



2011

SINGLE EQUALITY SCHEME



South Lakes Housing

September 2011



Single Equality Scheme

Foreword from the Board Diversity Champion

Welcome to South Lakes Housing's Single Equality Scheme (SES). The Scheme is based on the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty 2011 and outlines our work to date, our plans for the next three years and how we will monitor these.

South Lakes Housing is determined to promote equality and diversity to improve community well being in the South Lakeland District. We recognise that people who provide and use our services come from diverse backgrounds, with different experiences and needs.

We want our services to be accessible and useful to everyone and will take positive action where appropriate to ensure equality and fair treatment so that individual needs are met.

As an employer we are committed to working towards achieving a workforce that is reflective of our local population. We also want our staff and job applicants to feel valued and to believe that they are given equal chances, no matter what their background or circumstances.

On the 20th and 21st October 2010 SLH was inspected against the Equality Framework for Local Government by the 'Improvement and Development Agency' (IDeA). They assessed how well we know our customers, our commitment to equality, how responsive we are to the different needs of our customers and our workforce. SLH was awarded the 'Achieving' level of the standard.

IDeA found that "South Lakes Housing (SLH) has demonstrated strong leadership on equalities with a Board who are totally committed to the agenda."

It doesn't stop there though; we are determined to deliver against the action plan arising from the IDeA peer review which will ensure fairness to everyone in all aspects of service delivery.

1. Introduction

South Lakes Housing was established as a not for profit independent company from April 2004. In a ballot with a record turnout, tenants of South Lakeland District Council voted overwhelmingly for SLH to take over the management, repair and improvement of their homes.

The company employs approximately 130 people based at 2 offices, 2 works depots and a number of sheltered housing schemes. It has a Board management of 12 comprised of 4 tenant representatives, 4 SLDC Councillors and 4 independents.

Over the last 5 years the Decent Homes work has transformed people's homes and in delivering the programme we achieved a very high level of customer satisfaction and active tenant engagement in all the important decisions that affect them.

South Lakes Housing now looks forward to a new and challenging phase in the development of the company. A stock transfer proposal is underway which will enable SLH to improve levels of stock investment and continue to develop services. Need and demand for social housing continues to rise and in response SLH has a vital role to play in making the best use of the district's council housing stock, exploring opportunities to deliver more affordable housing and responding to the needs of an ageing population.

2. Legal Considerations

2.1 The Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 gives all people the right not to be treated less favourably as set out in the following "protected characteristics":

- Age
- Disability
- Gender re-assignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual Orientation

South Lakes Housing also recognises Rurality as a major factor within our locality that can overlay any of the equality characteristics mentioned above resulting in further obstacles to inclusion for customers brought about by isolation, poor transport and difficulties of access to services.

2.2 The Public Sector Equality Duty

The Public Sector Equality Duty aims to promote a consideration of equality and good relations into the day-to-day business of public authorities, requiring equality

considerations to be reflected into the design of policies and the delivery of services, including internal policies.

2.3 The Equality Standard for Social Housing Equality Framework

South Lakes Housing has undergone an assessment and is currently rated at the “Achieving” level of the Local Government Equality Framework. A specific Housing Equality Framework has been developed and SLH is using the framework to help it achieve the “Excellence” level.

2.4 The Tenants’ Services Authority (TSA) Regulatory Framework

The TSA requires *Registered Providers to demonstrate how they respond to tenants’ needs in the way that they provide services and communicate with tenants.*

3. South Lakes Housing’s Commitment

The company is committed to:

- Creating an environment in which individual differences and the positive contributions of all staff and customers are recognised and valued.
- Providing a working environment that promotes dignity and respect to all. No form of intimidation, bullying or harassment will be tolerated.
- Ensuring training, development and promotion opportunities are available to all employees.
- Ensuring employment practices and procedures are periodically reviewed to ensure equality.
- Communicating this policy to all members, workers and contractors and ensuring easy access to the policy for job applicants, local citizens and partner organisations.

4. Leadership and Responsibility

This Scheme sets out guidance that everyone is required to follow in order to ensure that its aims are achieved. Everyone has personal responsibility for the practical application of the Scheme, which extends to Board Members, Tenants, colleagues and members of the public.

