

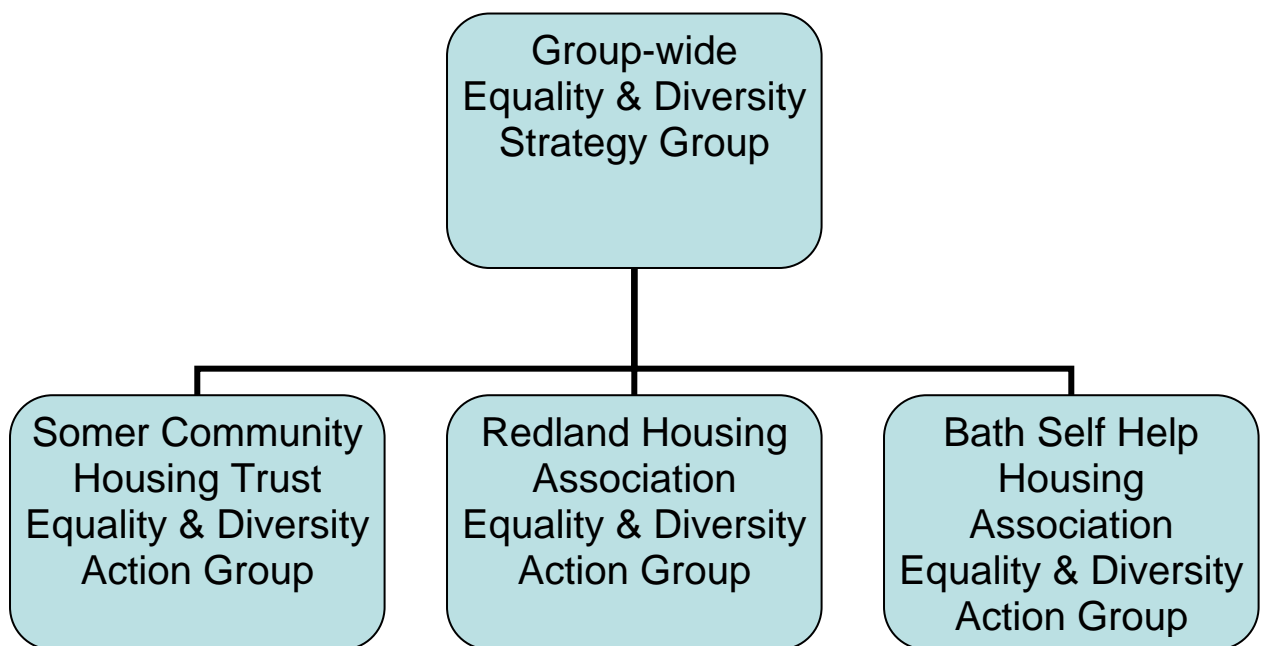


**GROUP-WIDE  
EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY  
STRATEGY  
2008 – 2013**

## **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 The overall goal of the strategy is to achieve equality of opportunity for an increasingly diverse customer and employee population and to provide excellent services that meet the needs and preferences of the individual.
- 1.2 The aim of the revised goal is to strengthen our approach and commitment to equality and diversity. It sets out how we as an organisation interpret equality and diversity, what it means to us specifically. It reflects our intention to be excellent in this area, driving us to meet the Audit Commission's 3 star criteria.
- 1.3 Equality and diversity are very closely related to each other. It is not possible to afford people full equality of opportunity without being aware of the diversity of their circumstances. This includes taking account of not only the differences that are visible, but also those that are invisible. Differences that may not be immediately apparent but which may manifest themselves in distinctive cultures, lifestyles or language and can take a number of forms
- 1.4 The dimensions of difference that most commonly come to mind are: race, age, gender, disability, religion and sexual orientation, this strategy seeks to address these inequalities, but we should not confine our attention to these factors alone. People also differ according to income levels, lifestyle, the kinds of relationship they form, the types of households and areas they live in, and this list is by no means exhaustive. Embracing diversity and promoting equality of opportunity means being sensitive to all these differences in the way that we manage our business.
- 1.5 Equality and diversity is group wide. It impacts on every aspect of the work each member of the organisation engages in. It is integral to the access to and the type of services we provide and how we provide them. It drives the recruitment development and retention of staff. It influences our relationships with stakeholders, partners and the people we do business with and the communities we work in.
- 1.6 This strategy provides the framework to support active leadership to embed equality and diversity into all areas of our work and enable everyone involved to know what their responsibility is in achieving equality and celebrating diversity.
- 1.7 This strategy recognises that all six equality strands are equally important. However, there is flexibility to respond to changes in the external environment and focus resources where they are most needed at any given time.
- 1.8 A rolling action plan has been designed to enable the Group to be innovative and positive in its approach to equality and diversity but also to ensure we meet best practice, our legislative and regulatory duties and ensure continuous improvement.

