

## **Gender Equality Scheme 2008-2010**

**‘Making equality a reality’**

**If you require this information in an alternative version such as Easy to Read, large print, Braille, audiotape, DVD with subtitles and BSL, or help in understanding it in your language, please contact the Communications Officer**

**Tel: 0121 766 1144, Fax: 0121 766 1180**

**Email [post@family-housing.co.uk](mailto:post@family-housing.co.uk)**

**To place diversity at the heart of all activities**



## **Foreword**

Welcome to Family Housing Association's first Gender Equality Scheme. It is part of our wider Equality and Diversity Strategy and together they explain how we at Family Housing aim to address gender equality issues in everything we do.

As an organisation we are committed to ensuring that when we deliver services and through our employment practices we think about how we can meet the diverse needs of our customers. This Gender Equality Scheme underlines this commitment as well as fulfilling our statutory duties. By committing to the objectives of the Scheme and the subsequent action plans we will monitor and evaluate our actions to ensure we continually move forward learning from monitoring and feedback.

# CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
• <b>Foreword</b>	<b>1</b>
• <b>Contents Page</b>	<b>2</b>
• <b>The Purpose of our Gender Equality Scheme</b>	<b>3</b>
• <b>Gender Equality Context</b>	<b>4</b>
• <b>Responsibility for the Gender Equality Scheme</b>	<b>5</b>
• <b>Meeting the General Duty</b>	<b>6</b>
• Equality Impact Assessments	<b>6</b>
• What are Equality Impact Assessments?	<b>6</b>
• Access to Services	<b>6</b>
• Accessible Information	<b>6</b>
• Involvement	<b>6</b>
• Resident Involvement Strategy	<b>7</b>
• Monitoring	<b>8</b>
• Publishing Results of Assessment, Involvement & Monitoring	<b>8</b>
• Comments and Complaints	<b>8</b>
• Training	<b>9</b>
• <b>Employment Equality</b>	<b>10</b>
• Employment Monitoring	<b>10</b>
• Identify objectives to close the gender pay gap	<b>10</b>
• Creating an open culture	<b>10</b>
• <b>Involving People</b>	<b>11</b>
• What will happen with the results of involvement	<b>11</b>
• <b>Our Gender Action Plan</b>	<b>12</b>
• Providing Access to Services	<b>12</b>
• Employment and Governance	<b>12</b>

## **The Purpose of our Gender Equality Scheme**

---

The Equality Act 2006 which amended the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and the Equal Pay Act 1970 introduced a new statutory Gender Equality Duty with effect from April 2007. It is unlawful to discriminate against people because of their sex. Although the law has been in place for over 30 years, there is still evidence of continuing discrimination, disadvantage and gender inequality in society today.

The general duty requires that we work towards:

- Eliminating unlawful discrimination and harassment
- Promoting equality of opportunity between men and women

The legislative changes also include the elimination of discrimination and harassment on the grounds of gender reassignment.

### **What is a Gender Equality Scheme?**

Our Gender Equality Scheme sets out our plans for making equality happen for people who come into contact with Family Housing and the communities we serve. The Scheme also includes a number of things we must consider under the specific duty.

To support progress in delivering the general duty, there are also specific duties which we must adhere to, these are:-

- Prepare and publish a gender equality scheme showing how we will meet our general and specific duties and setting out our gender equality objectives
- Develop reward systems which prevent, detect and rectify instances in which the pay for work of equal value is not equal between men, women and transgender people
- To gather and use information on how policies and practices affect gender equality in the workforce and in the delivery of services
- Consult with stakeholders and work with them to identify gender equality objectives
- Assess the impact of current and proposed policies on gender equality
- Implement the actions set out in the scheme
- Report annually on progress made on the scheme and review it every three years

Our Gender Equality Scheme will be published on our website.

## **The Gender Equality Context**

---

Birmingham as a city has approximately one million residents and just over half of these are female. Within our own workforce of 99 staff we have 58 males and 41 females. This is in part due to the large Property Services team which is predominantly male, although we have been successful in bringing in 3 female operatives to the team.

Views on gender equality, domestic violence, gay and lesbian people have changed significantly over the last 30 years, not only in response to legal requirements but also due to an increased awareness of the need for equality and a significant change in attitudes.

Women for example have seen major changes in their lives and society and whilst great progress has been made there still remain some persistent gender inequalities beneath the surface.

Additionally transgender people may experience discrimination or prejudice at work or in the community generally. There is a lot of ignorance around transgender issues and people from this group may often find themselves without support or inclusion with either gender and some have found themselves victims of hate crime.

As a service provider that Association is now expected to develop and deliver strategies for issues such as domestic violence which previously may have been regarded as a private concern.

