

WILLOW PARK HOUSING TRUST

WILLOW PARK HOUSING TRUST DIVERSITY STRATEGY

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1.0 STATUTORY AND REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

- 1.1.1 This Strategy reflects the statutory and regulatory requirements that exist regarding equality and diversity.
- 1.1.2 The Trust has a duty under the Disability Discrimination Act to promote disability equality. We will assess our policies and procedures to ensure that they do not have a negative impact on disabled people.
- 1.1.3 The Trust also has a duty under the Equality Act to promote gender equality. We will assess our policies and procedures to ensure that they do not have a negative impact on men, women and transgender people.
- 1.1.4 The Equality Act 2006 established the new Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR) that will come into being in October 2007. The CEHR will bring together the Disability Rights Commission and the Equal Opportunities Commission which will promote equality and tackle discrimination in relation to sexual orientation, age, and religion or belief – areas that are not covered by the existing Commissions. The Commission for Racial Equality will join by the end of March 2009, putting expertise on equality, diversity and human rights all in one place

1.2 Housing Corporation Regulatory Code:

- 1.2.1 The Housing Corporation Regulatory Code states that:

2.7 – 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 to all individuals. They must promote good relations between people of different racial groups.

3.5 – Housing Associations must provide good quality housing services for residents and prospective residents by being responsive to the individual characteristics and circumstances of residents. This is supported by Housing Corporation Good Practice Notes 4, Race Equality and Diversity, and 8, Equality and Diversity.

1.3 Current Legislation

- 1.3.1 The Trust will work within the following legislation and regulatory guidance in promoting equality and diversity:

Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (amended 1986)
Race Relations Act 1976 (amended 2000)
Disability Discrimination Act 1995
Disability Discrimination Act 2005
Equal Pay Act 1970 (amended 1984)

Asylum and Immigration Act 1996
Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974
Protection against Harassment Act 1997
Sex Discrimination (Gender Re-assignment) Regulations 1999
Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003
Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006
Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003
Equality Act 2006
Human Rights Act 1998
Statutory Code of Practice on Racial Equality in Housing (CRE)
Statutory Code of Practice on Racial Equality in Employment (CRE)

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1.1 This Strategy is derived from the Equality and Diversity Policy which outlines the Trust's role in promoting equality and diversity. This Strategy sets out what we will do in the coming period to promote equality and diversity in our work.

2.2 Definition of diversity

2.2.1 The concept of diversity encompasses acceptance and respect and means recognising and understanding individual differences. At Willow Park, we aim to create an integrated and cohesive community where there are strong and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds within the neighbourhood and where there is a widely shared sense of the contribution of different communities to a future vision for the neighbourhood.

2.3 Purpose of the Strategy

2.3.1 The Trust recognises the need to support and empower all sections of the community. As a social housing provider, our aim is to be responsive to the needs of the community that we serve. The issues of equality and diversity are integral to all of our activities and every aspect of the work that we do.

2.3.2 The Trust recognises that in maintaining community cohesion, all members of the community should have the opportunity to influence decisions that affect the local area. We therefore, seek to have balanced policies that meet the needs of all groups within the community groups.

2.3.3 This Strategy replaces the Trust's Black and Minority Ethnic Strategy 2005, and addresses the wider diversity agenda in line with the Trust's Equality and Diversity Policy approved by the Board in December 2006.

2.3.4 This Strategy and Action Plan sets out our objectives for achieving equality and diversity in all aspects of our business. The Strategy has a number of functions:

- It is a clear and public statement of our commitment to equality and diversity.
- It sets out what we hope to achieve and identifies a range of actions we will undertake in working towards our objectives.
- It provides a framework that will help to support our commitment to equality and diversity and help us to make progress towards achieving our goals.
- It will focus our energy, attention and resources on the areas we have identified as our priorities.

2.4 Scope of the Strategy

2.4.1 This Strategy relates to the following areas of our work:

- Corporate commitment and continuous improvement
- Partnership working
- Resident and community involvement
- Services
- New homes and improving stock
- Employment
- Contractors and Consultants

2.4.2 Within each area, we have agreed a series of activities within the Action Plan that we will undertake during the 3 years of the Strategy to help deliver our objectives. Over time, we will further develop our Strategies and continue to develop initiatives to raise the profile of equality and diversity throughout the organisation. We will keep the Strategy and all associated documents under constant review.

