

Equality and Diversity Annual Report 2010/11

Foreword

Welcome to our Equality and Diversity report for 2010/2011. As always, this has been an exciting year where we have continued to work hard to improve services for our customers and employees.

We have achieved a number of actions originally set out in our Single Equality Scheme back in 2008 to make sure that we continue to promote equality and remove discrimination in the work we do. We continue to do this in partnership with our customers, employees and partners as we know the best way to achieve real results is to work together.

This year has also seen major changes to the requirements placed on us both in legislation and the regulation we have to follow and a new government coming into power. The Tenant Services Authority launched their new framework in April 2010, setting out 6 national standards that all landlords in social housing must demonstrate we are meeting, as well as putting a requirement on us to work with customers to agree 'local offers' based on the specific needs of our customers living in Gateshead.

2010 also saw the Equality Act coming into force, bringing all equality legislation together and widening the protection from discrimination to everyone whether this is on the basis of age, religion, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

This makes equality and diversity a both exciting but challenging area for us and we will keep the momentum going in 2011/12 to show real improvements for us all.

Jon Mallen-Beadle – Director of Corporate Services

Introduction

Equality and diversity is at the heart of the company's work with one of company values being 'Embracing Equality'.

In 2008 we published our first Single Equality Scheme, which having been developed with customers, employees, partners and stakeholders set out our overall approach to equality. The aim of the scheme was to replace the numerous equality plans we previously had including a Young Persons Housing Plan, Race Equality Scheme, Gender Equality Scheme and Corporate Equality Plan and instead have one central document to focus our work in this area.

The scheme sets out three main objectives which are:

- Maintain a corporate commitment to equality issues
- Work in partnership with customers and stakeholders to deliver equitable services and improve social cohesion in the borough
- Be an equal opportunities employer with a workforce that represents the community it serves and is committed to equality and diversity.

In order to achieve these objectives, we agreed an action plan with specific tasks to help us meet our goals. We listened to feedback and concerns people had that by just having this one plan, the specific issues of different groups may lose emphasis. To do this we have made sure we continue to have specific actions where needed for different groups, and identify ways to engage with a range of people and give each group a voice.

We have checked how we were progressing against this action plan on a regular basis and our board of directors receive regular reports to challenge our progress and drive our work forward.

This year we also carried out a review of our approach to equality to make sure that our customers and our employees continue to see real improvements. This review involved talking to our customers, our service managers, our partners and our employees to find out where we were doing well and also highlighting some areas we could improve. We developed a new action plan following the review and our Resources and Audit Committee receive an update on this at every meeting. This report sets out what we have done over the last 12 months as well as setting out our challenges for the next year ahead.

Highlights from 2010/11

These are some of the highlights from our work this year:

- **April** – We carried out a review of the housing company's approach to equality and diversity. Following the review we agreed a new action plan to deliver the recommendations.
- **May** – We held our Running your Home course with a group of young people 'Not in education, employment or training' (NEET) to help understand the responsibilities of being a tenant and how to budget effectively.
- **June** – We delivered training to employees on Domestic Abuse awareness, giving our staff the knowledge and guidance to recognise potential abuse and what action they should take.
- **July** – We held our second involvement week Opportunity Knocks, talking to people in their communities about the services we provide. We started the week off with a stand at Northern Pride, the regions LGBT festival.
- **August** - The involvement team went along to the Nigerian Community Information Day at Gateshead Old Town Hall.
- **September** – We attended Gateshead College Freshers Fayre to talk to young people about how to apply for housing with the housing company and the opportunities available for them to get involved in decision making.
- **October** – Sent out our new forms 'Tell us about you' with rent statements to all tenants to get up to date information about our customers to make sure we are delivering the services people need. October also saw the launch of the ARCH Hate Crime reporting system in Gateshead of which all our housing offices are official hate crime reporting centres.
- **November** – Held a session for our tenants and leaseholders called 'Recognising Differences in people' to give our involved customers a better understanding of issues around discrimination, equality and diversity and challenging stereotyping
- **December** – Jon Mallen-Beadle, our Corporate Lead for Equality and Diversity was invited to speak for the second year running at Capita's 7th Equality and Diversity Seminar, offering learning and advice based on our experiences of tackling equality and diversity.

