



South Tyneside Council's
Housing Company

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy

March 2022

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1. Introduction

South Tyneside Homes is committed to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) as an employer and as a provider of services to tenants and residents in South Tyneside.

Equality is about making sure that everyone has the same opportunities to achieve the same or similar outcomes. It is not about treating 'everyone the same' but recognising that 'one size doesn't fit all' and that services should be tailored to meet individual needs.

Diversity is about respecting, valuing and celebrating people's differences.

Inclusion is about making sure that people feel comfortable to be themselves, that they belong and can reach their full potential without disadvantage or discrimination.

EDI is fundamental to the way we 'we do things' at South Tyneside Homes. We aim to positively embrace and celebrate diversity and promote an inclusive culture in our role as an employer and a provider of homes and services. We acknowledge that everyone is different, and that people have different needs and perspectives.

Everyone brings their own contribution, experience, skills and knowledge to make STH a successful organisation.

2. Legislative context

The Equality Act 2010 summary

South Tyneside Homes must comply with the Equality Act 2010 which legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society.

Discrimination can come in one of the following forms:

- Direct discrimination - treating someone with a protected characteristic less favourably than others
- Indirect discrimination - putting rules or arrangements in place that apply to everyone, but that put someone with a protected characteristic at an unfair disadvantage
- Harassment - unwanted behaviour linked to a protected characteristic that violates someone's dignity or creates an offensive environment for them
- Victimisation - treating someone unfairly because they've complained about discrimination or harassment

The protected characteristics covered by the Equality Act are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race – this includes ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality
- Religion or belief – this includes lack of belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

It is against the law to discriminate against anyone because of a protected characteristic.

It is also unlawful to discriminate against:

- Someone who is associated with someone who has a protected characteristic, for example a family member or friend
- Someone who has complained about discrimination or supported someone else's claim

South Tyneside Homes can do something voluntarily to help people with a protected characteristic. This is called 'positive action'.

Taking positive action is legal if people with a protected characteristic:

- Are at a disadvantage
- Have particular needs
- Are under-represented in an activity or type of work

The Public Sector Equality Duty summary

South Tyneside Homes must also adhere to the Public Sector Equality Duty. It means that we must consider all individuals when carrying out our day-to-day work – in shaping policy, in delivering services and in relation to our own employees.

It also required that public bodies have due regard to the need to the three aims of the Equality Duty:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it
- And foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

The Equality Duty is supported by specific duties, set out in regulations. The specific duties require public bodies to:

- Publish information to show their compliance with the Equality Duty, at least annually.
- Set and publish equality objectives, at least every four years. All information must be published in a way which makes it easy for people to access it.

Public bodies must publish information to show that they consciously thought about the three aims of the Equality Duty as part of the process of decision-making.

3. Our approach

3.1 Effective governance

South Tyneside Homes' Board has signed up to the National Housing Federation Code of Governance, which includes requirements in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion.

The Board has made a commitment to take account of the diversity of its own composition as part of its future succession plans.

The Board is responsible for approving this policy and the company's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and for overseeing its implementation. The Strategy will set out the objectives that the company will work towards.

The Board considers the equality and diversity implications of its decisions, with a specific section of each report setting out the implications.

The Board will receive an assurance report each year setting out whether the company is meeting its public sector equality duty obligations and the progress that is being made in achieving our equality objectives. This information will be published on the South Tyneside Homes website.

Equality impact assessments will be used as a tool to systematically check the impact of a strategy, policy, procedure or working practices on people based on their protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010.

3.2 As a service provider

We aim to provide services that are accessible to the communities we serve and meet their needs. We will do this this by:

- Make sure that everyone is given the necessary support to apply for our homes and use our services.
- Make sure we consider people's needs in the way we communicate.
- Respond pro-actively to reports of domestic abuse, hate crime and harassment.
- Consider the needs of current and future customers when designing the specification of new developments and our investment programmes.
- Support people to continue to live effectively in their homes where we can
- Work in partnership with other organisations to tackle wider issues.

