

Foreword

Welcome to the 2014/15 Equality and Diversity Annual Report. This report highlights the range of activities that The Gateshead Housing Company has undertaken over the last twelve months to support our equality priorities and make sure we are complying with the Equality Act.

The company continues to put equality at the heart of the way we deliver services and in our role as an employer. We do this by making sure that rather than being an add on or an extra, it is part of the way we work on a daily basis. Our aim is to create a working environment where people are valued for being an individual and are motivated to deliver high quality services to people in the way they need.

In order to achieve our goals we know that it is important to work with others and throughout this report you will see examples of activities we have done in partnership, although this report does not cover everything we do.

You will also see some of the activities we will be involved in for 2015/16.

Jon Mallen-Beadle
Managing Director and Lead for Equality

Introduction

Our Single Equality Scheme has provided the focus for the company's equality work for a number of years. Whilst there has been a number of changes to the organisation and the way we work during this time, our overall principles and values remain the same, to 'Embrace Equality'

The scheme sets out three overall goals which ensure that equality continues to be embedded across all areas of the organisation and that we are providing an inclusive workplace for our employees.

These 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.

Equality messages are communicated from the top with key messages from the Managing Director being included in internal communications Core Brief and weekly HomeWork on a regular basis.

An update report is provided at each Resources Committee who has delegated responsibility for overseeing equality activity and ensuring our compliance with legislation. Resources Committee also receive any relevant updates to legislation in relation to equality which could affect the way the company needs to operate.

All Board members received equality training in 2014. This covered the key areas of the Equality Act and things they should be aware of to challenge in reports received at the Board and other committees, including the Public Sector Equality Duty.

What did we do in 2014/15?

These are some of the highlights of our activity over the last twelve months:

April – June

- Completed an exercise to refresh a sample of our customer records and asked additional questions around digital inclusion and preparation for Universal Credit
- Supported Gateshead Volunteers Month with a joint Disabled Person Housing Forum and BME Housing Forum
- Attended the Percy Hedley conference on Disability and Employment
- Shortlisted for a TPAS Award for Equality and Diversity for the Hoops for Health Programme delivered with Newcastle Eagles, specifically for the focus on stereotyping and hate crime
- Successfully gained reaccreditation of CHS Code of Practice for Sheltered Housing

July - September

- Supported Newcastle Pride collecting information on LGBT Hate crime
- Submitted our entry into the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index
- Delivered training to front line employees on Hate Crime

October - December

- Collected information through our Let's Get Digital Survey to understand internet access in Gateshead
- Achieved reaccreditation of Customer Service Excellence
- Recognised Older Persons Day with an Older Persons Event bringing together 100 residents from sheltered schemes

January - March

- All employees completed a refresher of equality and diversity e-learning
- Supported our first breakfast club at Brandling Primary School
- Successfully achieved North East Better Health at Work Silver Award

How are we doing?

The next sections of this report show the work we have been carrying out and how this fits with progressing our three goals.

Maintain a corporate commitment to equality issues

During this year we have continued to carry out a range of activities to maintain our commitment to equality.

Our Managing Director leads from the top, regularly putting messages out to employees via our internal communications on equality issues and ensuring that it remains a key focus. The image below has continued to be used within 2014/15 to demonstrate how the housing company is supporting Gateshead Council's overall plan and shows that embracing equality is a key value for us to help achieve this.



Customer Service Excellence

In 2014 the company began the reaccreditation process for Customer Service Excellence. This is a national standard which introduced by the government to ensure that customers were at the centre of how services were provided.

The standard has 5 areas for assessment:

- Customer insight (customer profiling, engagement and satisfaction)
- Culture of the organisation (Policies, culture of the company and attitude of employees)

- Information and access (The range and quality of information provided to customers, access to services and working with partners)
- Delivery (Service standards, outcomes and dealing with complaints)
- Timeliness and quality of service (Standards and performance)

The assessor reviewed the self-assessment and evidence based provided by the company and then carried out a two day visit to the organisation. During this time she spoke to a range of officers and customers and visited properties and offices across Gateshead.

Overall we were assessed as being fully compliant with the standard. In particular the assessor found us to have a number of areas of Compliance Plus (or outstanding practice). It was identified that the company uses the range of information we know about our customers and potential customers to understand their needs and deliver services to meet these. Specifically the use of this information to understand and target those who would be affected by welfare reform was highlighted.

The assessor also noted that through the specific customer forums for Disabled, LGBT and BME tenants, we were able to identify and address barriers to accessing services and work with customers to improve the services we are delivering.

Involvement, partnership and access

Knowing our customers

In order to deliver the appropriate services and approach to our customers, we need to ensure that we have relevant, up to date information about the people living in our homes.

