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## **1. Introduction**

We are committed to and value diversity in the way that we run the organisation and deliver our services. We ensure that equality of opportunity and commitment to diversity are integral to all of our activities.

We recognise that there is a strong business case for this and are committed to it; both within the communities we work in and with staff we employ. Unless tenants and customers are treated fairly and feel valued they will be less likely to engage with us. Staff will feel less than fully committed and may under-perform. Diversity builds on equality, and evidence indicates that organisations that are serious about diversity show better overall performance.

There are three broad strands supporting the case for going beyond the requirements of legislation and introducing equality and diversity policies: people issues, market competitiveness, and corporate reputation. We recognise these and by following those strands find it easier to comply with increasingly complex legal obligations, and embed equality and diversity into our culture.

Equality is essentially about creating a fairer society, where everyone has the opportunity to fulfill their potential, to participate fully in the economic and social life of the community and to have access to the services that they need. We recognise the role that we have to play to make this happen and we're committed to doing so. Equality is supported by legislation designed to address unfair discrimination.

Equality is often summarised in terms of equal access, equal treatment and equal outcomes; or creating equal life chances for all.

Diversity is about recognising and valuing differences in their broadest sense. It is about creating a society that respects and values differences. There cannot be equality of opportunity if

differences are not recognised and valued in this way. Diversity principles accept that the mixture of people and their cultures and experiences should be harnessed for the benefit of everyone.

We recognise the diverse population we serve, and our wide staff demographic; as such, we are committed to promoting diversity and equality of opportunity as an employer and as a provider of services. The link between quality service delivery to the diverse community and the quality management and development of staff is intrinsic to our good employment practices.

This policy sets out our approach to equalities and diversity.

The policy will be reviewed every three years although it is not a static document. It is responsive to both changing regulation and the environment in which we operate and must be subject to regular review.

Any proposed changes will be submitted to the executive team for review and the board of directors for final approval if required.

We have decided not to publish separate Equality policies for Race, Disability and Gender. We believe that equality & diversity are crosscutting and to deliver separate policies for specific groups removes the nature of social inclusion. Therefore we have included all legal obligations within this one document and have separated the action plans, which can be found on our web site. Staff can access them on our intranet, the SHED.

We are committed to providing equality of opportunity for all by eliminating discrimination. We will do this by ensuring that our strategy and practices reflect relevant employment legislation and good practice and that employment decisions are based upon the completion of a full and fair recruitment process. We are also committed to encouraging diversity amongst staff to reflect the community we serve.

## **2. Responsibility**

The Board of Directors has corporate responsibility for ensuring that this policy underpins all aspects of Selwood Housing Group's work.

The Group Chief Executive has responsibility for developing an organisational culture in which this policy can operate effectively and for ensuring that it is implemented.

All staff and members of Selwood Housing Group have a responsibility to apply this policy. Selwood Housing Group expects a personal commitment to making this policy effective and setting an exemplary standard for all our partners and stakeholders. This policy does not give contractual rights to individual employees. The companies reserve the right to alter any of its terms at any time, although we will notify you in writing of any changes.

## **3. Principles**

Selwood Housing Group's approach to Equality and Diversity is based on these policy principles and sets out the ways in which the Group will make sure that this policy is incorporated into all of its activities by:

- Promoting the mainstreaming of equality and diversity into organisational activity via the Equality Impact Assessment process.
- Identifying barriers to employment across all the protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010
- Ongoing development of equality and diversity training programmes for board Directors, staff, tenant groups and contractors.
- Working closely with the wider community to develop involvement and partnership working.
- Aligning the Equalities policy and action plans with the corporate plan and aims.
- Developing action plans across the protected characteristic groups.
- Developing our equality monitoring, by integrating our equality impact assessment process into strategy, policy decision making, involvement activities, tenant satisfaction feedback and recruitment.

