

Every Customer Counts

STRATEGY DOCUMENT	
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A Strategy for Valuing Diversity, Ensuring Equality and Delivering Excellence in Customer Care

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Overview

We deliver services to a wide range of customers. Our largest group of customers are the residents living in our rented, leased and shared ownership properties but we also have our internal customers, the people that we work with and provide services to each day to ensure the business runs smoothly. In addition we have external customers, those working in external organisations that we do business with as well as our potential customers of the future, including those who are hoping to be housed by us.

All these customers count and all have varying needs and expectations of us. Valuing these customers means understanding their differences and doing our best to meet their diverse needs and expectations.

To do this we are committed to developing a culture which ensures that the people, communities and organisations we work with are treated fairly and equitably and that respects and reflects the diversity of their culture, backgrounds and need.

How we do business with our customers matters. Knowing and respecting our customers matters. It matters because we want to keep their custom and get new custom. It matters that we keep our customers because of the financial consequences of losing them. We want satisfied customers. We want customers who have high expectations of us in the way that we have high expectations of ourselves.

This Strategy and the accompanying Single Equalities Scheme describe how Family ensures that 'Every Customer Counts'; delivering equality in access, respecting and celebrating diversity and working towards the delivery of excellence in customer care.

Current Position

The Board approved a new Equality & Diversity Strategy in September 2007. This was reviewed in 2009 and a revised 'Diversity Matters' Strategy approved in June of that year. The review took account of the outcomes of a Short Notice Inspection carried out by the Audit Commission in January 2009. This inspection was of the delivery of the repairs and home improvement service but included an assessment of equality and diversity in relation to these service areas. The judgement for diversity was that there was a balance of strengths and weaknesses.

The Board approved: 'How can I help you?' - Family's Access and Customer Care Strategy, in September 2008. This Strategy has not been reviewed as a decision was taken during the latter part of 2009 to merge these two strategy documents, producing a single strategic approach to the delivery of equalities driven and customer focused services, 'Every Customer Counts'. In the Short Notice Inspection the judgement for access and customer care was that there were more weaknesses than strengths.

During the life of both Strategies to date and specifically since the Short Notice Inspection a number of key actions and activities have contributed towards Family making progress in both of these areas that cut across many aspects of our service delivery to both internal and external customers.

- ✓ Review of range, style, format and language of service specific leaflets for customers
- ✓ Production of 'welcome to Family' DVD
- ✓ Greater promotion of in-house and external translation and interpretation services resulting in increased take-up
- ✓ Implementation of a 'Getting to Know You' campaign to improve the profiling data we hold about our customers
- ✓ Disability access audits carried out across all office accommodation and residential communal areas and necessary adaptations and adjustments carried out
- ✓ Production and implementation of a 'shaping services' action plan to ensure we are using the data we hold to shape services around customer needs and preferences, particularly in the way we contact and communicate with our customers
- ✓ A review of all internal communications
- ✓ A review of service 1st service standards in consultation with customers and quarterly performance reports produced and published
- ✓ Revised framework for monitoring and reporting on customer satisfaction, targeted at service 'pinch points' and measuring satisfaction across different customer groups to establish variations or trends in levels of satisfaction
- ✓ Delivery and embedding of Mary Guber customer care excellence programme
- ✓ Development of Family Values and 'More than a Landlord, Family', Strategy
- ✓ Extension of customer access arrangements in respect of telephone access and access to repairs and housing services
- ✓ Improved customer call centre operation through external contract with Solihull Community Housing
- ✓ Achievement of Customer Service Excellence accreditation
- ✓ Re-accreditation of Investors In People, achieving bronze standard
- ✓ Initial development of Customer Insight programme
- ✓ Annual equality and diversity training programme
- ✓ Review of Equality Impact Assessment Process
- ✓ Better collation and analysis of profiling information in relation to Board and staff team make-up
- ✓ In the combining of the two strategies a new staff and resident working group has been convened with representation from all parts of the business

The Board approved a revised performance monitoring framework to enable the Association to monitor its performance in relation to equality and diversity in June 2009. This framework has been revised and now forms the major part of the new Single Equality Scheme which is attached to this Strategy document. The framework has been extended to include the broader equalities expectations of the Single Equality Bill.

