



Equal Opportunities & Diversity Policy

- 1.0 Introduction**
- 2.0 Legal Framework**
- 3.0 Statement of Objectives**
- 4.0 Definition of Objectives**
- 5.0 Wider Framework**
- 6.0 Responsibilities**
- 7.0 Training**
- 8.0 Consultation**

1.0 Introduction

Linstone Housing Association is committed to developing an organisational culture which values people from all sections of the community and the contribution which all individuals can make to that community.

In addition to our statutory responsibilities contained in the Housing Scotland Act 2001 we are keen to create safe and inclusive neighbourhoods and an environment where people can live without experiencing any form of discrimination or harassment.

The aim of this policy is to support these commitments by providing a framework for continuous improvement.

It covers the mechanisms and systems we will use to eliminate discrimination, implement good practice, and measure and monitor our performance.

Our objectives are to ensure that:

- All staff can contribute fully to the work of the Association.
- All Committee can participate and feel included in the Governance of the Association.
- All customers and potential customers are treated equitably in accessing our services.

In the above way we aim to meet Communities Scotland regulatory standard GS2.1 which states

“we embrace diversity, promote equal opportunities for all and eliminate unlawful discrimination in all areas of our work”.

This policy document should be seen as a practical guide towards effective implementation of our objectives and mainstreaming equality matters into all organisational practices and policies.

We will develop this policy through consultation with tenants and other service users and in line with future legal changes and good practice guidelines.

2.0 Legal Framework

Equal Opportunities is defined legally in the Scotland Act 1998, Schedule 5, L2 as

“..... the prevention, elimination or regulation of discrimination between persons on the grounds of sex or marital status, or racial grounds or on grounds of disability, age, sexual orientation, language or social origin or other personal attributes, including beliefs or opinions such as religious beliefs or political opinions”.

We will ensure that organisational policies and practices meet legal provisions and good practice guidance.

There are a range of Acts which inform this policy and which we aim to integrate into good practice.

The following is a summary of the important legislation which we have taken into account.

This is not a definitive or exhaustive list but is simply a sample.

- Equal Pay Act 1970 (as amended)
- Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (as amended)
- Race Relations Act 1976 (as amended)
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- Housing Scotland Act 2001
- Human Rights Act 1998

3.0 Statement of Objectives

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 places a duty on Registered Social Landlords to carry out their functions in a manner which encourages equality of opportunity and meets requirements laid down in other legislation.

Our overall strategy for Equality and Diversity is to ensure that our Policy is applied fully, fairly and consistently across the Association as an integral part of the services we provide; our staffing and business planning processes and our policy development.

The Association recognises that it has the power to assist in reducing the disadvantage that people experience, by making its services more responsive to all communities and individual needs.

Linstone values the diversity of communities and wants its services, facilities and resources to be accessible.

The Association also recognises that our ability to meet these diverse needs relies on having Committee and Staff members well trained with the skills and understanding to achieve our objectives.

Linstone is committed to:

- 3.1 Developing an organisational culture which values people from all sections of the community and treats them with dignity and respect.
- 3.2 Developing services to achieve equality and diversity in all our activities.
- 3.3 Consulting with service users and potential users to improve services and deliver goals.
- 3.4 Providing users – where required – with full, clear and accurate information regarding our services in a variety of languages and formats.
- 3.5 Opposing and counteracting discrimination in any form and at all levels.
- 3.6 Operating a fair and equitable recruitment and selection policy.
- 3.7 Providing Equal Opportunities training for all members of Staff and Committee and encouraging participation.
- 3.8 Applying this policy when carrying out our statutory, corporate and other responsibilities and also in relation to work undertaken for us by external consultants and contractors.

4.0 Definition of Objectives

4.1 Developing an organisational culture which values people from all sections of the community and treats them with dignity.

Our aim is to achieve mainstreaming of equality and diversity issues which will contribute to the development of organisational culture and performance generally.

Linstone Senior Staff and Committee will actively promote and support an organisational commitment to Equality and Diversity as an integral part of our strategy and activities.

All Staff and Committee will receive appropriate Equalities training and guidance and this will be reviewed on a regular basis.

Committee and Senior Staff will also receive training which ensures their understanding of evolving responsibilities as new issues or legal requirements come into force.

We will encourage participation in our services and activities from all sections of the communities in which we work.

