

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Black Country Housing Group (BCHG) provides a range of services to people from a wide range of backgrounds. We aim to be able to respond to the needs of our diverse customer base.

1.2 Our policy is to treat all people fairly and with dignity, but in ensuring fairness it requires that we provide homes and services in ways that reflect the differing needs of people in a diverse society. This will not occur by chance so different strategies are required to achieve our goals.

1.3 Whilst we believe that we are meeting most of the minimum requirements set out in guidance and good practice notes from reviewing the guidance and looking at other association's approaches, we strive to be a well performing association whose performance is recognised as being in the upper quartile.

1.4 This strategy is not intended to stand alone, but rather should be supported by other key strategies in order that this strategy is effective; e.g. Equal Opportunities, Resident Involvement and Procurement.

The performance against the targets set out in the various strategies should be measured and reported regularly to the board, staff and customers as part of our commitment to continuous improvement.

1.5 The business case for promoting diversity is overwhelming. If we do not value the differences between individuals and amongst communities, and treat them with respect, this will damage our relationship with our customers, staff, partners and other stakeholders. The promotion and awareness of diversity issues will allow us to improve access to our services, which should in turn increase levels of customer satisfaction.

2.0 Purpose of the Strategy

2.1

- It is a clear and public statement of BCHG's commitment to diversity.
- It sets out what BCHG hopes to achieve and identifies a range of actions, we will undertake to achieve these.
- It will focus our attention and resources on the areas we have identified as our priorities for improvement.

3.0 Scope of the Strategy

3.1

- This strategy is intended to address diversity issues in their widest context. When we refer to diversity, we mean the 7 strands of diversity that are: age, disability, gender, race, religion, sexual-orientation and work-life balance.
- The strategy is intended to cover anyone who comes into contact with BCHG, whether as staff member, resident, Board member, customer, stakeholder or partner and to ensure that they are all treated with dignity and respect.

4.0 Vision

Our vision for diversity can be defined under our various responsibilities as follows:

4.1 Business

Creating an organisation where different people want to work.
Enabling staff and customers to reach their potential by valuing their contribution.
As a business to maximise our potential for growth and innovation by utilising the vast range of ideas and experiences of our employees and service users.

4.2 Employer

By valuing the differences and individuality of all, BCHG aims to allow people the opportunity to achieve their potential.
Actively recognising and valuing the different contribution and potential of all staff and service users and creatively meeting their varied needs to enable achievement.
As an employer to actively seek to promote a culture which values the vital contribution that employees from different backgrounds and with different skills and experience can make. To maximise people's potential whilst endeavouring to meet their changing needs.

4.3 Service provision

As a deliverer of services to utilise the skills of a diverse and varied workforce to empathise with and reflect the needs of our client groups and thereby develop new and innovative services.

5.0 Current position

5.1 In the past, our BME Strategy and action plan was our Diversity Strategy. Whilst we made some progress in this area, our work in relation to diversity in its widest sense was not being acknowledged, disseminated, monitored, understood or embedded throughout the organisation. We therefore aim to address these issues, and improve our services in this area through this strategy.

6.0 Content of the Strategy

6.1 The Housing Corporations Regulatory Code and Guidance sets out the fundamental obligations of housing associations.

6.2 Section 2.7 of the Regulatory Code states that “Housing Associations must demonstrate, when carrying out all their functions, their commitment to equal opportunity. They must work towards the elimination of discrimination and demonstrate an equitable approach to the rights and responsibilities of all individuals. They must promote good relations between people of different racial groups.”

6.3 This general obligation to promote equality of opportunity is supplemented by more specific regulatory guidance and some elements have statutory force.

