

Report to Resources Committee

25 February 2014



Title: Equality and Diversity - Update

Report of: Involvement and Diversity Manager

Purpose of Report

1. To provide a summary of Equality and Diversity work within the organisation in the third quarter of 2013/14.

Background

2. The Company continues to place equality and diversity at the heart of everything it does with one of the values being 'embracing equality'.
3. The Single Equality Scheme has been in place since 2008 to provide an overall approach to the Company's work on equality covering both the organisation as an employer and service provider.
4. The scheme and associated actions help to ensure that we are meeting our requirements under the Equality Act 2010.
5. The Company contributes to the wider equality agenda in Gateshead as a member of Gateshead Council's Corporate Equality Working Group, ensuring that the Company is contributing to the equality objectives set by the council.

Knowing our Customers

6. The company continues to collect information about our customers to ensure that we understand the communities we are providing services to. This information is used both to tailor the services and way we communicate on an individual basis as well as helping us to plan and shape services more widely.
7. The information can also be used to identify any trends in satisfaction or take up of services to help us target resources and efforts in particular areas where necessary.
8. In the last quarter we have updated customer information on over 3500 occasions with the majority of updates taking place through Tyne and Wear Homes.

9. As at 31 December 2013, the profile of our main tenants (19490 tenancies) was as follows:
- 58.5% female
 - 2.8% Black Minority Ethnic (BME) with highest proportion being Black African
 - 41.2% are over 60, 3.3% are under 25
 - 28.9% of households have at least one person who has a disability, with the most common reported being mobility issues and mental health.
10. We have collected 37.5% of sexuality information and 41.6% of religion, and continue to collect this to be able to monitor and compare services effectively.

Stonewall Workplace Equality Index

11. In the last period, the results for the 2014 Stonewall Workplace Equality Index have been released. The index shows how employers are performing to provide the best possible working environments for lesbian, gay and bisexual employees, which ultimately creates a more inclusive working environment for all employees.
12. This year 369 organisations entered the index across public, private and voluntary sectors. It is the fourth year that the company has entered the index and we have steadily increased our placing each year. The company has increased from 181st with a score of 112 out of 200 in 2013, to 155th with a score of 128 this year which exceeds the average score of 115.
13. As the organisation is a Stonewall Diversity Champion, a benchmarking meeting is held annually following the publication of the results to discuss the details of our performance and identify a range of areas to focus on in the following year. This meeting took place on 6 February identifying that the company had scored highly in areas covering employee benefits, community engagement and work with suppliers. In particular, our scoring for our work with suppliers exceeded both the average for the housing sector and the Top 100 Employers.
14. There were also a number of areas where progress could be made and these will form an action plan for the year ahead, whilst maintaining our current areas of strength.
15. The areas we will be focussing on in 2014 will include:
- Developing an LGBT staff network
 - Developing positive LGBT role models within the organisation
 - Increasing opportunities to gather monitoring information
16. The report providing scoring and feedback will be made available on the Board members website after this committee.
17. As part of our overall LGBT activity, in the last period the company attended a joint housing session hosted by the LGBT Federation. This event was a follow up to a session in 2011 and saw a range of local housing providers and service users coming together to share progress and identify the outstanding issues.

Training and Awareness Raising

18. In the last period we have renewed our licence for the e-learning Equality and Diversity Training, Equality and Diversity Essentials so that this can be provided for the next three years. This training is undertaken by all employees on their first day of working for the company and then all employees are expected to undertake the training as a refresher as a minimum every 3 years.

Networking and joint working

19. The organisation has recently signed up to be part of the Housing Quality Network's Equality and Diversity Exchange attending the first meeting in January. This is a national group of housing organisations who will meet on a quarterly basis to discuss and share best practice in equality as well as getting access to advice and briefings from equality specialists.
20. As a member of this exchange we will receive a number of equality briefings during the year. The first one 'Evidence: Equalities' has been made available on the Board Member Website.

Supporting National Diversity Events

21. We have continued to recognise a number of national events as part of our general awareness raising of equality issues. This includes either attending organised events or disseminating information to employees as part of the weekly HomeWork.
 - **World Mental Health Day** – recognising that mental health affects both a significant number of our residents and our employees, key facts and figures were included in weekly HomeWork for all employees. The company also attended an event held in Trinity Square to mark the day, where a range of organisations were represented to give information and advice on the support available to people.
 - **World Aids Day** – information was provided to all employees about the challenges that still affect people with HIV and Aids, dispelling some of the myths surrounding the issue.
 - **International Day of Disability** – Representatives attended a large event organised by Disability North, at the Sage Gateshead where a number of seminars and workshops were delivered on the theme of disability and inclusion.

Mears Update

22. Following the update at the last meeting, Mears have now commenced a programme of equality and diversity training for all operatives. The training is classroom based and provides an overview of the equality act, protected characteristics and appropriate behaviours. To date approximately 150 people have undertaken the training, with the programme running weekly until all employees working on the Gateshead contract have completed it. Feedback from the sessions has been very positive and provides a platform for the company to work closely with Mears on more focussed issues in the future. Feedback from the sessions to date is provided at Appendix 1.

