

St Georges Community Housing



St Georges
COMMUNITY HOUSING

Equality and Diversity Strategy

2007- 2008



A strong future together – investing in homes,
neighbourhoods and lives

Equality and Diversity Strategy

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INTRODUCTION

St Georges Community Housing' (SGCH) mission statement is:
'A strong future together – investing in homes, neighbourhoods and lives'.

In achieving its mission, SGCH is committed to providing services that are consistent with best practice in diversity and equalities at all times, and meeting its responsibility to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and promote good race relations.

SGCH is legally obliged as an employer and provider of housing services to ensure equal opportunity for all. In addition to this statutory duty, St Georges Community Housing is also committed to developing a culture that recognises wider social diversity in society and therefore respects and recognises the values and needs of individuals regardless of whether they belong to a particular section of society or group provided for by legislation.

Promoting Equality – Valuing Diversity

Equality is about creating a fairer society where everyone can participate and has the opportunity to fulfil their potential. It is backed by legislation designed to address unfair discrimination based on membership of a particular group.

Diversity focuses on maximising people's potential through valuing the different ethnic, religious and social backgrounds, genders, sexual orientations, ages, skills and experiences of individuals. It recognises that "one size does not fit all".

There is a compelling business case for valuing diversity within our processes. By involving a diverse range of residents, staff and stakeholders, we will embrace the skills, experiences and perspectives of our communities and will be, therefore, more effective in providing services that are accessible and appropriate to all sections of the community.

Who is the Strategy for?

The key audience for this strategy are the Board, Senior Managers, and staff who play a critical role in shaping, directing and delivering the future

development of SGCH' services. However, it will also be of interest to service users and partners who seek further details of SGCH' approach to equality issues.

DEVELOPING THE STRATEGY

In order to move towards achievable and sustainable implementation of the equality and diversity agenda, it is crucial that a strategic process is followed. By collating a reliable evidence base, we aim to set achievable objectives that enable equalities to be integrated into all service areas.

Linkages

The Equality and Diversity Strategy is central to the work of SGCH. This strategy contributes to the aims and objectives of Basildon Council's Strategic Improvement Plan and its Corporate Equality Strategy and Action Plan.

It is an integral part of the SGCH service planning process and is closely linked to the following strategies and documents, and should not be read in isolation:

- Service Improvement Plan
- Equalities Action Plan
- Tenant Participation Compact
- Anti-social Behaviour Policy
- Equality and Diversity Policy
- Training Programme
- Delivery Plan

Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE)

The Housing Service received a two-star rating from the Audit Commission following an inspection in April 2003 and we are now working towards providing a three-star excellent service. However, the Audit Commission revised the diversity KLOE in November 2006 (KLOE 31) and this sets higher standards in encouraging landlords to meet the different needs of diverse customers. What was evidence of an organisation providing an excellent service in the original KLOE, now only indicates a fair service.

The KLOE covers six main areas: corporate culture and governance, access and customer care, service user involvement, partnerships, harassment and domestic violence. As well as the six areas covered, there are also three consistent themes running throughout KLOE 31 – understanding your customers, tailoring the service and providing leadership.

A gap analysis (between our current service and the criteria for an excellent service) has been undertaken and SMART targets set to ensure timely progress is made towards achieving these standards. These actions are reflected in the SGCH' Service Improvement Plan and will be incorporated into the Equalities Action Plan.

Carrying out Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) is a new element to the Diversity KLOE. The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, Disability Discrimination Act 2005 and the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (Public Authorities) (Statutory Duties) Order 2006 require all public bodies to carry out race, disability and gender impact assessments of their policies and functions. SGCH will adopt an EIA framework that covers all the six equality strands beyond to include age, religion/belief and sexual orientation.

For all new or substantially amended policies, SGCH will carry out an initial Equality Impact Assessment (EIA). This will filter out any potential discrimination within the policy. The EIA must accompany any new or substantially revised policy seeking formal approval by the Board.

Race Equality Scheme

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, Disability Discrimination Act 2005 and the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (Public Authorities) (Statutory Duties) Order 2006 are legislative responses to tackle "institutional discrimination" and places a general duty on all public authorities to:

- Eliminate unlawful race, disability and sex discrimination;
- Promote equality of opportunity amongst all groups
- Promote good relations between people of different groups.