The External Context

Legislation

The principal pieces of legislation that have to date made discrimination unlawful in the UK are:

- Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (SDA)
- Race Relations Act 1976 (RRA)
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA)
- Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (2003)
- Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003
- Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006
- Equality Act 2006
- Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007

The Equality Bill was introduced to Parliament in April 2009. It has passed the final stage in Parliament and will now become law. The majority of the new legislation is planned to come into force from autumn 2010, with some parts having phased introduction from spring 2011 and beyond. The new Single Equality Act will have a major impact on all housing providers as it replaces existing legislation, adds new legislation and a new public sector duty which housing associations will be required to comply with.

Some of the key areas covered in the Act include:

- A new public sector duty to consider reducing socio-economic inequalities
- The aim of making the law more accessible and easier to understand through a single act
- Introduction of a new single equality duty, requiring public bodies to plan for the diverse needs of their workforce and the communities they serve
- Strengthen enforcement, for example, by allowing tribunals to make wider recommendations in discrimination cases
- Enable employers to take positive action in relation to recruitment of under-represented groups

The Act gives people the right not to be treated less favourably by public authorities as set out in 'protected characteristics'. They are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

The Act extends the definition of Public Authorities to organisations that 'provide functions of a public nature'.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission is a non-departmental Government body established by the Equality Act 2006. It came into being in 2007 and took over the responsibilities of the three former commissions, the Commission for Racial equality, the Equal opportunities Commission and the Disability Rights Commission.

This Strategy and the associated Single Equality Scheme are premised on the basis of the requirements of the new Single Equality Act as we envisage it being enforced. However, it is recognised that there may be a requirement to review and amend our approach as its effects become more apparent.

Our approach seeks to address all of the equality strands listed above. The consideration of socio-economic inequalities is also incorporated.

Regulation & Inspection

The Tenant Services Authority (TSA) published their new regulatory framework in April 2010. In the six standards there are no specific standards for either equality and diversity or access and customer care.

However they, 'expect providers to understand and respond to the particular needs of their tenants and to demonstrate how they have taken account the needs of tenants across the seven equality strands'.

Understanding the needs of all tenants forms a cross cutting requirement that applies to all six standards. The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard makes it clear that in meeting all the standards, providers must take into account equality and diversity and tenants with care and support needs.

In addition a specific expectation of the same Standard in relation to customer service, choice and complaints requires providers to provide tenants with accessible, relevant and timely information regarding a variety of access and communication arrangements.

The TSA have also published a draft Single Equalities Scheme which is currently being consulted on and due for publication shortly.

The TSA has published a joint statement with the Audit Commission explaining the arrangements for inspection of registered providers in the period April to October 2010. In this period inspections are to be carried out using the approach in the existing Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOEs) with inspections focusing on the specific standard areas where the TSA has identified cause for concern. The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard defines the way in which providers are expected to deliver services across all the standards, in respect of customer service, choice, complaints, involvement and understanding and responding to the diverse needs of tenants. Where an inspection is targeted at one of the other standard areas the TSA will consider whether their concerns extend to the way Tenant Involvement and Empowerment is being delivered through that service area. If this is the case, the cross cutting KLOE relating to access, customer care and diversity may form part of the scope of the inspection, as aligned to the requirements of the inspection.

The TSA and Audit Commission will publish a consultation document on the longer term review of inspection methodology in May 2010 for a three month period. The new arrangements will come into effect in October 2010.

Internal Context

Communication and IT

Effective promotion of Family's Values both internally and externally, to customers and other stakeholders, is critical in ensuring that everyone understands how Family operates and its underlying ethos and beliefs. Equality and Diversity and Customer Care principles are embedded throughout the Family Values and specifically in the Respect ('we will value difference and promote equality') and Professional ('we will be efficient, effective and skilled') Values.

The formation of a new 'Every Customer Counts' working group with representation from customers and staff from across the organisation is key to the promotion and communication of the importance that equalities issues and customer care have within our business. Our work in these areas is also promoted throughout all our corporate publications including GN News, Grapevine and Connect.

Good IT systems are essential for the delivery of effective front line operational services. This applies for our own in house systems but also to those of our partners, particularly Solihull Community Housing and to the interface between the two. In addition effective systems are required to enable us to monitor our performance both in terms of customer service (including our service standards, 'Service 1st') and across all diversity indicators.

Health and Safety

In delivering services to our customers it is important that we ensure the health and safety of our employees. This is achieved by ensuring that staff are aware of their own responsibilities in this area and that managers make the necessary arrangements for ensuring that their staff adhere to the policies and procedures in place and are actively engaged in ensuring the welfare of their staff.