23. In the last quarter, Mears have also taken on a work placement as part of the Employability Project delivered by Percy Hedley Trust. The summary of the placement is provided at Appendix 2.

Link to values

24. This report relates to the following Company values: -

- Being a listening and learning organisation
- Being motivated, trained, and committed
- Being customer focused, innovative and professional
- Caring and respecting
- Embracing equality
- A commitment to all our employees.

Impact on tenants

25. Through ensuring that equality and diversity is at the heart of how we deliver services, it ensures that we provide services based on a sound understanding of the needs and priorities of our customers.

Risk Management Implications

26. Not meeting the requirements of current and new diversity legislation has been identified as an operational risk for the Company, which if breached could lead to significant financial loss and risk of reputation. Regular monitoring and reporting on our progress helps to ensure that we continue to meet our requirements.

Financial Implications

27. There are no financial implications directly relating to this report. There is an allocated budget to progress equality and diversity work within the Company. Any future financial implications would be reported to this committee.

Equality and Diversity Implications

28. This report relates to our approach to equality as a whole, ensuring that we are considering the impact on our employees and customers of the decisions we take.

Value for Money Implications

29. The Single Equality Scheme provides a focus for our approach to being an equal opportunities employer and service provider, promoting equality in relation to access to goods, facilities and services and helping us to ensure that no individual or group experiences direct or indirect discrimination.
30. Carrying out equality analysis when planning a project or service delivery allows us to identify any issues at the outset and find solutions where possible, rather than having to make potentially costly changes retrospectively.

Health Implications

31. The Company's approach to equality and diversity, embedded within everything that we do will ultimately has a positive impact on people's health and overall wellbeing.
32. A number of the initiatives included within our overall approach to equality has a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of either employees or customers.

Environmental Implications

33. There are no direct environmental implications arising from this report.

Consultation carried out

34. Progress on equality issues are provided to the Involvement Service Improvement Group and the Disabled Persons and BME Housing Forums.

Recommendation

35. The views of the committee are sought on whether it is satisfied with the progress activity relating to Equality and Diversity carried out in the third quarter of 2013/14.

At GATESHEAD we are very fortunate to have a strong working relationship with the Employability Project at The Percy Hedley Foundation. It is due to this relationship that one of our clients was offered a work experience placement at the MEARS Group. Our client Edward Atkinson was overjoyed to hear that he had been chosen to take part in the placement. From his initial interview and meeting with the company he has been shown a very professional approach to work and this has ultimately impacted on his workplace behaviours and encouraged him to work to a high standard. The good relationship which is obvious between The Employability Project and MEARS shines through and they have both played an active role in Edward's development.

Edward has expressed that he has really enjoyed his time at MEARS. He has found the staff to be very welcoming, friendly and has been made to feel like part of the team. He feels the work environment at MEARS is more professional and members of staff are very valued for what they do.

Before working at MEARS Edward would isolate himself in his room where he would surf the internet on his laptop and play on his Playstation. The only time Edward would go out would be if he was going to the cinema by himself or with friends. Edward quoted that "Working at MEARS has made his life better because he now has a routine."

Edward feels that MEARS has motivated him to make a good impression and show what he can do as he knows potential employers will be looking for individuals who are enthusiastic and are willing to push themselves beyond their limitations. This has also motivated him to play on his games less.

He said his achievements have been many because he was given great experience with a fantastic work force. These achievements are; becoming more independent i.e. going into the work environment on his own and being left to do work tasks after being shown once. Edward has also said about how being at MEARS has helped to break his habit of playing on games all of the time.

Edward never thought he would get the opportunity to work in an establishment such as MEARS and thought he may have struggled to get up early due to a repetitive routine for the last 3 years. Edward never thought that he would get the opportunity to do more than one day at MEARS and was delighted when Julie Bell asked if he could do 2 or 3 days.

Julie Todd who has supported Ed at MEARS said "Ed has come a long way since he started his placement in so many ways. Ed is a naturally confident and amiable young man who enjoys focussing on the tasks in hand. He has been able to develop many of the social skills required to work as part of a team. He learns new tasks easily and is not afraid of asking people when he comes across anything he is unsure of. Although having said this, Ed has a remarkable ability of being shown a task once and then being able to complete the task independently and thoroughly on a weekly basis. I believe

that Ed will be a valuable asset to any fortunate company who ultimately employs him.”

Case study:

Equality and Diversity Training by the Employability Project to Mears Group Ltd.

Background Information

Mears Groups have formed a partnership with the Employability Project (EP) which is part of The Percy Hedley Foundation. The Foundation is a registered charity that provides services for disabled people and their families. They offer a wide range of services to children, young people and adults. The education services include Percy Hedley Lower and Upper School, Northern Counties School, Percy Hedley College, residential and respite care for all ages. Adult services include residential services, and an ever increasing variety of adult day care services. The Employability Project works across the region to develop employability opportunities for disabled people and break down the barriers that employers envisage exist to employing disabled people. This project encourages regional organisations to be socially responsible and proactive by acting as a link between employers, supported employment organisations and disabled people. It also delivers first class Equality, Diversity and Disability Training to those employers who are committed to embed and embrace equality within their workplace - this is how the relationship continues.

