

Report to Resources Committee

9 September 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 for the period April to June 2014.

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. Our Single Equality Scheme provides the 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.
6. An Equality and Diversity Report is produced annually setting out our key achievements and demonstrating how we are working in line with the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Knowing our Customers

7. We continue to collect a range of information about our customers to ensure that we understand the makeup and needs of the communities we are working in. This information is used in a range of ways including: -
 - Tailoring service delivery or helping to forecast need for services in the future
 - Targeting customer groups to promote specific services
 - Measuring and comparing satisfaction with services across different groups
 - Communicating with individual customers in the most appropriate method.

8. Information is collected from the outset of someone applying to be a tenant and is followed up at sign up and periodically during their tenancy. This ensures that the information we hold is accurate.
9. The information collected includes the protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act as well as information on communication and contact preferences. In order to help us prepare for impending issues such as digital inclusion and Universal Credit we have also started to collect information on access to the internet and use of bank accounts. This information will be reported to a future committee as the level of data held increases.
10. As at 30 June 2014, the profile of our main tenants (19190 tenancies) was as follows: -
 - 58.7% female
 - 3.2% under 25, 41.3% are over 60
 - 2.8% Black Minority Ethnic (BME) with highest proportion consistently Black African
 - 29.4% of households have at least one person indicating they have a disability with the highest reported of mobility issues and mental health.
11. We have now collected information from over 40% of customers on sexuality and religion which will allow us to start using this information to monitor and compare services. We will continue to collect this information through the methods outlined previously to increase the data held. From the data provided we know that: -
 - 1.8% of tenants have indicated that they are Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual
 - The highest proportion of our tenants have indicated that they are Christian (62.8%), followed by 1.6% stating they are Muslim. 5.7% of tenants have stated they have no religion.
12. At the start of this financial year, we contracted an external organisation, Synergy to carry out a telephone exercise to collect 1000 records, verifying information currently held and collecting additional information as detailed previously in this report. As a result of this contact with tenants there were a number of additional outcomes from this exercise including: -
 - One potential safeguarding issue identified and reported.
 - Tenants referred to social services for assessments for potential adaptations.
 - Advice and signposting to other services to deal with a range of tenancy issues such as anti-social behaviour, outstanding repairs and estate management issues.

Training and Guidance

13. In the last period we have reviewed and updated our Employee Diversity Resource. This is an online tool for employees which provides information and guidance on the different protected characteristics, details of some of the potential barriers to people accessing our services and the support services employees can use to communicate more effectively.

14. The guidance was reviewed with customers, in particular with the Disabled Persons Housing Forum and BME Housing Forum.
15. In May, members of the Involvement Team attended a Disability and Employment event held by the Percy Hedley Foundation. The aim of this event was to give information and guidance about the issues facing disabled people accessing employment and how organisations can play a role in this.
16. As a result, a follow up meeting was held with the Percy Hedley Foundation to discuss taking a disabled student on a work placement basis. This will be progressed in the next period and reported to a future committee.

Hate Crime

17. In the last period revised guidance has been produced to support our overall approach to hate crime. Customers were involved in the development of this guidance through the Anti-social Behaviour Service Improvement Group and further focus groups of involved residents.
18. Hate crime awareness training has since been delivered to all front line officers within the company to ensure that all employees are equipped to deal effectively with any tenant or leaseholder who wishes to report a hate crime incident.

External recognition

19. In April this year, the organisation was shortlisted for a TPAS Award for Equality and Diversity for the Hoops for Health project delivered in partnership with Newcastle Eagles. This recognised the theme in the 2013/14 programme around stereotyping and hate crime.

Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Equality

20. We have continued to undertake a range of activities to make the organisation more LGBT inclusive, both as an employer and a service provider.
21. We will be submitting our entry into the 2014/15 Stonewall Workplace Equality Index in September and have been implementing actions raised as part of the benchmarking process from last year's submission. The Index was revised by Stonewall for 2014/15 so this will be the first entry we submit in the new framework. Results will be announced in early 2015.
22. In the last period we held the first meeting of our LGBT Employee and Customer Network. The aim of this network is identify the key issues and barriers facing both LGBT customers and employers and work with the group to overcome these. Prior to establishing the group, visits were made to both South Tyneside Homes and Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue to learn from their experiences of setting up and sustaining a network group.
23. The group are currently developing a name and branding for the network to publicise and attract wider membership. The next meeting will focus on experiences of reporting Hate Crime and Anti-social behavior.

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 have 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 first quarter of 2014/15.