

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY POLICY

Background and scope

BPHA recognises that we have both a service-led and a moral obligation to respond to the wide social diversity in contemporary society and to reflect this as an integral part of our organisational culture and through our policies and practice. This applies to work undertaken for us by external consultants and contractors as well as our own staff.

We are committed to fulfilling wholeheartedly our statutory and regulatory requirements to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and good relations between different groups and to maintaining an organisational culture which values people from all sections of the community. We recognise that BPHA households contain higher than average proportions of people who experience discrimination and other social disadvantage.

The main groups of people who may face direct or indirect discrimination include –

- People from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities, including gypsies and travellers
- Lesbians, gay men, bi-sexual people and people who identify as trans-gender
- Households headed by women (especially lone parents)
- People with disabilities
- Older people or young people
- People with HIV/AIDS
- People with learning difficulties and people with mental health issues
- People suffering from alcohol or substance abuse
- Ex-offenders and people in contact with the criminal justice services
- Those experiencing domestic violence or sexual abuse
- Asylum seekers and refugees

Purpose – policy statement

The policy aims to ensure that we treat each individual with dignity and respect. We recognise that some kinds of difference, discrimination or disadvantage are widely shared and experienced: where individuals have common needs, we also need strategies specific to particular groups of people.

BPHA is committed to –

- Valuing our customers and involving them in the development of services that recognise and promote diversity
- Recruiting a workforce and governance structure that generally reflects local populations
- Supporting and training staff to enable them to demonstrate an understanding of and commitment to equality and diversity and anti-discrimination practices
- Fulfilling wholeheartedly our statutory, regulatory and corporate responsibilities

Elements of the policy

To achieve our aims, we will take action to address discrimination faced by particular groups, as well as action to promote and achieve diversity in employment and service. This will include actively working with other agencies and community organisations to promote equality and eliminate discrimination and harassment.

Employment –

To achieve our aims we will:

- Provide full and fair consideration to all job applications to recruit a representative workforce that can sensitively address the needs of all communities
- Regularly review and widely report on all our recruitment, selection and training and promotion procedures to ensure that they are fair and reflect current best practice
- Provide sufficient training and support to meet all our employees' needs in recognising and discharging their work responsibilities
- Assist all our employees to realise their full potential by ensuring they receive fair consideration of their training and career development needs and promotion opportunities
- Wherever possible modify employment practices and procedures to reduce barriers experienced by members of disadvantaged groups in seeking, and during employment
- Apply vigorous processes to promote a safe and open environment to prevent harassment or bullying and to promote dignity at work
- Promote a flexible working environment where work and home balance requirements, including carer requirements, are recognised and supported in all areas and levels

Race –

To achieve our aims we will:

- Provide services relevant to people's needs, which respect their cultural and social identities
- Make sure that our services are accessible and available to all ethnic groups - majority and minority, recognising that different groups are likely to have different needs
- Strive to have a representative workforce that can sensitively address the needs of all communities
- Promote an environment which is free from racial harassment and racist behaviour

Religion –

To achieve our aims we will :

- Strive to foster an environment which recognises and respects religion and belief and is free from unlawful discrimination or harassment
- Follow best employment practices and services in ways which recognise and respect religion and belief
- Improve the understanding of religion and belief among staff so that they can sensitively address the needs of individuals and of different faith communities

Gender –

To achieve our aims we will:

- Promote an environment which is free from harassment and sexist language and behaviour
- Endeavour to achieve a better gender mix at a senior level.

Sexuality –

To achieve our aims we will :

- Apply and adapt policies and procedures to end unfair treatment and harassment of lesbians, gay men, transgender and bisexual staff and service users

Disability –

To achieve our aims we will:

- Strive to provide services which encourage independent living
- Make sure that all our services and documentation are accessible and available to people with a disability
- Seek to re-new our Positive about Disability accreditation

Methods for continuous improvement

This policy is designed to encourage practical changes. To improve our service, we regularly survey customers including requesting feedback on equality and diversity issues. We therefore expect to update it in the light of experience from practical application and as a result of changes in legislation or our own internal organisation and policies. A major and fundamental review of this policy will take place at least every three years.

Training & Information

Training on Equality and Diversity is part of the core training programme for all staff as all members of staff have a contractual responsibility to –

- Make sure that they understand the values and benefits of equality and diversity
- Demonstrate an understanding of a commitment to equality and diversity and anti-discrimination practices
- Draw to the attention of their line manager any instances of apparent discrimination or any perceived problem in relation to employment or to the provision of services.

In addition, managers are required to undergo training before undertaking any recruitment and selection.

A copy of this policy will be given to all job applicants and staff, to ensure that our policy is put into practice and will also be included with tender information and contracts for work undertaken for us by external organisations and individuals.

Equality & Diversity and Resident Involvement

The aim of this policy is to ensure that all sections of our diverse community receive fair and equal treatment. BPHA aims to maximise the involvement of residents and their influence on decision-making processes as an aid to improving the quality of services delivered.

Financial considerations

BPHA will allocate appropriate resources to ensure full and effective implementation of the policy. Specific allocations include an equality and diversity training budget, interpreting budget and dedicated staff resource.

Legal considerations

BPHA's commitments contained in this policy will include wholehearted compliance with the relevant current and forthcoming statutory duties, including Codes of Practice, Housing Corporation regulations and Good practice notes –

Legislation –

- Equal Pay Act 1970
- Race Relations Act 1976, Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and Race Relations Act 1976 (Amendment) Regulations 2003
- Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and Equality Act 2006
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and 2005 (Amendments 2003 and 2006)
- Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations 1999
- Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003
- Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003
- Civil Partnership Act 2004
- Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006
- Racial and Religious Hatred 2006
- Equality Act 2006

In addition, the following BPHA policies are particularly relevant –

- Aids & Adaptations
- Allocations
- Anti-Social Behaviour
- Bullying and Harassment
- Customer Services
- Domestic Violence
- Housing management
- Recruitment & Selection
- Support & Protection of vulnerable people

Policy appeals

Appeals against this policy will normally be via the Complaints procedure or as part of BPHA's ongoing customer surveys and reviews.

Mechanism for delivering policy and other issues

BPHA has a strategic framework for equality and diversity. The Board of Management, Executive Team and the Equality & Diversity Strategic group lead this, whilst also enabling and encouraging departmental initiatives and development through Local Delivery Plans. We will ensure that we consider the impact on equality and diversity in all our policies, strategies and decision-making processes.

The Equality & Diversity strategic lead officer has responsibility for monitoring progress against the strategic Equality & Diversity plan. The Equality & Diversity Strategy group will obtain feedback on how the policy is operating internally and externally to ascertain the

effectiveness of procedure to implement policy and to enable the policy and strategic plan to be updated. Every staff member has a responsibility to help deliver this policy.

Monitoring

Progress against the Equality & Diversity Strategy and Local Delivery Plans will be reported to the Board or Customer Services Committee, as appropriate.

Health & Safety

BPHA is strongly committed to achieving the highest standards of health and safety. We will actively promote a culture of health and safety best practice, which will lead to the avoidance of, or reduction in, risks to the health and safety of customers and staff. We are particularly committed to the tackling of hate crime, and Aids and Adaptations to the homes of residents with disability. See Health and safety policy PS022

Review Period

A major and fundamental review of this policy will take place at least every three years. The Equality and Diversity Strategy group may call for additional interim reviews to reflect regulatory, legislative or organisational developments.

<p>Please respond to Carol Solaiman with any comments about this draft by 20 January 2007. Telephone number: 01234 221343; email: carols@bpha.org.uk</p>
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