3.3 As an employer

We want staff to see South Tyneside Homes as a great place to work and to be an employer of choice for prospective applicants. We want to create a place where people can feel comfortable to bring their whole selves to work. We will do this by:

- Having a fair process for recruitment and selection.
- Taking pro-active action to address areas of under-representation within our workforce.
- Being a 'disability confident' employer and providing reasonable adjustments for prospective and existing staff.
- Publishing our gender pay gap, identifying actions to reduce the gap and monitoring progress.
- Having a wide range of supportive policies in place to support staff with their wellbeing and to achieve a positive work/life balance.
- Having a 'Resolving Issues at Work Policy', which provides a clear process for staff to raise concerns, including bullying and harassment.

3.4 Working with partners

We strongly support equal opportunity, equal access and positive outcomes for all sections of the community when procuring goods, works and services. We will aim to ensure that organisations which provide services on our behalf comply with equality legislation and promote equality, to ensure that people and communities fulfil their true potential.

We will work pro-actively with partner agencies to help us improve our approach to equality, diversity and inclusion but also to share our good practice to influence others.

4. Raising concerns

Customers and external people can use the Complaints Procedure to raise concerns in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion.

Staff can raise concerns via the relevant HR Policy, via their trade union representative or via the company's Whistleblowing Policy. All policies are available from the intranet for staff to access. Advice is available from HR if staff are unsure how to raise a concern.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

The EDI Policy applies to everyone at STH, including the Board and employees, apprentices, volunteers, residents, service users and external partners with whom we work, such as contractors, consultants and other agencies.

Everyone at STH has a responsibility to implement and promote this policy. Individuals and groups have specific responsibilities as follows:

Board members exercise leadership through policy and strategy approval, holding executives to account for performance and demonstrating appropriate behaviour and conduct. Board is responsible for ensuring legal responsibilities for EDI are fulfilled.

Board and Senior Management Team are responsible for ensuring that STH complies with the public sector equality duty, including publishing an annual report, annual gender pay gap report, equality objectives are published, and progress monitored, and equality impact assessments for policies and strategies are completed and implemented.

All managers are responsible for visible leadership, the overall implementation of the policy and strategy, reporting performance and setting standards for exemplar behaviour and conduct. They are required to exercise operational leadership, demonstrate strong application of the policy in their area of work and model appropriate behaviour and conduct. They must:

- Ensure that their staff are familiar with this policy.
- Ensure staff are appropriately trained
- Seek advice and guidance where necessary to implement the policy.
- Help to highlight policies and practices that could lead to discrimination and unfairness.

- Take speedy and appropriate action to deal with complaints/incidents indicating actual or potential breach of this policy. Actions must be taken in line with established practices, policies and procedures relating to STH's role as an employer and service provider.
- Support STH to collect, monitor and analyse data to highlight achievements and help to address shortfalls.

Employees, apprentices, agency staff, volunteers and contractors are responsible for familiarising themselves with and acting in line with this policy. They are encouraged to report actual or potential discrimination and negative consequences in a timely manner and in line with established policies and practices.

Tenant and Residents Groups that operate formally or informally are required to follow this policy.

6. Monitoring and Review

We will produce an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion report annually that fulfils our obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty and report on progress of the Action Plan. This report will be posted on our social media channels and the equality pages of our website.

We will monitor the effectiveness of our approach, including:

- Reviewing the profile of job applicants, staff, the Board, tenants, the housing register and actively involved tenants. We will use this data to identify where additional actions are required.
- Reviewing satisfaction data and other feedback to identify any differences by protected characteristic.
- The difference in our gender pay gap each year.

We will continue to develop performance metrics that are appropriate as part of the implementation of our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.

7. Policy Scope

This policy applies to all aspects of our work and functions as a service provider and employer.