

# Equality and Diversity Policy

2010 – 2013



Policy ref: PS013 Approved by Customer Services Committee

Date approved: 09/02/10 Reviewed every three years

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## A. BACKGROUND AND SCOPE

**bpha** recognises our 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. **bpha** values and aims to encourage diversity in everything we do. We would seek to challenge discrimination and intolerance based on an individual's characteristics.

**bpha** is committed to fulfilling wholeheartedly 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 may 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
- 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
- People who are financially excluded
- People undergoing gender reassignment, transsexuals, and people living a different gender to their birth

### Protected Characteristics

Characteristics which are protected by legislation are:

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- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

## B. PURPOSE

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.
- Everybody being entitled to an environment which promotes dignity and respect to all. No form of intimidation, discrimination, harassment or bullying will be tolerated
- Equality and diversity being central to the viability of the business
- Treating breaches of equality and diversity as misconduct for employees that could lead to disciplinary action
- This policy is fully supported by the Board , Customer Services Committee, senior management and work place representatives

## C. 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

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and community organisations to promote equality and eliminate discrimination and harassment.

## 1. Employment

**bpha** wants to have a workforce which reflects our local communities and to achieve this we will:

- Equality in the workplace is good practice and sound business sense
- 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
- Create an environment in which individual differences and the contributions of all our staff are recognised and valued
- Strive to have a workforce at all levels that can sensitively address the needs of all communities
- Ensure all employees are entitled to a working environment that promotes dignity and respect to all. Bullying, intimidation or harassment will not be tolerated
- We will monitor recruitment, redundancy selection and disciplinary actions across the seven equality strands to ensure fairness.

## 2. Race

To achieve our aims we will:

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- Provide services relevant to people's needs, which respect their cultural and social identities
- Ensure 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 our communities
- Promote an environment that is free from racial harassment and racist behaviour.

### 3. Religion/belief

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.

### 4. 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.

### 5. 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.

### 6. Disability

To achieve our aims we will:

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- 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 renew our Positive about Disability accreditation.

## 7. Age

To achieve our aims we will:

- Not use outdated and inaccurate assumptions about a person's ability due to age
- When allocating properties only use age as a selection criteria when this is objectively justifiable for the better performance of a service such as sheltered housing, extra care or where local lettings policies are used to create sustainable communities.

## 8. Gender Reassignment/Transsexual

- Gender reassignment/transsexual is where someone intends to change their gender or lives to a gender different to that of their birth

To achieve our aims we will:

- Not treat people less favourably if they intend or have undergone gender reassignment
- Treat customers and employees with dignity and will address them in the gender they choose to live and recognise transsexual people as of their new sex for all purposes including the work place and housing services.

## D. 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 will use customer profiling information to assess the impact of this and other policies and procedures in our work. The policy will therefore be updated as a result of practical experiences 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.

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## E. TRAINING AND 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 –

- Ensure 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
- Alert managers to any instances of apparent discrimination or any perceived problem in relation to employment or to the provision of services
- Undertake initial training and refresher training every three years.

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

This policy will be given to all job applicants and staff, to ensure that it 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 and diversity training will also be essential for all those who are involved closely with **bpha**; this will include the Board, Customer Services Committee, involved residents and contractors.

## F. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY AND RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT

The aim of this policy is to ensure that all our services are delivered fairly and all sections of our community receive treatment and services appropriate to their needs. Resident involvement is key to improving services for our residents who face direct or indirect discrimination. By working with residents we will seek to further understand how to best tailor services to meet residents' diverse needs.

## G. 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.

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## H. 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 (Equal Value Amendment 1984)
- 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
- Protection for Harassment Act 1997

We will also be mindful of new legislation such as the Single Equality Bill.

In addition, the following **bpha** policies are particularly relevant –

- Aids & Adaptations
- Allocations
- Anti-Social Behaviour
- Bullying and Harassment
- Customer Services
- Domestic Violence
- Housing Management
- Health & Safety
- Recruitment & Selection
- Support & Protection of Vulnerable People
- Hate Crime Reporting
- Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1994

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## I. POLICY APPEALS

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

## J. MECHANISM FOR DELIVERING POLICY AND OTHER ISSUES

**bpha** has a strategic framework for equality and diversity. The Board, Executive Team and the Equality & Diversity Strategy Group lead this, whilst also enabling and encouraging departmental initiatives and development through Local Delivery Plans. Equality and diversity is considered in all our policies, strategies and decision-making processes. **bpha** will use Equality Impact Assessments to monitor the effect of policies and procedures as they are reviewed to ensure they are fully inclusive.

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, the Board, Customer Services Committee and involved resident has a responsibility to help deliver this policy.

## K. HEALTH AND 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.

## L. MONITORING

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

## M. 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.