



**Group Customer Service Policy
– Equality & Diversity**

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1. Purpose

This policy sets out North Devon Homes Group's ("NDH") commitment to the values of equality and diversity in all our dealings as an employer and provider of housing and community services.

It sets out:

- What we understand by the concepts of "equal opportunities" and "diversity"
- How we will promote 'equality of opportunity' and work to eliminate discrimination in all areas of our operations;
- How we will implement the actions we need to take, and monitor the impact and outcomes of our efforts in line with statutory requirements and best practice.

North Devon Homes Limited (NDH) and its subsidiary Anchorwood Limited (AL) recognises its obligations to ensure the fullest participation of the whole community in every aspect of the life of the company.

This Policy aims to support our commitment to provide a structure for continually improving the ways in which we try to eliminate discrimination (whether direct or indirect); tackle harassment or victimisation; advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people sharing a protected characteristic with those who do not. We also aim to remove any barriers in order to provide the same access to opportunities for different groups.

The following descriptors explain what we mean by the key terms:

Equal opportunities – ending or reducing discrimination and improving social justice*

Diversity – valuing everyone as an individual*

*(*Taken from training by the Chartered Institute of Housing)*

Our work in this area is underpinned by the company value to "Celebrate Diversity" and this is further embedded within our departmental plans and performance management systems.

Feedback from NDH customers has revealed that the terms "Equality and Diversity" are not terms that are used in every day conversation and are therefore not particularly meaningful to them. As the ethos of the company is to try to respond flexibly to the different needs of individuals, this policy would be better understood as "**The Customer Service Policy**" - where the principles relating to equality and diversity are grounded in our approach to customer service.

2. Scope

This policy sets out the responsibilities and obligations placed upon NDH in relation to the protected characteristics identified by the Equality Act 2010 as:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender re-assignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion
- Belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation.

NDH and AL will strive to ensure that there will be no discrimination, harassment, victimisation or unfair treatment on any grounds relating to the protected characteristics; or on any other grounds outside of these parameters including colour, ethnic or national origin, social position, background (e.g. gypsies and travellers, asylum seekers), politics, trade union membership or social disadvantage.

In line with the Equality Act 2010, NDH will give due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination
- Advance equality of opportunity
- Foster good relationships.

The specific duties introduced by the Act in relation to employment will be mostly addressed in the separate staff handbook and the relevant HR documents.

Although the Government will not be taking forward the socio-economic duty for public bodies, NDH will still proactively pursue its work in combating financial exclusion and tackling issues like fuel poverty for its customers.

3. Principles

The following principles will apply in respect to the application of this policy:

- It will be open, fair and transparent.
- It will promote consistency in the approach to equality and diversity in all aspects of our business.

- It will be positively promoted with regards to informing the Company's staff, customer and Board members' views and behaviours.
- It will be realistic, achievable and provide value for money.
- It will support and be an integral part of all corporate service standards.
- It will reflect the current standards of operation and will be reviewed whenever industry standards, legislation or guidelines change.
- Will be periodically reviewed as set out in section 5.

4. Policy Statement

We aim to ensure that everybody is treated equally and has equal opportunity to receive the services and employment opportunities we offer.

We recognise that there are many barriers to true equality of opportunity, ranging from overt prejudice in favour of, or against, particular groups or individuals to unwitting ignorance of different lifestyles and needs. On whatever level it exists, discrimination is neither acceptable nor tolerable. Our commitment therefore, is to ensure that no group is intentionally treated less favourably than any other as a result of how we recruit our staff and / or design and deliver our services.

We will develop a positive action culture and values, through which achievement of equality is an integral part of our business. To achieve this we will:

- set clear objectives for all of our services
- regularly measure our performance
- take corrective action to deal with any imbalances we find
- make reasonable adjustments to our services and facilities to avoid any disadvantage, particularly with regards to those with a disability and
- regularly challenge our services to ensure they meet our obligations and aspirations as set out in this policy.

We will work to ensure that appreciation of issues relating to Equality and Diversity are embedded throughout our organisation and throughout our contractors, agencies and other partner organisations that we work with.

The Policy applies to all Board Members; staff; contractors; sub-contractors; partners and agencies employed or commissioned by NDH on any basis or in any capacity.

5. Review

We will review this policy, procedures and staff training needs at least once every 3 years to ensure that we continue to operate within best practice, achieve measurable results, and achieve continuous service improvement.

Alternatively, the policy and all associated procedures will be reviewed immediately following any relevant change to government policy, regulation or legislation. Staff will then be trained / briefed to respond positively to the changes, and to ensure that they are actively implemented.

The Director of Neighbourhoods will be responsible for ensuring that policy reviews are undertaken, that appropriate consultation takes place and that revisions are reported to the Board for its approval.

6. Application

The NDH Board will delegate responsibility to the Director of Neighbourhoods for ensuring that this policy is effectively communicated and implemented.

The Anchorwood Board will delegate responsibility to the Chief Executive to ensure that this policy is effectively communicated and implemented.

Detailed procedures will be developed and maintained by the Starfish Group, in line with this policy to provide further guidance during delivery of services. The Starfish Group is a cross departmental team of volunteers who have a genuine commitment to furthering the work of NDH in this area. The Group also has a Board member champion who provides a link between the governance and operations of the business.

