



Equality and Diversity Policy 2007

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Maidstone Housing Trust

Equality and Diversity Policy

1 Policy summary

Maidstone Housing Trust (MHT) promotes equality of opportunity and fairness in its role as a major landlord, service provider and employer. In so doing, we recognise and applaud the contribution made by the diverse communities to the Borough's economic, social and cultural well being.

We operate with professionalism, integrity and openness and believe that everyone should be treated with dignity, respect and fairness. We appreciate that some groups or individuals may experience discrimination and disadvantage because of their age, disability, ethnic or national origin, nationality, race or colour, gender, HIV status, marital status, religion or belief, political beliefs, sexual orientation, trade union activities, unrelated spent criminal convictions, caring responsibilities, or any other irrelevant factors. It is therefore our intention to seek to redress this through positive action measures. We recognise that different people and communities may have different needs and this may sometimes mean providing a range of different services to meet these varying needs.

This policy sets out our commitment to promoting and practising equality and diversity, and dealing with any form of discrimination or harassment. It also sets out mechanisms for implementing, monitoring and co-ordinating progress towards the achievements of our objectives.

2 Our values

The Trust's Board has defined our values, which specifically includes acting with integrity, valuing diversity and treating everyone fairly.

We are committed to ensuring that all our policies, procedures and practices provide appropriate treatment to all in the allocation of housing, provision of services and employment of colleagues and service providers.

We do not tolerate any form of unfair discrimination, bullying or harassment because it denies people the opportunities to develop to their full potential and play an active role in their neighbourhoods and communities.

This policy is underpinned by relevant laws, regulations, Statutory Codes of Practice, guidance from the statutory agencies (Commission for Racial Equality, Disability Rights Commission, Equal Opportunities Commission), Chartered Institute of Housing, The National Housing Federation and the Audit Commission.

3 Collective and Personal Responsibility

All Board members and staff at MHT have a responsibility to implement this policy and to ensure that their actions do not lead to unlawful discrimination.

3.1 Board Members

Board members are responsible for:

- Setting strategy, policy and targets
- Making resources available for implementation.
- Monitoring and analysing performance and agreeing corrective action where necessary.
- Regularly reviewing the Equality and Diversity policy, and action plans.

3.2 Overall implementation

The Chief Executive and the Senior Management Team are responsible for:

- Implementing this policy through annual and long-term action plans.
- Making sure that this policy is consistently applied in all areas of work.
- Reporting annually to the Board on progress of the Equality and Diversity Service Improvement Plan.

3.3 Day to day implementation

All staff are responsible for practising and promoting equality and diversity in their day-to-day activities.

MHT engages with a wide variety of organisations and individuals, such as contractors, consultants and suppliers, their support and co-operation to adhere to this policy is essential.

3.4 Sanctions

Deliberate acts of unlawful discrimination, including victimisation, harassment, bullying or pressure to discriminate, will result in serious disciplinary action, possibly including dismissal of colleagues and termination of contracts with service providers.

4 Key objectives

Equality and Diversity is central to our corporate visions themes and values. The main objective of this policy is to become a more inclusive organisation, promote fairness and implement best practice in all of our strategies, policies, practices, operational and other plans.

This policy applies to all MHT's activities and functions. The following outlines the key policy objectives:

4.1 Corporate Commitment and Continuous Improvement

We will demonstrate corporate commitment and continuous improvement through:

- Providing training and guidance to all staff, Board Members and active residents to ensure that they clearly understand their position in law and their personal responsibilities.
- Publishing a summary leaflet of this policy and making it available to staff, service providers, customers and Board members and others.
- Encouraging recognised tenants and residents associations to adopt our ethos and work in the spirit of our values.
- Taking account of equality and diversity impact on Service Improvement Plans and Best Value Reviews.
- Regularly analysing and reporting performance against targets to the Board and residents.

4.2 Recruitment of Board Members

MHT's Board Members recognise that, in order to be effective and accountable, we should aim for all sections of the community to be represented at the heart of the decision-making processes.

