



Aberdeenshire *housing partnership*

Equality and Diversity Policy

FEBRUARY 2005

This policy reflects Aberdeenshire Housing Partnerships to commitment to ensuring and promoting diversity and equality of opportunity in housing, employment and provision of services for all people within its range of work.

Aberdeenshire Housing Partnership will treat all people equally regardless of race, colour, ethnic origin, religion, cultural background, sexual orientation, gender, disability, age, marital or parental status (domestic circumstances), illness (such as HIV or Aids), employment status, membership of trade unions or political beliefs, or any other unjustifiable criteria.

List of Contents

Paragraph		Page
1.	POLICY STATEMENT	1
2.	AIMS	1
3.	OBJECTIVES	2
	OBJECTIVE 1 - DIVERSITY IN THE DELIVERY OF SERVICES	2
	Housing Needs	2
	Building New Homes	2
	Accessing Housing	2
	Adapting Existing Homes	2
	Accessing Services	3
	Upholding Equality	3
	OBJECTIVE 2 - DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE	3
	Recruitment, Selection & Training of Board	3
	Recruitment, Selection & Training of Staff	3
	Accessible Offices	4
	OBJECTIVE 3 - COMMUNICATIONS, CONSULTATION & INVOLVEMENT	4
	Communication	4
	Stakeholder Involvement & Feedback	4
	OBJECTIVE 4 - CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT	4
	Planning for Improvements	4
	Setting Targets	4
	Measuring & Reporting Performance	4
4.	REVIEW	5

Equality and Diversity Policy

1. POLICY STATEMENT

- 1.1 Aberdeenshire Housing Partnership recognises that Scotland is becoming an increasingly diverse society and will work to ensure that the organisation reflects and promotes that diversity in everything that it does. AHP embraces diversity, promotes equal opportunities for all and will strive to eliminate unlawful discrimination in all areas of our work.

2. AIMS

- 2.1 Aberdeenshire Housing Partnership has developed a comprehensive policy to ensure that it is positive in its approach to diversity and equality.

- AHP recognises and respects differences.
- AHP will strive to achieve equality of opportunity for an increasingly diverse customer and employee group.
- AHP will provide services that meet different needs and preferences
- AHP will promote understanding and good relations between people who have different backgrounds and experiences.
- AHP will review, monitor and challenge its approach to equality and diversity to ensure compliance with its own Objectives and those of its Regulatory bodies

- 2.2 In establishing these aims AHP has taken account of a range of service user, governance and employment matters including:

- AHP's determination to take full account of the diverse needs of our service users to ensure that services provided are appropriate to current (and future) needs.
- The need to ensure an effective Board which reflects the diversity of community interests
- The need to recruit, train and retain the best available staff within the job market.
- The requirements of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and other cornerstone statutes including the Sex Discrimination Act, 1975, the Race Relations Acts (1976 and Amendment Act 2000), the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and the Human Rights Act 1998.
- Good practice and other guidance produced by UK Government, Scottish Executive, Communities Scotland (particularly their publication Equalities in Practice (2002) and the Chartered Institute of Housing

Equality and Diversity Policy

3. OBJECTIVES

- 3.1 AHP has established the following four objectives across its range of services and business activities.

OBJECTIVE 1 - DIVERSITY IN THE DELIVERY OF SERVICES

- 3.2 **AHP will provide information and deliver services that accord with the diversity of the community now and the future.**

Housing Needs

- 3.3 AHP will assess the needs of its current and future service users through a range of appropriate approaches including direct contact with specific service users collectively or individually and where appropriate their families, friends, carers and support groups as well as through working in partnership with other organisations including the local authority. Account will be taken of the Local Housing Strategy, Joint Community Care Plan and Supporting People strategies in the development of AHP's Strategic and Operational Plans and Policies.

Building New Homes

- 3.4 AHP will establish a Development Strategy that will set out how the building programme will achieve AHP's objectives in relation to Equality & Diversity. This strategy, which is planned to be established in June 2005, will reflect both national and local priorities.
- 3.5 At a strategic level AHP will work closely with Communities Scotland, Area Office and the local authority in the development of new homes. AHP will be guided by the direction provided through the local housing strategy, supporting people strategy and homelessness strategy. In addition AHP will continue to develop its relations with local communities through the Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership and other fora. HP will continue to provide new homes that meet Housing for Varying Needs criteria.
- 3.6 At a more operational level new developments will take account of the specific needs of individuals and groups through discussion with them and appropriate support agencies.

Accessing Housing

- 3.7 AHP will ensure that it meets its various legal responsibilities in relation to the selection and allocation of its houses and in particular the avoidance of discrimination in this area. The arrangements for this being established within AHP's Allocation Policy (due to be reviewed in December 2005). A key aspect of the successful delivery of this Aim is the partnership with the local authority in terms of an agreed Homelessness Protocol and Nomination Agreement.

Adapting Existing Homes

- 3.8 AHP will work with Communities Scotland Area Office, the local authority and others including the Disabled Persons Housing Advisory Service to provide for and fund appropriate adaptations to tenants homes. A customer centred approach will be adopted to ensure that tenants are consulted, informed and involved throughout the process.