- Reviewing its existing services and developing new services in accordance with the aims of this policy.
- Aiming to have a Board of Directors and workforce, which generally reflect the communities, we serve.
- Actively encouraging people from diverse backgrounds and those from under-represented groups to take part in governance.
- Learning from its partners, regulators and other organisations how we can deliver better services by valuing diversity.
- Observing the principles of this policy in its procurement, contracting, partnering activities and where necessary enforcing them.
- By listening to its staff, customers and partners and using their knowledge to develop services that advance equality and respect diversity.

#### **4. Selwood Housing Group as an employer**

Selwood Housing Group seeks to ensure that our working environment is one that respects and includes everyone and that no employee, contractor, temporary worker, agency worker, or job applicant receives less favourable treatment. This is on the basis of the protected characteristics: age, disability, gender, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief or no belief, sexual orientation, transgender.

The Group will ensure that the very important work that needs to be done in relation to equality & diversity will be driven by the Human Resources team enabling our employment practices to be in line with both our duties under the law and our values.

As well as our legal duties, our desire is to be seen as an outstanding employer who recognises the value a diverse workforce can bring both staff and service users. With this in mind, we will strive to go beyond our legal duties and look to implementing practices which are 'good practice.'

The success of this policy relies on the understanding, commitment and support of all employees and it is important that everyone

takes account of the policy when managing staff, applicants or dealing with each other.

Employees will be treated with respect equally and fairly in recruitment, selection, promotion, training and career development. Individuals will be selected, promoted and treated on the basis of their abilities and merits in relation to the requirements of the job. We will take account of employees who have identified support needs to ensure equality of opportunity. They will be given an equal opportunity to use their ability, to progress and to fulfil their potential within the organisation.

Selwood Housing Group welcomes its legal duties to eliminate unlawful discrimination. We see these laws not as a hindrance, but rather as a lever to enable us to develop excellent working environments. This policy must be considered when:

- recruiting staff
- making decisions about work related opportunities, promotion and reward
- managing performance, appraisals, development activities and access to training
- dealing with requests for flexible working and career breaks;
- dealing with requests for paternity leave
- managing pregnant workers and those with dependant care responsibilities
- making selections for redundancy
- awarding pay.

Selwood Housing Group will not tolerate employees committing any act of unjustified or unlawful discrimination, or allow discrimination to occur without taking appropriate action, and our staff are governed by both their own professional codes of conduct and our policies and values.

## **4.1 Training, Education & Development**

Selwood Housing Group is committed to the personal development of every member of staff. All members of staff will be supported to undertake the training and development they need to help them achieve and maintain high standards of performance throughout their career and will be given encouragement and support to achieve their full potential.

We will work towards making sure that all our managers and staff are aware of diversity issues and will have the necessary training and advice available to them.

The training will be supported with visible and strong leadership at Board level.

We will evaluate our equality and diversity training programme on a yearly basis. If there is evidence to show that the training needs to be changed, we will take action to ensure that this happens.

## **5. Selwood Housing Group as a service provider**

Selwood Housing Group is part of a varied community, which includes people from a wide range of groups, living and working in both towns and rural areas. It values and appreciates diversity in the way that it is run and delivers its services, and strives to ensure that its services remain consistent, targeted and provides value for money.

### **5.1 Access to services**

The Group will monitor applications for housing or services, and the results of these applications, to ensure that services are available to everyone who is eligible.

Our target will be to ensure that people who are applying for services are accessing those services equally by monitoring, with sensitivity, outcomes and applications by age, disability, gender, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief or no belief, sexual orientation, transgender.

Where groups within the community are under-represented in accessing services we will, wherever practicable, take active steps to promote accessibility for that group.

Selwood Housing Group is committed to ensuring that tenants, other customers and potential customers can communicate with us. We use a variety of methods to ensure this:

- Both service requests and complaints can be made in writing, telephone, e-mail, fax or in person
- A telephone interpreter service is available on request
- Our staff offer home visits to those people who may find visiting our offices difficult.
- Where permission has already been given, we will discuss a tenant's tenancy, repair or rent issues, for example, with a third party. This could be a friend, family member or agency acting on their behalf.
- We are committed to a policy of equal access to information. We will provide information and documents in a range of formats such as Braille, large print, easy read, text messages, audio and translated for limited English speakers on request
- We will aim to tailor services for individual needs where possible.
- We will respond to specific needs when it is cost effective for us to do so.