4.1 The Board

The Board of Management of SLH comprises 4 tenant board members, 4 councillor board members and 4 independent board members. The Board strives to be representative of the community it serves and a commitment to equality underpins everything that it does and a Board member has been appointed Champion for Equality and Diversity to promote this commitment and ensure that SLH delivers its services in a way that is accessible to all.

The Board aims to comply with the National Housing Federation (NHF) ‘excellence in standards of conduct’ code for members and specifically to ‘avoid any discrimination, promote the association’s policy on equality and diversity and make staff aware of it’ by ensuring that that diversity targets are met and monitoring progress against the equality and diversity action plan.

4.2 Senior Management Responsibility

The Management Team have overall responsibility for ensuring that adequate resources are provided for the implementation of the Scheme. They will ensure that this Scheme is applied consistently throughout the company through its Chief Executive, Directors, Managers, and all employees.

Directors will be responsible for ensuring that managers and staff for whom they are responsible act within the provisions of this policy and that any decision that affects tenants is made with due regard to any possible implications for protected groups.

4.3 Manager's Responsibility

Managers and supervisors must:

- Ensure that they are aware of their own individual responsibilities to comply with the requirements of this Scheme.
- Ensure that employees are made aware of the policy and that it is understood by them.
- Ensure that appropriate action is taken to ensure that unfair discrimination does not occur in the workplace or in their area of responsibility.
- Ensure that they follow good practice with regard to equality and diversity and fully participate in any initiatives to promote equality.
- Ensure that they adhere to appropriate procedures in relation to the selection of candidates for recruitment, promotion, training and redeployment and do not discriminate in any of these areas.
- Ensure that employees are released to attend training on Equality and Diversity.
- Ensure that an equality analysis is undertaken on all service developments, policies and procedures consulting with tenants and publicising the results.

4.4 Employee's Responsibility

All employees must:

- Ensure they are aware of their own individual responsibility to comply with the requirements of this Scheme.
- Ensure they do not discriminate unfairly against any other employee or potential employee.
- Co-operate with measures introduced by South Lakes Housing that are designed to ensure equality of opportunity.
- Bring to the attention of the management any acts of discrimination, victimisation or harassment.
- To highlight areas where a customer may be excluded or disadvantaged.

5. Recruitment and Selection

South Lakes Housing will:

- Ensure that the employees of South Lakes Housing are representative of the community it serves.
- Ensure that employees are recruited and promoted on the basis of ability and other relevant objective criteria to carry out the duties and responsibilities of the post for which they have applied.

- Continue to ensure that the recruitment and selection procedure is applied consistently to ensure fair access to all jobs.
- Ensure that external job opportunities are communicated to all sections of the local community.
- Ensure that at least one member of a recruitment panel is trained in equality and diversity.
- Ensure that all employees and applicants are treated with dignity and respect. Where harassment, victimisation or bullying occurs this will be confronted and dealt with through the appropriate policies and procedures.
- Ensure that recruitment policies and procedures are reviewed and updated on a regular basis and reflect and incorporate national legislation and leading models of good practice and codes of conduct.
- Consider adapting organisational requirements or existing practices where they are contrary to employee's cultural and religious needs.
- Involve and communicate effectively with all employees.
- Provide a fair, equal and transparent pay and reward system.

6. Learning and Development

South Lakes Housing will:

- Provide fair access to learning and development opportunities as well as encourage and support employees in fulfilling their potential in line with organisational needs.
- Provide training that complies with the principles of South Lakes Housing's Equality and Diversity Policy.
- Provide equality and diversity training for all new employees as part of the Induction programme.
- Provide general equality and diversity training as part of the corporate learning and development programme for managers and supervisors, tenant representatives and board members.

7. What is a Single Equality Scheme?

A Single Equality Scheme is a document that explains how SLH plans to meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. It requires SLH to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination and enhance equality of opportunity by:

- Eliminating discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Advancing equality of opportunity between person who share a protected characteristic and those who do not share it and
- Fostering good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not share it.

8. What does the scheme do?

Our SES is has been developed to help SLH to:

- Achieve high quality services and improve opportunities for everyone
- Ensure that embed equality and diversity into everything we do, so that it is at the heart of our business.