Therefore we will:

- Regularly review the make-up of the Board (where appropriate) by age, disability, ethnicity, gender, religion and sexuality and where necessary set appropriate targets to ensure that the Board represents the community it serves.
- Have fair and transparent policy and procedures for Recruitment, Appraisal, Selection and Training of Board Members.
- Encourage under-represented groups to apply when vacancies occur.
- Make Board appointments on merit.
- Remove barriers and ensure support is available for all Board Directors to fulfil their role and responsibilities fully.

4.3 Employment

Our desire to meet diverse needs is achieved by having a workforce that reflects diversity and has the skills and understanding to achieve our strategic and operational objectives.

We aim to:

- Have a workforce that reflects the local population and the communities in which we work. All selection, appointment and advancement of staff will be on merit.
- Have Recruitment and Selection Policy and Procedures that are non-discriminatory.
- Include a positive statement about equality of opportunity in job advertisements.
- Advertise in specific publications where we seek to attract specific applicants.
- Only ask for essential qualifications in person specifications.
- Provide appropriate training to those responsible for conducting job interviews.
- Use disabled trainers for disability training wherever possible.
- Consider “permitted work” arrangements when employing disabled people.
- Take positive action measures as permitted under the relevant legislation, in order to enable under-represented groups to acquire skills necessary to compete for jobs at all levels and grades.
- Develop an organisational cultural which values people from all sections of society and supports the contribution each individual can make.
- Ensure that unlawful discrimination does not occur in terms and conditions of employment, learning and development opportunities, promotion and other benefits, achieving a work-life, etc.
- Not tolerate harassment, bullying or victimisation of Board members, staff service providers, customers or residents in any circumstances and take appropriate action against any person found harassing, bullying or victimising. Any such claims will be speedily and fully investigated and appropriate action will be taken.
- Train staff, agency workers and Board members to enable them to identify and deal with all forms of harassment.

4.4 Awarding Contracts

We will:

- Promote equality and diversity through engagement of contractors, consultants, suppliers and partners.
- Require external agents to conduct themselves in a manner that reflects our ethos.
- Give assistance to small businesses so that they can meet our standards for example, by asking them to adopt our Equality and Diversity stance.
- Award contracts to objective criteria to assess the service provider’s ability to carry out work to required standards, timetables and budgets.

4.5 Access to Homes and Services

As a social landlord it is important that our homes and services are available to everyone.

We will:

- Set targets and measure performance on lettings to diverse groups.
- Work in partnership with the local authority and other local community, voluntary and religious agencies to meet the housing needs of all sections of the communities in which we work.
- Provide services in a sensitive way that takes account of the needs of all communities. In particular, we will seek to identify the various needs of our customers, and develop specific service delivery approaches in an effort to tailor services to meet them. These approaches will also take particular account of vulnerable and discriminated groups.
- Design and develop our services to meet the diverse needs of all customers.
- Provide clear, accurate and accessible information about services, including interpretation and translation services to remove communications barriers.

4.6 Equality Monitoring & Customer Satisfaction

Our aim is to ensure that we do not discriminate directly or indirectly, and that all customers are equally satisfied with our services.

We will:

- Carry out equality & diversity monitoring of various activities, and the people who use our services in areas such as repairs, benefits advice, transfer list, aids and adaptations, complaints and recruitment etc.
- Regularly monitor the quality of our homes and services by reference to particularly disadvantaged groups and identify unfair and discriminatory practices and outcomes.
- Undertake informal and formal monitoring and customer satisfaction surveys (eg, STATUS). Results will be analysed to identify differences in responses from different groups.
- Collect and process all personal and sensitive data obtained during equality monitoring and satisfaction surveys, in full accordance with the Data Protection Act requirements and the Trust's relevant policies.

4.7 Resident Involvement

We believe that customer involvement and consultation are at the centre of delivering decent homes and services around the needs of customers. It is essential to ensure that flexible consultation and participation methods are available.

