

equality, diversity and inclusion framework

May 2020



1. Introduction

We pride ourselves on putting our customers and employees at the heart of what we do and want to create an inclusive environment, treating people as individuals and celebrating their diversity.

Our approach to equality, diversity and inclusion lies firmly within our value to 'Do the right thing for our customers, our people and our business'. We want to go beyond just delivering our legal obligations and recognise the value in the diversity we all bring.

Equality and inclusion run throughout the way we operate within believe housing, rather than being a standalone issue and this framework brings together our approach in one place. Everyone has an important role in helping believe housing to be both a great place to work and a great landlord.

2. Purpose of the framework

A clear equality framework helps us to:

- Demonstrate how we approach equality, diversity and inclusion across believe housing
- Ensure that we are meeting our legal and regulatory responsibility
- Create a culture within believe housing, where inclusion goes beyond the legal responsibility and is focussed on every employee feeling valued and recognised for their individual needs and the skills, knowledge and experience that they bring to the organisation
- Highlight the ways we consider the impacts of our decisions and approach for different customers

3. Our vision and values

Our vision is:

"We believe in life without barriers...."

If everyone expects more they can achieve more and we can transform lives together. It is this power of 'more' that will let people realise what is possible – challenge perceptions, raise aspirations and create inclusive, vibrant communities."

Our values and behaviours set out how we will go about achieving our ambitions, recognising that the culture and the way we go about our business is as important as the output. This is central to our approach to be fair and inclusive.

4. Equality Statement:

We are committed to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion through all our activities as a housing provider and employer. We do not believe that equality and diversity activity should be viewed in isolation, instead it is an integral aspect of our day-to-day behaviours and working in the believe way.

We will:

- Ensure we work to remove any direct and indirect discrimination and the eradication of any harassment or victimisation.
- Recognise that no two people are the same and treat everyone as an individual.
- Understand the diversity of our customer base and deliver services which recognise this.
- Recognise the positive impact a diverse workforce brings to believe to help us achieve our vision of a life without barriers.
- Recognise the challenges and needs of our communities and finding ways to support them to reach their potential.
- Ensure that the behaviours we expect of our people are integrated in to how we work and how we treat each other. They will be embedded in to how we attract, recruit and retain our people as well as how we performance manage and manage talent/succession across our business

5. Roles and Responsibilities

Everyone has a role to play in helping us to create a fair and inclusive environment within believe housing. This includes our Board, Executive Management Team (EMT), Senior Leadership Team (SLT), employees and customers.

Board and SLT set the direction and our commitment to create an inclusive workplace and customer experience. This is supported by our policies and procedures which set the parameters for our work.

However, the behaviour of each of our employees is key to bringing this to life within our business.

6. Legal and regulatory context

There are a range of legal and regulatory requirements for us to ensure we meet in our approach to equality and inclusion

Equality Act 2010 – This legislation protects employees and service users from discrimination, harassment and victimisation across the protected characteristics of:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender Reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnerships
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual Orientation

Public Sector Equality Duty – As a housing provider delivering public functions we are expected to meet the general public sector duties. This means we have to give due regard (when performing those functions) to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Human Rights – The European Convention on Human Rights gives people protection for a range of human rights, a number of which apply to our role as a housing provider.

Regulator for Social Housing Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard - This standard sets out a requirement for housing providers to:

- Treat all tenants with fairness and respect
- Demonstrate that they understand the different needs of their tenants, in relation to the equality strands and tenants with additional support needs.

7. Collecting and reporting equality information

We collect a range of demographic and equality information from our customers, employees and Board members. This information is used to help us understand the makeup of our customer base, our workforce and our governance structures. We report a summary of this annually through our Equality Annual Report and are able to compare it to the wider profile of County Durham, the regional picture and nationally, where that data is accurate and available.

We will review the customer profile of people making complaints and customer satisfaction to identify any trends.

We also publish information on our Gender Pay Gap annually alongside information about our plans to narrow the gap and create gender equality.

8. Understanding the equality impact of our policies, decisions and plans

We want to make sure that we consider the implications of our policies, plans or decisions we make so that we can take any actions to reduce the impact on different people. We also want to make sure that we think about this from the outset and that we do this in the most effective way.

Through our impact assessment process, we will initially screen policies and procedures to see if there is a likely impact and help us determine if a full assessment is needed. This initial screening allows us to identify and potential disadvantages for customers or employees depending on the policy whilst supporting the services to either amend or understand the issues identified.

We report on any implications from these assessments in reports presented to Board for approval.

9. Our employees:

We want our people to see believe housing as a great place to work and somewhere they would recommend to their friends and family.

Through our work to develop the believe housing culture and transform our people services we are creating a place where people can feel comfortable to bring their whole selves to work.

We also have a range of policies and procedures in place to support employees including our Dignity at Work policy.

Beyond this we have a range of support in place to support employee wellbeing.

Our Equality Action Plan sets out a range of objectives and plans to help work towards gender parity and more widely to develop our approach as an employer.

10. Our Customers:

We want to make sure that our customers are at the heart of everything we do and the services we provide are delivering great value whilst meeting their needs.

We gather feedback from customers to inform our decisions and plans and this helps us to ensure that we are creating inclusive services and understand specific needs.

When delivering homes and services we will:

- Make sure that everyone is given the necessary support to apply for our homes and use our services
- Make sure we consider people's needs in the way we communicate
- Tackle any reports of harassment or bullying in our neighbourhoods
- Monitor customer complaints and satisfaction by different characteristics to identify if there are any trends
- Consider the needs of current and future customers when designing the specification of our new developments

- Support people to continue to live effectively in their homes where we can
- Respond promptly and effectively to any reports of hate crime
- Work in partnership with other organisations to tackle wider issues
- Provide support through our Community Investment programmes to deliver projects which meet the needs in our neighbourhoods including improving mental health.

11. Collaboration and partnership working:

We know that in order to drive our equality, diversity and inclusion activities that working in partnership can often deliver even better results. We are part of a range of networks and groups that help us share and learn from other organisations.

We also continue to look at opportunities to work with external partners to deliver services or activities on our behalf.

12. Ensuring Success:

Our annual equality report will set out the activities we have undertaken during the year which have supported the overall commitments in our equality and inclusion statement.

During the year through our equality impact assessments, monitoring of equality data and feedback and partnership working we will identify any further priorities to help us achieve our commitments. This will help us to continue to “Do the right thing”.

A key aspect of this activity is ensuring that it becomes embedded within the organisation and that staff across believe housing understand and acknowledge their role in ensuring we create a great, inclusive environment and fair and consistent services.

We will use awareness raising exercises with our Board and employees to make sure that we are all clear on our role.

13. Associated Documents:

Equality, diversity and inclusion is a consideration in all our key documents.