And we will do this by:

- Finding out what barriers are faced by customers when they access our service
- Finding out what our customers and employees needs are
- Involving customers and employees in decision making
- Communicating our responsibilities with the regard to equality and diversity
- Explaining how we promote equality when delivering our services
- Working in partnership with other organisations to raise understanding within our communities and prevent ignorance and prejudice
- Demonstrate what has changed as result of our SES
- Monitor and report on how we are doing via an annual Equality and Diversity Report.

9. Equality Analysis – what is it?

Equality Analysis is a way of considering the **effect** of a policy or decision on different groups protected from discrimination by the Equality Act. It is less cumbersome and more outcome focussed than the previous equality impact assessing. The regulator requires SLH to undertake equality analysis to help demonstrate commitment to meeting the PSED.

10. How we developed our Single Equality Scheme

SLH is committed to involving our customers and staff when developing policies and procedures. We have used a broad range of consultation and research to develop our Scheme.

10.1 Consultation

SLH has a wide range of consultation mechanisms available that allow us to consult with and involve tenants and stakeholders in developing policies and monitoring outcomes. This is done formally through the Staff Group, Policy Committee, the HR Committee, the Tenants Committee, The Board, and Service Improvement Groups. SLH asked these groups what they thought were SLH's priorities in achieving equality. The responses have informed the development of SLH's SES.

Over the last two years SLH has worked hard to capture data on all the protected groups within our local area and for our customers.

10.2 Data on local community profile

Analysing this data has shown us that South Lakeland's main characteristics can be summarised as:

- Rural isolation, many stone built, off gas properties
- Difficult transport links
- High levels of agriculture and leisure based businesses (farming, hotels, tourist attractions – seasonal work, low paid)
- Affordable housing problems as there is a large proportion of second homes and retirement to this area
- Lower Higher Educational opportunities – (although this is improving with the new University of Cumbria)

- A homogenous population (94.9% white British)
- A small but growing ethnic minority population (0.8%) -the largest group is Chinese
- Predominant religion Christian with less than 1% other religions (mainly Buddhist)
- A small but growing East European migrant worker population –mostly Polish
- High levels of prejudice
- An ageing population – 20% are retired – forecast for nearly 40% of population to be over 60 by 2021
- Loss of younger people
- More women than men
- Higher than the national average long term illness
- Predicted increase in claimants for Disability Living Allowance and Incapacity Benefit
- 6% gay/lesbian/bi-sexual/transgender

10.3 Data on SLH Customer Profile

- Higher proportion of elderly than in the wider community– nearly half of tenants are over 65yrs
- Higher proportion of retired (40%)
- Higher proportion of women (62.6%)
- Stable tenancies – 43% have been tenants for over 21 years
- 46% rely on state benefits
- Higher proportion of disabled than in the community– 27.5% of tenants have a disability in addition to frailty associated with ageing
- Very few tenants from ethnic minorities (0.12%)– very few on waiting lists (24)

10.4 Data on our Workforce Profile

- 100% of employees are White/British
- Majority of employees are in the 45 – 64 age bracket
- 45 % of employees have over 10 years service with 18% having over 20 years service
- 3% of employees have declared a disability
- Higher proportion of female employees (53%)

10.5 Data on our Board of Management Profile

- 50% Board Members are aged over 65
- 25% Board members are female
- 92% of Board Members are White/British
- 82% of Board Members are Christian

10.6 Equality Framework for Local Government Recommendations (EFLG)

The EFLG Assessment made the following recommendations:

- Improve data collection and monitoring in all areas of the business where relevant for race, sexual orientation and religion/ belief. This includes exploring the reasons why the tenant population does not reflect the wider population and where that is the case taking action to redress this

- Ensure that there are explicit equality actions within the delivery plan and managers' service plans. These should be across all areas of inequality (see above) and should be focused on achieving outcomes for existing and potential tenants.
- SLH should seek to improve the diversity of its workforce to more reflect the wider population of South Lakes and not just the existing tenant population. Where possible, SLH could use the work placements from AWAZ and Lindeth College to do this when opportunities arise, and encourage people from diverse backgrounds, such as former work placements, to apply for jobs when they arise.
- Significant improvements are needed to the way Equality Impact Assessment (EqIAs), now superseded by Equality Analysis, are conducted as there are very few actions arising out of the process. Service managers need to own the process and sign off the final product and use the outcomes to improve services for underrepresented groups.