There are two specific duties that every public authority must meet in order to comply with this general duty. These are to publish race, disability and gender equality schemes and monitor employment practices and procedures. Although we are not a public authority named in the RR(A)A 2000, this Equality and Diversity Strategy incorporates the principles of the Equality Schemes.

Investors in People (IIP) Standard

Basildon Council was awarded Investor in People in January 2004 and this was re-assessed in January 2007. The IIP Standard is a tool designed to improve performance by linking people development with organisational success. This strategy complements principles of the IIP and its indicators of good practice.

The staff that has transferred to SGCH contributed to achievement of this standard although SGCH will be re-assessed in its own right in the future.

Chartermark

The Housing Service received a CharterMark award in December 2005. Section 3 of the criteria for this award states that as an organisation we have to be, "Fair and Accessible to everyone and promote choice".

In particular we have to, "make services easily available to everyone who needs them offering choice where we can" and "Treat everybody fairly in access to services and service delivery and pay particular attention to people with special needs"

We were compliant with the majority of the requirements of the criteria with only a couple of partial compliant areas that have been incorporated into the Service Improvement Plan.

The "2 Ticks" Disability Scheme Award

SGCH has applied for the Two Tick Disability Symbol User status, which recognises our commitment to good practice in employing disabled people.

MAINSTREAMING EQUALITY & DIVERSITY

This strategy defines what SGCH aims to achieve in relation to mainstreaming equality and diversity and in eliminating discrimination. It provides a clear framework for what we are trying to achieve, how we will achieve it, and the mechanisms we will use to measure our success.

By 'mainstreaming' equality, SGCH will ensure that equality is considered at all stages of development and delivery of policies and services, and by everyone involved in that development and delivery. In developing and implementing this strategy, SGCH recognises the six equality strands:

- Disability
- Race and Ethnicity
- Sexual Orientation
- Gender
- Religion and Belief
- Age

The focus on these strands at the core of our equalities work does not, however, detract from our commitment to protect our employees and customers from unfair discrimination on the basis of any unjustified grounds, as stated in our Equality & Diversity Policy.

Mainstreaming equality cannot work without careful exploration of the interests, needs and experiences of the disadvantaged groups in question. There also needs to be analysis of how and where these equality considerations intersect with usual organisational processes, policies, practices, products and structures. This requires that all managers and officers are aware of their responsibility to make equalities and diversity integral to their every day duties. Judgements can then be made about where these can be adjusted and where additional measures are required to address those interests, needs or experiences which cannot be accommodated within the mainstream.

Equality Standard for Local Government

SGCH has made a commitment to follow the ESfLG systematic framework for mainstreaming equality into all aspects of its service delivery and employment practice, enabling us to meet our legal obligations under anti-discrimination law while providing a framework for improving performance. These developments translate into action in the four substantive areas of the Standard:

- Leadership & Corporate Commitment
- Consultation, Community Development & Scrutiny

- Service Delivery and Customer Care
- Employment: Recruitment, Workplace, Training & Development

Crosscutting Principles

In achieving the objectives set out in this strategy, we will ensure that certain crosscutting principles are applied consistently throughout each service area and build on work already being carried out. Our approach will be a holistic one, placing people at the centre of a well-developed organisational framework, enabling us to bring about a gradual change in the culture of the organisation.

Partnerships

A partnership approach is intrinsic to the way we function. We will work in partnership with our residents and other stakeholders in order to maximise our effectiveness and impact. These relationships will be based on mutual interest and respect, working towards the attainment of agreed goals and with clear expectations.

We will build strategic partnerships with contractors, statutory, voluntary and community organisations in order to engage additional resources, expertise and influence. Where partnerships are involved in the contracting out of work, we will ensure that contracts meet equal opportunity criteria and are effectively monitored.

Participation

SGCH will use a participatory approach, which will give residents, employees and external stakeholders a voice in decision-making processes. This will be achieved through a systematic and interactive process, to extract information from people, allowing them to be involved at a pace they are comfortable with. Making participatory approaches integral to our work will enable us to analyse problems together, find solutions and shape common plans.

Learning and Good Practice

We will develop processes to enable us to learn actively, systematically and continually from our own and others' experience so that we can build upon our skills, knowledge and understanding, and increase our effectiveness and impact. We will promote sharing of good practice organisationally as well as amongst our residents' groups, and will work more closely with our partners to increase our ability to learn with and from them.