- **January** – Rolled out new e-learning for all our employees, directors and Board Members on Equality and Diversity to bring everyone up to date with the requirements of the new equality act.
- **February** – Won the TPAS Award in the Northern Region for Equality and Diversity for our work on the Single Equality Scheme and Accompanying projects
- **March** – We joined up with the LGBT Federation and other local housing providers to get a better understanding of employment issues and potential improvements to services for LGBT tenants and leaseholders. We also signed up to Stonewall's Diversity Champions programme, demonstrating our commitment to LGB equality as an employer and a service provider and entered the Workplace Equality Index for the first time.

Legislation and Regulation

Tenant Services Authority (TSA) Regulatory Framework

In April 2010, the TSA launched a regulatory framework for all social housing providers to follow. This set out 6 national standards which landlords are required to demonstrate they are meeting, supplemented by a requirement for landlords to work with their customers to identify local offers in specific areas such as estate management.

The first standard relates to Involvement and Empowerment and specifically includes a section on 'Understanding and responding to the diverse needs of tenants'. This requires us to show how we treat all tenants and leaseholders with fairness and respect, and demonstrate how we understand the different needs of our customer groups in relation to the protected characteristics.

We are required to produce an Annual Report for Tenants and Leaseholders with customers to show how we are meeting these standards. Although the TSA, is due to be disbanded, the Homes and Community Agency will take over the regulatory functions and so this requirement will continue.

Equality Act

In October 2010 the Equality Act was brought into force, bringing together numerous key pieces of equality legislation.

The act was intended to strengthen and simplify existing legislation and protect individuals from unfair treatment, creating a fairer, more equal society.

The act also identified 'protected characteristics' providing protection from discrimination on the basis of:

- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race – including ethnic or national origins, colour and nationality
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

The act also introduced a General Duty for public organisations to follow.

Although housing organisations aren't explicitly listed under the general duty, as the housing provider for the local authority receiving public funding, there is an expectation for ALMOs to follow the duty.

The general duty states that in exercising public functions, public authorities must have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Advance equality of opportunity
- Foster good relations – including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding

Social Housing Equality Framework (SHEF)

The SHEF was developed to provide a framework for housing providers to use as a performance and improvement tool. This followed the introduction of the Equality Framework for Local Government, offering a framework which reflected the sector more specifically.

The framework includes three levels, Developing, Achieving and Excellent, highlighting a range of objectives that would be expected from an organisation working at each level.

As part of the external review of our approach to Equality and Diversity, this included an assessment against this framework during which they stated the company was 'well on the way to fulfilling the excellence requirements'.

How are we doing?

The Single Equality Scheme set out three overarching goals which our work on equalities fit into. This section gives you some information about how we have progressed in each area.

Maintain a corporate commitment to equality issues

Over the past 12 months we have done a lot of work to make sure that we don't lose the momentum in promoting equality and producing positive outcomes for the people we work for and with. Our Single Equality Scheme continues to provide the focus for our work on equality and diversity working to achieve our key value of 'Embracing Equality'.

Our Board plays a key role in ensuring that we are fulfilling our responsibilities with the Resources and Audit Committee receiving a report at every meeting on our progress against our Equality and Diversity Action plan.

In April 2010, we carried out an external review of the way we deal with equality and diversity both for customers and as an employer. This helped us to understand and recognise the areas where we are doing well and some areas we needed to concentrate on over the next year or so. This review looked at the following areas:

- Diversity KLOE
- TSA's Diversity Standard (contained within the Empowerment standard)
- Code of Practice for Racial Equality
- Social Housing Equality Framework

Overall this review recognised that the company had developed a workplace culture which has embraced its commitments to promote equality and diversity

To make sure that all our employees are kept regularly up to date with equality issues, we have put an article in each edition of our internal magazine **HomeWork** to raise awareness of key changes or activities the housing company has been involved in.

Our **Equality and Diversity Working Group** has continued to meet to discuss upcoming issues, consider performance information and to help develop new projects in this area. Service managers from each area of the company are represented on the working group to act as a champion for equality, passing key messages back to their teams.

This year we reviewed the way we carried out **Equality Impact Assessments** to see that we are getting the most out of the process for our customers and as a company. In February, we held a day of training focussing on this. This involved our Corporate and Senior Management Teams looking at their role of challenging the assessments they receive to make sure they are robust and have considered all relevant information to make the assessment. We also held workshops with service managers to look at some examples such as the Repairs Service, Gas Servicing and our Moving Forward programme to see how we could improve on the assessments we had drafted.

In March 2011, we achieved the **Customer Service Excellence** accreditation. This involved an external assessor talking to us, reading our policies, procedures and reports and meeting with customers to see that we can evidence excellent customer service across the company. Some of the key areas looked at within this included how well we know our customers and what we have done with the information to improve our services.