## **Responsibility for the Gender Equality Scheme**

---

- The Board of the Association has overall responsibility for the Gender Equality Scheme.
- The Chief Executive and Directors are responsible for ensuring that the Scheme is put into action.
- Employees and our colleagues in partner agencies all have a role to play in helping us to meet our duty to promote equality.
- The arrangements described below ensure that we co-ordinate the work involved in putting the Scheme into practice.
- A Diversity Matters Group made up of staff from across the Association and with a Board member Champion on Diversity is in place to ensure the implementation of the Diversity and Equality Strategy and the Gender Equality Scheme
- Monitoring and reporting will take place through the group to the main Board on an annual basis.

## **Meeting the General Duty**

---

The following section and our Action Plan (Appendix 3) looks at how we are meeting (or how we will meet) the new general duty. More information about the general duty can be found in the section called “the Purpose of the Gender Equality Scheme”

### **Equality Impact Assessments (EIA's)**

We need to understand whether our services, policies and procedures are meeting everyone's needs and that people who need our services have access to them. To help us to do this we carry out Equality Impact Assessments.

#### **What are Equality Impact Assessments?**

An Equality Impact Assessment is a way of deciding whether an existing or proposed policy, procedure, practice or service does (or may) affect people differently, and if so, whether it affects them in an adverse way.

The Association will be carrying out Equality Impact Assessments on a number of policies and services during 2008. Assessments will be carried out on new policies and services, as they are developed and over time on all other existing policies and services. Gender issues will be considered alongside other equality issues such as race and disability.

We will be producing guidance and providing training to people who are responsible for policy development and undertaking Equality Impact Assessments.

A summary of the results of the Equality Impact Assessments, Action Plans, and consultation exercises will be reported as part of the annual review of the Gender Equality Scheme.

### **Access to Services**

As part of our commitment to equality and diversity, we are carrying out a customer profiling exercise to enable us to have up to date information which will help us shape the services we provide to meet the needs of our customers.

### **Accessible information**

We are undertaking a review of our Communications Strategy and are conducting a best value review of this area. We have recently conducted a survey of our tenants on their communication preferences and needs and this will inform our strategy. We have also put in place a working group to look at access and customer care, who will also be involved in the communications review.

### **Involvement**

Family Housing is committed to involving all sections of the community and giving everyone every opportunity to comment on how our services and employment practices are provided and developed. The Association also recognises that it is

important that there is equality of opportunity in all the ways in which we consult. For example we will make sure that our resident involvement groups reflect the diversity of the communities we serve.

We will involve a representative group on employment matters and the services we provide including:

- Finding out what barriers people face due to gender issues and taking steps to remove them e.g. impact assessments
- Asking if people are happy with the services we provide e.g. through satisfaction surveys, focus groups.
- Setting priorities and helping us to plan things.
- Looking at the impact of existing and proposed policies.
- Monitoring and checking how well things are done.
- Reviewing and revising the Scheme and providing feedback on how people's views have influenced our decisions.

### **Resident Involvement Strategy**

The Resident Involvement Strategy gives our overall approach to consulting and involving people who use our services. The strategy commits the Association to ensuring "that consultation is accessible to all people who take part". This includes:

- Using accessible venues and equipment.
- Arranging events at reasonable times and dates to make it easier for people to attend.
- Providing/arranging advocacy support for people who request it.
- Ensuring that specific needs of people are met

## **Monitoring**

---

The Association is committed to monitoring gender issues in regard to who access services, apply for jobs and the experience they have of the Association in general. We have a system which assists in monitoring applicants for jobs. We also monitor whether employees have fair access to training and promotion, and the extent to which they are subject to grievance and disciplinary procedures.

We will provide the results of monitoring information through service plans, the results of equality impact assessments and where appropriate within the annual report of the Scheme.

### **Publishing Results of Assessment, Involvement & Monitoring**

Once we have collected the information we will publish the results.

There are many ways in which results are published. Some will be published within reports provided by services to relevant committees.

The main consultation and involvement carried out will be summarised in our yearly report on the Gender Equality Scheme.

The yearly report for this Scheme will include an update on the Action Plan. We will involve people further both internally and externally and provide information on our gender equality plans and activities. We will also show what has changed as a result of their involvement.

We will inform our customers and employees about this information through:

- 'Good Neighbours' our newsletter which is delivered to all tenants.
- The Equalities and Diversity section within the website and intranet. We will provide information there about our work to promote equality.

### **Comments and Complaints**

Members of the public who feel that they have experienced gender discrimination in the way the Association has treated them may make a complaint through its Complaints procedure.

We have grievance and disciplinary procedures in place and a policy on dealing with complaints of harassment relating to employees.