## **5.2 Service Delivery**

Selwood Housing Group will monitor its services to ensure that all groups find them equally accessible and are equally satisfied with our service delivery. We will use a variety of methods to monitor satisfaction including; feedback questionnaires, mystery shopping, Customer service inspectors etc.

Our target will be to make sure that we reach all of our service users when we ask about satisfaction with service delivery. If we learn that any of our service users are less satisfied we will consult them about improving the service.

### **5.3 Opportunities for Involvement**

We will actively encourage people from all groups to be involved in monitoring and improving our services.

Our target will be to ensure that every tenant has an opportunity to comment on services in a way that is meaningful to them, and that consultative bodies and focus groups are as diverse and inclusive as possible.

We will measure our performance against our own Equality and diversity strategy and actions plans and compare our performance against that of other relevant organisations. Our aim is to ensure that our tenant groups are representative of the community we serve. We will actively encourage involvement from hard to reach groups.

Our target will be to comply with regulatory requirements and good practice and to equal other organisations, which are recognised to be performing well in achieving equality and diversity.

## **6. An overview of the law**

It is unlawful to discriminate in providing goods, facilities or services to the public on the grounds of age, disability, gender, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief or no belief, sexual orientation, transgender.

Discrimination in providing services means:

- refusing to provide a service
- providing a lower standard of service or
- offering a service on different terms than you would to other people

There are specific laws, which relate to the work of Selwood Housing and how we conduct our core business in relation to equalities & diversity. We will comply with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. We also expect our contractors and their sub contractors to comply with all current equality legislation. We will continue to comply with the following relevant pieces of legislation,

- 1 The Employment Rights Act 1996
- 2 The Human Rights Act 1998 (HRA)
- 3 The Housing Act 1988
- 4 The Housing Act 1996

## **7. Relevant Policies**

### **7.1 Internal Policies - Employment**

1. Company Recruitment & Selection Policy
2. Company Capability policy
3. Company Code of Conduct
4. Company Disciplinary Policy
5. Company Grievance Policy
6. Group Dignity at Work Policy
7. Maternity Policy
8. Paternity Policy
9. Flexible Working & Leave Policy
10. Group Whistle blowing policy

### **7.2 Internal Group & Company Policies – Provision of Services**

1. Company ASB Policy
2. Company Rent & other charges Management Policy
3. Group Child Protection Policy
4. Group Domestic Violence Policy
5. Company Allocations Policy
6. Company Terminations Policy
7. Company Joint Tenancy Policy

8. Company Assignment Policy
9. Company Succession Policy
10. Group Racial Harassment Policy
11. Company Local offer
12. Group Compliments and Complaints Policy
13. Company Repairs Policy
14. Lone Working Policy
15. Company Health and Safety Policy
16. Company High Risk Policy
17. Company Involvement statement
18. Group Confidentiality and Data Protection Policy
19. Company Claims, Goodwill, Regulatory and Statutory Payments Policy
21. Company Asbestos Policy
22. Company Asset Management Policy
23. Company Mutual Exchange Policy
- 24.
25. Related Assets/Sewage Policy
26. Company Decent Homes policy

As a major part of this policy, Selwood Housing Group will offer guidance on how it meets its legal duties in relation to:

- 1 Disability
- 2 Race
- 3 Gender
- 4 Religion, belief or no belief
- 5 Sexual Orientation
- 6 Age
- 7 Transgender
- 8 Marriage or civil partnership status
- 9 Pregnancy and maternity

We will do this with a series of Action Plans, which will highlight the Group's priorities and how it will meet its legal obligations. These can be found on our web site and staff can access them on our intranet the SHED. There will be an individual action plan for each protected characteristic.