2.4.3 The Diversity Strategy applies to:

- The Board and Committees
- Employees of the Trust and those seeking employment with the Trust
- Suppliers and contractors who supply goods or services to the Trust or on their behalf and other stakeholders

2.5 The Business Case

2.5.1 Demonstrating our commitment to equality and diversity can bring a number of benefits to our business:

- Using our understanding of the diversity of views and needs of our customers to drive service reviews and deliver high quality services
- Develop relevant products and services to meet the current and future needs and aspirations of the communities in which we work
- Positively influence our ability to win new business
- Help to recruit and retain the most able from all sections of the community
- Enhance our reputation and standing in the community and amongst stakeholders

- Ensuring that the community is viable and cohesive where the needs of all members of the community are recognised.

3.0 OUR COMMITMENT

3.1 Our commitment to equality and diversity is consistent with our corporate objectives, vision and values:

3.2 Our Objectives

3.2.1 We will:

- Provide quality homes in an attractive environment
- Promote diverse and sustainable communities
- Work in partnership to maximise investment and added value
- Meet our financial targets
- Support resident involvement in all aspects of our work
- Ensure staff are equipped, trained and motivated to provide good quality services

3.3 Our Vision

3.3.1 We are making Willow Park a place where people want to live and work, where residents are proud of their homes and their community.

3.3.2 Our purpose is to provide well-maintained homes at prices people can afford and quality customer services, and to contribute to improving the quality of life in our area.

3.4 Our Values

3.4.1 We will strive to be:

- Accessible and approachable
- Responsive and supportive
- Open and accountable
- Respectful of people and their homes
- Committed to equal opportunity for all

3.5 Our Equality and Diversity Policy sets out how we aim to:

- Provide and deliver services which are relevant, appropriate and accessible to all sections of the communities we serve, and to create an environment where diversity is valued and embraced by Board Members, staff and customers alike.

- Recognise and respect the valuable contribution which diverse groups can bring to a community and to treat individuals with dignity and respect.
- Take action to address discrimination experienced by particular groups, as well as taking action to promote diversity in employment and in the provision of services.
- Mainstream all equality and diversity issues throughout the organisation to improve its culture and performance and to enable staff to deliver services and proactively respond in ways which meet the needs of our diverse community.

3.6 Within our Diversity Action Plan, we have set out how we will:

- Contribute to the wider regeneration of the area and support community activities that benefit all groups within the community
- Develop housing and other services which are appropriate to the needs of individuals and groups from all communities
- Ensure that diverse groups are represented throughout the organisation to reflect local communities
- Encourage and support partner, agents, contractors and consultants in meeting diversity objectives
- Work closely with people from all backgrounds in the future development of the Strategy

4.0 OUR APPROACH

4.1 The implementation of our Diversity Strategy will be guided by the following principles:

4.2 Mainstreaming

4.2.1 We aim to ensure that equality and diversity issues are integral to all our activities and a routine part of our organisational and business planning activity. We will systematically consider equality and diversity at all stages and in all aspects of the organisations activities in relation to employment and delivery and procurement of services. This means everybody within the organisation is responsible for incorporating equality principles into their day to day activities.

4.2.2 We will achieve this by:

- Ensuring that equality objectives are reflected in staff appraisals
- Producing regular equality update reports for the Board
- Producing equality briefings for Committees and staff
- Considering equality issues and assessing how services impact in all service areas.

4.3 Working in Partnership

4.3.1 The Trust can make better progress on equality and diversity issues by working together with our partners, other housing providers, service users and other stakeholders. We will work with partner organisations to add value to our equality and diversity work.