We also have a 'whistleblowing' procedure, which extends the protection for employees who want to report bad practice without fear of being victimised as a result.

We will take all complaints seriously and will not tolerate any form of discriminatory behaviour.

Monitoring complaints is also another way of gathering information to see whether we are meeting our equality duties.

## **Training**

We will train our staff (and Board Members) so they are more aware of and have skills to take positive action in removing barriers placed in the way of sections of the community by society.

Equalities and Diversity training will provide employees with the skills and knowledge they need to ensure that equalities becomes part of our day to day activities. The plan will also help to create a culture of diversity.

The training is supported with visible and strong leadership from the top and every manager has individual responsibility and objectives, as with anything else they deliver.

The approach includes:

- Deciding the content of the equality/diversity elements to be included in training initiatives from service delivery and employment perspectives.
- Finding out what the different training needs for employees and Board members are.

We will evaluate the overall equality and diversity training programme on a yearly basis. If there is evidence to show that the training needs to be changed, we will take action to ensure that this happens.

## **Employment Equality**

---

The Association values its employees and wants to ensure that it fosters an open culture which offers equality of opportunity. As such we are committed to:-

- 1 ensuring our recruitment process is open and fair
- 2 to consult employees regularly
- 3 to ensure there is an equal pay culture
- 4 to improve the knowledge of employees about gender issues and
- 5 to check progress each year, plan ahead and let employees know about progress and future plans

### **Identify objectives to close the gender pay gap**

The new gender legislation has a particular aim to address and help resolve the evidenced pay gap between women and men. This is not just about equal pay for equal work, but also recognises that there may be cultural factors such as stereotyped careers, work life balance, limited aspirations and opportunities all of which can lead to women for example women ending up in lower paid work or part time work to accommodate their responsibilities for dependants.

### **Employment Monitoring**

We will monitor the gender and sexuality of people that we employ and we will monitor on a quarterly basis to ensure that our workforce continues to be representative of the wider community and seek to ensure that people do not face discrimination during the recruitment process, as our employees or in progressing their careers.

### **Creating an open culture**

We will create a culture where people can feel comfortable in declaring their sexuality or transgender status so that we can help make any reasonable adjustments that are necessary.

## **Involving people in the Gender Equality Scheme**

---

The draft scheme will be subject to customer involvement during Spring 2008. Focus groups from our tenant base will consider the scheme and the Diversity Matters group will also consider the document. Staff have been consulted via a focus group in January 2008.

All written information will be made available upon request in alternative formats such as Braille, large print and audio tape.

**What will happen with the results of the involvement on shaping the Gender Equality Scheme?**

We will use the results in two ways. All those comments that affect the Scheme will be considered in a report to the Diversity Matters group. What we have decided will then be reflected in the Scheme and fed back to the organisations and people who responded.

Any comments we receive that relate to the services that our partners provide will be forwarded to the relevant service providers to consider and prioritize the issues raised. Any actions taken will be included in the annual report on the Scheme.

## **Our Gender Action Plan**

---

We have grouped our actions in the plan that follows into two key areas

### **Providing Access to Services**

We aim to remove barriers to obtaining the Association's services and will seek to ensure that the services provided are those that are required.

We are committed to do this by:

- Providing services fairly to all.
- Involving people appropriately about their needs, whether they are happy with the services they use, and seeking their views on how new services are provided or designed.
- Providing accessible information about our services.
- Undertaking Equality Impact Assessments to assess how services are provided (including audits of our own services to remove barriers to access). The results of these will highlight areas for improvement, which will be dealt with through service plans.
- Ensuring that we monitor and pro-actively address any harassment
- Working with our agents providing services on our behalf to take similar initiatives.
- Monitoring our performance against agreed targets and seeking continuous improvement, reporting annually to Board
- Monitoring complaints and suggestions and improving services through these.

### **Employment and Governance**

The Association's Equal Opportunities in Employment Policy already demonstrates our commitment to achieving equality of opportunity for people in employment. We will build on this in:

- Recruitment - by ensuring that the application, short-listing and interview processes gives equal opportunity.
- The working environment - by taking all reasonable steps to ensure that the working environment does not prevent anyone from taking up or staying in employment with us.
- Career development - by ensuring that all staff have the same opportunity as to develop their full potential within the Association.
- Retention of staff undergoing gender re-assignment – by making every effort to ensure that any employee who is undergoing gender reassignment stays in employment and is fully supported in maintaining their role.
  
- Employees training - by making employees throughout the Association more aware of the circumstances of service users and changing behaviour, where necessary, to fulfil potential in service delivery and employment.
- Monitoring our performance against agreed targets and seeking continuous improvement, reporting annually.
- A commitment to work force and community profiling.
- Ensuring the Board is representative.