Equality and Diversity Policy

Accessing services

- 3.9 AHP will ensure that all its services are accessible to its current and future service users taking account of any specific needs. This will be done through a range of approaches including information, communication, physical access to our offices taking account of the Disability Discrimination Act requirements and through appropriate policies and practices.
- 3.10 Specifically AHP will tackle “hate” harassment whether motivated by racism, sexism, homophobia, and prejudice against disabled people. Best practice approaches are being developed following the MacPherson Report (1999) in liaison with Grampian Racial Equality Council and others and AHP will continue to work with partners in dealing with these issues. AHP is planning to establish a Racial Harassment Policy in June 2005.

Upholding Equality

- 3.11 AHP will uphold and promote equality and diversity throughout its services and activities including through literature to tenants, for example through the Tenants Handbook and Newsletters, support to tenant groups and through Board and staff training.
- 3.12 In addition AHP will work with its contractors and suppliers to ensure that they are aware of our requirements in relation to Equality & Diversity and that they are upheld in the pursuance of service delivery.

OBJECTIVE 2 - DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

- 3.13 **AHP will work to ensure that its governing body reflects the diversity of the community it serves and is well informed on equality and diversity issues. In addition AHP will explore the opportunity of becoming an Equal Opportunities employer to ensure that it recruits and retains staff of the best calibre available.**

Recruitment, Selection and Training of Board

- 3.14 AHP will strive to ensure that the diversity of the community it serves is reflected in its Boards' composition taking account of the various business requirements of the organisation.
- 3.15 Board members will be kept informed of the legislative and policy background to equalities and diversity issues through reports to the Board and through related training programmes.

Recruitment, Selection and Training of Staff

- 3.16 AHP will explore the opportunity of becoming an Equal Opportunities employer by ensuring that the approach to recruitment is fair, accountable and accessible. Those members of staff and Board responsible for the recruitment of employees will be trained on equal opportunities in recruitment and selection.
- 3.17 AHP will establish a targeted approach to staff training and incorporate equal opportunity awareness in the Training Plan.

Equality and Diversity Policy

- 3.18 AHP will regularly review its Employment Manual and Code of Conduct for staff and board members to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of the organisation and the staff. In particular the Board will be advised of any significant changes in legislation relating to employment and related areas.

Accessible Offices

- 3.19 AHP will continue to ensure that the physical layout of its offices remains accessible for those with physical and other impairments particularly having regard to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

OBJECTIVE 3 - COMMUNICATION, CONSULTATION & INVOLVEMENT

- 3.20 AHP will communicate with, consult and involve stakeholders (including tenants and staff) about the services provided and planned and what can be done to improve them.**

Communication

- 3.21 AHP will establish a Communications Policy and Customer Charter that will take account of the diversity of needs within the community as well as within the organisation. The Policy will identify the approaches to be taken in relation to communication and the standards to be adopted. The Customer Services Charter is planned to be established in April 2005.

Stakeholder Involvement & Feedback

Tenant Involvement

- 3.22 AHP will develop Tenant Involvement (including tenants with particular needs) through the Tenant Participation strategy. The strategy will identify the overall approach, and resources required to ensure effective participation and involvement of all our stakeholders. A range of consultation mechanisms will be used including Tenants Newsletters and Events. In addition AHP promotes the use of its Complaints system and encourages feedback through a variety of channels. AHP will be developing a website and other approaches to develop communications with tenants and other stakeholders.

Staff Involvement

- 3.23 Staff are encouraged to contribute and are consulted on all employment and related issues in addition to the strategic direction of the organisation. Regular meetings are held for the whole staff team and team meetings with service managers are seen as important opportunity to identify areas for improvement. One to one development meetings are held regularly between managers and staff and meetings are held between those staff not reporting directly to the Chief Executive and that postholder.
- 3.24 All staff also have access to the Board.

Other Stakeholders

- 3.25 The views of other stakeholders involved in the business of AHP are actively encouraged and consultation is achieved through a variety of opportunities including the Annual Report.

Equality and Diversity Policy

OBJECTIVE 4 - CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

3.26 AHP embraces the need to continuously review and improve services and will do this through planning for improvements, setting targets, and measuring and reviewing performance.

Planning For Improvements

3.27 AHP's Strategic Plan (2005 – 2009) sets out its Key Objectives for the period and how it will achieve these objectives. Underpinning the Strategic Plan is a range of service and operational plans.

3.28 In addition AHP has agreed an Improvement Plan with Communities Scotland following their inspection in June 2003 and progress against this plan is monitored by the Board and Communities Scotland.

3.29 An annual Internal Management Plan is also produced.

Setting Targets

3.30 AHP measures performance against a number a number of key service level indicators. These include, for example, information retrieved from SCORE in relation to lettings, information about racial harassment and anti social behaviour, the results and feedback from communication exercises including Tenant Satisfaction Surveys, Tenants Events and Complaints

Measuring & Reporting Performance

3.31 Performance on achieving the established targets (service and governance related) will be reported to the appropriate service committee (normally monthly) and to the Board on a quarterly or annual basis. Performance will also be reported to stakeholders through a variety of means including Tenant Newsletters, the AGM, the Annual Report and through direct discussion and meetings. Information will also be provided to Communities Scotland through the Annual Performance Statistical Review and during Inspections carried out by Regulation & Inspection.

3.32 In addition AHP will carry out self - assessment against the eight "challenges" (measures) identified by Communities Scotland in their publication Equalities in practice (2002) and subsequent publications.

3.33 All reports being considered by AHP's Board and Committees will take account of Diversity & Equality issues.

4. REVIEW

4.1 AHP reviews all policies according to priority. This policy will be formally reviewed every 3 years and updated in the event of major legislation or other significant impacts as required.