4.3.2 We will achieve this by:

- Working in partnership with other agencies to organise multi-cultural and other diversity events to bring the community together to celebrate diversity
- Being part of local and national diversity networks sharing good practice in this area
- Provide support for community projects and initiatives
- Work with Wythenshawe Regeneration Team on projects to help services become more responsive to the changing needs of our community
- Continue to establish and develop our residents panels and volunteering projects

5.0 AREA PROFILE

5.1 The Willow Park area falls within Wythenshawe, which is a distinct area of the City with a total population of 66,000 people (Census 2001). Approximately 25000 people live in the Willow Park area. The 2001 Census figures show that:

- Wythenshawe is characterised by a significantly young population. In total, 16.2% of the population are between 5 and 15 years of age, which is higher than the City percentage of 14.9%.
- The proportion of people between 25 and 39 years of age (22.4%) is almost the same as the City percentage (23.9%).
- The proportion of people between 40 and 59 years of age in Wythenshawe (22.6%) is higher than the City (20.5%).
- The employment rate for both males and females in Benchill is below the City averages (which are amongst the lowest in England).
- The factors which account for inactivity are 28% looking after family/home (20.7% for Manchester); and 36.2% permanently sick/disabled (25% for Manchester). The incidence of long term sick/disabled, combined with the high number of registered unemployed claimants, highlights the scale of worklessness amongst working age residents.
- We see our role in expanding employment within the community as a main priority. As an example, the Trust is supporting a programme with Manchester City Council and the Stepping Stones initiative providing a dedicated member of staff based in one of the Trust's offices each week. The initiative is directly

linked to the City Strategy on worklessness to encourage and support those on incapacity, lone parent and other benefits, to consider and access employment.

- Wythenshawe is still a predominantly White British area (91%), with relatively high proportions of Irish (2.4%) and Other White (1.2%).
- Proportionally, the third biggest group is mixed: White and African Caribbean (1%), followed by Pakistani and African Caribbean (0.7% respectively). However, there are issues of accuracy and under-reporting of BME populations in Census data. For example, local schools report significant numbers of single white parents with mixed race or black children.

5.2 The Trust commissioned research during 2006 with the aim of starting to establish information on the needs of the growing number of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) residents and tenants in the area, to inform future service delivery. In addition, a separate satisfaction survey was carried out of all Willow Park tenants, and the results were analysed by ethnicity.

5.3 The research highlighted that the growth of BME communities in Wythenshawe is largely due to new arrivals from Somalia and Nigeria, Eastern Europe and Southern India, however the research also identified that a wide range of diverse communities now live in Wythenshawe.

5.4 This growth reflects a range of factors: the increase of migrant workers into the UK following the expansion of the EU to include Eastern Europe; job opportunities at Manchester Airport and Wythenshawe Hospital and migration from other parts of Manchester and elsewhere in the country.

5.5 Key findings for the surveys were:

- There are very diverse minority and new communities in Wythenshawe, including new European communities.
- There is a lack of knowledge about support organisations and groups for minority and new communities, and how to access them.
- There is a lack of knowledge about different cultures and customs.
- There are currently low levels of involvement in community activities, but strong interest in becoming involved.

5.6 The Trust will also carry out an important piece of work during 2008 to help us to better understand our customer base and local demographics. We aim to know the breakdown of our residents by age, ethnicity, disability, gender, sexual orientation and faith where residents are comfortable about disclosing this information. This will enable us to prioritise resources and adapt services appropriately.

6.0 KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- 6.1 We held an event with local stakeholders and partner agencies to share the key findings from the BME and new communities' research we commissioned in 2006. Through this partnership working, we are developing a Community Cohesion Action Plan to include a range of actions to ensure that wider needs are identified and services are geared to address the needs of the communities.
- 6.2 We have rolled out a programme of equality and diversity training of all its staff, Board and Committee members. This has also been extended to members of tenant and resident panels and resident volunteers.
- 6.3 We have produced a Community Profile Guide providing staff with information on language, faith, diet, places of worship and other useful details on the main BME groups in the community. This also contains details of support groups and community organisations, enabling staff to signpost customers to relevant points where needed.
- 6.3 We have established an Equality and Diversity Group consisting of staff from a range of levels within the organisation. We have also appointed a lead member of the Board to take responsibility for driving the organisation's agenda on equality and diversity.
- 6.4 We have set up several residents panels to help guide our work and services to all diverse groups within the community. Examples of these include a Youth Panel, Disability Awareness Panel and Older Persons Panel.
- 6.5 We have established a Junior Board to expand youth involvement in the area. Members of the Board meet with the main Board and senior management to share ideas, thoughts and visions.
- 6.6 The Trust manages the new Lifestyle Centre in Woodhouse Park and continues to support the new Benchill Community Centre. Both centres offer a range of community activities and training programmes that the Trust supports. We are also developing further accessible programmes for all the community.
- 6.7 We are working with partners such as the Scarman Trust to provide advice and support to local residents including training courses which are delivered through the Open University. Further training courses are being targeted including Youth, Childcare and Financial Awareness. Mentoring Schemes will also be developed.
- 6.8 Willow Park has a wide ranging Financial Inclusion Strategy. We hold Money Roadshow events bringing together various agencies and partners to provide a range of financial advice including how to set up a business, dealing with VAT and applying for housing benefit and Tax Credits.