Human and Financial Resources

Ensuring equality, valuing diversity and the delivery of excellence in customer care apply equally to the way we deliver services to external customers, the way we deliver services to each other and to our human resource activities (in relation to staff and Board members).

The implications of the Single Equality Act are relevant to service delivery and employment practice, though apply differently to each.

The adoption of the Gober principles of excellence in Customer Care applies equally to internal and external customers.

There are budgetary implications in relation to training of staff, Board members and residents in both these areas. Our intention is to deliver an annual equality and diversity training programme and to deliver refresher training on the Gober methodology.

There may well also be budgetary implications to the outcome of equality impact assessments to ensure equality of access to services across different customer groups

and to ensuring effective access and communications to customers. These will need to be budgeted for through the annual budget planning process.

Cross Cutting Themes

This Strategy relates to two of the three cross cutting themes, equality and diversity and access and customer care.

Value for Money principles should be incorporated into the planning and delivery of all customer facing services and equality and diversity and customer care principles will specifically feature in the Association's approach to the procurement of goods and services. The requirements being enshrined in Family's procurement policy and procedures.

Corporate Strategy

'More Than a Landlord, Family' was developed in partnership with residents, the staff team and the Board of Management. The Strategy is based on the delivery of six key outcomes.

Equality and Diversity and Customer Care principles clearly cut across all the Association's business but there is also a specific outcome focused on these areas; outcome 3:

'To consider diversity in all that we do, and provide all customers with equal access to services'

A summary of the specific milestone activities scheduled for the period October 2009 to September 2012 are detailed below. The Every Customer Counts Working Group will play a key role in monitoring delivery of these outcomes and this delivery will be reported to the Homes & Neighbourhoods Committee on a regular basis.

- The ongoing delivery and embedding of the Mary Gober Customer Service Excellence principles into mainstream service delivery
- The retention of Customer Service excellence accreditation
- Evaluation of call centre outsourcing and a decision taken about its future
- A robust Equality Impact Assessment process in place
- Tenant Insight being used to shape service delivery and target resources
- Diversity profile of Board and staff group maintained and targeted recruitment carried out where necessary
- Innovative equality and diversity training provided for Board and staff

Aims and Objectives

The aim of this Strategy is to ensure that throughout all its activities Family promotes equality, tackles discrimination, values diversity and seeks to provide excellence in customer care through the delivery of services shaped around the needs of its customers.

It is underpinned by seven key strategic objectives that provide a framework for the delivery of equality, diversity and excellence in customer care throughout the Association.

Culture and Leadership

Living our values and valuing our customers; setting high expectations for ourselves and our services; leading by example:

- By having clear leadership, championing equality and diversity issues and promoting excellence in customer care at the Board and in Senior Management
- Living our values by embedding them in all that we do
- Developing our own brand of Customer Service Excellence through the embedding of Gober principles across all areas of service
- Developing a culture where staff feel empowered to take responsibility and ownership and encouraged to make decisions and give options to customers
- Delivering services that staff can feel proud of and customers have confidence in

Equality Driven Employment and Governance Arrangements

Ensure that equalities considerations, valuing diversity and the promotion of excellence in customer care are at the heart of the business and embedded in all that we do

- Set targets to ensure that the Board and staff group are representative of the communities that we work in and take action to address areas of under-representation
- Deliver innovative training and development programmes
- Have employment policies and procedures that reflect latest legislation and best practice
- Use the Single Equality Scheme framework to measure and analyse key aspects of personnel and training functions to ensure equality of access
- Provide a 'safe' working environment where staff feel comfortable challenging inappropriate behaviour and raising their concerns
- Ensure all areas of the business have equalities targets through the Single Equality Scheme framework

Accessible Services Shaped Around the Needs of Our Customers

Provide services that recognise the diversity of customers, best meets their needs and that any barriers to access are identified and removed

- Set targets for gathering customer profiling information and have systems in place for the continuous collection of data and the storing and analysis of the information collected
- Using the information we hold about our customers to shape services, developing a customer insight programme to better target resources where they are most needed
- Use the information we hold about customers individual circumstances to provide sensitive and responsive services
- Ensure equality of access to services and equality in satisfaction through monitoring performance in accordance with the Single Equality Scheme framework
- Listening to customers views about services and shaping services accordingly; through the Customer 1st Involvement Framework and through other feedback including complaints, compliments and customer satisfaction data

