

## Group Equality and Diversity Strategy and Policy 2011 - 2014

### A. BACKGROUND AND SCOPE

The Coastline Group (Coastline Housing Ltd, Coastline Services Ltd and Coastline Care Ltd) is committed to achieving equality making a difference to peoples lives and we believe is what makes us different, makes us stronger, recognising that everyone is unique with individual needs. The group values and aims to encourage diversity in everything it does and will seek to challenge discrimination and intolerance based on an individual's characteristics.

Our values, as set out in the Corporate Plan 2010-2014 are what we as an organisation care most about, and articulate the difference we want to make. They will underpin everything we do.

We will:

- Put our customers first
- Be open, honest and accountable
- Nurture innovation and creativity
- Respect people's differences and be sensitive to their needs
- Respect and protect the environment

The group is committed to fulfilling wholeheartedly statutory and regulatory requirements to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and good relations between different groups and to maintaining an organisational culture which values people from all sections of the community. It is recognised that households in Coastline properties may contain higher than average proportions of people who experience discrimination and other social disadvantage. At Coastline, we understand that diversity includes everyone and many people can experience disadvantage or be discriminated against for a number of reasons.

The main groups of people who may face direct or indirect discrimination include:

- People from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities, including gypsies, roma and travellers
- Lesbians, gay men, bi-sexual people
- Households headed by women (especially lone parents)
- People with disabilities
- Older people or young people
- People with HIV/AIDS
- People with learning difficulties and people with mental health issues
- People suffering from alcohol or substance abuse
- Ex-offenders and people in contact with the criminal justice services
- Those experiencing domestic violence or sexual abuse
- Asylum seekers and refugees
- People who are financially excluded

- People undergoing gender reassignment, transsexuals, and people living a different gender to their birth

### Protected Characteristics

Characteristics which are protected by legislation are:

- Age
- Disability
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Gender reassignment

## **B. PURPOSE**

The policy aims to ensure that we treat each individual with dignity and respect. We recognise that some kinds of difference, discrimination or disadvantage are widely shared and experienced: where individuals have common needs, we also need strategies specific to particular groups of people.

The group is committed to:

- Valuing our customers and involving them in the development of services that recognise and promote diversity
- Recruiting a workforce and having a governance structure that generally reflects local populations
- Supporting and training staff to enable them to demonstrate an understanding of and commitment to equality and diversity and antidiscrimination practices
- Fulfilling wholeheartedly our statutory, regulatory and corporate responsibilities.
- Everybody being entitled to an environment which promotes dignity and respect to all. No form of intimidation, discrimination, harassment or bullying will be tolerated
- Equality and diversity being central to the viability of the business
- Investigating any breaches of our policy seriously and taking appropriate action to mitigate any negative impacts
- Ensuring we have a Diversity Champion at every level, including the Board and Executive Team.
- This policy is fully supported by the Board, executive team, senior management group, Equality and Diversity working group, staff forum representatives and the Involvement & Empowerment sounding board.

## **C. ELEMENTS OF THE POLICY**

To achieve our aims, we will take action to address discrimination faced by particular

groups, as well as action to promote and achieve diversity in employment and service. This will include actively working with other agencies and community organisations to promote equality and eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited.

## **1. Race**

To achieve our aims we will:

- Provide services relevant to people's needs, which respect their cultural and social identities
- Ensure that our services are accessible and available to all ethnic groups - majority and minority, recognising that different groups are likely to have different needs
- Strive to have a representative workforce that can sensitively address the needs of our communities
- Promote an environment that is free from racial harassment and racist behaviour.

## **2. Religion or belief**

To achieve our aims we will:

- Strive to foster an environment which recognises and respects religion and belief and is free from unlawful discrimination or harassment
- Follow best employment practices and services in ways which recognise and respect religion and belief
- Improve the understanding of religion and belief among staff so that they can sensitively address the needs of individuals and of different faith communities.

## **3. Sex**

To achieve our aims we will:

- Promote an environment which is free from harassment and sexist language and behaviour
- Endeavour to achieve a better gender mix at a senior level.

## **4. Sexual orientation**

To achieve our aims we will:

- Apply and adapt policies and procedures to end unfair treatment and harassment of lesbians, gay men, transgender and bisexual staff and service users.

## **5. Disability**

To achieve our aims we will:

- Strive to provide services which encourage independent living
- Make sure that all our services and documentation are accessible and available to

- people with a disability
- Seek to renew our Positive about Disability accreditation.

## **6. Age**

To achieve our aims we will:

- Not use outdated and inaccurate assumptions about a person's ability due to age
- When allocating properties only use age as a selection criteria when this is objectively justifiable for the better performance of a service such as sheltered housing, extra care or where local lettings policies are used to create sustainable communities.

## **7. Gender reassignment**

To achieve our aims we will:

- Not treat people less favourably if they intend or have undergone gender reassignment
- Treat customers and employees with dignity and will address them in the gender they choose to live and recognise transsexual people as of their new sex for all purposes including the work place and housing services.