- 1.9 This strategy and associated action plan have been developed in consultation with Board members, staff, residents and outside agencies. The Group undertook a review of Equality and Diversity in 2007, the recommendations of which lie at the heart of the new strategy.
- 1.10 A structure of action groups will oversee the implementation of the actions underpinning the strategic objectives. We must recognise and embrace the diversity of the organisations within the Group and accept that one size does not fit all. Each member organisation will have its own action group that will work towards achieving the overall goal of the strategy in a way that is appropriate for them.



## **2 Principles for Equality and Diversity**

2.1 The Equality and Diversity Strategy has been drawn up to take into account the following guiding principles to support the Group's commitment to equality:

- To recognise and respect differences;
- To promote understanding and good relations between people who have different backgrounds and experiences;
- To create cohesive and sustainable communities;
- To strive to ensure that the composition of the governing body and workforce fairly represent the communities we work in;
- To achieve equality of satisfaction in the quality, choice and availability of the services provided for customers and staff;
- To ensure that legal and regulatory equality and diversity requirements are met.

## **3 Review**

3.1 The Equality and Diversity Strategy will be reviewed annually. Feedback from customers and other key stakeholders will form part of the review process and this will influence the development and content of the annual action plan.

## **4 Key Objectives**

**(1) To demonstrate strong and positive leadership in promoting a consistent message of Somer Housing Group's commitment to equality & diversity.**

- The commitment of senior staff and Board members will be affirmed, demonstrated and communicated to all staff regularly.
- There will be a Board and Senior Management Champion appointed for each member organisation, whose role is to support and promote key initiatives.
- The Group will have a consistent approach to tackling the six equality strands: race, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, and religion & belief.
- Equality and diversity will form an integral part of the strategic planning and performance management framework of the organisation.
- Equality Impact assessments will be introduced for all major projects, policy development and reviews.
- A budget will be identified to support and enable positive initiative projects.
- The Group will use publicity positively to promote the message and raise awareness.
- The Group will strive to be a Champion of diversity and will be involved in positive campaigns and schemes.
- The Group will produce a summary of our approach in leaflet format and ensure it is Crystal-marked.
- The Group will aim to have a representative staff and governing body and we will take steps to proactively promote opportunities to achieve representation.
- The Group will have a dedicated role for co-ordinating corporate, strategic and group-wide equality and diversity.

**(2) To ensure equality of opportunity underpins every aspect of staff and Board member recruitment, employment, development and training.**

- The Group will collect and analyse information on key aspects of employment against relevant targets to ensure equality of opportunity and fair treatment.
- Staff will be recruited and promoted using a written, fair code of practice.
- Board members will be recruited using a written, fair code of practice.
- Staff involved in recruitment will have been trained to implement the code of practice.
- The Group will use innovative recruitment practices to make the organisation more attractive to under-represented groups.
- Staff terms, conditions and policies will regularly be reviewed to ensure they are fair to all and can effectively tackle any imbalance or discrimination.
- The Group will establish a reputation for good practice on equality and diversity issues that will enable us to attract partners including specialist providers to work with us, as well as recruit skilled and motivated people from all sections of the community.
- The Group will use the information we currently hold to produce employee and Board profiles.
- Equality and diversity induction training will be provided for all new staff and there will be compulsory refresher training for all staff at least every two years. Training will be comprehensive, covering all equality areas. Specific training needs will also be addressed.
- The Group will extend the equality and diversity training programme to Board members, and resident representatives. This training will also be offered to contractors.
- The Group will organise an annual series of events dedicated to promoting diversity.
- The Group will produce a Diversity Handbook which explores language, cultural and communication issues.
- The Group will conduct regular staff satisfaction surveys, which will consider equalities issues.
- The Group will take positive action steps to address under representation within the workforce and governing body.
- The Group will ensure provision is made to support staff and Board members with individual or specific needs.

**(3) To provide services which are accessible, accountable and responsive to all.**

- The Group will understand the profile of its residents by conducting regular tenancy audits/census.
- The Group will hold an up-to-date and complete database of resident information. This information will be kept in line with Data Protection and Confidentiality Policies. We will not repeatedly ask for information we should already hold.
- The Group will use that information to provide services in a way that reflects the individual's needs.

