



## **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY POLICY**

### **1. POLICY STATEMENT**

- 1.1 Fabrick Housing Group is an equal opportunities employer and service provider. The Group is committed to achieving equality of opportunity and valuing diversity. This policy intends to ensure that services are accessible to everyone and that the Group continues to be an equal opportunities employer.
- 1.2 The Group is committed to creating an inclusive environment that is free from harassment and discrimination. The Group serves a very diverse community and celebrates having a diverse population and the enrichment that a multicultural society brings.
- 1.3 The Group is dedicated to achieving equality of opportunity and recognises that discrimination, harassment and bullying are unacceptable on any grounds. Fabrick aims to ensure that no service user or potential user will receive less favourable treatment on the grounds of the following: (this is not an exhaustive list)
- Gender
  - Race
  - Disability
  - Colour
  - Ethnic or national origin
  - Nationality
  - Sexuality
  - Political beliefs
  - Religion/Belief
  - Age
  - Trade Union Membership
  - HIV Status
- 1.4 This policy will inform every area of activity from the way we provide services to the way we employ.

### **2. REFERENCE MATERIAL**

#### **2.1 Legislation**

- 2.1.1 The Group has ensured that detailed consideration has been given to legislation and best practice. The following list of statutes and guidance is not exhaustive, but outlines the current framework that exists to assist equality and contributed in the development of this policy.

- Sex Discrimination Act 1975;
- Race Relations Act 1976 (Amendment) Act 2000;
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995;
- Crime and Disorder Act 1988;
- The Human Rights Act 1998;
- EU Directives;
- Commission for Racial Equality Code of Practice in Rented Housing;
- Employment Equality (Religion and Belief) Regulations 2003;
- Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003.

2.1.2 As well as complying with the law, Fabrick Housing Group will follow the guidance and good practice recommended by the Housing Corporation, National Housing Federation, and the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

### **3 DEFINITIONS**

3.1 The Group – means the parent and its partner companies.

3.1.1 The definitions used are from relevant pieces of legislation and Codes of Practice

3.2 Direct Discrimination

Takes place when someone treats someone else less favourably than they would treat others in the same circumstances. For example:

- Refusing to offer a job to a person who has the required skills because they belong to a particular ethnic group.

3.3 Indirect Discrimination

Takes place when someone applies a condition or requirement to something which, although applied equally to all, some groups would have more difficulty meeting than others. This is because the proportion of one group that can comply with the condition or requirement is much smaller than that of another group. Such a situation is illegal if it cannot be justified and it causes detriment to someone from the group that cannot comply. For example:

- A height requirement of 6ft 2ins in a job advertisement, which is not necessary to do the job. Men are normally taller than women, so the number of women who can meet this job requirement is considerably smaller than the number of men who can do so. Therefore women are placed at a disadvantage.

3.4 Institutional Discrimination

Is a term used to describe the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service or employment condition to people because of their race, sex or disability.

3.5 Institutional Racism

The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to

discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people.

### 3.6 Racism

A racist incident is any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person.

### 3.7 Disability

Someone who has a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal, day-to-day activities.

### 3.8 Transgender

Is a term to describe anyone that lives, or wishes to live, as a member of the opposite gender to his or her birth gender.

### 3.9 Victimisation

Is where a person or group is treated less favourably because they have pursued, or it is suspected they might pursue their rights under the equal opportunities policy or the law via the internal complaint procedure, an external agency or legal proceedings.

### 3.10 Harassment

Unwanted conduct affecting dignity. It may be related to age, sex, race, disability, religion, nationality or any personal characteristic of the individual, and may be persistent or an isolated incident. The key is that the actions or comments are viewed as demeaning and unacceptable to the recipient.

### 3.11 Bullying

Is inappropriate and unwelcome behaviour that causes distress, alarm, apprehension or fear. It involves remarks, gestures, acts or omissions that can reasonably be described or perceived as intimidating.

### 3.12 Prejudice

Involves making a pre-judgement about something before experiencing or fully understanding the true concept of the situation. It can lead to the development of discriminatory attitudes about certain kinds of people, produce negative views about different lifestyles, different value systems, standards of behaviour and the value we place on other people's right to choose to be different.

### 3.13 Stereotyping

Is the pre-judgement of people based on assumptions. Assumptions made about individuals or groups are often based on false or misleading information, and without direct experience or proper judgement, have no validity.

### 3.14 Domestic Violence

Shall be understood any violence between current or former partners. The violence may include physical, sexual, emotional or financial abuse between those generally recognised as a couple whether or not married and whether or not co-habiting.