## **8. Disability**

The Equality Act 2010 makes it unlawful to discriminate, directly, indirectly, by association or perception against disabled people, people who have had a disability, or people associated with someone who has a disability in a number of areas including, employment, access to goods and services, education and transport.

The Disability Action Plan sets out our aims and objectives for the following three years. The action plan developed in conjunction with Selwood Housing's Diversity focus group and will be formally reviewed every three years.

It aims to:

1. Maintain our Positive about Disability in employment accreditation by ensuring that all disabled applicants who meet the minimum requirements of a role are interviewed and recruited on merit.
2. Create a culture based on accurate knowledge and positive attitudes, to increase understanding of, and address the barriers that affect the experiences of disabled people.
3. Work to ensure that disability equality is embedded into the mainstream of all organisational activity.
4. Working in close partnership with disability groups, we hope to promote a positive view of people with disabilities by involving them in the way that services are planned, delivered and improved and by consulting directly with disabled people about issues that affect them.

## 9. Race

The Equality Act 2010 makes it clear that race includes colour, nationality and ethnic or national origins. A racial group can be made up of two or more different racial groups.

The Race Action Plan is designed to help Selwood Housing Group provide a robust, systematic approach to the way that it manages issues of race equality.

Objectives and targets relating to our statutory duties will be integrated into the Selwood Housing Groups' 's strategic and operational business plans, and will be cascaded to managers and staff at all levels.

Selwood Housing Group will take race equality considerations into account in its day-to-day work, which covers service delivery, policy making and employment.

As part of our ongoing commitment to provide a service to all communities, we will seek to:

1. Provide services to tenants and other customers and an environment for staff that is free from both direct and indirect discrimination and ensure that no member of staff is victimised for asserting their rights under the Act
2. Ensure that the provision of quality service is readily accessible to people of all ethnic backgrounds and cultures and that the needs of individuals are respected
3. Ensure that race equality is embedded in all policies and procedures throughout Selwood Housing Group and that a robust monitoring system is in place for both service provision and employment practice
4. Recruit staff that are representative of the population that we serve.

5. Ensure that staff are given the necessary training and development, and support to enable them to provide a culturally sensitive service
6. Work in partnership with representatives from the different communities from within the area.

## **10. Gender**

Discrimination on the basis of gender is unlawful under the Equality Act 2010

It is acknowledged that men and women have different needs and that in both the workplace and as service users they can experience unfair and unequal outcomes.

The Gender action plan is designed to help Selwood Housing Group provide a robust, systematic approach to the way that it manages issues of gender equality.

Selwood Housing Group will be proactive in promoting gender equality, with a focus on outcomes and process by:

1. Providing services to tenants and other customers and an environment for staff that is free from both direct and indirect discrimination and ensure that no member of staff is victimised for asserting their rights under the Act
2. Ensure that gender equality is embedded in all policies and procedures throughout Selwood Housing and that a robust monitoring system is in place for both service provision and employment practice
3. Recruit staff that are representative of the population that we serve.
4. Ensure that staff are given the necessary training and development, and support to enable them to provide a culturally sensitive service.

## **11. Transgender Equality**

The Equality Act 2010 does not require a person to be under medical supervision to be protected by legislation. The Act defines a transgender person as someone who proposes to, starts to or has completed a process to change his or her gender. Someone who decides to live permanently as a member of the opposite sex but does not go through any medical procedures is covered by the Equality Act 2010.

We are committed to ensuring that transgender tenants and other customers and staff members, in common with all others, are entitled to live and work in an environment free from discrimination, bullying or harassment.

Selwood Housing Group strives to promote equality for all users of our services, employees and members of the community. The following objectives are intended to support and complement this framework:

1. Ensure that the provision of quality service is readily accessible to transgender people, either pre-operative or post-operative and that the needs of individuals are respected.
2. Ensure that gender equality is embedded in all policies and procedures throughout Selwood Housing Group and that a robust monitoring system is in place for both service provision and employment practice
3. Recruit staff that are representative of the population that we serve.
4. Ensure that staff are given the necessary training and development, and support to enable them to provide a gender sensitive service.

