

Report to Resources Committee

8 September 2015



Title: Equality and Diversity - Update

Report of: Managing Director

Purpose of Report

1. To provide a summary of Equality and Diversity work within the organisation in the first quarter of 2015/16.

Background

2. The Company continues to place equality and diversity at the heart of everything it does with one of our values being 'inclusive, valuing diversity'.
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 demonstrates 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 followed up at sign up and then 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 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 2015, the profile of our main tenants (19,111 tenancies) was as follows:
 - 58.94% female
 - 3.34% under 25, 39.11% are over 60
 - 3.07% Black Minority Ethnic (BME) with highest proportion consistently Black or Black British African
 - 28.49% of households have at least one person indicating they have a disability with the highest reported being mobility and mental health
 - 16.85% (3,221) customers have told us that they have mobility issues followed by 5.89% (1,126) customers informing us they have a mental health disability.
11. We have now collected information from over 40% of customers on sexual orientation 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:
 - 8,355 customers have declared their sexual orientation, 2.0% of which have indicated that they are Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual
 - The highest proportion of our tenants have indicated that they are Christian (61.37%), followed by 1.81% stating they are Muslim. 11.84% of tenants have stated they have no religion.

Single Equality Scheme

12. Forum members requested at least one joint meeting to be held every year. As a result we held one in June 2015 with all members from the BME, LGBT and Disabled Persons' Housing Forums being invited.
13. This year's joint forum focused on a review of the Single Equality Scheme to ensure it is up to date and relevant based on current legislation and company priorities. Attendees were split into groups each looking at different sections of the scheme. Feedback was gathered to help inform the review with several members wanting to be part of the focus group to continue with this piece of work.
14. It was proposed to change the name of the scheme to the 'Equality and Inclusion Scheme' as it will refer to digital and financial inclusion information, and members felt the new title was more reflective of the revised content.
15. A focus group of forum members will continue to meet on a regular basis until the document is finalised.

Training and Guidance

16. In June 2015, an Involvement and Diversity Officer attended a Mental Health Market Place held in Newcastle to gather relevant information about available support to help us deal effectively with mental health conditions of customers and staff. We also established positive links with relevant support organisations.
17. In June, we also attended a training event facilitated by Stonewall called 'Supporting your trans staff'. This helped us to gain a greater understanding of how to put policies into practice in the workplace and information gathered was fed back to our Human Resources team. We were also able to establish positive links with local trans organisations for our future support.

Hate Crime

18. During the last period, we have worked in partnership with Gem Arts and Gateshead Council to deliver arts projects in senior schools around hate crime.
19. Intelligence information on where hate crimes were occurring more frequently was used to help select the schools to engage with. As a result, Heworth Grange Comprehensive School and Joseph Swan Academy were approached and agreed to be part of this project.
20. Both schools began work in June with an artist to produce pieces of artwork about hate crime awareness, which can then be used more widely across Gateshead. These pieces of artwork will be both a poster and animation campaign. The final artwork will be launched and presented in their assemblies in September.

Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Equality

21. We have continued to undertake a range of activities to make the organisation more LGBT inclusive, both as an employer and a service provider.
22. We continue to be a member of Stonewall and are actively working on recommended actions following last year's submission into the Workplace Equality Index. As a result we will defer our entry until 2016/17, to ensure recommended processes are implemented accordingly.
23. As a method to further promote our LGBT Network group, in May an Involvement and Diversity Officer attended an 'LGBT Plus' group made up of 16-25 year olds, to raise awareness of the network's achievements to date and encourage new members. The network is due to meet again in the next period.

Link to values

24. This report relates to the following Company values:
 - Fair
 - Customer focused
 - Open and honest
 - Inclusive, valuing diversity
 - Passionate about what we do.

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, Disabled Persons' and BME Housing Forums.

35. Consultation took place with forum members to review the Single Equality Scheme in the joint forum, and following this a focus group will continue to meet until the final document is produced.

Recommendation

36. 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 2015/16.