Value for Money

SGCH recognises the importance of achieving value for money in all aspects of its work. SGCH will continue to develop effective monitoring and evaluation methods so that we can learn from our own and others' work and identify good practice. This will maximise our impact and make effective use of limited resources.

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY OBJECTIVES

Through this Equality and Diversity Strategy, and implementation of the Action Plan, we will be seeking to achieve the following key objectives.

1. Promoting Equality through Leadership

We will demonstrate our commitment to equality and diversity in our services and our workforce through effective leadership and the use of positive messages and images.

There is a clear link between top-level commitment and achieving behaviour and culture change throughout the organisation. Those who have the power, influence and resources to effect change have a duty to play a leading role in promoting equality. This demonstrates that the organisation takes this responsibility seriously, and to ensure an integrated approach.

SGCH will strive to include representation from a full cross section of the community on the Board and other decision-making bodies. Where an imbalance exists positive steps will be taken to encourage people with relevant skills and experience from under represented groups to stand for election to the Board.

Visible leadership commitment to equality and diversity is a key enabler to success. We will use transparent accountability systems for diversity targets to support the demonstration of this commitment and ensure that action towards progress remains focused.

SGCH will provide leadership and promote positive messages by:

- Making sure that we are accountable by making public statements of intent and taking action if things go wrong.
- Making personal contacts with leading members of community groups
- Hosting public meetings and consultations on equalities issues
- Chairing committees and working groups on equalities issues
- Hosting, sponsoring and speaking at events celebrating different aspects of diversity

2. Learning and Development

We will enable staff to plan and deliver equal and accessible services by developing their skills and raising their awareness of equality and diversity issues as they relate to their specific areas of work.

Access to Learning

Employees at all levels of the organisation are entitled to fair opportunities for promotion, and development and training will be an integral part of every employee's personal development.

We will develop a profile of SGCH' staff as a baseline, and monitor the diversity of staff taking up learning and development opportunities against this.

We will review our learning and development processes to ensure that they are dynamic and flexible and equip our staff with the knowledge and skills they need to provide responsive and high quality services to all our community.

Information on training courses will be available on the website, in newsletters and through team briefings. We will use learning tools that enable participative learning and organisational development. These will include e-learning and surveys.

Relevance of Training

In order to mainstream equality, and to implement organisational change, we will continue to train all our staff on their duty to promote equality and combat discrimination and harassment.

Staff will also be enabled to carry out equality impact assessments to ensure that all aspects of their work are inclusive and that they do not have an adverse impact on any section of the community.

We will provide equality and diversity training for anyone involved in our recruitment or performance management procedures. We will train all our staff and make sure everyone is aware of their duties under the current and future equalities legislation. Success of training will be measured in terms of immediate learning outcomes, as well as long term improvements demonstrated through performance indicators.

3. Consultation and Communication

We will improve the effectiveness of our communication with our diverse resident base, staff and other stakeholders, increasing availability of and access to relevant information and resources. We will do this by using appropriate media.

The Service Improvement Team is responsible for developing effective information and marketing for SGCH. The team will support staff in meeting their communication and information needs to ensure that we have consistency in the quality of information we provide and image we wish to project.

Transparent Consultation

We will consult with our residents and their representatives, staff and contractors using a variety of inclusive consultation techniques including surveys, written documents, focus groups as well as face-to-face meetings. In order to ensure transparency and to promote the value of consultation, we will ensure that the results of all consultations are communicated to the relevant people in an appropriate format.

Communication with Employees

We will ensure that staff are able to access information in a variety of ways. We use various methods to communicate with our workforce at present, allowing information to filter out to all sections of the organisation. These include e-staff bulletins, team meetings, one-to-one meetings with line managers, training sessions, staff road shows and conferences.

Communication in Service Delivery

SGCH has a responsibility to promote its services by providing good quality information to its residents, and continually assessing and improving how it communicates.

We will identify current good practice and introduce new methods where necessary. We will use a variety of tools to communicate with residents, identifying the most appropriate methods for getting the message across including newsletters, the SGCH' website, the press, public meetings and face-to-face communication where it is appropriate.

Information will also be distributed through organisations working with ethnic minority communities and hard to reach groups. We will develop mechanisms

that will increase residents' access to information by ensuring that it is produced in plain English and making provision for it to be translated into the main community languages, produced in Braille, tape format and large print.