6.4 The strategy has been developed to meet the following requirements:

- Commission for Racial Equality – ‘Statutory Code of Practice on Racial Equality in Housing’
- The Regulatory Code and Guidance- Housing Corporation
- Housing Corporation Good Practice note 4 ‘Race Equality and Diversity’
- Good Practice note 8 – ‘Equality and Diversity’
- Audit Commission Key Lines of Enquiry – no 31 – Diversity
- Supporting People Quality Assessment Frameworks
- Black and Minority Ethnic Housing Policy- Housing Corporation
- Housing association disability and gender action plans- Circular 10/07

6.5 The strategy therefore looks at the following areas of work:

Service Area 1: Governance- Board of Management

Service Area 2: Asset Management

Service Area 3: Employment

Service Area 4: Community Regeneration

Service Area 5: Housing

Service Area 6: Customer Services

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APPENDIX 1: Action Plan- April 2008 to March 2009

Service Area 1: Governance				
Action:	Measure/ Objectives	Led by	Timescale	Evaluated and Reviewed Q4
<p>Recruit Board members that are broadly representative of the communities that BCHG serves in terms of race, gender and disability.</p> <p>Provide a training programme to update Board members regarding diversity issues.</p> <p>Provide regular updates regarding progress against the action plan.</p>	<p>The Board is providing leadership and direction in relation to diversity.</p> <p>The Board is equipped to drive improvements in the area of diversity.</p>	<p>Board</p> <p>SMT</p>	<p>Annually</p> <p>Six monthly</p>	<p>Board members representative of the communities we serve. Customer profiling information and equality testing to feature in Board reports.</p> <p>New training plan in progress. Diversity training will be included on Board member induction programme as appropriate. Equality Impact Assessment training will be delivered by Board member to relevant staff.</p> <p>Regular updates against action plan not provided, though reports to Board consider diversity implication. New Covalent system to provide updates and policy hour to be held to consider how key aims from strategies can be delivered effectively.</p>
<p>Key corporate documents reflect our commitment to diversity.</p>	<p>Staff are clear about their role in delivering the diversity strategy.</p>	<p>CMT</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>This is to be included within new work plan. Covalent system will introduce measures to effectively monitor performance.</p>

Service Area 2: Asset Management

Action:	Measure/ Objectives	Led by	Timescale	Evaluated and Reviewed Q4
Promote the Aids and Adaptations Policy (2007).	Best use of homes where aids and adaptations have been carried out.	Housing	Quarter 1	Adapted property detail now recorded on IBS, used to assist lettings. One CHAT edition has publicised Aids and Adaptation budget. Customer information booklet in progress. Training delivered to all staff.
Involve customers in evaluating existing services	New services identified that meet customers needs New homes and refurbished dwellings meet the requirements of people with disabilities	Housing & Maintenance	Quarter 3	Accompanied viewings taking place. Working with Occupation Therapist (OT) at new developments. Existing properties, OT assists with determining suitability and adaptability for disabled applicants. Satisfaction slip comments provide feedback that shapes service.
Collect information to produce a profile about customers current and on-going needs	Services tailored to meet customer's needs	Housing	Quarter 1	Customer profile work in progress, 80% profiled.
Includes a breakdown according to disability, gender, and race in the feedback from customers regarding repair satisfaction levels	Trends regarding dissatisfied customers are identified and addressed.	Maintenance & CRD	Quarterly	Status Survey report finding investigated and concluded. 'Equality testing' carried out by Graduate trainees, report in progress for SMT.
Members on the Maintenance review Panel are representative of BCHG's diverse customer base.	Efficient and economic specification of services.	Maintenance Housing and CRD	Quarter 2	New Resident Involvement strategy will assist in delivering this action.
Review procurement procedures in order to identify unintended barriers to disability and	Provision of services by a range of diverse organisations and businesses on the approved	Maintenance	Annually	Procurement processes to be overhauled. Bob Gregory assisting department to achieve this action.

gender focussed organisations.	list.			
Review existing contractors, consultants and suppliers on the approved list	All organisations that we employ promote equality and diversity in their own practice	CMT	Annually	In progress