## **12. Religion or belief or no belief**

It is unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of religion or belief, directly or indirectly; or to harass or victimise somebody because they have made a complaint or intend to, or if they give or intend to give evidence concerning a complaint of discrimination. This applies to all aspects of employment (recruitment, terms and conditions, promotions, transfers, terminations and training) and vocational training. The Equality Act 2010 covers religious/belief or no religion/belief. It sets out that belief must have a clear structure.

Selwood Housing Group has identified key areas for improvement. These are:

1. Ensure that staff members are given the necessary training, development and support to enable them to be aware of new and existing religious communities in our area.
2. Ensure that an individual's religious belief does not prevent them from accessing any of the Group's services by involvement activities and the development of a religion or belief action plan.
3. Engage with religious communities and their representatives.

## **13. Sexual orientation**

The Equality Act 2010 make it unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of sexuality, directly or indirectly; or to harass or victimise somebody because they have made a complaint or intend to, or if they give or intend to give evidence concerning a complaint of discrimination. This applies to all aspects of employment (recruitment, terms and conditions, promotions, transfers, terminations and training) and vocational training.

Selwood Housing Group has identified key areas for improvement in the way we consider deliver our services in relation to sexual orientation. These are:

1. Ensure that staff members are given the necessary training, development and support to enable them to be aware of issues relating to lesbians, gay men and bisexuals in our locality
2. Ensure that an individual's sexual orientation does not prevent them from accessing Selwood Housing's services.
3. The need to engage with lesbian, gay and bisexual communities and their representatives.

#### **14. Age**

The Equality Act 2010 makes it unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of age when providing services.

The Equality Act 2010 makes it unlawful to discriminate against workers, employees, job seekers and trainees because of their age. The Act covers recruitment, terms and conditions, promotions, transfers, terminations and training.

The Equality Act has removed the compulsory retirement age for employees unless it can be objectively justified.

Selwood Housing Group recognises the contribution that older and younger workers can make to an effective and productive organisation.

As part of our commitment to combat age discrimination, we have prioritised the following key areas:

1. Become more aware of people's attitudes in relation to age discrimination
2. Ensure that staff members are given the necessary training, development and support to enable them to be aware of issues relating to age

3. Ensure that an individual's age does not prevent them from accessing any of the Group's services.
4. Consider options such as retaining older staff, and retraining older workers.

### **15. Marriage or civil partnership status**

The Equality Act 2010 makes it unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of marriage or civil partnership directly or indirectly; or to harass or victimise somebody because they have made a complaint or intend to, or if they give or intend to give evidence concerning a complaint of discrimination. This applies to all aspects of employment (recruitment, terms and conditions, promotions, transfers, terminations and training) and vocational training.

Selwood Housing Group has identified key areas in the way we deliver our services in relation to marriage or civil partnership. These are:

1. Become more aware of peoples' attitudes in relation to marriage and civil partnership
2. Ensure that staff members are given the necessary training, development and support to enable them to be aware of issues relating to marriage and civil partnership
3. Ensure that an individual's marital or civil partnership status does not prevent them from accessing Selwood Housing's services.

### **16. Pregnancy and maternity**

The Equality Act 2010 makes it unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of pregnancy and maternity directly or indirectly; or to harass or victimise somebody because they have made a complaint or intend to, or if they give or intend to give evidence concerning a complaint of discrimination. This applies to all aspects of employment (recruitment, terms and conditions, promotions, transfers, terminations and training) and vocational training and to

the delivery of our services in relation to pregnancy and maternity.  
These are:

1. Become more aware of people's attitudes in relation to pregnancy and maternity
2. Ensure that staff members are given the necessary training, development and support to enable them to be aware of issues relating to pregnancy and maternity
3. Ensure that an individual's pregnancy or maternity situation does not prevent them from accessing Selwood Housing Group's services