4. Monitoring and Evaluation

We will improve the way in which we monitor and evaluate diversity information so that we are able to provide a better service to customers and provide equal opportunities in employment.

Developing a Profile

SGCH is committed to providing equal opportunities in employment and demonstrating that we value the diversity of our workforce. We aim to create a workforce that is as diverse as the community we serve.

To ensure that our services and employment practices are inclusive, we will monitor and review our data on residents and staff. This enables us to develop a better understanding of the diversity within resident communities and to represent this diversity in our workforce and in our service provision.

We will review the systems we currently use to monitor diversity information so that it is more useful. This profiling information will be used to map our services against all the equality strands, identify where services are unbalanced and where we need to take action. The Human Resources team has the responsibility to develop procedures and monitor delivery on equalities issues in employment within SGCH.

Setting Targets

Each service area will be responsible for developing equal-access service objectives and for setting out its targets and related performance indicators. These will depend on impact and needs assessments, as well as reviews on existing situations. Managers will be given guidance on target setting and diversity monitoring.

Relevant performance indicators will be provided annually, including local performance indicators agreed with customers.

Targets will be set for employment and service delivery and any other area of activity annually. Progress against these targets will be monitored and actions taken as appropriate to demonstrate continuous improvement.

Effective monitoring will check the progress made towards achieving specific targets and will go beyond the generalised process of information collection. It will follow on from the community and employee profiling process, which establish the baseline for monitoring.

Measuring progress

Targets, action planning and monitoring will take place within a defined timeframe. Time limits will be made explicit within the process of target setting and action planning. This will be achieved through the service improvement plan and the equalities action plan, through which each of our service areas monitor and report back on their performance against each of the targets.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR IMPLEMENTATION

SGCH recognises that within its organisation all board members, staff and resident representatives have a part to play in challenging discrimination and in implementing this strategy.

- SGCH' Board is responsible for providing strategic direction to the organisation. It recognises that any discrimination that exists can only be eliminated in partnership with staff and residents. Board Members will follow the strategy in all their dealings with staff and residents.
- The Executive Director is responsible for the overall management of SGCH and for developing an organisational culture in which this policy can operate.
- The Executive Management Team is responsible for achievement and effectively monitoring the strategy and action plan in their services.
- Senior Management Team has responsibility for implementing the strategy and supporting staff in promoting equality and diversity in service delivery.
- The Service Improvement Team is responsible for facilitating service improvement including equalities & diversity issues.
- The Human Resources Team has the responsibility to develop procedures and monitor delivery on equalities issues in employment within SGCH.
- All employees share the responsibility to carry out their tasks, following this strategy and the law.
- Resident representatives have a responsibility for promoting equality and diversity issues in their groups, challenging discrimination and ensuring their membership reflects the communities.

The Equality Action Plan translates this policy into actionable tasks that will be implemented by each team within SGCH. Senior management will take responsibility for its implementation and monitoring of its progress.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Relevant Legislation

SGCH will implement its Equality & Diversity Strategy in accordance with the current legislation governing local authorities and the associated codes of practice.

Disability

- Disability Discrimination Act 2005
- Disability Rights Commission Act 1999

Gender

- Equal Pay Act 1970 (as amended)
- Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (as amended)
- Equal Pay (Amendment) Regulations 1983
- Sex Discrimination Act 1986
- Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (Public Authorities) (Statutory Duties) Order 2006

Race

- Race Relations Act 1976
- Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000

Sexual Orientation

- Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003

Religion and Belief

- Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003

Human Rights and Employment

- Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- Human Rights Act 1998
- European Employment Directive 2000

Appendix 2 – Current Codes of Practice

Disability Rights Commission

- Code of Practice: the elimination of discrimination in the field of employment against disabled persons or persons who have had a disability (1999)
- Code of Practice: rights of access, goods, facilities, services and premises (1999)
- Access to goods, facilities and services: regulatory impact assessment (1999)
- Code of practice: the duty to promote Disability Equality 2006

Equal Opportunities Commission

- Code of practice on sex discrimination (1985)
- Code of practice on equal pay (1997)

Commission for Racial Equality

- Code of Practice for the elimination of racial discrimination and the promotions of equality of opportunity in employment (1984)
- Code of Practice in rented housing (2006)
- Code of Practice in maternity services (1994)