Training and Delivery

The Employability Project designed and developed a training package to suite the needs of Mears staff at the Gateshead branch. The training had to be specific to ensure that all delegates were able to engage, interact and benefit from this training. Mears committed over 300 staff members to attend this training and time was taken to carefully consider a time table to ensure staff were willing and had the time to partake and they also had to consider customers needs and requirements. This was managed very well and initially 2 sessions were booked 1 a per week over a 8 week period, thereafter EP delivered 1 session per week over 6 months. To date over 150 employees have been through the training and the full programme is due to be completed by April 2014.

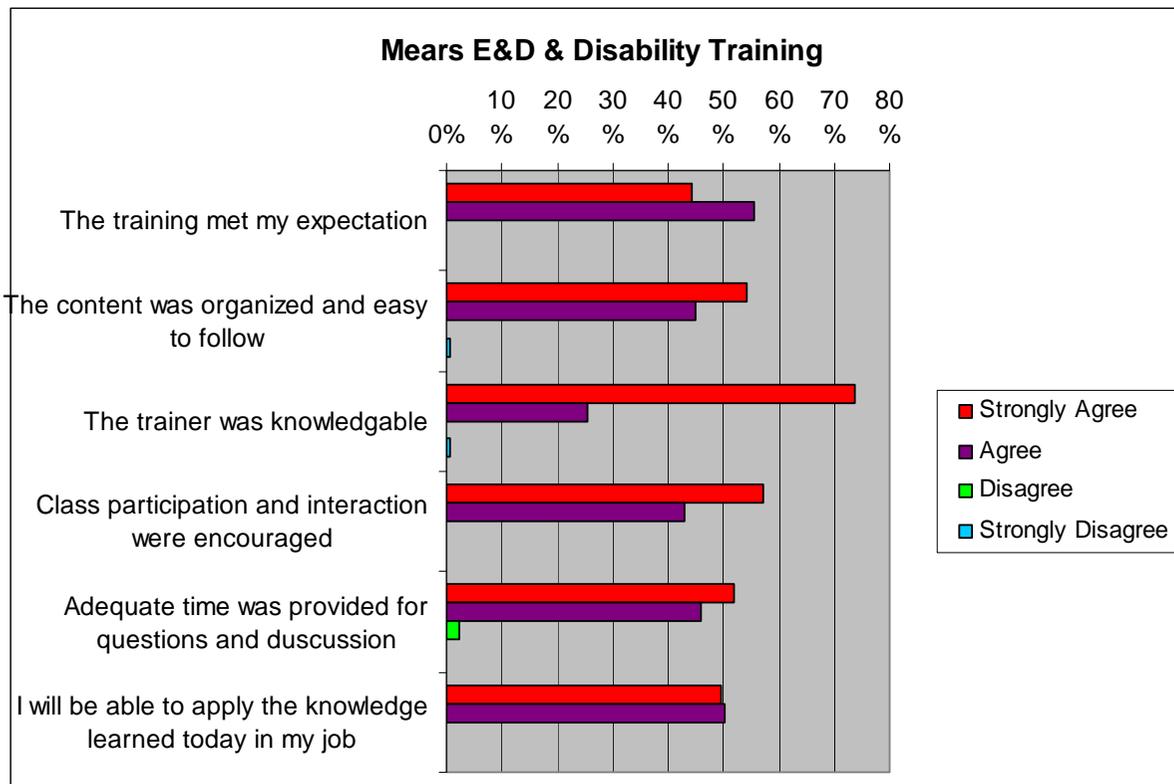
The training is specifically designed to raise awareness to equality, diversity and disability. The trainer Ashleigh Ritchie is a first class trainer and delivered awareness training in schools and hospitals. She has cerebral palsy and has used a wheelchair her whole life and was able to empathise and communicate to groups in a way which made people have real 'eye openers' there own words! The training was specifically tailored to cover all aspects of equality, diversity and disability with the foresight to build confidence from the most senior level and cascade this throughout the organisation.

The training has received excellent feedback from all staff who have taken part. We have measured the impact this has had on staff and further feedback has highlighted that training had a positive impact on communication, performance and inclusion.

Facts and Graphs

Questions on the feedback included:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The training met my expectation	44.4%	55.6%		
The content was organized and easy to follow	54.1%	45.1%		0.8%
The trainer was knowledgeable	73.7%	25.5%		0.8%
Class participation and interaction were encouraged	57.1%	42.9%		
Adequate time was provided for questions and discussion	51.9%	45.8%	2.3%	
I will be able to apply the knowledge learned today in my job	49.6%	50.4%		



As the graph indicates the training has been a huge success with an overarching conclusion that the training exceeded expectations and they agree both strongly that they will be able to apply the knowledge in their day to day work.

Feedback from operatives included that the session was a real 'eye opener' they 'never would have guessed' 'I never knew disabled people could. . . . 'and many more.

To conclude:

The sessions have been a huge success and have made a positive difference to the way in which people will work and how they communicate will people.