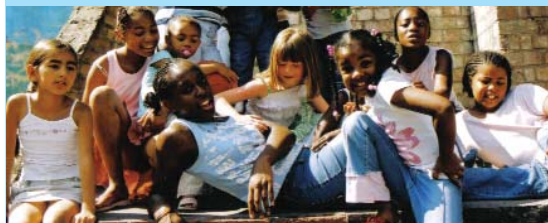


# Equality and Diversity Strategy

2006-2009



# Introduction

Southern Housing Group is committed to eliminating discrimination and valuing diversity in the communities where we work and within our own workforce. We aim to ensure that residents and other customers receive effective, responsive and culturally sensitive services which recognise particular issues of discrimination and harassment.

We recognise that disadvantage and discrimination are more likely to be experienced by particular groups in society because of their race, ethnic origin, colour or national origin, disability, sexual orientation, religion, gender or transgender identity, or age. We recognise our legal responsibilities as well as the demands arising from our commitment to support sustainable communities and promote community cohesion. We value the benefit that an effective diversity and equality strategy will bring both to the organisation and to our customers.

We aim to ensure that, in supporting and promoting diversity, we recognise that people are different. We will recognise the needs of individuals and when providing services and employment will treat each person with dignity and respect.

We will consult and work with a range of internal and external stakeholders in developing local strategies and action plans to address the areas outlined in this document, to ensure ownership and to ensure the effectiveness of the strategy.

**This strategy identifies key priorities for the Group in the following areas:**

1. Governance.
2. Recruitment and staff development.
3. Access to housing.
4. Promotion of social and community cohesion.
5. Tackling harassment.
6. Services to residents and customer satisfaction.
7. Resident involvement.
8. Working with specialist support agencies and BME housing associations.
9. Procurement and work with consultants and contractors.

This strategy was approved by the Group's Board in March 2006 and applies to all parts of Southern Housing Group, including James Butcher and South Wight Housing Associations, Southern Space and Southern Housing Home Ownership.



# Governance

We aim to ensure that our governance structures are appropriate and meet the needs of a very significant social housing business, and that members of the Group's main and subsidiary boards bring with them a wide range of experience and expertise. We recognise the value of a diverse membership, reflecting the communities where we work.

We will:

- work to ensure that membership of the Group Board, and the boards of our subsidiary organisations, broadly reflect the communities where we work, by setting and reviewing ethnicity and gender targets for membership
- be transparent in the recruitment of members to the Group's governance structures
- ensure that those involved in governance are well informed about diversity and equality issues, specifically in relation to the Group's business
- ensure that all new members undergo diversity training before being confirmed in post.

## In practice

To maintain and increase the diversity of our board and committee membership, we practise open recruitment, advertising nationally as well as locally.

We also welcome nominations from a number of organisations that are actively promoting diversity in governance.

In filling two vacancies on the Board of Southern Housing Home Ownership in 2006, we were pleased to consider nominees put forward by the National Housing Federation's Get On Board scheme, which aims to match skilled and experienced candidates to board vacancies within member associations, and the Black On Board scheme run by Olmec, the community investment foundation.

As a result, we gained the skills of two experienced housing professionals, who might otherwise not have become known to us.

# Recruitment and staff development

We recognise that employing staff who are able to deliver responsive and culturally sensitive services, and who reflect the diversity of our customer base, will enhance our effectiveness.

We will:

- ensure that all staff recruitment and development is transparent and in accordance with the Group's legal obligations and equality and diversity principles
- consistently monitor and review the recruitment and existing staff levels of under-represented groups, particularly at senior management level, and take action to redress imbalances whilst meeting the Group's commitment to employing the best people for the job
- provide all employees with access to personal and professional development opportunities, and monitor outcomes and take up
- provide all employees with training around diversity and equality issues, particularly in relation to the implementation of this policy, their employment obligations and the provision of services
- ensure that the Group's employment policies are underpinned by recognition and value of diversity
- ensure that our anti-harassment and anti-bullying policy is clearly understood and that staff are confident that the Group will take seriously instances of harassment, bullying or inappropriate behaviour
- make sure external agencies, where they are used as part of any process related to employment, are aware of and respect the Group's policies in this area
- make sure that all offices in the Group are compliant with the public requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

## In practice

### Hackney caretaker

Derek Chen, who is profoundly deaf, is one of a number of Group staff to benefit from specialist equipment designed to facilitate their work.