## 4 POLICY CONTENT

4.1 To aid the implementation of this policy, the policy covers 11 areas that The Housing Corporation considers as a matter of good practice as outlined in Good Practice Note 8. These being:

- Service delivery;
- Lettings;
- Access to information and advice;
- Tenant participation ;
- Tenant satisfaction;
- Complaints;
- Dealing with harassment ;
- Procurement and supply diversity;
- Governance;
- Staffing and employment;
- Development and regeneration.

4.1.1 This policy is supported by the Equality and Diversity strategy with an associated action plan.

## 4.2 Service Delivery

4.2.1 Fabrick Housing Group will ensure that all services are accessible to the communities they serve. Services will be tailored to meet the diverse needs of the community we serve. The services will be non-discriminatory and free from prejudice. In the provision of all services we will endeavour at all times to act in a non-discriminatory, inclusive manner. Fabrick Housing Group will:

- Deliver services that are flexible and responsive;
- Remove barriers which may deny access;
- Ensure services meet the needs of the diverse communities, particularly those who face discrimination and disadvantage;
- Provide information in accessible formats;
- Provide translation and interpretation services as appropriate;
- Monitor the take-up of services accordingly;
- Look for opportunities to work in partnership with other organisations, including voluntary and community groups, local authorities, other housing associations to improve outcomes for specific communities or groups;
- Carry out regular accessibility audits to ensure that our offices comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

## 4.3 Lettings

4.3.1 The Group provides high quality affordable housing that aims to meet the needs and aspirations of its tenants. Fabrick Housing Group will ensure:

- It works towards achieving balanced and sustainable communities that are a true reflection of the diversity of the communities we serve;

- That access to properties is open;
- That all groups are given equal access;
- Take-up of services is monitored;
- The regular review of our application and allocation procedures;
- That services to organisations representing or working with minority groups are actively monitored.

#### 4.4 Access to Information and Advice

4.4.1 The group will ensure all information is available to our residents in a format that is accessible. We will ensure that we:

- Provide information in accessible formats as appropriate, e.g community languages, large print, braille, audio-tape etc;
- Provide translation and interpretation services as appropriate.

#### 4.5 Tenant participation

4.5.1 The Group is committed to tenant empowerment and involvement. We encourage partnership working with tenants, leaseholders and residents, involving them in decisions that affect their homes and communities. All participants who choose to be involved will feel valued and supported.

4.5.2 The Group consults and involves tenants, leaseholders and residents through various methods such as newsletters, mobile exhibition unit, regular public meetings, surveys, questionnaires and focus groups etc. All customers are able to choose the level and type of involvement that best suits their needs and preferences. To achieve our aims we will:

- Establish monitoring systems to allow us to profile the customers involved ;
- Seek ways to actively promote involvement in formal and informal structures to a diverse range of customers, particularly where we are aware of under-representation;
- Offer a range of options for consultation and involvement that customers can choose from;
- Encourage customers involved in formal structures to complete training on equality and diversity;
- Be sensitive to the needs of different groups and individuals when planning and organising events;
- Work with tenant groups to ensure that they operate in an open and inclusive way.

#### 4.6 Tenant satisfaction

4.6.1 The Group aims to ensure that all our customers are receiving the same high quality of services and that there is minimum disparity in satisfaction levels between different groups of customers and the majority.

4.6.2 The Group is committed in seeking the views of satisfaction rates, a number of methods are used to gain how satisfied tenants are with their homes and the services we provide. The feedback helps to shape and identify areas which can be improved upon. To achieve this we will:

- Carry out regular analysis of satisfaction levels between different groups of customers for key service areas including overall satisfaction;
- Analyse/identify reasons for any disparity in satisfaction levels between specific groups and the majority and address any identified problems.

#### 4.7 Complaints

4.7.1 In the delivery of the complaints policy and procedure, we aim to deal with complaints from customers fairly, and with respect and professionalism regardless of their gender, race, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation and marital status.

4.7.2 To enable all residents to have clear information and equal access to our comments, compliments and complaints policy, the Group will publish clear information in a range of appropriate languages and formats as required, and through a range of media. Feedback is also accepted through a variety of different routes to reflect individual customer's preferences or needs.

4.7.3 Where required, assistance will be given to people who wish to make a complaint but have difficulty doing so because of their circumstances e.g. disability or English comprehension difficulties. This may be the provision of translation/interpretation services, printing of documents in large print or home visits to housebound/vulnerable people.

4.7.4 The Group will monitor trends among groups of customers who access the comments, compliments and complaints scheme to ensure accessibility and customer satisfaction for all members of the community.

#### 4.8 Dealing with Harassment

4.8.1 Fabrick Housing Group endeavours at all times to provide a work and living environment that is free from discrimination and harassment.