We gather a wide range of information and use this for different purposes. We are able to monitor this information year on year to see how our customer base is changing and how this might affect our service delivery.

At the end of this year (31 March 2015) we had 19163 tenancies with:

- 575 BME tenants, with the majority being Black African
- 629 tenants under 25
- 3291 being over 75
- 5530 tenants have told us they have a disability, with mobility difficulties and mental health being the highest proportion
- 8129 tenants have indicated their religion or belief with 5702 of these declaring that they are Christian.
- 8412 tenants have declared their sexuality with 162 stating they are Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual.

During this year we have been monitoring the changes in the profile of our customers and in particular the rise in the number of more vulnerable customers. Having compared our customer base for a number of years, whilst the proportion of tenants indicating they have a disability has not changed significantly, the actual types of disability and complexity of some customers' needs has increased.

We are aware that the number of tenants with mental health issues has increased steadily. In March 2012, 981 tenants had told us they had a mental health disability; this has increased to 1130 in March 2015 which is a 15% increase. These rises, along with

the increase in the proportion of people with mobility issues and sensory impairments poses an increased pressure on some service areas; for example there maybe an increased number of customers who would be more seriously impacted by certain repairs issues such as a lack of heating or water. It may also affect people being able to prepare for investment works to be done to their properties where they maybe unable to move furniture and items in their homes.

We continue to gather information on the communication preferences of our tenants and leaseholders. This information is used by officers who are making contact with our customers to ensure that we communicate effectively. At the end of 2014/15, 900 tenants had stated that they required communication or information in a specific format, with 767 preferring large print. This is taken into account by our communications team who typically produce communication materials in larger font to recognise this growing demand.

Officers also have access to a range of support and interpreting services that they can use to communicate more effectively. This includes Language line, face to face interpreters in alternative languages, BSL interpreters or lip readers. The performance framework in the appendix to this report shows how many interpreters have been used during the year.

We have worked with an external organisation to undertake an insight project on Digital Inclusion. The aim of this research is to understand how digitally ready our tenants and leaseholders are, in particular to prepare for universal credit and the requirement to apply for their benefit online. This research will help inform our new inclusion strategy in 2015/16.

Involving customers in shaping and scrutinising our services

This year we have continued to work with customers to shape our services, with a focus on ensuring that the needs of different people are reflected.

We regularly monitor the profile of customers engaging with us to aim for a representative group of people. In addition to this we have carried out diversity training with involved customers called Understanding Differences in People. This has helped them to consider different perspectives and points of view when working with officers on developing policies and procedures.

Through our Disabled Persons Housing Forum, representatives from our Repairs contractor Mears were able to discuss the customer information shared with the operatives to help them respond effectively when visiting a property to carry out a repair.

This year we have worked with customers to review the training and guidance provided to employees on dealing with Hate Crime. The training was shaped by members of the Anti-social behaviour Service Improvement Group and has since been rolled out to front line employees.

Our independent scrutiny panel, TALISMAN have continued to review services during the last year and as part of these reviews, they remain focussed on how we tailor any support to vulnerable customers or ensure that the services we are providing are accessible to all. This has included making recommendations about decoration for elderly residents, increased work with young people around rent arrears prevention and the accessibility of facilities in our offices.

Supporting Local Communities

In 2014/15 we increased the TGHC funding in the Community Fund to reach as many local community groups as we could, supported by the in kind support from Mears and Construction Services.

The priorities of the fund were revised for this year to reflect key issues affecting our tenants and leaseholders with a focus on the following:

- Support projects that help tenants, leaseholders and their families overcome disadvantage caused by welfare reform, including fuel and food poverty
- Create stronger communities by supporting local groups and organisations that are undertaking asset transfers
- Improve health and wellbeing opportunities for young people and the elderly

Some of the projects supported during this year were:

- A wellness project delivered through Bill Quay Farm working with residents of sheltered schemes.
- A summer family learning project delivered by the Crechemobile
- In-kind support to improve the community café at Gateshead Clubhouse, a centre for people with mental health issues.
- Rookie Golf project delivering intergenerational work in local sheltered schemes.

This year we have linked with the Greggs Foundation for the first time to support the delivery of a breakfast club at a local primary school. This school is based in the catchment for housing company employees and helps to ensure that the primary school children get access to breakfast to start their school day. We will be looking to support additional schools in 2015/16.

Partnership working and supporting victims of anti-social behaviour

In order to work towards our equality objectives and those of Gateshead Council, we regularly work in partnership with other organisations. Antisocial behaviour is a key example of where an effective approach is based on drawing on the strengths of each organisation to achieve the best outcome.

