SINGLE EQUALITIES SCHEME
This Single Equality Scheme (SES) supersedes any previous schemes for Disability, Gender and Race.

Housing plays a fundamental role in everyone’s life. Homes, and the communities in which they are located, directly influence our access to key opportunities and they affect our well-being. Estuary Housing Association believes that, with this Scheme, it is taking a lead in driving equality and diversity in housing.

The scheme marks the ongoing process of firmly embedding equalities into the priorities of the Association. Feedback and comment is welcomed from anyone who uses our services, represents those who use our services, our staff, our partner agencies and members of the public throughout the life of this scheme, particularly if any adverse impact of the plans in this document is anticipated.

We believe that striving for greater equality means the Housing and Care sector is working towards a better balance of opportunities, resources and decision making processes for customers and employees. Striving for greater diversity will ensure that the housing and care sector provides the right services and meets the right needs and aspirations of our customers in their diversity.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Linda Hollingworth
Director of HR & OD
August 2017
What does the Single Equality Scheme (SES) Do?

Our SES sets out:

- Our commitment to equality and diversity and includes an evolving action plan, which changes as we progress, outlining our achievements and priorities.
- Our approach to ensuring fairness, accessibility and transparency in every aspect of our work.
- The ways by which we will promote positive attitudes to people who may have suffered bias, prejudice or discrimination.
- The steps we will take to meet the needs of people with disabilities, even if this requires more favourable treatment.

Estuary’s Policy on Equality & Diversity 2016-2019

We want Estuary to be a truly open, accessible and diverse organisation in which everybody can participate regardless of their individual diversity.

To achieve this we need to ensure that:

- We provide and promote access points for everyone and do not place any unnecessary barriers to services, recruitment and opportunities;
- Our professional development, training and policies help to drive performance on equality and diversity issues and that they are accessible and relevant to everyone;
- Our governance and structures are open and welcoming to encourage participation from a wide range of people;
- Our staff understand our corporate vision and values, are equipped with the necessary skills and provided with appropriate support to ensure that Estuary is genuinely ‘open to all and closed to prejudice’;
- We communicate our message effectively so that people understand Estuary’s commitment to equality and diversity.
- We ensure that people who work with us, such as contractors and suppliers, are aware of our commitment to Equality and Diversity and we will check that their policies make a similar commitment, and that they put them into practice.
- We take action when we consider that someone who works with us has acted in a way which is not consistent with our Equality and Diversity policy or has caused unlawful discrimination or harassment.

The Association’s Equality and Diversity policy (first issued in 2009) acts as a framework that brings together, in one place, the previous schemes or action plans that have been approved by the Association. The policy will be annually reviewed through the life of this scheme with particular attention being paid to the impact of any new legislation.

Introduction

Equality is about treating individuals fairly so that needs are met, supported by legislation and designed to address unfair discrimination that is based on membership of a particular group.

Diversity is about the recognition and valuing of difference; creating a working culture and practices that recognise, respect, value and harness differences for the benefit of the organisation and the individual. Equality and diversity are not inter-changeable but are inter-dependent. There is no quality of opportunity if difference is not recognised and valued.

The Legal Framework

The Equality Act 2010 received Royal Assent on 8th April 2010. The Act had two main purposes – to harmonise discrimination law, and to strengthen the law to support progress on equality. The Act brought together and re-stated all the enactments listed below to give a single approach where appropriate.

Key legal requirements previously covered by:-

- The Equal Pay Act 1970;
- The Sex Discrimination Act 1975;
- The Race Relations Act 1976;
- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995;
- The Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003;
- The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003;
- The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006;
- The Equality Act 2006, Part 2;
- The Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007

The Equality Act 2006 remained in force (as amended by the Act) so far as it related to the constitution and operation of the Equality and Human Rights Commission.
So what does all that mean?

Protected Characteristics and their definition.

