



EQUALITY & DIVERSITY POLICY

1.0 Introduction

Northwards Housing is fully committed to the elimination of unlawful and unfair discrimination and values the differences that a diverse workforce brings to the organisation. In celebrating and encouraging diversity, it will enable Northwards Housing to access a unique mixture of talent, skills and experience that can make a valuable contribution to business performance and deliver a service to Northwards Housing tenants.

This policy applies to potential as well as current workers and relates to all aspects of employment, including recruitment, pay, terms and conditions of service, promotion, training, transfer, grievance and disciplinary procedures, and to the arrangements made for working within the organisation.

Northwards Housing will ensure that all sections of the population have equal access to jobs, and no applicant or worker will receive less favourable treatment than others because of his or her colour, race, creed, gender, disability, nationality, religion, age, sexual orientation, marital status (including same sex couples), responsibility for dependents, HIV/AIDS, unrelated criminal activity, income, spent offender background, trade union activity or any other irrelevant factor. It will build a culture that values meritocracy, openness, fairness and transparency. Northwards Housing will work to eliminate any form of discrimination, and will work to promote good relations between people of different groups.

All employees are responsible for the promotion and advancement of this policy. Behaviour, actions or words that transgress the policy will not be tolerated and will be dealt with in line with the disciplinary policy and procedure.

Objectives relating to fair and inclusive practices will be included in all employees' appraisals and will form an integral part of performance review/meetings throughout the year.

This policy is applicable to all employees, clients, communities, suppliers and contractors, whether permanent or temporary. The policy applies to all processes relating to employment and training and to any dealings with customers and clients. Decisions relating to customers and communities will be based on business-related criteria only and any irrelevant information will not form part of the process.

The policy will be reviewed on an ongoing basis to reflect changes in the law, demographics and internal business requirements. Progress relating to the policy will be recorded annually and a full report will be presented to the Board to debate progress and review the status of the policy.

2.0 Scope of Policy

The policy covers:

a) Employment including recruitment, training and education

Northwards Housing recognises that, with an effective recruitment, training and education policy, it will reflect the range of knowledge and experience within local communities and assist in service delivery. Northwards Housing will endeavour to ensure that training and education is promoted, and that Northwards Housing will not exclude any groups or individuals.

Northwards Housing will endeavour to ensure that job requirements do not exclude any groups or individuals, that jobs are accessible to all through effective and fair advertising methods and that awareness of such vacancies is promoted to internal employees and to local communities.

Northwards Housing will endeavour to:-

- conduct a full training needs analysis relating to the understanding and management of diversity;
- consult key stakeholders and players on the organisational learning requirements;
- evaluate suppliers' training and secure budget for training design and delivery;
- integrate diversity into mainstream training and development programmes;
- Establish education programmes for all staff (including programmes that move from awareness to behavioural change); and integrate equality and diversity into development programmes, and assessment and selection processes.

Northwards Housing will offer flexible terms and conditions promote diversity within the workplace and cater for employees lifestyles during their employment. Career opportunities will be available to all, and promotion will be on merit and ability.

Northwards Housing will ensure equality of opportunity in development of its people.

b) Leadership

Northwards Housing will:

- identify a Board member and a senior level champion for leading the diversity strategy;
- secure top-level ownership and sponsorship for the programme.

c) Measurement

Northwards Housing will:

- capture all available workforce organisational health targets to benchmark against other housing management organisations and registered social landlords, demographics and best practice standards;
- agree the targets for the workforce composition over a five-year period with the Board and with staff groups;
- develop relationships with external benchmarking bodies to assess progress (with, for example, Commission for Racial Equality, Equal Opportunities Commission, the Employers Forum on Age and the Disability Rights Commission); and

d) Policy development and implementation

Northwards Housing is firmly committed to ensuring that this policy is fully complied with. An Equality and Diversity Officer will be appointed and based on this appointment, initiate task groups, conduct and utilise impact assessments, evaluate policies using a variety of sources, establish key relationships with stakeholders, formulate, develop and implement multi agency strategies and endeavour to enhance the role with Northwards Housing's strategy.

Northwards Housing will also:

- benchmark existing policy statements from other organisations and advisory groups;

- develop human resources and other policies (outlining vision, scope, responsibility, accountability and measurements);
- cascade new policies through team briefings; and
- identify a budget to enable related activities to be undertaken (for example reasonable adjustments to comply in accordance with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, communication and training programmes).

e) Communication and consultation

Northwards Housing will establish key lines of communication across the business through consulting both internally and externally to key stakeholders. Northwards Housing will consult with all relevant community groups and external agencies on a regular basis to assess effectiveness of the policy.

f) Complaints Procedure (Please also refer to Northwards Housing complaints procedure)

Northwards Housing will take seriously and deal effectively with all complaints of discrimination on the grounds of colour, race, creed, gender, disability, nationality, religion, age, sexual orientation, marital status (including same sex couples) responsibility for dependents, HIV/AIDS, unrelated criminal activity, income or spent offender background, trade union activity or any other irrelevant factor.

Complaints that are made will be treated with sensitivity and anyone who makes a complaint or who gives evidence will not be victimised or treated less favourably than other workers.

Such complaints will be acknowledged within an appropriate time period and kept as a record in compiling an audit trail to ensure each case is progressed and dealt within a reasonable time frame.

3.0 Definitions

Definitions of Indirect/direct discrimination?

Northwards will abide by the relevant legislation in ensuring that opportunities for the discrimination are eradicated. Such legislation includes:-

- Sex Discrimination Act 1975
- Race Relations Act 1976

- Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- Equal Pay Act 1970
- Race Relations Act 1976 (Amendment) Act 2000
- Race Relations Act 1976 (Amendment) Regulations 2003
- The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003
- The Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003
- Civil Partnerships Act 2004.
- Disability Discrimination Act 2005.
- Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006
- The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006
- Equality Act 2006.

Northwards Housing encourages and maintains diversity in its workforce and service delivery recognising the diverse needs of both employees and customers.