Derek has worked at the George Downing and Keates Estates in Hackney for nearly 15 years, first as a cleaner for Hackney Council, then as a caretaker for the Group, after the estates transferred to us following a resident ballot.

Direct communication with fellow staff and residents poses few problems for Derek, as he is able to lip-read. Friend and colleague Andrew Emmanuel also went to college to learn British Sign Language to improve on the impromptu signing they had developed together.

In addition, Derek is equipped with a Blackberry hand-held computer, so we can alert him when someone needs to get hold of him and he can answer calls from residents when they have problems in their homes.

Derek attended a training course to develop his repairs skills, which we funded, and he was provided with a British Sign Language interpreter. He went on to win the Open College Network's Multiskills Student of the Year award.



# Access to housing

Southern Housing Group provides homes for rent and purchase.

We recognise that some groups face disadvantage and discrimination when it comes to gaining access to affordable housing. These groups may therefore be over-represented among the people referred to us as being in housing need.

We will:

- work with the Housing Corporation, local authorities, regional partnerships and other agencies to identify and assess the housing needs and aspirations of local communities. These partnerships will enable us to deliver a range of housing options that meet strategic and local housing needs – including homes for rent and ownership
- ensure that access to the Group's range of housing options is transparent, accountable and monitored
- provide open and non-discriminatory access to information on our housing options
- monitor all nominations and lettings to rented properties in relation to ethnicity and disability, ensuring lettings are in accordance with targets and nomination agreements, and that they contribute to community coherence
- work with residents and their agents so that individuals and their support needs are identified at the start of their tenancies, and make sure arrangements are put in place to ensure the sustainability of each letting
- monitor all low-cost home ownership sales in relation to ethnicity and disability, in accordance with legislation and good practice, and local authority agreed targets
- build new rented housing to meet individual needs, in line with strategic housing requirements for long-term housing sustainability, whilst meeting mobility standards.

## In practice



**Meeting** local housing need, our development at Turner Close in Ashford was designed to provide homes for families, people with disabilities and a range of support needs. It includes the borough's first bungalows with designated carer accommodation.

Close partnership working played a key role in enabling us to meet diverse needs at the scheme. While Ashford Borough Council provided strategic support, Kent County Council used its choice-based lettings scheme to encourage suitable applicants to apply for the specialist and supported housing.

Moat Support Services, who provide support for a number of residents at the scheme, also provided valuable specialist advice about design and funding, as well as plans to enable individual residents to live as independently as possible.

# Promotion of social & community cohesion

We aim to develop and manage homes of a consistently high standard, which contribute to sustainable communities and are desirable places in which to live.

We will:

- consult proactively with local communities and relevant authorities over the design and location of homes, to ensure we develop appropriate housing
- review the effectiveness of our sustainability strategy, where appropriate, to ensure we are achieving community coherence and desirable outcomes
- ensure integrated approaches to new and developing communities, by joint planning and use of our management, development and social investment resources
- target our social investment activities to promote community cohesion, and monitor outcomes, particularly in relation to majority and minority communities.

## In practice

In 2005, Southern Housing Foundation funded a special project at our Amhurst Road Estate in Hackney, which was designed to allow local people of all ages and backgrounds to express their opinions, ideas and suggestions through creativity.

Working with the Okai Collier Company and members of the Dalston Youth Project team based at the estate, residents and young people worked together to produce a documentary, 'The 411, the bottom line on Amhurst Road', a book and a rap single on CD.

By offering several mediums to communicate in, the project successfully involved a diverse group of residents, who were able to share their feelings about their lives, interests and environment, as well as the improvements they wanted to see locally.

The documentary was later screened at The Rio Cinema in Dalston.

The Foundation is increasingly using culture and art in its community regeneration projects, as a way of involving and delivering benefits to whole communities.

[Pictured: Some of the younger participants.](#)



# Tackling harassment

We are committed to ensuring that residents and staff are able to live and work safely, and we will take effective action to combat harassment.