Involvement, partnership and access

Knowing our customers

We have been collecting **information about our customers** for a number of years including age, gender, disability and ethnicity. This year, we wrote out to all customers with their quarterly rent statement to check the information we already had and to ask some additional questions. We use some of this information on a daily basis to help us respond in the best way to our customers such as knowing that someone requires an interpreter or needs longer to answer the door when visiting them in their home. Other information helps us look at whether different groups of people have different experiences of our services so that we can identify where we can make improvements. This information can be used for looking at different areas such as satisfaction from surveys, levels of rent arrears or allocations of properties.

At the end of this year (31 March 2011), we knew that we had 20681 tenancies with:

- 467 tenants being of BME ethnicity
- 5703 tenants declaring they had a disability, with the highest proportion being mobility issues or hearing impairments

- 832 tenants were under 25, with the most common age bracket being between 60-74 (4903)
- 3729 tenants had told us their faith or religion with the highest proportion being Christian.
- 3134 tenants had declared their sexuality with 54 stating they were Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual
- 1088 people had stated they require communication with us in a particular format, of which large print is the most common with 806 people requesting this

We will continue to collect and update this information on a regular basis to make sure that we are delivering the services our customers need in the way they require it.

Working with customers to deliver services

We have continued to work with our customers to make sure that the services we are delivering meet their needs and that there are no barriers to accessing them.

Our BME Housing Forum and Disabled Persons Housing Forum meet quarterly to look at the potential issues affecting how these customers receive or access services and have worked to secure improvements to the way services are delivered. This year the group have looked at areas including hate crime reporting, the review of the Adaptations Service and differing levels of rent arrears for different ethnic groups.

We also hold a number of events during the year to get customers involved in decision making and monitor the representation of people getting involved to make sure that it reflects our customer profile. This helps to us to get different perspectives and experiences to improve services.

Working with our partners

We recognise that we can't achieve our objectives for equality working alone and that the best outcomes for our employees and customers come from working with our partners.

This year we worked with Tyneside Women's Health to offer training and support to victims of Domestic Violence "Undoing the Damage of Domestic Abuse" (UDDA). This course supported 9 women to reclaim their lives, identify coping strategies and build a new future without fear of becoming a victim of domestic violence again.

This year the company has also contributed to the newly formed Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Domestic Abuse Forum, seeing a range of partners such as support agencies, other local housing providers and councils to come together to address domestic abuse issues specific to LGBT people. In particular the group has raised awareness through attendance at Northern Pride and by improving the relationships between voluntary and statutory organisations to respond more effectively to victims of abuse.

We also formed a number of partnering arrangements to allow us to deliver specific support to our tenants, which had been identified through customer profiling. This included a Mental Health Link Worker, Brief Alcohol Intervention

Worker and a Parenting Support Officer and the impact of these arrangements has been regularly monitored and reviewed to ensure that this is delivering the service our customers need.

During this year we made:

- 55 referrals to the Parenting Support Officer
- 56 referrals to the Brief Intervention Alcohol Worker
- 66 referrals to the Mental Health Link Worker

In October 2010, the ARCH Hate Crime reporting system was launched. Gateshead ARCH is designed to support victims of hate crime, take action against perpetrators and help to tackle the causes of hate crime and harassment. All housing company offices, including our head office, Keelman House are designated hate crime reporting centres. Our Neighbourhood Relations Team attend regular meetings as part of the Safer Gateshead Partnership to monitor reports of hate crime and provide a targeted and coordinated approach to tackling hate crime. In this year, the housing company received 46 reports of hate crime.

Employment and Training

We carry out a personal details audit every 3 years to collect key information about employees. This information is used in a range of ways such as to monitor applications and successful applicants. Although this year we were not due to carry out this exercise, we provided information in our HomeWork magazine for employees on the reasons for collection and encouraged people to tell us of any changes as they occur. This ensures that the information we are reporting on and basing decisions on is current.

In order to provide support and information to employees, our Human Resources team launched a series of drop in sessions in August for employees to talk to an HR advisor in confidence about any issues they may have about their employment.

We achieved the **Positive about Disabled People** status again this year having demonstrated that we are committed to employ, keep and develop the abilities of disabled staff.