## **8. Pregnancy and maternity**

To achieve our aims we will:

- Not treat a woman unfavourably because of her pregnancy, maternity leave or because she is breastfeeding in the work place and housing services.

## **9. Marriage and civil partnership**

To achieve our aim we will:

- Not discriminate against same sex partners in any matter relating to tenancies.

## **10. Employment**

The group recognises that equality in the workplace is good practice and wants to have a workforce that reflects the local community. To achieve this we will:

- Provide full and fair consideration to all job applications to recruit a representative workforce that can sensitively address the needs of all communities
- Regularly review and widely report on all our recruitment, selection and training and promotion procedures to ensure that they are fair and reflect current best practice
- Provide sufficient training and support to meet all our employees' needs in recognising and discharging their work responsibilities
- Assist all our employees to realise their full potential by ensuring they receive fair consideration of their training and career development needs and promotion opportunities

- Wherever possible modify employment practices and procedures to reduce barriers experienced by members of disadvantaged groups in seeking and during employment
- Apply vigorous processes to promote a safe and open environment to prevent harassment or bullying and to promote dignity at work
- Promote a flexible working environment where work and home balance requirements, including carer requirements, are recognised and supported in all areas and levels
- Create an environment in which individual differences and the contributions of all our staff are recognised and valued
- Strive to have a workforce at all levels that can sensitively address the needs of all communities
- Ensure all employees are entitled to a working environment that promotes dignity and respect to all. Bullying, intimidation or harassment will not be tolerated
- We will monitor recruitment, redundancy selection and disciplinary actions across the seven equality strands to ensure fairness.

#### **D. METHODS FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT**

This policy is designed to encourage practical changes. To improve our service, we regularly survey customers including requesting feedback on equality and diversity issues. We will use customer profiling information to assess the impact of this and other policies and procedures in our work. The policy will therefore be updated as a result of practical experiences and as a result of changes in legislation or our own internal organisation and policies. A major and fundamental review of this policy will take place at least every three years.

#### **E. TRAINING AND INFORMATION**

Training on Equality and Diversity is part of the core training programme for all staff as all members of staff have a contractual responsibility to –

- Ensure that they understand the values and benefits of equality and diversity
- Demonstrate an understanding of a commitment to equality and diversity and anti-discrimination practices
- Alert managers to any instances of apparent discrimination or any perceived problem in relation to employment or to the provision of services
- Undertake initial training and refresher training every three years.

In addition, managers are required to undergo training before undertaking any recruitment and selection.

This policy will be given to all job applicants and staff, to ensure that it is put into practice and will also be included with tender information and contracts for work undertaken for us by external organisations and individuals. Equality and diversity training will also be essential for all those who are involved closely with Coastline; this will include Board members, involved tenants and contractors.

#### **F. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY AND TENANT INVOLVEMENT**

The aim of this policy is to ensure that all our services are delivered fairly and all sections of our community receive treatment and services appropriate to their needs. Tenant involvement is key to improving services for our tenants who face direct or indirect discrimination. By working with residents we will seek to further understand how to best tailor services to meet tenants' diverse needs.

## **G. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The group will allocate appropriate resources to ensure full and effective implementation of the policy. Specific allocations include an equality and diversity training budget, interpreting budget and dedicated staff resource.

## **H. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The group commitments contained in this policy will include wholehearted compliance with the relevant current and forthcoming statutory duties, including Codes of Practice, and Good Practice notes:

### Legislation

The main provisions of the Equality Act 2010 came into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2010, this Act harmonises the law on tackling discrimination and to strengthen and extend the law in a number of respects.

## **I. POLICY APPEALS**

Appeals against this policy will normally be via the Complaints procedure.

## **J. MECHANISM FOR DELIVERING POLICY AND OTHER ISSUES**

Coastline has a strategic framework for equality and diversity. The Board, Executive Team and the Involvement & Empowerment Sounding Board lead this, whilst also enabling and encouraging departmental initiatives and development through Service Improvement Plans. Equality and diversity is considered in all our policies, strategies and decision-making processes. Coastline uses Equality Impact Assessments to monitor the effect of strategies and policies as they are reviewed to ensure they are fully inclusive.

## **K. HEALTH AND SAFETY**

The group is strongly committed to achieving the highest standards of health and safety. We will actively promote a culture of health and safety best practice, which will lead to the avoidance of, or reduction in, risks to the health and safety of customers and staff. We are particularly committed to the tackling of hate crime, and aids and adaptations to the homes of residents with disability.

## **L. MONITORING**

Progress against Equality & Diversity, the Performance Improvement Plan and the Service Improvement Plan will be reported to the Board and Monitoring & Review Panel, as appropriate.

#### **M. REVIEW PERIOD**

This policy and our employment practices will be reviewed every three years and we make any changes in advance of this period if there are any significant changes to legislation, policy and procedures.