- The Group will have systems in place to identify residents who have support needs, particularly around disability, vulnerability or challenging behaviour. This information will be accessible to staff and contractors as appropriate.
- The Group will work to ensure all groups of residents are similarly satisfied with the services provided and will address why under-represented groups are currently less satisfied.
- The Group will ensure that equalities considerations are built into all work on resident and customer satisfaction and follow a consistent style so that comparative data can be collected.
- Monitoring questions will incorporate all equalities strands where appropriate.
- The Group will consider other ways of exploring satisfaction with service delivery by focusing directly on the six strands and targeting members of those under-represented groups
- The Group will have a suite of performance indicators which will monitor the six equality strands including sexual orientation and religion & belief.
- Targets will be set for these indicators, based on the demographic of the communities in which we work.
- The Group will have non-discriminatory operational policies including allocations, lettings and transfers.
- The Group will provide customer access points which are fully wheelchair accessible, and have hearing loops.
- The Group will pick up operational aspects of the Audit Commission's Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE) 31 and those elements contained within service KLOEs.

**(4) To remove all barriers to effective communication.**

- The Group will understand and respond to residents' preferred communication needs, including issues of language, literacy, hearing and visual impairment and other forms of support in communication. This information will be available on the housing management systems for the benefit of all staff and provided to contractors where appropriate.
- The Group will ensure that the format of information, its content, language and images, positively promotes equality and diversity.
- The Group will ensure that it can, as needed, provide all its published information in alternative formats, including large print, Braille, audio, easy read and in other preferred languages.
- The Group will have access to a translation/interpreting service and this service will be well advertised.
- The Group will promote and train staff in using plain language.
- The Group will have a website which meets standard accessibility requirements.

**(5) To offer all Somer Housing Group residents and the wider community the opportunity to be consulted on and participate in the delivery and development of the Group's services.**

- The Group's criteria for recognising residents' and tenants' associations will include equality considerations.

- The Group will provide training and other support to encourage residents' and tenants' associations to reflect the composition of the areas they cover.
- The Group will use a range of methods to ensure all tenants and residents have the opportunity to be consulted and participate.
- The Group will develop a system to monitor its work on resident involvement and tenant participation in terms of its equality commitments and set targets.
- The Group will monitor the take up of training opportunities to ensure they are being accessed by all sections of the community.
- The Group will build on the work already done in neighbourhoods and communities to establish links to all sections of the community so that we increase our confidence in our understanding and knowledge of peoples' background culture and needs.
- The Group will increase representation from minority groups within the formal resident involvement structures.

**(6) To have strong partnerships with external stakeholders, agencies and organisations to ensure a cohesive approach to working with our communities.**

- The Group will work in partnership with local authorities to ensure that equalities issues are an integral part of the housing need analysis and nomination/ lettings policies and procedures.
- In relation to its development programme the Group will ensure that equality and diversity considerations have been built into any assessment of local housing need.
- The Group will regularly review and update its equal opportunities requirements of its development partners.
- The Group will work in partnership with specialist housing providers to broaden its knowledge of and support for people with a wide range of housing needs within the community.
- The Group will work with relevant organisations to determine and address the current and future housing need of under-represented groups.
- The Group, working with Local Authority partners will provide an effective aids and adaptations service for disabled tenants and residents.
- The Group will draw up agreements with relevant agencies to strengthen external relationships.
- The Group will review progress of its approach to equality and diversity in procurement, to include monitoring performance of contractors, partners and suppliers.
- The Group will continue to play a major role in multi-agency partnerships and forums. And will benchmark, share and cascade information.
- The Group will make use of internet-based best practice networks and websites.

**(7) To ensure fair, equal and consistent treatment in the prevention and tackling of all forms of harassment, discrimination and anti social behaviour.**

- The Group will have an overall strategy for dealing with harassment and anti-social behaviour.

- The Group will have policies and procedures that cover all forms of harassment, anti-social behaviour, nuisance and domestic violence.
- These policies will be supported by detailed procedures, and cover record keeping, target setting, monitoring, preventative work and working with other agencies.
- The Group will ensure that the individual policies and procedures provide consistency and fair treatment.
- The Group will ensure staff are regularly trained on these policies and procedures.
- The Group will consult with staff and residents who have experienced harassment and use this experience to strengthen our approach.
- The Group will sign up to the Government's Respect Agenda.
- The Group will have an active role in local Hate Crime Partnerships.

## **5 The Longer Term Perspective**

### **5.1 In the longer term the Group should look to:**

- Developing our experience, local knowledge and frameworks to adjust proactively and appropriately to social, cultural and demographic changes.