We will provide training for staff to ensure that they fully understand the wider issues surrounding this policy and any associated procedures.

7 Equality and Diversity – Monitoring

North Devon Homes and its subsidiary Anchorwood Limited will monitor diversity among Board Members, job applicants, appointees and existing staff and report bi-annually to the NDH Board. Our target will be to ensure that we make every possible effort to have a Board of Management and a workforce that is as richly diverse as the communities and customers we serve. Active steps will be taken to recruit from groups that may be underrepresented in the workforce or on the Board.

NDH will monitor applications for housing or services (and the results of those applications) to ensure that services are available to everyone who is eligible. Our target will be to ensure that people with protected characteristics who are applying for services are accessing these equally.

Where groups within the community are under-represented, we will take active steps to promote accessibility for that group. Our target will be to monitor our services to ensure that people from diverse backgrounds find our services equally accessible and are equally satisfied with our service delivery. We will monitor applications and outcomes with regard to the protected characteristics. This approach will also be adopted with regards to recruitment and retention activities.

NDH will actively encourage people from diverse backgrounds to be involved in developing and monitoring services. Our target will be to ensure that every customer has an opportunity to comment on our services in a way that is meaningful to them, and that consultative bodies and focus groups are as diverse and inclusive as possible.

NDH will actively seek to build and continually refresh the tenant profiling information that it collects and hold. This will enable us to best shape our services to respond to the diverse needs of our customers, in a meaningful way.

Monitoring will cover all aspects of this policy and will involve a range of different activities including:

- All departmental Service Excellence Plans will have an “Equality and Diversity” dimension to ensure good practice is being developed and implemented in all aspects of our work.
- All new or revised policies will have an “Equality Impact Assessment” (EIA) undertaken
- We will make a full statement of progress and compliance in the Annual Report to Tenants.

The Starfish Group will review selected operational performance KPIs and ensure that:

- Progress is made against objectives in the E&D Service Excellence Plan and monitored on a bi-monthly basis.
- This policy will be made widely available and publicised on a widespread basis including the Intranet and the website.
- All staff, Board members, applicants for jobs and contractors and consultants working for NDH will be advised of the policy either by receiving a copy of the policy or the relevant service standard leaflet.

- Customers will be advised of the policy through their Tenant’s Handbook.
- Suppliers will be advised of the policy through the tendering and contract review processes.
- All other policies will be monitored to ensure that equality and diversity issues are properly addressed.
- Reports to the Board will carry an impact statement regarding the issues covered by this policy, and that staff will have due regard to the implications for equality and diversity issues in their work.
- Training will be provided to all Board Members and staff at induction and at other points throughout their employment or term of office.
- Training opportunities will also be made available to other parties including:
 - Involved residents
 - Contractors, suppliers and consultants
- The work of specific task groups within NDH such as the Disability Equality Scheme will be supported and directed as appropriate.

8 Related Documents, Policies and Procedures

Equality Act 2010

E&D Service Excellence Plan

The Starfish Group – Terms of Reference.

9 Equality Impact Assessment form

1. Who has been consulted in developing the SPPF?

Date	Consultation methodology	Challenge/impact/result
Oct 2010 – Feb 2011	Starfish Group – training & research events as well as meetings.	Reviewed all elements of Policy in line with new Equality Act 2010
Nov 2010	Disability Equality Scheme Group	Reviewed work plan for 2011 in light of changes

2. Identify potential impact on each of the diversity “groups”

Strand	No impact	Negative impact	Positive impact	Comments/evidence
Race			√	The revised Equality and Diversity Policy has been reviewed to support and proactively embed all of the new requirements introduced by the Equality Act 2010 for NDH as an employer and a landlord / service provider.
Disability			√	
Gender			√	
Gender Reassignment			√	
Sexual orientation			√	
Religion or belief			√	
Age			√	
Rural issues			√	
Social Inclusion issues			√	
Pregnancy and maternity			√	
Marriage and civil partnership			√	

3. Does the Policy promote equality of opportunity?

Yes – in a proactive way throughout all aspect of our business.

4. Further details of any “adverse impact” identified?

N/A

5. Is Full EIA required for this policy?

The revised Equality and Diversity Policy will be embedded throughout NDH in the following ways:

- All team Service Excellence Plans (SEPs) will include tasks related to E&D
- The company value of “Celebrate Diversity” will be actively promoted
- All staff appraisal meetings will be referenced to their actions and behaviours to live the value of “Celebrate Diversity”.
- There will be a separate E&D SEP to set out tasks for the whole business to progress
- Each team will have 3 specific targets relating to the testimonials recorded in the company wide E&D training in 2010.

6. If actions/suggestions for improvement have been suggested, what should the positive outcome be for North Devon Homes customers and stakeholders?

- Services will be delivered with regard to the E&D policy – this will result in equality of opportunity for all stakeholders and services flexed to better meet individual needs.
- Staff will be recruited with regard to the E&D policy – this will result in support and equality for all staff; with reasonable adjustments being made for individuals with any disability.
- Contractors and agents working for NDH will be required to embrace the E&D policy which should ensure the same levels of opportunity and equality as provided by NDH directly.
- The Service Standard for E&D will set out our promises to our customers and provide parameters to guide and support the results we achieve.