We will take appropriate action to rectify any contraventions of this policy by Staff or Committee.

4.2 Developing Services to Achieve Equality and Diversity in all Activities

Our overall strategy is to ensure that our Equality and Diversity Policy is applied fully, fairly and consistently across the Association.

An important part of this strategy is to ensure that equality matters are integrated with our service delivery; housing plans; policies, procedures and practices.

This process is known as “mainstreaming” of equality.

A major objective of our service delivery is to consult with and encourage participation of users in the development of our services.

We aim to reach as wide an audience as possible by using a broad range of communicative mechanisms and eliminating all forms of discrimination.

4.3 Consulting with Service Users and Potential Users to Improve Services and Deliver Goals.

Linstone is committed to:

- Actively consulting service users.
- Listening to their comments.
- Using this feedback to inform current and future service development.
- Using a variety of communication methods to ensure that our consultation process is as inclusive as possible.
- Ensuring that service users are not excluded from actively participating by:
 - Eliminating discrimination by providing a range of participative methods to suit each client group.
 - Having information available as required in a variety of languages and formats.
 - Holding meetings in accessible locations and at convenient times for the attendees.
- Operating an effective Complaints and Customer Care Policy which ensures that we have due regard to representations made by tenants or residents groups.

We have developed a comprehensive Tenant Participation (TP) Strategy which clearly defines our approach to customer involvement in the development of services. This TP document should be read in conjunction with this Equalities Policy.

4.4 Providing Users with Clear and Accessible Information on Services

The Association will use a variety of methods to ensure that service users are provided with adequate, clear and accessible

information to allow them to contribute to the development of the Association and their communities.

The following are amongst mediums we will use to provide this information and receive feedback.

Newsletter – for both tenant and owners

Letters

Leaflets

Tenants Handbook

Annual Report

Website

Public Meetings

Focus Groups

Surveys – regular satisfaction surveys on a variety of services, plus large scale customer satisfaction survey on a 3 or 4 yearly basis.

Questionnaires

One to One Contact

- At home; in the office or other mutually suitable location.
- Information Displays
- Open Days
- Tenants' Conference
- Consultation with Representative Groups

In all of the above we will provide information in a range of languages and formats where required.

4.5 Opposing and Counteracting Discrimination in Any Form and at all Levels

We will seek to eliminate discrimination in all aspects of our business and service delivery.

The Association will deal quickly and firmly with all forms of discrimination of or by tenants; staff members or Committee. However, we will be sensitive to the feelings and wishes of the recipient of the discrimination.

We will strive to eliminate discrimination in the following categories:

4.6 Employment

Linstone aspires to have a skilled and diverse workforce which can provide a quality service reflecting individual and community needs.

We aim to ensure that all people are treated fairly and without unlawful discrimination and that our employees treat each other with respect and dignity. We will strive to develop a working environment free from harassment and prejudice, where individuals feel confident that complaints will be dealt with fairly and with discretion.

To achieve our aims we will:

- Advertise all permanent posts on an open recruitment basis in appropriate locations, publications and give full fair consideration to all job applicants, in line with our Recruitment Policy.
- Maintain records in recruitment processes; equal opportunities; training for Staff and Committee and relevant employment information. This information will be used to identify compliance with Good Practice Guidelines and legislation and identifying and rectifying potential areas of inequality.
- Regularly review our Recruitment Policy and Practices to ensure compliance with current guidelines and legislation.
- Provide sufficient training and support for all employees to enable them to carry out their duties in line with our Equalities policy and procedures.
- Provide appropriate training for Committee to enable them to discharge their responsibilities as a Governing Body.
- Wherever possible modify employment practices and procedures to reduce barriers which may disadvantage some communities and individuals when seeking employment.

- We will incorporate Equal Opportunity Standards into Job Specifications and Annual Performance Targets.

4.7 Race

In line with the Race Relations Act and Codes of Practice Linstone is committed to achieving racial equality in service provision and employment. We will promote good relations between all racial groups and organisations where we can exert influence.

We aim to achieve equality by:

- Providing services relevant to people's needs, which respect their cultural and social identities.
- Striving to have a representative workforce that can sensitively address the needs of all communities.
- Working with partners and community organisations where appropriate to promote racial equality and eliminate racial disadvantage and harassment.
- Striving to create an environment which is free from racial harassment and racist behaviour.