There are nine specific areas (or protected characteristics) covered by equality and diversity guidelines and legislation.

| Age | Refers to a person belonging to a particular age (e.g. 60 year olds) or range of ages (e.g. 18 - 30 year olds). |
| Disablity | A person has a disability if s/he has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on that person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. |
| Gender Reassignment | The process of transitioning from one gender to another. |
| Marriage and Civil Partnership | Marriage is no longer restricted to a union between a man and a woman but now includes a marriage between a same-sex couple. Same-sex couples can also have their relationships legally recognised as ‘civil partnerships’. Civil partners must not be treated less favourably than married couples (except where permitted by the Equality Act). |
| Pregnancy & maternity | Pregnancy is the condition of being pregnant or expecting a baby. Maternity refers to the period after the birth, and is linked to maternity leave in the employment context. In the non-work context, protection against maternity discrimination is for 26 weeks after giving birth, and this includes treating a woman unfavourably because she is breastfeeding. |
| Race | Refers to the protected characteristic of Race. It refers to a group of people defined by their race, colour, nationality (including citizenship), ethnic or national origins. |
| Religion & Belief | Religion has the meaning usually given to it but belief includes religious and philosophical beliefs including lack of belief (e.g. Atheism). Generally, a belief should affect your life choices or the way you live for it to be included in the definition. |
| Sex | Man or a woman |
| Sexual orientation | Whether a person’s sexual attraction is towards their own sex, the opposite sex or to both sexes. |
| Associated Discrimination | There is also protection for those who may be discriminated against because they are perceived to have, or are associated with someone who has, a protected characteristic. For example, the Equality Act will protect people who are caring for a disabled child or relative. They are protected by virtue of their association to that person. |

What are the Vision and Aims of the Estuary Single Equality Scheme (SES)

Our vision is to champion, inspire, challenge and support people who use our services, our staff and those who work with us, so that consideration of equality and diversity issues becomes a way of life for us all.

We will:

- Champion our staff, residents and customers to demonstrate true commitment to equality and diversity;
- Inspire our staff and those who work alongside us to provide homes and services to meet the needs of all our customers;
- Challenge barriers to equality and diversity;
- Support those who face inequality and discrimination of any kind.

The main aims of the Association’s SES are to:

- Identify and address Association policies and practices that may be viewed as discriminatory (through Equality Impact Assessments);
- Ensure that consideration of equalities issues are at the centre of our thinking and day-to-day practice across the Association and with our partner agencies;
- Meet the current legal requirements concerning the protected characteristics;
- Challenge discrimination against people who work for us, with us, or use our services;
- Ensure equal access to services and work to enhance and improve customer choice and control;
- Raise awareness and understanding of these issues for all who work with us.

Our vision is to champion, inspire, challenge and support
Consulting with others

Staff have been directly consulted on the content of the scheme and have been asked to contribute through the use of Association communication methods such as Estuary Matters (staff newsletter), the Equality & Diversity Working Group, the Staff Consultation Group, Team Meetings and the Joint Negotiating Committee (with recognised unions).

The Equality and Diversity Working Group oversees all aspects of the Scheme implementation and review. (It is important that we point out that our plans are drawn up in the light of current available resources so if something is not in the action plan this does not mean that it is not recognised as important).

People who use our services

Consultation with customers and those who work alongside us is continually taking place through the following forums:

- Federation of Estuary Residents
- Service user involvement committees
- Equality & Diversity Working Group
- Family Centre Local Advisory Board

Our public commitments to Equality & Diversity

Back in June 2012 we first signed up to the Chartered Institute of Housing Equality & Diversity Charter. By continuing to sign up to the Charter we are making public our commitment towards greater equality and diversity in housing. We work with our residents to tailor the Charter to local needs and priorities in the areas in which we work.

The Charter is a framework for improvement, based on a self-assessment approach – it will be important for us to involve our residents and those who use our services as we are ultimately accountable to them for our delivery against the Charter.