Service Area 3: Employment

Action:	Measure/ Objectives	Led by	Timescale	Evaluated and Reviewed Q4
Provide initial training for all new staff relating to equality and diversity	Staff understand their own individual accountability in reading and understanding the policies.	HR	Annually	Part of induction process.
Provide refresher training to all staff regarding equality and diversity	All employees enjoy freedom from harassment at work. Staff challenge stereotyping and marginalisation based on age, gender and disability. Reduction in the number of grievances received from staff	HR	Quarter 1	Core training. Opportunity provided to existing staff to refresh.
Regularly review recruitment and selection practices	Increase in the diversity of the staff team. Balanced mix of genders, ethnicity, age and ability at all management levels across the organisation. 19% of our staff are from BME backgrounds and this should increase by at least 1% per year. 'Positive About Disabled People' status retained.	HR	Annually	Monitored through KBI.
Carry out impact assessments of organisational policies.	Policies are designed, developed and implemented in an anti-discriminatory way.	HR	Annually	Impact assessment carried out annually by HR Manager and at the Schemes by Care & Support Manager
Attend local HR network	Best practice information is	HR	Quarterly	Due to staff shortage has not been

and forum meetings.	exchanged with other housing providers.			possible to attend forum meetings. New HR manager in post will commence networking.
Test new approaches to increase the diversity of the staff team	Employees who become disabled during their employment are retained. Employees with special needs are accommodated. Staff retained beyond the age of 65 years	HR	Annually	Recent changes made to facilitate disabled colleague, namely: Alarm and aids fitted in disabled toilet, handle changed to allow easier access through rear door, and disabled parking bay provided.
Conduct reviews into the process of determining pay levels	Pay systems are fair	HR	Annually	Appraisal and pay and grading policy in place to provide fairness in system.

Service Area 4 : Resident and Community Participation

Action:	Measure/ Objectives	Led by	Timescale	Evaluated and Reviewed Q4
Implement innovative ways to involve residents with a disability.	Services respond to the needs of residents with a disability.	CRD	Quarter 1	New Resident Involvement Strategy and working Group in place to deliver this action. Plan for Road show in progress to consult and involve residents.
Offer a range of options for consultation and involvement to residents.	Residents choose the level and type of involvement that suits their needs. Increasing numbers of women and residents with a disability are participating in the decision-making processes. Services tailored to meet customer's needs.	CRD Housing	Quarter 2	Same as above
Establish working relationships with local BME groups.	Improved understanding of the needs and aspirations of our diverse customers. Provision of high quality services to meet their needs.	CRD Housing	Quarter 2	Traditional contacts maintained. Tenancy support Service has established some new links in the last 12 months.

Service Area 6: Customer Services

Action:	Measure/ Objectives	Led by	Timescale	Evaluated and Reviewed Q4
Monitor the take-up of services according to ethnicity, gender and disability and address concerns.	High quality and flexible services meet our customer's needs.			Customer profile information being collated and used to measure.
Build stronger links with groups that work with customers that are under-represented in taking up BCHG's services.	Greater understanding of the needs and preferences of the communities that we serve. Improved take up of BCHG's services to diverse groups.			Traditional contacts maintained. Tenancy Support Service has established stronger links with groups, directory in place.
Collate customers preferred communication methods and implement them.	High service standards irrespective of their background. Uniformly high levels of satisfaction across different groups.			Collated as part of customer profile.
Complete a profile of our customers.	Services tailored to meet the needs of customers	Housing	Annually	Customer profile in progress.
Language line and induction loops installed in offices and schemes.	Equality of access for the uptake of services	Housing IT	Quarter 1	Language line promoted at reception and computer kiosk. Induction loop in place. We know those with language difficulties through customer profile and can respond with staff who speak those languages.
Make available service standards in formats appropriate to customers.	Customers are fully aware of BCHG's obligations. Complaints are made when obligations are breached.	Corporate Support	Quarter 2	Customers involved in setting service standard. Suite of information leaflets of services in progress.

<p>Ensure information exists in a range of formats that will help customers from a range of diverse backgrounds access BCHG's services.</p>				<p>Customer profile used to identify vulnerability and language needs. Service is responsive and tailors to needs.</p>
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