4.8 Religion

The Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003 came into effect on 2nd December 2003.

Our understanding is that religion or belief is defined as being any religion, religious belief or similar philosophical belief.

It does not include political belief.

We will strive to:

- Create an environment which recognises and respects religion and belief and is free from unlawful discrimination or harassment.
- Develop employment practices and services in ways which respect religion and beliefs.

- Provide appropriate support for staff in understanding therefore dealing sensitively with the needs of individuals and different faith communities.
- Work with other agencies and communities where appropriate to promote understanding and good relations between people of different faith communities.

4.9 Gender/Sexuality

We are committed to achieving gender equality.

We recognise our responsibilities under the Sex Discrimination and Equal Pay Legislation.

We aim to meet the requirements for gender equality in service provision and employment.

We aim to:

- Create an environment free from harassment and sexist language and behaviour.
- Work with other agencies and groups to promote gender equality and eliminate disadvantage.
- Create a flexible working environment where home and work balances are recognised and supported at an appropriate level and in all areas.
- Create an environment where lesbians, gay men and bisexual people are free from unfair treatment and harassment and feel free to be open about their sexuality if they choose to do so.
- Work towards the equal application of all terms and conditions of service irrespective of an employee's sexuality.

4.10 Disability

Wherever reasonably possible the Association is committed to achieving disability equality by eliminating unlawful discrimination and the disadvantage which is experienced by people with a disability.

We recognise that this disadvantage can be related to both environmental and social attitudes, which reflect principally the needs of non disabled people.

We aim to reduce this disadvantage by:

- Recognising our responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination legislation and implementing appropriate changes where necessary.
- Review our premises, services and processes on a regular basis to make sure that these are accessible to people with a disability and meet current legislative practice.
- Striving to provide services which are relevant to disabled people.
- Ensuring that our services and documentation are available, as appropriate, to people with a disability.
- Train Staff and Governing Body members in disability issues to give them awareness and confidence in supporting people with a disability.
- Guarantee people with a disability an interview for any employment vacancy where they meet the basic essential criteria.

4.11 Age

Linstone is committed to opposing unjustified age discrimination. We will value people regardless of their age and seek to ensure that our employment practices are relevant and fair to all.

Discrimination can affect all age groups and both genders and is no indicator or effectiveness in most work activities.

We will work to create an environment where people are judged on their talents, skills and experience, rather than on misconceptions and prejudices about age.

Our retirement age will normally be 65, but we will be happy to consider requests to extend this date beyond 65 on an individual basis.

We will ensure that we have no age related criteria in the provision of recruitment, promotion and training.

5.0 Wider Framework

The Association is involved in a variety of activities such as a Landlord; Employer; Service Provider and Purchaser of Services.

In all of these areas we will strive to have policies and practices which comply with Communities Scotland's Performance Standards on Equality; meet Good Practice Guidelines and meet the needs of the Communities which we save.

5.1 Partnerships

We will strive to develop partnerships with a wide variety of Agencies to promote Equal Opportunities.

We will continue to liaise with current partners such as the Federation of Local Associations in Renfrewshire (FLAIR); Renfrewshire Council; Employers in Voluntary Housing (EVH); Positive Steps; Barnardos.

5.2 Contractors

We will encourage Contractors, Consultants and other Bodies with whom we work to implement an Equal Opportunities Policy.

Contractors will only be added to or remain on our Approved Lists if they meet agreed Equalities Standards.

If there are specialist Contractors who represent the interests of disabled people or other under represented groups we will encourage them where appropriate to apply for registration on our Approved Lists at tender stage of a contract.

5.3 Membership

Membership of the Association and the Committee is voluntary.

Linstone aims to be accountable to the Communities it services. We will seek to ensure that our general membership and Committee of Management is as representative as possible all sections of these communities.

For example membership should reflect the diverse range of households in our areas, including single person households, older people, people from black and minority ethnic communities and disabled people.

As part of our commitment to promote equality, we will ensure that venues for meetings are accessible and barriers are minimised for those eligible to attend.

5.4 Information and Communication

Good communication is the cornerstone of any effective organisation.

We will ensure that our Communications Strategy promotes the views of all community groups.

Our aim will be to raise general awareness of Equality matters through publicity in our newsletters, consultation documents and other forums such as tenant/residents groups.