We will:

- expect that residents, employees and agents are able to live or work in an environment free from intimidation or harassment
- support residents who experience harassment or intimidation and take effective action against perpetrators, making use of all the legal powers open to us
- work, and exchange information with, other agencies, to enhance our ability to provide safer and more confident neighbourhoods
- expect any agent or contractor employed by the Group to observe and respect the policy, and treat seriously any instance of harassment or bullying by an employee or contractor
- publicise and promote Group policies to residents and other customers, and report on our performance in tackling harassment
- monitor and report the outcomes of our actions.

## In practice

**Southern** Housing Group provides homes for an increasing number of older residents, many with varying degrees of support needs. We recognise this gives us an important role when it comes to identifying and preventing elder abuse.

All Group staff who work with vulnerable adults are properly trained and supported to do their jobs, and we expect staff to take immediate action if they are suspicious that abuse is occurring – no matter in what setting or the identity of the perpetrator or victim.

In the summer of 2006, we helped raise awareness of the issue amongst our residents, staff and other stakeholders, by organising events to support the ERoSH (Emerging Role of Sheltered Housing) national campaign against elder abuse.

We organised a sponsored stroll around London's Victoria Park, involving residents and staff from our London and Thames Gateway regions (pictured) and a number of other events were organised by sheltered scheme residents and staff around the Group.



# Services to residents & customer satisfaction

We recognise the value of delivering services which are of a high standard and which meet the needs of a diverse and changing customer base. We aim to ensure that all customers receive services which are characterised by recognition of, and respect for, the individual.

## In practice

In July 2005, we improved access to the Group's Service Centre by introducing a separate telephone number for Bengali residents.

When residents call this number, they hear a message recorded in Bengali by a member of our housing staff, which explains that they are about to be put through to an English-speaking customer service advisor, who will arrange for a translator to be on hand for a three-way conversation.

The new line has proved popular with Bengali speakers and around 200 calls had been made to it by the end of March 2006. Resident feedback tells us that it has improved our direct communication with this group of residents, because they no longer have to wait until they can find someone to call on their behalf.

The Bengali line is just one of the steps we have taken to make sure we are reaching the 17 per cent of our residents who are more comfortable using their first language.

We know that 32 per cent of these residents prefer to use Bengali and 19 per cent Turkish, so we now routinely translate many of our publications into these languages.

We also employ staff with relevant community languages in areas where there is an identified demand.

We will:

- ensure that all our housing service policies and processes are non-discriminatory
- provide all residents and other customers with clear and easily-understood information about our services
- provide residents and customers with the opportunity to access services in ways which meet their needs, monitoring service take-up and resident satisfaction by ethnicity, gender and disability
- provide redress mechanisms if there is dissatisfaction with service delivery
- reassess the way we deliver services when dissatisfaction is expressed
- explore with residents the possibility of recording personal information that will help us provide them with a better service, for example information about their religion, health and support needs, or sexual orientation
- develop non-intrusive and voluntary ways to measure and monitor the impact and outcomes of service delivery with residents.



# Resident involvement

We want to involve residents and make sure their views are reflected in the design and delivery of our services. We recognise the benefit to the organisation of delivering services which residents want, need and can influence. We are committed to providing a range of inclusive opportunities to all residents, which allows them to be involved at any level and in ways they choose. We recognise that a range of barriers may exist for some residents and we are committed to helping them to fuller involvement.

We will:

- provide and support a framework for residents which gives them a wide range of opportunities to become involved with the Group
- identify significant minority groups in our areas of operation and ensure our involvement strategy is capable of meeting their needs and aspirations to be involved
- actively promote resident involvement with all groups of residents through our community involvement team and local housing managers
- make information about opportunities for involvement available to all residents and present it so that it is accessible to minority communities
- continue to develop appropriate ways to communicate with, and involve, those groups and individuals who are currently under-represented – specifically people who are socially excluded
- monitor levels of involvement and assess where there may be under-representation, given knowledge of local community profiles, and address any imbalance
- promote access opportunities for hard-to-reach communities.

## In practice

To make sure the voices of our minority communities are heard, we routinely invite residents from particular groups to take part in special focus groups.

For example, we recently invited eight Turkish speakers from schemes around London to join us at Stamford Hill Estate in Hackney, where Turkish residents are a large minority, so that they could comment on the new Service Charter we were preparing to issue.

To enable us to run a focus group in Turkish, we enlisted the services of translators from Article, a community enterprise translation service run by bilingual tenants and backed by social landlords including Southern Housing Group.