4.8.2 Harassment can be a source of great stress to an individual. Behaviour constituting harassment is considered by The Group to be a serious offence and is taken very seriously. The Group will not tolerate the harassment or victimisation of employees or workers by other employees, workers, Board members, customers, contractors or members of the public in any circumstances, and will take appropriate action against the perpetrator(s).

4.8.3 Every member, employee, tenant, consultant, contractor etc is expected to adhere to this policy. All claims of harassment and discrimination will be quickly and actively investigated in a sensitive manner. All claims will be treated sympathetically and with the utmost discretion.

4.8.4 Any behaviour constituting harassment is subject to a range of measures outlined below. It could also lead to criminal prosecution, where the Group deems it appropriate to contact the Police.

- Disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal for staff;
- Expulsion from the Group for Board / Committee members;
- Eviction from a property for tenants.

4.8.5 Where tenants/members of the public report cases of harassment the relevant subsidiary's policy and procedures will apply. The policies and procedures adopts a victim centred approach to dealing with the reported incident and supports the victim throughout the process.

4.8.8 All claims of harassment and discrimination from employees will follow the procedure outlined in the Dignity at Work Policy or may invoke a formal grievance policy.

4.8.9 The Group is committed to challenging domestic violence. As an organisation we will assist and support employees who want help in addressing problems arising from domestic violence. The Group considers domestic violence in any form as being unacceptable.

4.8.10 Should a perpetrator affect the health and safety of employees, appropriate action will be taken. Managers should be flexible about working arrangements until the situation is resolved.

4.8.11 The Group will support perpetrators who genuinely wish to change. Conduct outside of work may lead to disciplinary action, if it has implications for an employees' role and contractual obligations.

4.8.12 Employees can contact Lancaster Life Employee Assistance Programme, a free service for employees which gives independent advice on discrimination, harassment, domestic violence and bullying.

#### 4.9 Procurement and supply diversity

4.9.1 The Group uses contractors, consultants and agencies to ensure its services to residents are delivered speedily, to a high quality and in the most cost effective manner.

4.9.2 The Group requires that contractors and suppliers of services comply with equal opportunities and do not discriminate. A copy of this policy will be provided to all external contractors, consultants and suppliers appointed to work for the Group. All such organisations will be expected to ensure that their contractual duties are executed so as not to conflict with The Groups policy. Contractors/consultants who do not comply with the requirements of the Group in this area will be removed from the Approved List.

4.9.3 The Group will promote equality of opportunity by the following and ensure:

- Contractors/consultants are aware that they must adhere to the Housing Corporation's Regulatory Code 2.7.7;

- Contractors/suppliers with more than twenty direct employees must have a written equal opportunities policy which complies with the relevant Codes of Practice;
- Contractors/suppliers with less than twenty direct employees and who do not have an equal opportunities policy will sign an undertaking to comply with the relevant Codes of Practice on equal opportunities;
- Major projects that are undertaken and included in the Ojeu process of selection of contractors/suppliers will be fair and non-discriminatory;
- Contractors/suppliers will provide the Group with detailed statistics on company owners and their workforce;
- Complaints against external organisations will be monitored closely, any allegation of discrimination or harassment will be taken seriously and swiftly investigated ;
- Contractors / suppliers will be also expected to take prompt and appropriate action against any member of their own workforce found in breach of this policy.

#### 4.10 Governance

4.10.1 The Group Boards will provide leadership and direction in relation to equality and diversity and drive ongoing improvement. The Group therefore aims to achieve equality and diversity through representation of stakeholders in the membership of its Boards.

4.10.2 Board members are therefore encouraged to supply this information when appointed, and the Group will aim to achieve a balanced representation to ensure that different groups are represented, and their needs, where possible are met.

4.10.3 In cases of under representation, where possible, action will be taken to redress the imbalance in membership by the use of such initiatives as positive action. The Group will also promote board members opportunities as widely as possible and in ways likely to attract interest from a diverse range of people.

4.10.4 Board members are required to adhere to this policy in the discharging of their duties. All board members are aware of the standards of behaviour expected of them and any breaches will be dealt with immediately. All board members will therefore receive training in this area.

#### 4.11 Staffing and Employment

4.11.1 Fabrick Housing Group wishes to be an employer of choice and understands that in order to achieve this; it must act responsibly, provide equality of opportunity and value diversity.

4.11.2 The Group intends to ensure that no employee or prospective employee receives less favourable treatment on any grounds.