In November 2014, two officers from the company's Neighbourhood Relations Team supported the White Ribbon Campaign, an initiative developed by Tyneside Women's Health, in partnership with Gateshead Council.

The campaign actively ran for 15 days and began on 25 November 2014, coinciding with the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against women. An online pledge was also publicised with company employees encouraged to sign up to the pledge to end violence against women and girls.

The company monitors the number of domestic abuse incidents recorded aiming to ensure that people have the confidence in the company to come forward and report this to us. There were 275 incidents reported in 2014/15 compared to 282 in the previous year. All cases reported this year led to further action being taken.

We have also worked to improve our response to hate crime, rolling out the training developed as previously mentioned with the ASB SIG. There were 49 incidents reported in 2014/15 which was a reduction from 55 in the previous year. We continue to increase awareness of the ways people can report hate crime to encourage people to come

forward where they have been a victim of this. One of the specific aims for 2014/15 was to increase reporting from LGBT communities recognising that typically this is an area of underreporting. As a result, this was the survey subject for our attendance at Newcastle Pride, gaining feedback on people's experience of hate crime and how likely they would be to come forward if this happened to them.

An equal opportunities employer with a workforce that represents the community it serves and is committed to equality and diversity

We continue to work to ensure that we provide a workplace where employees feel they are encouraged to be themselves.

We have carried out a refresh of our Equality and Diversity e-learning training to all employees to ensure that people understand their requirements under the 'Equality Act 2010'. Whilst all employees complete the standard training, Equality and Diversity Essentials', managers were also required to complete a further course on 'Managing Diversity in the Workplace'. This covers how to deal with workplace issues and recruitment processes.

We have raised awareness with employees of a range of equality issues during the year and have identified key customer groups who we need to ensure we are tailoring our response to and dealing with them effectively. We have signed up all our offices to be part of the Safe Places Initiative through Gateshead People. This is a scheme aimed at providing a safe environment for people with learning disabilities if they are out and become lost, confused or just in need of some support. Training was delivered to all front line employees by a group of service users from Gateshead People which covered the issues that people with learning disabilities face. Feedback from these sessions showed that there was a much greater impact by receiving this training directly from service users rather than through an internal briefing.

All managers involved in recruitment are required to undertake the company Recruitment and Selection Training, ensuring that recruitment is carried out consistently and fairly. In addition to this, an HR representative supports the appointing officer throughout the recruitment process.

The HR report produced for Resources Committee on a quarterly basis provides information on the profile of employees as well as profile information throughout the recruitment process from application, appointments and leavers. This helps us to identify if there were any trends in terms of particular protected characteristics being unsuccessful at interview stage or if there was an increase in leavers who share a protected characteristic.

LGBT Equality

In the last year we have continued to be Stonewall Diversity Champions and enter the Workplace Equality Index to ensure that we are continually improving and creating an inclusive workplace.

Following feedback from the 2014 index, an action plan was developed which involved considering the wording in key HR policies such as Bullying and Harassment, Parental Leave schemes and the Whistleblowing schemes.


In addition a joint LGBT staff and customer forum was established. This group was promoted to employees and customers and whilst it is still in its early stages, the group

have already met with representatives from Mears, our repairs contractor to see how the response of operatives can be improved for LGBT tenants.

Domestic Abuse Policy and Procedure for Employees

In 2014 we developed and launched our policy and procedure on domestic abuse for employees. As part of this launch, managers were briefed on the policy to ensure that they are able to respond effectively to incidents of domestic abuse. In addition a number of employees were identified and trained to be workplace domestic abuse champions.

This builds on the extensive work we have done previously to support customers who have been affected by domestic abuse and demonstrates our commitment to supporting our employees.



Where will we be focussing our efforts in 2015/16?

In 2015/16 we will work to ensure that our revised value of Being Inclusive and Valuing Diversity is key to our approach. Some of the areas of activity will be:

- Developing an equality and inclusion strategy, supporting the company's overall new 5 Year Plan.
- Identifying actions needs to address the people who will be affected by universal credit.
- Carrying out a range of digital inclusion activities based on the outcome of the insight project.
- Working with schools both at primary and secondary level on hate crime/stereotyping related projects
- Reviewing the information we collect on customers to ensure this gives us the information we need to plan services effectively and tailor our approach.