In a similar way, in 2013, our Support and Care services signed “The Social Care Commitment”. The Social Care Commitment is the social care sector’s promise to provide people who need care and support with high quality services. Employers and employees sign up to the commitment pledging to improve the quality of the workforce.

By making the commitment, we are making a public declaration that our customers can trust the support and care we provide is underpinned by strong core values, and that the organisation cares about the quality of services we deliver, and offers, through our trained staff members:

The framework for this Social Care Commitment was developed through consultation with those working within the social care and support sector and the people who use those services. The public is able to see which providers have made the commitment either on the NHS Choices website or on the Social Care Commitment website.

In addition, Support and Care services have signed up to the Skills for Care Code of Conduct. This code is based on the principles of protecting the public by promoting best practice. It helps us to ensure that staff are ‘working to standard’, providing high quality, compassionate care and support. Support and Care services have also signed up to Dignity in Care and appointed Dignity Champions across all schemes to promote dignity and respect within our services.

Our Contractors

Contractors who work with us are required to have their own Equality & Diversity policies or to sign up to Estuary’s policy and they are made aware of our Single Equality Scheme.

Our legal responsibility

We have a legal responsibility for ensuring that discrimination does not occur. The Association is liable (together with its managers and staff) for any act of unlawful direct or indirect discrimination by its staff committed during the course of their employment unless it can prove that it did all that was reasonably practicable to prevent that act.

The Chief Executive has overall responsibility.

The Executive Director – Corporate Resources is the Executive Team member responsible for the overall development of equality matters (the policy and this scheme) with support from Management Team colleagues.

All staff are responsible for delivering the scheme as it relates to their area of work and this requirement is outlined in our Code of Conduct for Employees.

The Equality and Diversity (E&D) Working Group is chaired by the Director of Human Resources & Organisational Development and has a core standing membership of staff, union and tenant/Board Member representatives. All staff and customers are welcome to contribute to the agenda through their service area representative or Federation of Estuary Residents representative. The group meets approximately every 10-12 weeks and the dates of meetings are published on our website (www.estuary.co.uk) and intranet.

The Board of Management consider all their business in the light of equality and diversity requirements.
So what have we done so far?
We have put in place structures and processes to actively promote equality of opportunity for all including:

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For more information on what we have been doing to actively promote Equality & Diversity please visit: www.estuary.co.uk
**Disability equality**

We work alongside Job Centre Plus to ensure that we are ‘positive about disability’ and encourage applications from candidates with disabilities. We have the ‘two ticks’ symbol which is awarded by Job Centre Plus to employers who have made commitments to employ, keep and develop the abilities of disabled staff. Improvements to toilet facilities, public areas and access to main receptions have been undertaken at our Registered Office (Meatland House) to improve standards in these areas. Customers also have access to portable hearing loops, situated in reception areas.

Examination of the maintenance contract arrangements for office sites has been carried out with the aim of improving cost efficiency and achieving regular maintenance checks.

Staff Access to Work - Provision of aids adaptations and advice to individual staff members continues to be provided via partnerships between Access to Work, our information and technology department, the occupational health provider and the employee assistance programme.

Adaptations for residents - Provision of aids and adaptations for customers is undertaken where appropriate and where funding has been accessed and is reported to our Board of Management via our Corporate Performance Dashboard. We continually strive to enhance the service provision to customers in this area.

Centre Place Nursery ensures that children with physical and sensory disability are provided with necessary equipment and support to enable them to fully integrate and take part in activities. Extensive investment in new playground surfacing and equipment took place over the summer of 2016 and sensory equipment has been installed. Supported Housing and Care services have installed sensory rooms in all the registered services with nursing provision to assist with sensory stimulation.

**Mental ill health**

With our Occupational Health Provider partner we work to ensure that the health of our employees is effectively monitored and supported and that absence from the workplace is minimised. The provision of an Employee Assistance Programme enables employees to access a 24 hour, 365 days a year helpline which will give advice, guidance and counselling on all matters that might be affecting individuals.