We will also produce documentation in appropriate languages formats as required.

Application forms and other published materials will be in plain English and we will strive to be jargon free. We will build into our policy development framework a timetable for seeking Investors in People and other appropriate accreditation. Where appropriate, assistance will be offered to help people complete standard documentation.

5.5 Complaints Procedure

Although we are committed to providing a high level of customer service, it is inevitable that problems may arise from time to time.

As a result a Service User may feel dissatisfied with our service delivery or the Association in general. Should this situation arise, we will fully investigate the matter and try to reach a satisfactory solution as quickly as possible.

We welcome suggestions, comments and enquiries on our services.

All information will be treated seriously, and used in formulating/reviewing policies and procedures.

A copy of our Complaints Policy is readily available on request.

6.0 Responsibilities

6.1 Management Committee and Senior Staff

The Management Committee has corporate responsibility for endorsing our approach to equalities and ensuring that the Policy underpins all aspects of our work.

6.2 Chief Executive and Senior Staff

The Chief Executive has responsibility for:-

- Developing the organisational culture in which this policy can operate effectively.
- Ensuring the policy is implemented.
- Reporting annually to the Management Committee on the effectiveness of the Policy.

The four Directors are responsible for:-

- Liaising with the Chief Executive – as part of the Corporate Management Team – to ensure that an equalities culture is promoted throughout the organisation.
- Ensuring that the Policy is implemented within their particular departments and areas of responsibility.

6.3 All Staff

All members of staff have an obligation to:

- Put the Equalities Policy into practice.

- Familiarise themselves with the Policy, follow it and ensure that any staff for whom they are responsible do so as well.
- Make sure they understand the values and benefits of equality and diversity.
- Alert their Director or Chief Executive to any instances of potential non compliance with the Policy.
- Attend training on equality issues.

6.4 Implementation

Senior Management Team will at agreed regular intervals review the effectiveness and implementation of the Policy against the Action Plan.

An annual report will then be presented to Committee so that an integrated organisational wide view can be formed.

6.5 Review

This Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policy will be reviewed on a bi-annually basis or as legislation is amended.

7.0 Training

To ensure that the Policy is understood and can be effectively implemented by all Staff and Committee, training is an essential part of our Action Plan.

Basic training sessions have already taken place with a range of Staff and Committee, facilitated by Dr S Montgomery.

Further training needs are identified in our Training Plans.

The following are amongst the areas which will be covered:

- Induction
- Awareness raising, including anti racist training/disability.
- Policy and good practice issues, including positive action programmes.
- Legal issues.

The Association is committed to adequate resourcing of training and will identify an annual budget for this purpose for both Staff and Committee.

We also feel it is important to promote and facilitate where appropriate training for tenants and tenants groups. This is covered in our Tenant Participation Policy.

8.0 Consultation

We have a commitment to improve our consultation with all tenants, service users and other residents to provide housing and environmental conditions which meet, as far as possible, the needs and preferences of households.

To encourage participation throughout our local communities, we will be sensitive to a variety of individual needs.

The range and format of our consultative process is commented on earlier in this policy development and is covered more fully in our Tenant Participation Strategy.

Under the auspices of our Corporate Services Directorate, we will continue to develop a range of consultative surveys and forums and use these to inform our future service delivery.

We are also keen to promote a partnership approach to equalities.

9.0 Monitoring

The Association recognises that monitoring is vital to the success of the Equal Opportunities Policy. Without this we would be unable to determine whether or not all groups are being treated equally; establish if and where discrimination exists and the effectiveness of our Policies and Procedures in eliminating discrimination.

A range of Key Performance Indicators (KPI) will be introduced to monitor our Performance. The following are examples of the KPIs which will be used:-

- Applicants by age, ethnicity, gender and disability.
- Lets by age, ethnicity, gender, disability and type/location of housing.

- Income of tenants.
- Complaints by category and incomes.
- Profile of members on Committee by age, ethnicity gender and disability.
- Employees and members by age, ethnicity, gender and disability.
- Promotion of staff by age, ethnicity, gender and disability.

Training provided to employees by age etc as compared to Training Plan.

We will also aim to collect demographic and population info on our local communities to inform our policies and services.

Communities Scotland's Self Assessment of Compliance with Performance Standards will be used as a basis for drawing together our Action Plan and monitoring progress.