures available for the areas and communities in which we work. We are aware that as a small organisation with a low turnover of property and staff, we are particularly affected by statistical targets. We will monitor our performance across a range of outputs to ensure in all areas we are representative of our communities and do not discriminate, directly or indirectly, against under represented groups. Where necessary, positive action, as permitted by legislation, will be taken to help disadvantaged and/or underrepresented groups to access housing or compete for jobs and the provision of services on a genuine basis of equality.

1.3 The Society's Equality and Diversity Policy and the measures to implement it, have been devised on the basis of advice from the relevant bodies, and to reflect best practice. Equality and Diversity implications will form part of our standard reporting to Board.

1.2 The responsibility for the policy lies with the Board, which takes seriously the requirements of legislation and the regulatory code. Day to day responsibility for implementation lies with The Chief Executive and the Senior Management Team. Each member of staff, however, has a responsibility to ensure they comply with this policy.

- 1.3 A copy of the policy will be included in the induction pack for new staff and Board members.

2. THE TARGET GROUPS

The Society recognises that certain groups are more likely to be disadvantaged or discriminated against. We have therefore prioritised the following groups:

- Black and ethnic minorities and racially disadvantaged groups
- Women
- Disabled people

3. THE LEGISLATIVE AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

The objectives of the equality and diversity policy are to eliminate unlawful discrimination, promote equality of opportunities and take positive action to redress the effects of historic and continuing discrimination. In achieving these, the Society will abide by the following legislation, codes of practice and regulatory guidance:

- The Race Relations Act 1976
- The Race Relations Act 1976 (amendment) Regulations 2003
- The Sex Discrimination Act 1975
- The Equal Pay Act 1970
- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- The Disability Discrimination Act 2005
- The Sexual Orientation Regulations 2003
- The Religious Beliefs Regulations 2003
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006
- The new CRE Code of Practice on Race Equality in Housing
- The Housing Corporation's Regulatory Code – sections 2.7, 3.2, 3.4 and 3.5

4. THE GENERAL ELEMENTS OF THE POLICY

- 4.1 In the provision of housing services and employment, the Society will seek to eliminate discrimination and ensure equality of opportunity and treatment for all.
- 4.2 No-one applying for housing, the provision of services or employment will be treated less favourably than anyone else.
- 4.3 Positive action will be undertaken by the Society when it is considered necessary to enable members of a minority group to receive equality of opportunity in housing, the provision of services and employment.
- 4.4 The Society is aware of the particular difficulties and discrimination often connected with HIV + status and AIDS, and therefore is committed to

ensuring that all its policies and procedures incorporate positive action to adequately reflect this.

- 4.5 Ensure complaints are dealt with promptly, fairly and without discrimination.

5. GOVERNANCE

- 5.1 The composition and operation of The Board, will aim to reflect the Society's commitment to Equality and Diversity and the communities in which we operate. Adoption of our Equality and Diversity Policy will be a criterion for formal recognition for Tenants' and Residents' Associations, should they arise. Equality implication will be a standard section in Board reports so that the impact of policy change can be considered.

6. HARASSMENT

- 6.1 Effective action will be taken to combat victimisation and harassment and the Society will take a victim centred approach. The Society will provide support to residents and will follow the processes in the External Harassment Policy. For staff the Society will follow our Anti-Harassment and Bullying Policies and Procedures, and will provide additional support where necessary..

7. THE HOUSING ELEMENTS OF THE POLICY

In the provision of services to our clients, the Society will:

Lettings

- 7.1 Ensure its allocation of housing is made through a system that aims to produce an objective assessment of housing need and to prevent prejudice or discrimination being practised. We will consult with our Local Authority partners over the operation and outcomes of Choice Based Lettings Schemes. We will monitor the outcome of our lettings.

Procurement

- 7.2 The Society requires all main contractors and other agencies it hires to embrace our Equality & Diversity Policy. The Society places a similar requirement on all but the smaller, jobbing builders undertaking minor repair and maintenance.
- 7.3 Ensure in its partnership work, that consultants, contractors and suppliers operate policies and procedures similar to our own. Where unlawful discrimination is discovered, we will make every effort to influence the partners, consultants, contractors or suppliers to take remedial action and we may review our agreements with them.

Development and Regeneration

- 7.4 The Society will work with partner Local Authorities to ensure any new housing developed meets the needs of the communities where it is built. Given the nature of our housing stock, it is unlikely we will be involved in major regeneration schemes.

Sales

- 7.5 The Society will ensure its Shared Ownership sales policies and procedures are fair and transparent and will monitor the outcomes of sales.

Tenant Involvement

- 7.6 The Society will seek to involve its tenants in service delivery and will ensure all tenants have an equal opportunity to access involvement. The Society does not have formal resident and tenants groups, but holds accessible tenant meetings throughout the year. Satisfaction will be monitored to highlight any issues with underrepresented groups.

8. EMPLOYMENT ELEMENTS OF THE POLICY

This section of the policy ensures the Society observes the Commission for Racial Equality, the Disability Rights Commission and the Equal Opportunities Commission Codes of Practice for Employment.

8.1 Vacancy Advertising

- Wherever possible, all vacancies will be advertised simultaneously internally and externally.
- All vacancy advertisements will include an appropriate short statement on equality and diversity.

8.2 Selection and Recruitment

- Selection criteria (job description and employee specification) will be kept under constant review to ensure that they are justifiable on non-discriminatory grounds as being essential for the effective performance of the job.
- More than one person must be involved in the selection process, and all should have received training in recruitment skills and equality and diversity awareness.

8.3 Positive action – training, promotion and conditions of service

- Given the small staff establishment and low turnover, the Society will do all it can to encourage a diverse workforce. However, actual recruitment to all jobs will be strictly on merit.

- Wherever appropriate, lawful exemptions (genuine occupational requirements) will be used to recruit suitably qualified people to cater for the special needs of particular groups.
- Wherever possible, efforts will be made to identify and remove unnecessary/unjustifiable barriers and provide appropriate facilities and conditions of service to meet the special needs of disadvantaged and/or underrepresented groups.
- We will monitor training and career development to ensure fairness.

8.4 General

The objectives of the employment section are to:

- Ensure that the Society has access to the widest labour market and secures the best employees for its needs.
- Ensure that no applicant or employee receives less favourable treatment and that, wherever possible they are given the help they need to attain their full potential.
- Achieve an ability-based workforce, which is in line with the working population mix in the communities in which we work.
- All staff have a duty to co-operate in the operation of this Policy. However, the Society has ultimate responsibility for achieving the policy's objectives and for ensuring compliance with current and future legislation and various Codes of Practice.
- Any behaviour or actions which breaches this Policy will be considered serious disciplinary matters and will be subject to the disciplinary procedure, which may, in some cases, lead to dismissal.