Estuary has obtained ‘Mindful Employer’ accreditation, to promote the Association as an employer which understands mental health issues and disabilities and supports staff in the workplace.

Human Resources (HR) is continually striving to understand the needs of our employees; HR staff undertake appropriate Mental Health Awareness training to further develop our consideration and support for staff.

Our employees also receive training and development in areas of mental health awareness. Staff in our support services, and in our front line customer services, benefit from a greater understanding of the needs of people who may present as having mental health needs.

Where we have concerns or are aware that a resident has a mental health need we will signpost them to appropriate agencies to support them to successfully sustain their tenancy.

Supported Housing & Care department works with specialist groups (such as Linked Employment) to facilitate our customers with learning difficulties to find employment where possible.

Progress has been made in the area of service user involvement both at an individual care planning level and at service planning level. Our Supported Housing and Care service continues to develop personalisation and supported living, enabling people who use our services to live as independently as possible. This moves us away from a set service provision or ‘one size fits all’ and allows us to focus on the needs of individuals, giving the freedom to address these needs in a multitude of ways. Our Supported Housing & Care service has always provided a service that takes account of equality and diversity – personalisation just helps us do it more effectively.

Nursery staff are trained to recognise early signs of learning difficulties, and work with families, carers and partner agencies to determine and address support needs.

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**Race Equality**

We continue to work with local community groups to heighten our understanding of the service needs in the localities in which we work.

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**Public Sector Equality Duty**

Housing providers are required to give ‘due regard’ to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations where they exercise a public function.

**Regulation**

The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) have adopted a more reactive approach to consumer protection with fewer codes of guidance so we are working closely with our tenants and customers to ensure excellence in all we do.

**Localism**

more flexible approaches to allocations and lettings means that we need to make sure our priorities reflect the needs and aspirations of our communities in their diversity to ensure fair and accessible housing for all.

**Funding and Benefits**

welfare reform changes continue to have an impact on a wide range of residents. We are working with our residents to provide information, support and guidance where we can to ensure equality impacts are addressed.

**GOING FORWARD**

Changes to legislation, regulation and funding continue to cause providers such as ourselves to re-evaluate what we do and why we are doing it.
Age equality

A succession planning model is being developed utilising the National Apprenticeship Scheme to encourage younger people into the workplace. Funding has been accessed through partnership working with Job Centre Plus, Skills for Care, the National Apprenticeship Scheme, local colleges and Local Authority partners.

Estuary has recruited numerous apprentices between 2012-2017 (2 in HR, 3 in Supported Housing and Care and 5 in Finance). Service areas have appreciated the opportunity to work alongside and coach new workers of all ages and we have been able to offer a permanent role to some of the successful completions.

We have an Apprenticeship Scheme under the new Apprenticeship Levy programme which will enable us to offer apprenticeship and graduate placement opportunities to all ages.

Gender equality

Issues of gender are linked to privacy and dignity, to religious and cultural needs, to different health needs and to different life stories. Services will do their best to meet a request for a member of staff of the requested gender, but if it is not possible to meet the request, then staff will do whatever they can to ensure tenant/ service user agreement to the type of service being provided.

Equal pay & gender pay gap

As part of the Gender Equality Duty, Estuary is required to consider the need to include objectives to address the causes of any differences between the pay of men and women that are related to their sex. The Director of Human Resources & OD undertakes an annual Equal Pay review to ensure there are no inconsistencies within the pay structure of the whole organisation. And in 2017 we are undertaking our first round of Gender Pay Gap reporting which will be published on our website by April 2018 (as per requirement).

Sexual orientation

Guidance from the Department of Health, on issues related to sexual orientation, is highlighted on the Association’s intranet.

