



# Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

Version #:	Date:	Summary of Changes
Version 5		
Version 4		
Version 3		
Version 2	September 2010	Slight amendments in light of Equality Act
Version 1	September 2009	(changed from E&D Policy, approved by Board)

A charitable housing association



# Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy



## Introduction

Connect Housing is committed to equality of opportunity in all aspects of our work and values the rich social and cultural diversity of our communities. We understand that the people who provide and use our services have diverse characteristics and different experiences, needs and aspirations.

One of our key values, underpinning our work, is to include the whole community, treating people with fairness and offering equal consideration, valuing the different contributions they make

We recognise that people face exclusion, discrimination and harassment as a result of any one or more aspects or perceived aspects of their identity (or by association with people with different characteristics) such as:

- Having or not having religious beliefs
- Age
- Language & literacy
- Physical or mental disability & health needs
- Low Income and employment status
- Sexual orientation
- Asylum status
- Family status, (including civil partnerships, caring responsibilities & Pregnancy and maternity)
- Gender identity
- Domestic violence
- Offending history
- Race, colour & ethnic or national origin including gypsies and travellers
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Indeed many people come to us because they have experienced discrimination and disadvantage in the housing and employment markets. We have the power

to reduce some of those disadvantages by making our practices and services responsive to community and individual needs.

In providing services, employment, governance and procurement, we will actively promote equality and inclusiveness for all of our customers and staff and challenge discrimination and exclusion.

We will make sure that our services, workforce and governing body reflect the diversity of our local communities and that all of those with whom we work are aware of our commitment to equality and diversity.

We will:

- Seek to eliminate barriers to service delivery and employment and ensure that our customers and staff feel that they have been fairly treated.
- Develop and deliver plans of action to help people achieve their full potential in integrated and cohesive communities, promoting good relations within communities.

Promoting equality and inclusiveness is core to our business. It is, therefore, the responsibility of all of our Board members, staff and contractors working on our behalf to adhere to and implement this policy.

### **Our commitment through governance**

The Board will visibly demonstrate its leadership in promoting an organisational culture which values equality and diversity by:

- Nominating a Board member to be part of the Equality and Diversity Working group alongside customers and staff.
- Monitoring performance in the delivery of this policy as part of each service area strategy review and an annual review of Equality and Diversity.
- Regular review of key policies and strategies, including equality impact assessments, to ensure that they do not directly or indirectly discriminate against groups of people.

We will seek to reflect the diversity of our communities in the composition of the Board. All Board members will receive regular training on equality issues.

## **Our commitment as a service provider**

### Knowing our communities

In order that we can develop services and facilities that are accessible, relevant and of use, now and in the future, to the individuals within the communities in which we work, we will gather information from our customers, staff and partners on:

- The composition of local populations and research on local housing need.
- The composition of our tenant population, Board and staff.
- Individual needs

We will use equality and diversity data in each service area to measure take-up of services and satisfaction.

We will ask questions regarding age, gender, race, disability, sexual orientation and religion, offering the option not to answer the question, but we will not ask questions regarding gender re-assignment as we consider our population is too small and to do so may result in an inadvertent breach of confidentiality. We will raise awareness about why we ask all of these questions and what we do with the information.

### Raising awareness of our services within our communities

Key objectives of our PR and marketing strategy will be to:

- raise awareness of our services in local communities, particularly those where we have identified an under-representation in take-up of our services
- project positive images of diversity
- raise awareness of our approach to equality, diversity and inclusion.

We will actively work to establish close relationships with people from disadvantaged and minority groups to help us identify their needs and ensure that they benefit from our work.

### Serving individual needs

We are committed to providing excellent customer care to all of our customers.

In designing our services and training our staff, we will be mindful of recognising individual needs and, whilst also considering value for money, ensure that we are adaptable in meeting those needs and removing barriers which may exclude people. We will endeavour to offer choices to tenants in the services we offer and the way we deliver them.

This will include providing clear information in ways that are accessible and meet a diverse range of needs.

We want to ensure our tenants are not digitally excluded. We will work in partnership with other organisations to improve access to digital services for our tenants.

### Influencing our services

We will actively consult people within local communities about what services they need and how accessible and relevant our services are. In the way we consult and involve customers, we will strive to give every customer an equal opportunity to express their views and influence decision-making. This will include taking active steps to encourage engagement from under-represented groups by offering a wide range of opportunities and practical support to people to enable them to participate.

We will specifically involve customers in reviews of our single equality scheme.

### Working with partners to maximise resources available to our communities

We will actively seek out opportunities to work with local authorities, other landlords and specialist organisations, that deal with 'disadvantaged' groups, where, by doing so, we can:

- Obtain feedback and good practice to improve our approach
- Offer additional services to meet specific needs
- Influence local strategies to address unmet needs in our communities

- Gain access to funding or resources which will benefit our communities.

### Meeting housing need

We will be innovative and proactive in seeking housing solutions which can meet different physical and cultural needs to ensure that our stock is suitable for current needs, can respond to changes in personal circumstances and is adaptable to future needs and aspirations. This will be a key consideration in our investment decisions regarding the acquisition of new properties for rent or sale, improvements to existing homes, the offer of supported accommodation and services which support sustainable communities.

New or remodelled developments and services will, as part of the planning process, include equality impact assessments in order that any indirect discrimination and positive impacts may be identified to inform the decision-making process.

We will monitor our lettings to ensure that our allocations policies are giving everyone equal access to housing.

### Tackling discrimination and harassment

We will challenge and address discriminatory behaviour or acts of harassment by or towards customers, staff, Board members, service users or contractors. If such behaviour is encountered, we will take appropriate action which may include dismissal, termination of membership of the Association, removal from our approved contractor list or possession proceedings.