- Undertake equality impact assessments on all key services and policies
- Deliver services to customers in the ways that they prefer, at the times they prefer and at a location of their choice wherever possible
- Have clear service standards in place across all key service areas and measure and report on performance
- Set challenging performance targets and benchmark performance, comparing it to best in class so that we can learn from others

Clear Communications

Communicating with and providing information to customers in ways that are clear, accessible and wherever possible tailored to the needs of the individual

- Regularly review all written communications with customers to ensure they are clear, use plain language and avoid the use of jargon
- Providing translation and interpretation facilities
- Develop the use of the Family website to make it easy to navigate
- Collect, record and respond to any individual customer communication preferences
- Provide quality and informative corporate communications, both internally and externally, gathering feedback and using this to further improve what we do

Assisting Community Cohesion

Supporting community cohesion and addressing disadvantage

- Deliver targeted community investment and regeneration projects that address inequality and disadvantage within and around the communities we operate in
- Work with a range of local community and other external agencies to maximise the impact of what we do for customers
- Ensure our approach reflects local and national policy, taking advantage of external sources of funding
- Listen to and work with customers to target resources on what they consider priorities

Tackling Discrimination and Harassment

Having a clear stand on tackling all forms of discrimination and harassment

- Have policies and procedures in place to ensure that all reports of discrimination and harassment are dealt with promptly and sensitively; this applies to human resources and operational activities
- Monitor performance in this area to monitor the effectiveness of our intervention

Exemplary Procurement Practices

Working with companies that have a commitment to equalities issues, valuing diversity and a commitment to excellent customer care and service

- Have a procurement policy and procedures that ensure all contractors, consultants and suppliers that we work with can demonstrate their commitment to equality and diversity and customer care and service
- Have equality and diversity and customer care and service a key component for the process of contractor and supplier selection
- Monitor the performance of contractors and suppliers to ensure they can demonstrate their commitment in practice

- Providing support to smaller local contractors to achieve the requirements of our procurement policy

Outcomes/Targets/Indicators

OUTCOME	TARGET	INDICATORS
Customers are equally satisfied with services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 70% overall satisfaction and equal satisfaction across diversity strands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mini Status (70% = 2010 target) Full Status 2011 (target to be set) Customer satisfaction monitoring framework Reported to Homes & Neighbourhoods Committee quarterly
Customers have equal access to services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No evidence of inequality or discrimination in relation to customers having access to or receiving services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Single Equality Scheme performance indicators Continuous improvement reviews Mystery shopping results Equality Impact Assessments
Customers do not experience harassment or discrimination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any reports of harassment are dealt with promptly and resolved in accordance with performance targets Any trends investigated and actions taken to address Staff are all aware of and trained in Family policies and procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6 monthly ASB performance report to Homes & Neighbourhoods Committee
Customers are communicated with in a style that meets their needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All communication preferences recorded and met Range of communication methods available to meet need 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Getting to Know You targets for data collection Monitoring that expressed needs being met
Customers receive services that meet their particular needs and circumstances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Full customer profiling data set available Customer insight programme delivers targeted approach to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Getting to Know You targets for data collection Monitoring that expressed needs being met

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> specific customer groups Aids and Adaptation requirements being met 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance monitoring regarding aids and adaptations Customer satisfaction monitoring Equality Impact Assessments Outcomes of Customer Insight Programme
Customers are happy in the communities within which they live	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 72% overall satisfaction with neighbourhood High satisfaction with outcomes of community investment initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mini Status (72% = 2010 target) Full Status (target not yet set) Community Investment evaluation reports
The Board make-up reflects the communities within which we operate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targets within Single Equality Scheme met 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Single Equality Scheme performance monitoring
The staff group make-up reflects the communities within which we operate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targets within Single Equality Scheme met 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Single Equality Scheme performance monitoring
Staff receive equal treatment and have equal opportunity for development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targets within Single Equality Scheme met 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Single Equality Scheme performance monitoring
Staff are equally satisfied working for Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targets for staff satisfaction met Equal satisfaction across different staff groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff satisfaction survey
Staff are satisfied with the services they receive from each other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal customer satisfaction reports give high levels of satisfaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff satisfaction survey Internal customer satisfaction framework
Board and staff have a good understanding of equality and diversity issues and customer care principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 100% attendance on corporate equality and diversity and customer care training (as required) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training attendance records and performance monitoring
Customers receive services from organisations and companies that respect them and the Family Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All contractors/suppliers comply with requirements of procurement policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contractor performance monitoring