In March 2011, following our first entry into the **Stonewall Workplace Equality Index**, the company signed up to the Diversity Champions Programme. This demonstrates the company's commitment to progressing LGB equality as well as providing a support and information network for the company to access to drive this work forward. In our first entry, we scored 79 out of a possible 200 points, with the average housing score being 101. Through joining the Diversity Champions programme we gained access to information and advice on how we could improve our performance, identifying actions that would benefit both LGB people and the wider employment and customer base.

In January 2011, we rolled out a new version of the online **equality and diversity training** to let everyone know their roles and responsibilities under the new equality legislation. This training is mandatory for everyone in the company including our Chief Executive and Board Members. Our managers also completed an additional programme focussing on **Managing Diversity**,

highlighting issues relevant to recruitment and selection, and managing people with different needs.

We have also provided training in specific areas such as Domestic Abuse awareness, Safeguarding Children, Immigration and Housing Rights and ARCH reporting.

We continue to run an accreditation programme for **Recruitment and Selection** to ensure that officers involved in this process behave in a fair and open way, following the company's policy. During this year, an additional 9 managers went through this training. In addition to this, all interview panels continue to have a member of HR present to ensure that recruitment decisions are fair and in line with our policy.

This year we have continued to run a number of health and wellbeing initiatives for employees, recognising the positive impact this brings both to the individual and the company. This has included offering free health checks for employees over 40 through South of Tyne and Wear NHS, access to chiropractor and chiropodist services, free passes to local gyms, eye tests, pamper days and workstation assessments.

Performance Framework

Customer Profile of main tenant as at 31/03/2011

Gender	Total	%
Female	11889	57.49%
Male	8564	41.41%
Agency	228	1.10%
Total	20681	100.00%

Age	Total	%
No Date of Birth	3	0.01%
Under 16	230	1.11%
16 - 24	832	4.02%
25 - 39	4246	20.53%
40 - 49	3607	17.44%
50 - 59	3267	15.80%
60 - 74	4903	23.71%
75 and over	3593	17.37%
Total	20681	100.00%

Ethnicity	Total	%
Agency	228	1.10%
Asian Or Asian British Bangladeshi	10	0.05%
Asian Or Asian British Indian	12	0.06%
Asian Or Asian British Other	82	0.40%
Asian Or Asian British Pakistan	12	0.06%
Black Or Black British African	161	0.78%
Black Or Black British Caribbean	6	0.03%
Black Or Black British Other	26	0.13%
Chinese	19	0.09%
Mixed Other	18	0.09%
Mixed White & Asian	15	0.07%
Mixed White & Black African	11	0.05%
Mixed White & Black Caribbean	4	0.02%
Other	91	0.44%
Refused	15	0.07%
Unknown At Data Load	23	0.11%
White British	19683	95.17%
White Irish	20	0.10%
White Other	223	1.08%
Blank	22	0.11%
Total BME	467	2.26%
Total	20681	100.00%

People of a disability	Total	%
N	14715	71.32%
ND	211	1.02%
R	3	0.01%
Y	5703	27.64%
Total	20632	100.00%

Types of Disabilities	Total
Blind or visually impaired	2318
Deaf or hearing impaired	3002
Learning Disability	1519
Mental Health	2206
Mobility Difficulties	4684
Wheelchair User	2087
Total	15816

Special Requirements	Total
3RD_PARTY	27
AUDIO	53
BRAILLE	6
LARGE PRINT	806
LIP READING	6
INTERPRETER OTHER_LANGUAGE	19
BSL INTERPRETER	15
TRANSLATION	9
TYPE TALK	16
	131
Total	1088

Faith or Religion	Total	%
Blank	16952	81.97%
Buddhist	4	0.02%
Christian	2832	13.69%
Hindu	1	0.00%
Humanist	16	0.08%
Jewish	1	0.00%
Muslim	26	0.13%
No Religion	462	2.23%
Other	206	1.00%
Prefer Not To Say	180	0.87%
Sikh	1	0.00%
Total	20681	100.00%

Sexuality	Total	%
Bisexual	29	0.14%
Blank	17034	82.37%
Gay Man	14	0.07%
Gay Woman / Lesbian	11	0.05%
Heterosexual / Straight	3080	14.89%
Prefer Not To Say	513	2.48%
Total	20681	100.00%