4.11.3 The Group recognises that it is important to treat everyone with equal dignity and respect, this includes respect for religion or other beliefs. We will endeavour to achieve equality of opportunity in the following ways:

- Regularly review our recruitment & selection processes to ensure that they are fair and transparent;
- Have a workforce representative of the diverse communities we serve at all levels;
- Use positive action to address workforce under-representation;
- All posts (except those subject to legal exemption, e.g. genuine occupational qualifications), will be equally open to all members of under-represented sections of the community;
- Have policies and practices which are inclusive and respectful of the needs and wishes of different groups;
- Introduce relevant training for recruitment and selection;
- Seek ways to develop cultural awareness within our organisation;
- Monitor diversity of both applicants for employment and the workforce as well as staff promotion, take up of career developments, staff use of complaints and grievance procedures;
- Provide training for all staff on equality and diversity;
- Wherever reasonably practicable, undertake reasonable adjustments in relation to building access, equipment, working methods and arrangements with regards to staff, or new employees with disabilities;
- All disabled applicants who meet the minimum requirements for an advertised job will be afforded an interview;
- Flexible working arrangements will be offered to employees and workers to assist with individual personal circumstances, provided this does not conflict with service delivery commitments.

#### 4.12 Development and Regeneration

4.12.1 The Group is a developing organisation and seeks to increase its stock by continuing to build new stock. It also aims to improve stock/undertake major repairs, to ensure each property matches the Decent Homes Standard as set by the Government in-line with its major repairs programme.

4.12.2 The group appreciates that when developing and improving its stock, it must consult with current and prospective residents to enable it to provide housing that matches the requirements of the community.

4.12.3 The Group wishes to maximise the use of its housing stock and deliver suitable housing to meet the needs of all of its current and potential residents. The group will:

- Consult with the diverse communities when building new properties to ensure that their views and needs are considered in the planning process, stock improvement programmes and in renewal and regeneration initiatives;
- Liaise with partner local authorities to regularly review the housing needs (including size, quality and design issues) of the diverse communities;
- Include tenants in the appraisal of completed developments to feed back into the review process.

## 5. IMPLEMENTATION

- 5.1 Overall responsibility for the implementation of this policy lies with the Group Director of Corporate Services. All managers have a particular responsibility for promoting equality of opportunity and diversity within their own areas.
- 5.2 Individual employees at all levels have responsibility for ensuring that equality of opportunity is continually provided and diversity is valued in all of the Group's activities. All staff can be personally held liable in law for acts of discrimination that they commit, authorise, contribute to or condone in relation to other staff.
- 5.3 The Group will not support any employee who has carried out acts or omissions of wilful, persistent or serious discrimination, domestic violence, victimisation or harassment.
- 5.4 The Diversity Manager will develop procedures which will ensure effective implementation of this policy.
- 5.5 All employees will be notified of the details of this policy and will be aware of its implications through the provision of training.

## **6 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY**

- 6.1 This policy will ensure that equality and diversity is embedded into the fabric of the Group. This policy is supported by the Equality and Diversity Strategy and associated Action Plan.
- 6.2 Consultation on this policy has been conducted with diverse groups, forums and panels, as set down in section 7.1. Comments arising from the consultation have been considered when developing this policy.

## **7. CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT AND CONSULTATION**

- 7.1 The following groups have been consulted with during the development of this policy:
  - Equality and Diversity Working Group;
  - Erimus Residents Disability Action Group;
  - Senior and Corporate Management Team;
  - The Black and Minority Ethnic Residents Panel;
  - The Residents Panel;
  - Middlesbrough Black and Minority Ethnic Forum;
  - Middlesbrough Joint Agency Working Group;
  - Fabrick Employee Council;
  - Erimus Housing's Joint Consultative Group;
  - Tees Valley Works Council;
  - Housing Advisory Panel;
  - Fabrick Housing Board;
  - Tees Valley Housing Board;
  - Erimus Housing Board.
- 7.2 To ensure that the policy remains fit for purpose, staff, service users and stakeholders will be consulted prior to any changes being made.

## **8. MONITORING AND REVIEW**

### **8.1 Monitoring**

8.1.1 This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that it continues to be fit for purpose. The Parent Board will monitor the effectiveness of this policy by receiving regular reports on its implementation. Changes in statute or case law and advice will also prompt a review of this policy.

### **8.2 Review**

8.2.1 The Group will undertake a review of this policy whenever there are any relevant changes in statute, case law or good practice that will impact on this policy.

8.2.2 The Group Director of Corporate Services will be responsible for ensuring that reviews of this policy are carried out.

8.2.3 Tenant representative groups will be involved and consulted in any review of this policy, in-line with the Groups policy on tenant participation and consultation.

## **9. RESPONSIBILITY**

9.1 It is the responsibility of the Group Chief Executive and senior officers to ensure that:

- All staff are aware of this policy;
- All staff are trained on this policy;
- Customers are adequately informed of this policy;
- Appropriate action is taken against employees whose actions are inconsistent with this policy.