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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Performance Framework

Customer Profile of main tenant as at 31/03/2015

Gender	Total	%
Male	7886	41.2%
Female	11276	58.8%
Unknown	1	0.0%
Total	19163	100%

Age	Total	%
No Date of Birth	2	0%
16 - 24	629	3.3%
25 - 39	4045	21.1%
40 - 49	3253	17.0%
50 - 59	3422	17.9%
60 - 74	4521	23.6%
75 and over	3291	17.2%
Total	19163	100%

Ethnicity	Total	%
Asian Or Asian British Bangladeshi	15	0.1%
Asian Or Asian British Indian	9	0.0%
Asian Or Asian British Other	108	0.6%
Asian Or Asian British Pakistan	16	0.1%
Black Or Black British African	217	1.1%
Black Or Black British Caribbean	4	0.0%
Black Or Black British Other	26	0.1%
Chinese	20	0.1%
Mixed Other	27	0.1%
Mixed White & Asian	19	0.1%
Mixed White & Black African	15	0.1%
Mixed White & Black Caribbean	7	0.0%
Other	92	0.5%
Refused	47	0.2%
Unknown	95	0.5%
White British	18064	94.3%
White Irish	33	0.2%
White Other	349	1.8%
Total BME	575	3.0%
Total	19163	100.00%

People of a disability	Total	%
Yes	5530	28.8%
No	13522	70.6%
Not disclosed	4	0.0%
Refused	33	0.2%
Blank	78	0.4%

Type of disability*	Total
Learning Disability	285
Wheelchair User	450
Mobility Difficulties	3269
Mental Health Disability	1130
Blind	299
Hard of Hearing	456
Visually Impaired	263
Deaf	582

*Tenants may have indicated having more than one disability

Information Formats special requirements	Total
3 rd Party contact	19
Audio	38
Braille	4
Large Print	767
Lip Reader	5
Other Language	19
BSL Interpreter	12
Translation	19
Type talk	17
Total	900

Faith or Religion	Total	%
Buddhist	17	0.1%
Christian	5702	29.8%
Hindu	6	0.0%
Humanist	19	0.1%
Jewish	1	0.0%
Muslim	164	0.9%
No religion	1087	5.7%
Other	2219	11.6%
Prefer not to say	261	1.4%
Sikh	1	0.0%
Blank	9686	50.5%
Total	19163	

Sexuality	Total	%
Bisexual	66	0.3%
Blank	9952	51.9%
Gay Man	57	0.3%
Gay Woman / Lesbian	39	0.2%
Heterosexual / Straight	8250	43.1%
Prefer Not To Say	799	4.2%
Total	19163	

Use of Support Services

Language line calls	Total calls
Albanian	0
Arabic	2
Bengali	1
Cantonese	1
Chinese	0
Czech	1
Farsi	3
French	1
Hindi	0
Korean	0
Kurdish	1
Latvian	0
Lithuanian	0
Mandarin	0
Polish	4
Portuguese	0
Punjabi	0
Russian	3
Serbian	0
Slovak	0
Sorani	0
Somali	0
Spanish	2
Swahili	0
Tamil	0
Thai	1
Tigrinya	1
Turkish	0
Urdu	0
Total	21

BSL Interpreters	3
Face to Face Interpreters (other language)	8

		% of company employees	% of Board members	% of top five per cent earners	% of new employees	% of employees ending their employment
Ethnicity	Total count	335		18	20	18
	BME	2.68		0	0	5.55
	Non BME	97.32		100	100	94.45
Gender						
	Male	41.49		66.66	15	44.44
	Female	58.51		33.34	85	55.56
	Not known	0		0	0	
Age						
	under 25	4.18		0	25	11.12
	25-39	42.98		27.78	35	33.34
	40-49	22.99		55.56	25	16.66
	50-59	23.59		16.66	10	38.88
	60-74	6.26		0	5	0
	75+	0		0		0
	Not Known	0		0		0
Disability						
	Yes	9.85		11.11	5	22.22
	No	90.15		83.33	95	77.78
	Not known	0		5.56	0	0

		% of company employees	% of Board members	% of top five percent earners	% of new employees	% of employees ending their employment
Sexual Orientation	Bisexual	0.60		0	0	0
	Gay man	0.29		0	0	0
	Gay woman/lesbian	0.29		0	5	0
	Heterosexual/Straight	54.93		61.12	95	94.44
	Prefer not to say	5.68		38.88	0	0
	Not known	38.21		0	0	5.56
Religion or Belief	Buddhist			0	0	0
	Christian	43.89		38.88	20	38.89
	Hindu			0	0	0
	Humanist			0	0	0

	Jewish			0	0	0
	Muslim	0.29		0	0	0
	Sikh	0.29		0	0	0
	Other	2.69		0	0	0
	No religion	20.60		16.66	25	38.89
	Prefer not to say	17.00		11.12	55	16.67
	Not known	15.24		33.34	0	5.55