Estuary recognises the need to do all it can to support any requests from employees, tenants or service users who require transgender support. Any support offered will of course need to be appropriate to the service provided or the employment contract, and be consistent with our policies and procedures.

Our Central Services Team has considered availability of access to suitable private facilities and conveniences, for transgender customers visiting our registered offices or employees. They have produced relevant signage in preparation for such a request, restricting access by others if required.

Religion and belief

Estuary continues to work with local community groups to heighten our understanding of the service needs that are in the localities in which we work.

The Association aims to raise awareness for staff and customers of different cultural and religious events, publicising various religious festivals and dates via our staff intranet and within customer newsletters.

Whilst we do not currently have specific prayer rooms at the Registered Office or the main Housing Office, provision has been made to accommodate individual needs utilising available private spaces at both offices. Estuary will make every effort to ensure that private space is provided for prayer once this requirement is made known to us and Central Services Officers will provide a compass for those who require knowledge of the cardinal points in connection with their religious belief.

The Nursery at Centre Place continues to work on educating the children on different cultures and beliefs.

Our Equality & Diversity Working Group continually reviews practices within our services and has more recently reviewed guidelines for our staff on dealing with death under various religious and belief requirements. By ensuring our staff have access to this kind of advice and guidance we can help people using our services to have the lifestyle and consideration of their wishes in death that each of us would want to have.

Gender reassignment

Estuary has a Gender Reassignment Policy which outlines how we will aim to support staff undergoing reassignment and ensure that they do not suffer harassment or discrimination in the workplace.

Our Housing Officers work with residents to ensure that there is a zero tolerance policy for any harassment or discrimination of tenants or those using our services that may be undergoing reassignment.
Pregnancy, maternity and paternity

Estuary has family friendly policies including Maternity, Paternity and Shared Parental leave schemes which aim to support staff in the way that best suits their needs. Support is given to any member of staff who advises that she is pregnant and we undertake a risk assessment to ensure that any risks at work are addressed during the pregnancy.

Our policy supports ‘Keep in Touch’ Days (KIT) where staff on maternity leave can come into the work place during the maternity leave to ensure that the employee is kept updated with colleagues and the workplace and is able to undertake any training or development needs prior to returning to the workplace.

On return to work following maternity or shared parental leave, staff members undertake an induction to the workplace and have the ability to request flexible arrangements under our Flexible Working Policy.

Marriage and civil partnership

We aim to ensure that none of our policies discriminate against people on the grounds of their relationship status. We offer tenancies to married and civil partnership couples, and cohabiting couples who have evidence of their relationship.

Staff benefits such as pensions and health plans are inclusive of both marriage and civil partnerships. Our HR team monitors the legal position on marriage/civil partnerships and our policies and procedures are reviewed and adapted as required.

And finally ..... 

This is a developing and changing Scheme – and this document helps us to highlight what we are doing. Feedback is appreciated and welcomed from customers, staff and partner agencies. If there is something you feel Estuary could (or should) be addressing we would be pleased to hear from you.

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August 2017
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Get in touch

If you would like this document in another language, large print, Braille or audio or if you require the service of an interpreter, please contact us on 0300 304 5000

Chinese
如果你想这份文件在你的语言联系 0300 304 5000

Italian
se volete questo documento nella tua lingua di contatto 0300 304 5000

Lithuanian
jei norėtumėte šį dokumentą jūsų kalba Susisiekite 0300 304 5000

Polish
jeśli chcesz ten dokument w swoim języku kontakt 0300 304 5000

Portuguese
se você gostaria que esse documento em seu idioma contacte 0300 304 5000

Swahili
kama ungepanda huu katika lugha yako ya kuwasiliana 0300 304 5000

Turkish
Bu belgeyi istersiniz sizin dillerinizde 0300 304 5000 arayın

Vietnamese
nếu bạn muốn tài liệu này trong ngôn ngữ của bạn liên hệ 0300 304 5000