- 6.9 The Trust supports a successful Business Enterprise Support Project which has helped to create over 50 new businesses for people in the area.
- 6.10 We have set up a Youth Volunteer Training Programme working with staff from Parklands School who are actively participating in the programme designed to encourage positive attitudes and develop citizenship in young people.

7.0 DEVELOPING THE ACTION PLAN

- 7.1 The Disability Awareness Forum and Equality and Diversity Group have been involved in the development of this strategy. We will continue to develop the Strategy and targets and feedback throughout the year will be collated and used to inform the next update.
- 7.2 The research commissioned by the Trust highlighted the increasing ethnic diversity of the local community and the need for us to have a better understanding of the new communities. The Action Plan incorporates several actions resulting from this research.
- 7.3 The Audit Commission published a revised Diversity KLOE in December 2006 and we have used this to provide a benchmark for our services and employment practices. We are aiming to achieve the standards of an organisation delivering an excellent service.
- 7.4 We compare our performance on diversity with other social housing providers and share good practice with other similar organisations. We are members of a number of equality and diversity benchmarking groups and networks.
- 7.5 We recognise the need to set a range of targets to drive performance improvement and measure our progress over time. We will continue to identify diversity targets in both areas of employment and services.

8.0 IMPLEMENTATION

- 8.1 The Trust considers that everyone within the organisation including the Board, managers, employees and contractors, has responsibility for complying with the Diversity Strategy and for ensuring that the standards of behaviour required by the organisation are achieved. This means creating a positive working culture by breaking down and challenging negative stereotypes and inappropriate language.
- 8.2 It is essential to the success of this strategy that all staff are aware of its contents and have a clear understanding of their role in delivering it. In addition, all departments and staff will have a role to play in completing the tasks within the Action Plan.
- 8.3 The Strategy is available in other languages and in alternative formats, larger print and audio tape on request.

- 8.4 As an important part of their induction, all new members of staff will be made aware of this Strategy and Action Plan and their role in its delivery.
- 8.5 We will ensure that customers are kept up to date with our progress of implementing the Strategy through regular features in our In Touch Newsletter.

9.0 MONITORING AND REVIEW

9.1 We will review the Strategy and our progress towards achieving our equality objectives in the Action Plan on an annual basis. This review will enable us to set new objectives and targets where necessary. We currently monitor the following performance indicators, some of which have targets in place:

- Lettings to BME households
- Lettings to disabled people
- Racial Harassment and Domestic Violence incidents reports
- Harassment incidents reports by members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender communities and also by disabled people
- Disabled employees
- BME employees of the Trust
- Women employees
- Employees by age
- BME employees of contractors
- Customer satisfaction levels of work carried out by contractors
- Evictions by ethnicity

9.2 Monitoring will include:

- Use of CORE data of the social profile of new applicants rehoused
- Recording ethnicity, gender and disability of service users, complainants and applicants
- Satisfaction Surveys of service users
- Monitoring the extent and nature of tenants involvement and ensuring that barriers to involvement are minimised

9.3 The monitoring of the Diversity Strategy and Action Plan will be carried out by the Equality and Diversity Group which is responsible for ensuring that the Action Plan is implemented.

9.4 We will report our progress on equality and diversity to Board on a quarterly basis. The report will give details of:

- Progress against the Action Plan
- Performance on the key targets and diversity performance indicators
- Recommendations for service improvements and strategies for dealing with issues

10.0 APPENDICES

Action Plan