

Group disability equality scheme 2008-2010

Foreword

The purpose of this Group Disability Equality Scheme (the scheme) is to describe how we approach disability issues and how we ensure that disabled people are treated fairly.

The scheme sits within the group's equality and diversity policies, which aim to ensure fairness and accessibility in every aspect of our work and the services we provide.

The scheme sets out how we will promote positive attitudes to disabled people, and the steps we will take to identify and meet their needs. It sets out the actions we will take as a service provider to ensure the services we provide and our other functions take account of the needs of disabled people.

The scheme also considers arrangements for our staff, in line with our commitment to Investors in People and being Positive about Disabled People. These include recruiting, developing and retaining disabled employees and ensuring there is open access to the full range of employment opportunities.

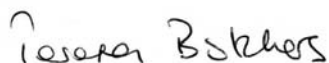
We will actively seek to involve disabled people who have an interest in the way we work in implementing the scheme, and in monitoring its success. This may include former, current and potential service users, staff and the wider community, all of whom are encouraged to come forward with suggestions and feedback to help us to deliver improvements.

We will seek to identify our performance on disability equality across all relevant aspects of our work and use a range of ways to collect information and feedback.

The group boards and group management team are committed to overseeing the implementation of the scheme through the group equality and diversity executive group (EDEG), ensuring that our core value of 'promoting equality and fairness' remains at the heart of who we are and what we do.



Jonathan Broad, Chair DCHT



Teresa Butchers, Group Chief Executive

November 2007

1. Our approach to the scheme

1.1 This is our first disability equality scheme and action plan and it is intended to be a live document that co-ordinates the work of all the organisations in the group in relation to disability.

1.2 Critical to the success of the scheme is our commitment to a regular review of progress against the action plan through EDEG, and for further improvements to be developed.

1.3 In addition the scheme will be reviewed annually by the boards, and a summary of the review will be published to stakeholders and customers.

2. How we developed this scheme

2.1 We have directly involved disabled people in developing this scheme. We have taken advice and discussed issues with stakeholders and representatives from disability forums.

2.2 We have run two events, one each in Devon and in Cornwall, involving between 15 and 30 stakeholders on each day. The output was compiled into a report by an external facilitator to help form the action plan.

2.3 A sub-group of EDEG was established to lead on the production of the scheme and two senior managers attended the NHF conference in June 2007 to gain a broader appreciation of best practice.

2.4 EDEG members undertook a series of equality impact assessments across the group, which helped identify further points for consideration in finalising the accompanying action plan.

2.5 The scheme was approved by all the association boards in the group, and by the board of Devon and Cornwall Housing Trust.

2.6 The scheme was then published as a summary in newsletters, with copies on the website, and presented to staff at dissemination sessions across the group.

3. The legal context

3.1 The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 amended the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (the Act) to place a duty on public sector bodies to promote disability equality. The general duty of public authorities, in carrying out their functions, is to have due regard to the need to:

- promote equality of opportunity between disabled persons and other persons
- eliminate discrimination that is unlawful under the Act
- eliminate harassment of disabled persons that is related to their disabilities
- promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons
- encourage participation by disabled persons in public life, and
- take steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, even where that involves treating disabled persons more favourably than other persons.

3.2 The requirements for a disability equality scheme are broadly similar to those for race equality schemes, but with an additional requirement to involve disabled people in the development of the scheme.

3.3 Housing associations are not covered by a specific public sector duty, but they are regulated by the Housing Corporation, which is named in the Regulations, and are required by the Housing Corporation to produce a scheme in order to deliver that duty.

4. Identifying functions

4.1 There is no definitive list of a housing association's functions. They could be viewed as that of a landlord providing decent and well managed homes and creating housing opportunities for future customers. However, there needs to be a more detailed analysis of the activities through which this is achieved.

4.2 Our approach was to undertake equality impact assessments based on relevant modules from the National Housing Federation equality and diversity toolkit.

4.3 The functions identified were:

- access to housing (allocations and lettings)
- income collection and support
- estate management
- supported housing and housing related support
- tenancy enforcement (ASB, harassment and domestic abuse)
- contractors, consultants and procurement (planned, cyclical and responsive repairs and maintenance)
- maintenance, aids and adaptations
- resident involvement and neighbourhood renewal
- new homes and refurbishment (development and asset management)
- governance and corporate culture
- employment, training and staff development
- communication
- partnership working.

5. Involving disabled people

5.1 We are committed to involving disabled people across the full range of our activities as a service provider and as an employer in order to identify areas for improvement and help us to take the necessary steps to address these.

5.2 The group uses involvement registers, and regional and resident committees and forums to enable formal participation as well as more ad hoc stakeholder and customer panels on specific issues. These groups will be involved in the implementation of the scheme and its future development.

5.3 As an employer we provide training to frontline staff to enable them to identify and support the needs of residents with mental health issues and to encourage their involvement wherever possible, particularly within supported housing projects.

5.4 A number of disabled residents are actively involved on the group's involvement registers and on the boards within the group.

6. Information gathering, reviewing and performance monitoring

6.1 The group collects and monitors performance data in relation to disabled people for a wide range services from allocations and disabled adaptations to housing support.

6.2 According to the group's status surveys 50% of our tenants consider themselves to have a disability, and 36% are over 65 years old. As a result significant resources have been spent on improving the service for disabled adaptations requiring close working with partner agencies.

6.3 For 2006/07 the group assisted with 649 adaptations to its properties for tenants with disabilities, using £65,000 of our own resources and securing over £500,000 in grant funding.

6.4 Current performance information shows that, during 2006/07, 21% of our lettings were to disabled people.

6.5 Customer profiling has begun within the group and is being rolled out over the coming year. The information being received is helping to direct service provision and enable a more targeted approach where a specific disability, vulnerability or need is identified.

6.6 We use a range of other mechanisms and will continue to expand these, to ensure we are gathering the right information and inform service improvement, such as our resident and staff consultation forums, complaints monitoring, resident and staff surveys.

7. Reviewing the effectiveness of the Disability Equality Scheme

7.1 The effectiveness of the scheme will be subject to regular review by the EDEG. This group has overseen the development of the scheme during 2007, and its terms of reference include the monitoring of the scheme and action plan.

8. As an employer

8.1 From an employment perspective, we have involved our staff in the development of this scheme by invitation group-wide to all staff, the staff councils being consulted at the same time as other stakeholders outlined earlier.

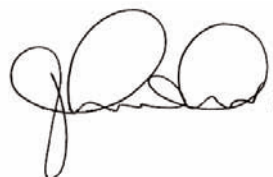
8.2 We are committed to best practice and equality of opportunity in all matters relating to recruitment and employment and work hard to ensure that our employment policies and practices are fair and transparent, that we embrace diversity, and regularly assess our performance in these areas.

8.3 Our human resources teams have taken part in the equality impact assessment programme and the outputs are reflected in the action plan.

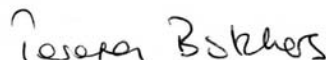
9. Developing the Action Plan

9.1 We have developed a detailed action plan setting out the activities that will take place from January 2008 to further develop the group's approach to disability equality, and to ensure that our scheme is implemented successfully.

9.2 The action plan will be reviewed and updated quarterly by the group equality and diversity executive group, and annually by the board.



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Community Services Manager



Teresa Butchers
Group Chief Executive