### Contractors

To achieve and retain a place on our approved contractor's list, we will require contractors to declare a commitment to upholding the principles of equality and abiding by our Equality and Diversity policy.

All contractors offering services directly to customers will be monitored on an annual basis regarding the equality training offered to staff, the composition of their staff team, the adaptability of their service to meet individual needs and customer feedback.

We will promote initiatives to offer training and employment to under-represented or disadvantaged groups.

## **Our Commitment as an employer**

### Working environment

We aim to provide a working environment which is friendly, supportive, where each person is able to give their best, and where discrimination or harassment does not occur and is known to be unacceptable.

As such, we will endeavour to identify and meet different work-related needs such as providing physical adaptations or equipment and reviewing working arrangements for people with disabilities; having 'family-friendly' policies and being sensitive to cultural and religious needs of our staff.

We will regularly raise awareness of this policy with our staff team to ensure all staff treat each other with dignity and respect. We will ensure that staff feel safe to report incidents of discrimination or harassment to us, without fearing prejudice, and confident that we will act appropriately, in accordance with strong policies and procedures.

### Recruitment

The principles of equality and diversity are central to make sure that we attract and recruit the best candidates to our posts; people who have the skills and understanding to achieve our vision, operate in accordance with our values and serve everyone in our communities.

We will require all staff involved in recruitment to be trained in applying equality and diversity principles in the recruitment process.

In fulfilling our aims to promote equality, tackle discrimination, and understand and meet the needs our diverse communities, it is important that our workforce reflects the composition of our communities.

To help us achieve this, we will:

- Monitor the composition of our workforce at all levels, identify under-representation and set targets as appropriate
- Monitor our recruitment process from application to employment to identify barriers.
- Actively promote Connect as widely as possible to raise awareness amongst under-represented groups including advertising vacancies in a range of ways and participating in training and work-experience schemes.
- Offer career development opportunities to all staff

### Training and Awareness

Staff are the key to the successful delivery of our approach to customer care and equality and diversity. We believe that only a well trained and informed staff team can deliver an excellent service.

Equality and diversity and customer care training will start at induction with regular opportunities each year (in-house and via external providers) for refreshers and more in-depth training. The aim of the training will be to:

- Promote positive attitudes to customer care and equality and diversity
- Reinforce personal responsibility for implementing this policy
- Ensure we keep in line with new legislation and good practice
- Continuously improve our service to customers

Staff will be expected to participate in equality and diversity training.

We will encourage all staff to fulfil their potential by giving fair access to training and development opportunities. To promote this, we will train managers to conduct personal and career development reviews effectively.

We will seek to ensure that, regardless of work location or pattern, we provide equal access to information and consultation for all staff.

## Human Resources policies and procedures

We will carry out equality impact assessments of our HR policies to ensure that they are fair and not discriminatory.

### **Responsibilities for implementation**

All staff have responsibility to implement this policy, as itemised on each job description. We will ensure that staff understand that they can be held personally liable as well as, or instead of, the association, for any acts of unlawful discrimination or harassment.

The table below outlines areas of specific responsibility.

Board members and Management Team.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Leadership in ensuring Connect's culture embraces equality and diversity and that this policy underpins all aspects of our work.</li><li>• Ensuring this policy is implemented.</li><li>• Supporting objectives with resources.</li></ul>
Equality & Diversity Working group (EDWG)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Development, review and monitoring of the Single Equality Scheme action plan to implement this policy</li><li>• Ensuring latest good practice, legislation and regulatory requirements are addressed</li><li>• Identifying staff and customer recommendations</li><li>• Linking service area strategies to the EDI policy.</li><li>• Promoting equality and diversity across the association.</li><li>• Progressing specific projects.</li><li>• Monitor and analyse equality &amp; diversity performance and recommend action.</li></ul>
Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Implementation of this policy in their service areas, including Equality Impact assessments, and development of action plans. Ensuring action plans are reported to EDWG.</li><li>• Incorporating recommendations from EDWG into service action plans.</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resourcing representation on the EDWG including allocating staff time to the implementation of agreed actions. Monitoring progress on actions</li> <li>• Acting on performance information</li> <li>• Promoting the importance of E &amp; D to teams and reinforcing adherence to this policy.</li> <li>• Addressing inappropriate behaviour</li> <li>• Supporting and developing staff potential and encouraging personal growth and training.</li> <li>• Ensure that any partners comply with this policy.</li> </ul>
Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take personal responsibility for, and a positive approach to, understanding this policy and putting it into practice, seeking training as appropriate.</li> <li>• Set an exemplary standard for others.</li> <li>• Promote equality and diversity with customers and ensure that actions do not wittingly or unwittingly lead to unfair or discriminatory treatment of others.</li> <li>• Challenge discriminatory behaviour.</li> <li>• Support colleagues who may be experiencing discriminatory behaviour by encouraging them to report it informally or formally.</li> <li>• Bring any concerns regarding discrimination in the workplace or service delivery to the attention of their manager or HR.</li> </ul>

### **Communicating this policy**

All job applicants, applicants for Board membership, Board members and staff will receive a copy of this policy. It will be available on the intranet.

This policy will be made available to customers via the website and a summary version will form part of the customers handbook.

It will also be provided to contractors.

## **Review**

This policy will be reviewed as required by changes in legislation or regulation. It will also be considered at the annual review of Equality & Diversity to ensure that it captures good practice.

## **Legal Obligations and regulatory requirements**

Supporting People Quality Assessment Framework

TSA standards

Audit Commission Key Line of Enquiry

Equality Act 2010 2010