We trained the translators to hold a focus group and sat in with them during the session to allow for some three-way discussion.

The focus group had the added benefit of giving the residents the opportunity to raise other housing and benefits issues with us that they had struggled to solve because they had language difficulties.



# Working with specialist support agencies and BME housing associations

We recognise the specialist expertise and value that other organisations can bring, and their ability to deliver more effective, appropriate and sensitive services to particular communities.

We will:

- continue to work with and support specialist and BME associations in areas where the Group is developing homes and services
- identify community support needs on new and existing housing schemes and seek to meet those needs by working in partnership with appropriately skilled and staffed organisations
- develop transparent and effective procurement and monitoring of the services provided by managing agent specialists, and assess the quality of the outcome for residents.

## In practice

In partnership with Agudas Israel Housing Association and the London Borough of Hackney, we are providing eight town houses for the Jewish community at our 155-home development at Hillside in Stamford Hill. The scheme is due to be completed by the summer of 2007.

To meet the religious and cultural requirements of this grouping, a sizeable minority in the area, the homes are 10 per cent larger than Parker Morris space standards. We are providing two sinks, for dairy and meat products, and a wider than usual cooker space, while wash hand-basins are situated outside WCs and bathrooms.

We are also installing timers on all lights except those in WCs, bathrooms and hallways, to allow for automatic operation during the Sabbath, and shaver/mirror lights in WCs and bathrooms, which can be left on at this time.

Outside, we are providing external door lights, but no lights at the scheme will be operated by sensors that could accidentally be switched on by movement during the Sabbath.



# Procurement and work with consultants and contractors

We recognise the challenges of working within EU procurement legislation and are committed to ensuring maximum benefit is derived from our arrangements and relationships with suppliers, contractors and consultants. We aim to deliver effective promotion of equality and diversity requirements in our work.

We will:

- identify all professional relationships where there are real possibilities of influencing the outcomes and quality of service delivery to the Group's customers
- ensure new procurement arrangements include assessment of equality and diversity in service delivery as part of tender assessment arrangements
- agree standards and monitoring arrangements with partner contractors and consultants, to assess outcomes and identify where improvements can be made in relation to equality
- work with contractors and suppliers who provide services to residents, to ensure they are sensitive to different needs and reflect the Group's commitment to diversity and equality
- explore opportunities for joint initiatives, including training, selection and employment initiatives, which include equality and diversity outcomes
- work with other registered social landlords and partners to develop better practice and to promote best practice within the Group.

## In practice



In June 2006, we held a series of diversity awareness training days for around 80 key staff from the Group's day-to-day and service contractors.

The aim of the training was to raise awareness of diversity and to acknowledge the different needs and expectations of residents from different communities and groups, so as to ensure we provide an excellent service to all our residents.

It was also an opportunity to acknowledge the value of our contractors' front line staff as ambassadors of our service and representatives of Southern Housing Group.

The training formed part of our programme of continuous improvement of our partnered contracts and reflected the Group's commitment to promoting best practice in the handling of diversity issues.

# Equality and Diversity Strategy

2006-2009

## Contacts

If you want to find out more about the latest initiatives of Southern Housing Group in relation to this strategy, please contact us on **08456 120 021**

For general information about the Group, use the same contact telephone number as above. You can also visit us at **www.shgroup.org.uk** or send an email to: **info@shgroup.org.uk**

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## Translations

For help with translations, or if a large type, Braille or taped summary would be useful, please contact Southern Housing Group's Service Centre on 0300 303 1771.

**Arabic** لمساعدتك في الترجمة يرجى الاتصال بمركز الخدمة على هاتف 0300 303 1771.

**Bengali** অনুবাদ সাহায্য পেতে হলে সার্ভিস সেন্টারে 0300 303 1682 নম্বরে ফোন করুন।

**French** Si vous souhaitez recevoir de l'aide avec vos traductions, appelez le 0300 303 1771.

**Somali** Wixii ah caawimo turjumaan ka soo wac Xarunta Adeegga telefoonka 0300 303 1771.

**Spanish** Si necesita que le ayudemos con alguna traducción, llámenos al 0300 303 1771.

**Turkish** Tercüme konusunda yardım için 0300 303 1683 'den Hizmet Merkezi'ni arayın.