We will:

- Encourage the involvement of all communities in decision-making and developing services through Tenants and Residents groups and partnerships.
- Encourage all customers to join Tenants and Residents Associations, and expect and encourage membership of those groups to reflect their local communities.
- Review our Resident Involvement Policy to ensure that it allows all customers and residents to have equal access and involvement in how services are designed and delivered.
- Monitor the equality and diversity profile of Tenants and Residents Groups to ensure they reflect their local communities.

4.8 Anti Social Behaviour

We believe that no one in society should live in fear of harassment or victimisation, and we are fully committed to ensuring that effective action is taken against perpetrators of anti-social behaviour. Our Tenancy Agreement requires customers and members of their households and visitors, not to harass, intimidate or create any nuisance. The Residents Handbook provides details of the above policies and procedures and encourages customers to inform us of any breaches so that we can investigate them.

We will:

- Take action to eliminate harassment and anti-social behaviour operating a victim centred approach.
- Ensure that all customers have the opportunity to live in a safe and secure environment.
- Take appropriate steps to encourage particularly vulnerable groups to report possible incidents.
- Have effective systems and resources available to support victims of racial harassment, and have appropriate mechanisms in place for reporting and recording incidents of anti-social behaviour and racial harassment and taking action against perpetrators.
- Provide relevant training to staff to deal with racist incidents and hate crimes.

5 Setting targets, monitoring and evaluating

To assess the success of the equality and diversity policy, equality and diversity monitoring and data collection is essential. Service Directors / Managers will identify key equality and diversity performance indicators, set annual targets and analyse performance.

Board Members will regularly monitor the effectiveness of practice against this policy. An annual equality and diversity report and progress of the E&D SIP

will be presented to the Board. The E&D Forum will regularly consider ongoing equality & diversity monitoring data (as this is further developed and introduced across Trust activities) on disability, gender, ethnicity, age, religion and belief, and sexuality in the following service areas:

i Housing

Transfer list, including waiting time
Nominations
Refusals and reasons for refusal
Quality of property offered - new-lets and re-lets
Mutual Exchanges
Right to Buy sales
Aids and adaptations service
Lifeline and support services
Percentage of homes suitable for people with disabilities

ii Service delivery

Customer Satisfaction rates
Complaints
Racial Harassment and anti social behaviour
Tenant participation and involvement

iii Staff

Job adverts
Number of applicants, shortlists and appointments
Current workforce
Learning and Development opportunities
Opportunities for flexible working and work-life balance
Grievance and disciplinary action
Harassment, bullying and victimisation
Turnover
Exit interview trends
Action taken to make reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities, of different faiths, ethnicity or sexuality etc.

iv Contractors, Consultants and Suppliers

Contracts awarded to service providers.
BME staffing levels of contractors, consultants or suppliers
Equality & Diversity policy compliance
BME Tenant Satisfaction by contractor
Racial harassment handling by contractor

v Membership of Governing Body / Resident Groups (MRG) / Leaseholder and resident Panels

By age, gender and sexuality
By disability, faith and ethnicity

6. Policy Review

The Policy will be included in the Trust's Document Review Framework, and the Chief Executive has the responsibility for ensuring that this policy is reviewed and presented to Board at least every three years.

7. Linked policies

To ensure that equality & diversity is embedded across the organisation, this policy is linked to a number of the Trust's other policies and procedures including (but not limited to):

- Recruitment Policy and Procedure for appointment of Board Members
- Employee Recruitment and Selection Policy and Procedure
- Terms and Conditions of Employment
- Procurement and Tendering Policy
- Business Plan and Corporate Plan
- Resident Involvement policy
- Anti Social Behaviour Policy and Procedure
 - Harassment & hate crimes Policy
 - Racial Harassment Policy
 - Domestic Violence Policy
 - Vulnerable Adults / People
- Customer Handbook
- Tenancy Agreement
- Allocations & lettings Policy and Procedures
- Mutual Exchange and Right to Buy procedures
- Aids and adaptations Policy and procedures
- Communications Strategy