11. Our Action Plan

The action plan incorporates recommendations as a result of the EFLG assessment in October 2010. It by no means covers all the work that goes on across the business and services carried out by both tenants and staff. This action plan will be a live document that will be continually updated as and when needed and the results reported regularly to the Board and in the Annual Report. The Action Plan is at Appendix A.

12. Monitoring our Scheme

The Board and Senior Management Team have put in place several measures to ensure that Equality and Diversity is embedded within the organisation and they will monitor the implementation of this scheme and its associated action plan

- There is an Equality and Diversity Champion at Board level
- Staff have been chosen from across the business to form an Equality Analysis Assessment Group to work through the existing policies, strategies, procedures and service changes and to provide support to managers when developing new policies etc.
- SLH is a member of the local South Lakeland Equality and Diversity Partnership, and the North West Equality Practitioners in Housing to assist with learning best practice and developing our services.
- Regular training has been provided to staff, Tenants' Committee and Board Members across a range of Equality and Diversity issues to raise awareness and confidence in dealing with tenants, community groups and staff
- E & D issues are a standard item on team meeting agendas and all board reports highlight E & D issues
- The Board of Management receives a regular E & D update

Equality and Diversity Action Plan 2011/12 (EFLG RECOMMENDATIONS) 2011/12

Team	Lead Officer	Task	Milestone	Milestone date	Task Date	Progress/ Outcomes	Traffic light	Resources
HM	AK	<p>Improve data collection and monitoring of the business by: Identifying equality characteristics already held</p> <p>Include additional equality characteristics on CBL Application Form</p> <p>Collect missing information on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • existing applicants • new applicants • transfer requests and • existing tenants 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. CBL application form amended to include missing equality characteristics. 2. Biennial review form amended to include 3. Existing applicants re-registered 4. New applicants re-registered 5. Transferring tenants re-registered 6. Biennial visits to include E & D Characteristics questions 7. HM System Updated with E & D Info 	Mar12	Jan 11	<p>CBL application form includes missing E & D Data</p> <p>Info available on all Sheltered Tenants</p>		
BUS	SAB	Improve the links between equalities information and the design, delivery and monitoring of services.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify information already held 2. Identify person responsible for managing and maintaining E & D Data and who distributes E & D information to staff 3. Ensure EIA Group has most up to date information when conducting EIAs 4. Provide E & D information to Chairs of SIG Groups and Line Managers to assist in customer influence in EIA process 					
BUS	SAB	Raise staff confidence and understanding when asking E & D monitoring questions	Compulsory E & D training for all staff timetabled within annual training plan to concentrate on Sexuality characteristic	Mar 12	Sep 11			£1K

Team	Lead Officer	Task	Milestone	Milestone date	Task Date	Progress/ Outcomes	Traffic light	Resources
CEO	PT	Identify areas of inequality across all service areas and identify outcomes for existing and potential tenants.	Produce E & D action plan from EFLG recommendations. Equality targets agreed for all managers. Equality outcomes monitored in 121s Actions identified included in Delivery Plan Report progress to Board, TC and SIGs	Mar 12	Jan 11 Apr 11			
BUS	SAB	Improve services for underrepresented groups.	Using staff monitoring form identify potential members of EIA Group to ensure that it is representative. Ensure that EIA group membership is proportionate with departmental composition Include EIA assessments in staff member's 121s EIA actions to be reported to Policy Group for monitoring progress and sign off	Mar 12				
BUS	SAB	Ensure that the workforce is representative of the wider diverse community	Equality Characteristics are included in biennial staff survey Rurality characteristic included in staff survey Equality monitoring of all applicants					
BUS	SAB	Attain "Excellence" Level of Social Housing Equality Framework	Conduct self evaluation against Effect Toolkit Report findings to SMT Identify actions and resources Undertake Peer Review	Mar 14	Dec 12 Mar 13 Mar14 Sep 14			