

Report to Resources Committee

4 November 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 second quarter of 2014/15.

Background

2. The Company continues to place equality and diversity at the heart of everything it does with one of our values being 'embracing equality'.
3. An Equality and Diversity Report is produced annually setting out our key achievements and demonstrating how we are working in line with the Equality Act's Public Sector Equality Duty.
4. Our Single Equality Scheme set out three broad aims for our approach to equality and diversity which are: -
 - Maintaining a corporate commitment to equality issues
 - Working in partnership with customers and stakeholders to deliver equitable services and improve social cohesion in Gateshead
 - Be an equal opportunities employer with a workforce which represents the community and is committed to equality and diversity
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 supporting the equality objectives set by the council.

Knowing our customers

6. The information we collect about our customers helps us to ensure that we understand the makeup of the community we are delivering services to. In particular this information can help us to understand the needs of our customers and plan our business to make sure that we can deal with this effectively.
7. We monitor the makeup of our households on a monthly basis. The summary of our customer base as at September 2014 told us that of our 19127 tenancies:

- 58.9% were female
 - 3.2% were under 25 and 17.4% were over 75
 - 2.8% Black Minority Ethnic (BME) with the highest proportion consistently Black African
 - 0.9% of our tenants (168) have told us that their first language is not English
 - 1.8% (151) of the people who have provided us with information about their sexuality have indicated they are Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual
 - 60.8% of the people who have provided information about their religion or belief have indicated that they are Christian (5722) with the next highest proportion being Muslim at 0.8% (151).
8. We have been collecting this information for a number of years and are able to use this to demonstrate some of the changes to our customer base which affects the way we are delivering services or how we will need to do this in the future. Disability is an example of this. In September 2012, 27.9% of our main tenants had indicated that they had a disability. At that point 7057 tenants had told us they either had mobility issues or were a wheelchair user. At the same point this year, we have over 9300 tenants who have told us this. This poses an increased pressure on some services such as repairs where we have an increasing number of customers who will be more seriously impacted by certain repairs issues such as lack of heating or water, but also a higher proportion of people who may require assistance to help prepare their homes for works to be undertaken.
 9. In addition to this, in September 2012, 2428 tenants had told us they had a mental health issue, compared to 3795 tenants who have indicated this now. This reflects some of the more complex issues that officers are dealing with when addressing different areas such as tackling anti-social behaviour cases or dealing with the impact of welfare reform.
 10. We also recognise that inclusion and access to services goes beyond the protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act. Through our Let's Get Digital Survey we have been collating information about our tenants' access to the internet and bank accounts to inform our approach to digital and financial inclusion. This information is currently being prepared and will be reported to Board on 20 November.

Hate Crime

11. In the last report it was noted that guidance and training has been delivered to employees to equip them to deal effectively with reports of hate crime.
12. During this last period, we have continued to focus on this area, ensuring that our approach meets the needs of people affected by hate crime to encourage them and give confidence to report incidents to the company or our partners.
13. One of the priorities of the Safer Gateshead Partnership was to increase reporting from the LGBT community, recognising that incidents were likely to be currently underreported.
14. In July 2014, the company attended the annual Newcastle Pride event in Exhibition Park which attracts thousands of LGBT people and their family and friends. This opportunity was used to collect information about people's experiences of hate crime

and how this was handled by organisations if they reported it, or to find out the reasons why they may not have reported it.

15. In total, 150 people engaged with the team on the day and told us the following: -
 - 21% of people engaged said they had experienced hate crime in the last 12 months and 48% had experienced hate crime in the last 3 years
 - 47% of people knew someone who had experienced hate crime in the last 12 months
 - Of those who had experienced incidents, the majority reported that they had been insulted, intimidated, pestered or harassed. There were however 54 people who had experienced a physical attack or had been threatened with physical violence.
16. This information is being shared with the Safer Gateshead Partnership to help inform their future activity.
17. Following attendance at Pride, members of the Neighbourhood Relations Team have also attended the LGBT Network to talk to members specifically about the company's approach to dealing with hate crime. As a result of this meeting, the group made a number of suggestions about how the company could reach out to LGBT communities and encourage reporting.

Working in partnership with customers and the community

18. In the last quarter we have worked with customers on a range of issues to help improve the way we tailor our services to deal with our customers' needs.
19. In August, the Older Persons Housing Manager delivered a Dementia Awareness session to the Older Persons SIG, encouraging people to sign up to become a Dementia Friend. This is an increasingly prevalent issue and it is intended that a number of people will become Dementia Friends to become aware of some of the key behaviours someone with dementia might display and how to deal with this to help the person.
20. In September, the Mears Customer Care Manager attended the Disabled Persons Housing Forum to discuss the information shared with operatives when attending for a repair, to see how this information can be used more effectively and ensure that the tenant receives the appropriate service from Mears as our contractor.
21. We have continued to support a number of community projects and organisations through our Community Fund with some of these projects impacting directly on equality and inclusion. In the last quarter, we awarded funding to Gateshead Sight Service to deliver a befriending service to visually impaired residents. The aim of the project is to identify a range of volunteers who will work with some of our visually impaired customers who are at risk of social isolation. This could include visiting them in their home, carrying out a range of tasks depending on the individual such as helping them to read mail, make appointments for them or help with shopping. As we currently have over 4000 tenants who have told us that they are blind or visually impaired, sight service will be focussing on promoting the befriending service to our tenants and leaseholders.

External activities and networking

22. We continue to be a member of a number of equality networks and partnerships which helps us to ensure that we keep up to date with relevant policy and changes to legislation as well as sharing and learning from good practice.
23. As part of the Housing Quality Network's Diversity Exchange, we receive a regular briefing which provides us with information, advice and case law updates relating to equality. The latest briefing is available on the Board members' website for further information.
24. In addition we regularly attend the Housing Diversity Network (HDN) North East Equality Network. In the last meeting, this focussed on the Chartered Institute of Housing's consultation on Diversity in Leadership with the group providing information to feed into the collective response HDN will be providing to the survey.

Future approach to Equality and Diversity

25. The Single Equality Scheme is currently due for review and initial work took place with customers about some of the priorities that this should include.
26. It is proposed that further work is carried out with customers, linking this with the overall planning process for the organisations' future priorities in order to produce a new strategy for the financial year. It is also suggested that this strategy would cover inclusion issues as well as equality and diversity.
27. Further information will be brought to a future committee including the draft strategy for approval.

Link to values

28. 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

29. 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

30. 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

31. 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

32. 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

33. 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. Having a detailed customer database of our tenants and leaseholders characteristics and needs helps ensure that this can be done effectively.

Health Implications

34. 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.
35. 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

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

Consultation carried out

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

Recommendation

38. 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 second quarter of 2014/15.

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