Annual Survey Satisfaction Information 2010/11

		Satisfaction with overall services	Satisfaction with neighbourhood	Satisfaction with home	Satisfaction that rent and service charges are VFM	Satisfaction with opportunities to participate
	Total count	90.1	87.7	87.4	88	80.1
Ethnicity	White British	89.16	87.6	87.4	86.3	79.3
	White Irish	100	80	80	100	100
Gender	White European	no responses	no responses	no responses	no responses	no responses
	White Other	86.9	65.2	78.3	78.3	82.6
	Non BME	89.2	87.3	86.84	87.4	79.4
	BME	92.16	78	88.46	90.2	83.33
	Male	90.4	88.3	87.8	88	79.7
	Female	89.8	87.1	87.2	88.1	81.9
Disability	Yes	90.7	89.7	88.5	89.4	82.4
	No	89.6	86.5	86.9	87.3	79.8
Age	under 25	83	87.5	73.1	87.5	65
	25-39	85.7	78.6	75.6	77.7	72.1
	40-49	84.7	75.4	78.9	83.6	73
	50-59	87.7	85.5	88.00	86	79.4
	60-74	92.8	91.6	90.8	90.7	84.5
	75+	93.2	94.6	93.6	93.1	86.5
Sexual Orientation	Bisexual	no data	no data	no data	no data	no data
	Gay man	no data	no data	no data	no data	no data
	Gay woman/lesbian	no data	no data	no data	no data	no data
	Heterosexual/Straight	no data	no data	no data	no data	no data

Religion or Belief	Prefer not to say	no data	no data	no data	no data	no data
	Not known	no data	no data	no data	no data	no data
				no data		
	Buddhist	no data	no data	no data	no data	no data
	Christian	no data	no data	no data	no data	no data
	Hindu	no data	no data	no data	no data	no data
	Humanist	no data	no data	no data	no data	no data
	Jewish	no data	no data	no data	no data	no data
	Muslim	no data	no data	no data	no data	no data
	Sikh	no data	no data	no data	no data	no data
Transgender	Other	no data	no data	no data	no data	no data
	No religion	no data	no data	no data	no data	no data
	Prefer not to say	no data	no data	no data	no data	no data
	Not known	no data	no data		no data	no data
	Not known	no data	no data	no data	no data	no data

NB. In 2010/11 the levels of data held on customers' sexual orientation, gender identity and religion or belief were so small that it was not possible to break down the satisfaction data on this basis. As the collection of profile information increases, we will be able to report this information more effectively.

Use of support services

Language line usage by language:

Language	Line Calls	Total calls
Albanian		0
Arabic		3
Bengali		0
Cantonese		5
Chinese		0
Czech		5
Farsi		1
French		0
Hindi		0
Korean		0
Kurdish		1
Mandarin		4
Polish		15
Portuguese		0
Punjabi		0
Russian		0
Serbian		1
Slovak		2
Sorani		0
Somali		0
Spanish		1
Swahili		0
Tamil		0
Thai		0
Tigrinya		0
Turkish		4
Urdu		0
Total		42

Other support services:

Face to face interpreters – other language	12
BSL interpreters	7

		% of company employees	% of Board members	% of top five per cent earners	% of new employees	% applications received (external)	% of employees ending their employment
	Total count	375	15	24	26	168	51
Ethnicity	White British	97.38%	86.00%	100.00%	100.00%	60.60%	98.00%
	White Irish	0.26%		0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	White European	0.00%		0.00%	0.00%	0.60%	0.00%
	White Other	0.26%		0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	Mixed White/Black Caribbean	0.00%		0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	Mixed White/Black African	0.00%		0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	Mixed White Asian	0.00%		0.00%	0.00%	0.70%	0.00%
	Mixed Other	0.00%		0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	Asian/Asian British Indian	0.26%		0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	Asian/Asian British Pakistani	0.00%		0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	Asian/Asian British Bangladeshi	0.26%		0.00%	0.00%	0.60%	0.00%
	Asian/Asian British Other	0.26%		0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	Black/Black British	0.00%		0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	Black/Black British Caribbean	0.00%	7.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	Black/Black British African	1.06%	7.00%	0.00%	0.00%	1.20%	0.00%
	Black/Black British Other	0.26%		0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	2.00%
	Chinese	0.00%		0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	Other Ethnic Group	0.00%		0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	Refused To Provide Information	0.00%		0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	Not known	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	36.30%	0.00%

Employment Monitoring:

		% of company employees	% of Board members	% of top five per cent earners	% of new employees	% applications received (external)	% of employees ending their employment
Gender	Male	44.80%	67.00%	75.00%	50.00%	60.70%	51.00%
	Female	55.20%	33.00%	25.00%	50.00%	35.70%	49.00%
	Not known	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	3.60%	
Disability							
	Yes	14.10%	7.00%	12.50%	0.00%	1.80%	17.64%
	No	85.90%	93.00%	87.50%	100.00%	63.10%	80.40%
Age	Not known	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	35.10%	1.96%
	under 25	5.30%	0.00%	0.00%	26.90%	15.50%	11.79%
	25-39	42.40%	0.00%	41.70%	26.90%	20.70%	35.30%
	40-49	21.90%	27.00%	37.50%	34.70%	19.00%	7.84%
	50-59	22.10%	33.00%	20.80%	7.70%	10.00%	23.50%
	60-74	8.30%	40.00%	0.00%	3.80%	0.60%	21.57%
	75+	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	
Not Known	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	34.20%		
Sexual Orientation							
	Bisexual	0.68%	-	-	-		-
	Gay man	0.68%	-	-	-		-
	Gay woman/lesbian	0.00%	-	-	-		-
	Heterosexual/Straight	87.70%	-	-	-		-
	Prefer not to say	10.94%	-	-	-		-
Religion or Belief	Not known	0.00%	-	-	-		-
	Buddhist	0.00%	-	-	-		-
	Christian	59.90%	-	-	-		-
	Hindu	0.34%	-	-	-		-
	Humanist	0.00%	-	-	-		-
	Jewish	0.00%	-	-	-		-
	Muslim	0.34%	-	-	-		-
	Sikh	0.00%	-	-	-		-
	Other	1.72%	-	-	-		-
	No religion	21.60%	-	-	-		-
	Prefer not to say	16.10%	-	-	-		-
	Not known	0.00%	-	-	-		-
Transgender	Not collected						-

What will be our challenges for 2011/12

There will be a number of challenges for us to face in 2011/12, particularly within the context of large reductions in public spending, the end of the Decent Homes programme and changes to welfare reform which are likely to have an impact on the way we are able to deliver services and on the tenants and leaseholders living in our homes.

Review the Single Equality Scheme

Our Single Equality Scheme was developed in 2008 and since then there has been a lot of changes which have an impact on the way we work. We will start reviewing and updating the scheme this year to make sure that it is up to date and reflects the current position nationally and locally. We will do this working in partnership with our stakeholders and customers and then will agree a revised action plan to support the delivery of this.

Keeping Up to Date

Over the next 12 months we will continue to collect information about our customers via the 'Tell us about you' forms to make sure that we have the most current details. This helps us not only respond to individuals more effectively but also plan future service provision based on the profile of our customers.

Human Rights

The Equality and Human Rights Commission produced a report 'Human Rights at Home' providing guidance to social housing providers on the implications of the Human Rights act. Our equality and diversity working group will spend time this year reviewing this guidance and understanding what impacts there maybe on the way we deliver services in the future.

Impact of the Welfare Reform Bill

The bill contains a number of proposals which will impact on our customers. This includes reductions to housing benefit allowances, and the universal credit, seeing tenants receiving the allowance for their housing themselves and placing a requirement on them to pay the landlord.

Although these proposals will not come into force until 2013, we are already working to identify what the impacts of these changes maybe and what groups are most likely to be affected.

Customer Risk Assessments

Recent national case reviews into the tragic deaths of Fiona Pilkington and David Askew have highlighted concerns around how social landlords work with partner agencies to safeguard and protect vulnerable adults.

During this year we will explore how we can better identify customers at risk of harassment, physical violence and harm and look to develop a Customer Risk Assessment tool to help officers identify the factors and triggers putting customers at risk.

Repairs and Maintenance Retender

We are currently working with Gateshead Council to go through the process of re-tendering for the Repairs and Maintenance contract for our tenants and leaseholders. We will ensure that equality and diversity and responding to the needs of our vulnerable tenants is included in the criteria both at the Pre-qualification questionnaire stage and tendering stage. Following this we will look with the successful organisation to ensure that their practices on equality and diversity follow the company's principles and values as well as complying with legislation.

Community Cohesion

As a partner of the Gateshead Strategic Partnership, we have been working with our partners to deliver action to achieve the aims of the Community Cohesion Strategy 'Gateshead Together'. This year we will contribute to the refresh of this strategy and will outline what actions we will take to achieve the overall objectives of the new strategy.

Investors in People and Health and Wellbeing

Following our successful accreditation for Investors in People in 2008, we will be undergoing a reassessment for this as well as undertaking a new assessment for Health and Wellbeing.

Contacts

For further information please visit: www.gatesheadhousing.co.uk/equality

If you would like to discuss anything in this document or have an issue relating to our approach to equality and diversity please contact:

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