

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy

Date written: 8 April 2009

Date(s) reviewed: reviewed April 2010, reviewed May 2012, reviewed March 2013, Reviewed March 2016, Reviewed 5 September 2017, Reviewed June 2020, August 2020

Purpose: The purpose of this policy is to identify and eliminate discriminatory practices in the provision of goods and services at Bernicia and to ensure Bernicia meets its legislative and regulatory obligation with regard to equality and diversity. It also details mechanisms for implementing, monitoring and coordinating progress towards the achievement of the Group's equality and diversity policy objectives

Scope: The policy covers all members of staff and all aspects of the work of the organisation

Definitions: Equality – Equality protects people in minority groups from being discriminated against on the grounds of group identity, ie age, disability, trans-gender, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation.

Diversity – Recognising, respecting and valuing the difference between individuals within the workforce and among service users. Recognising the value that access to a wide range of talent and abilities brings to the Group and the whole community. Ensuring that our service is tailored to the different needs and aspirations of the diverse range of users and that no-one is disadvantaged by policies, services or employment practices.

Positive Action – Positive action is that taken to try to counter the effects of discrimination in society. The Group monitors lettings and employment practices and satisfaction levels with services and where it is shown that levels are different in any of the discriminated against groups, will take action to redress the balance. The Group does not practice positive discrimination, however, which is where people are treated more favourably on the grounds of their group identity.

See Glossary of Terms for other definitions under the Equality Act

Associated documents: Affects all Bernicia Policies

Single Equality Scheme

Modern Slavery Act Statement

Date for review: 1 July 2023

Responsibility: Head of Business Improvement

Policy

1. Introduction

Bernicia provides social housing and services to a wide range of customers from different age groups, backgrounds and cultures. All our tenants are equally important, but we recognise they have different needs that require specialist services and management. We acknowledge our role in helping to tackle deprivation and discrimination through providing better services which are more inclusive and accessible and to introducing measures to combat discrimination in day-to-day operational services. We believe a socially inclusive society is more likely to prosper and thrive than one where exclusion and inequalities are left unchecked.

1.1 Bernicia Group is committed to:

- Ensuring there are no discriminatory practices in any aspect of its work and will be proactive in challenging prejudice, complacency and apathy.
- Ensuring that equality of opportunity remains an integral feature of everything we do.
- Achieving a diverse board and workforce, recognising the value that access to a wide range of talent and abilities brings to the Group and the whole community.
- Making a contribution to the overall prosperity and well-being of individuals and communities by addressing factors that leave people and communities socially isolated and excluded.
- Ensuring the make-up of our tenants reflects the population of the area in which we have our homes.
- Taking steps to mitigate the risks of modern slavery and human trafficking within its supply chain and in other aspects of its business. The methods by which we will do this is set out in our Modern Slavery Statement published on our website.

1.2 In order to tackle injustice and inequality the Group has set out in this policy its intention to ensure discriminatory practices are eliminated and positive action taken where necessary.

1.3 An accessible communications strategy ensures that interpretation, translation services and accessible formatting are readily available and a written communication guide and accessibility training ensure that staff are aware of and can cope with the communication needs of the diverse range of people living in our properties.

1.4 We understand that in order to achieve a diverse board, workforce and tenant base we need to present ourselves as an organisation that is inclusive and welcoming to all groups in society. We will, therefore, portray a diverse range of people with protected characteristics through positive images in our literature and general publicity.

2. Policy statements

2.1 The objectives of this Equality and Diversity policy are to eliminate unfair discrimination and to take positive action against discrimination in all areas of our business.

2.2 Governance

2.2.1 The Group recognises it can be better served by Boards that are representative of the communities which we serve.

2.2.2 Consequently, our Board recruitment procedures conform to established equality principles, including that of positive action where there is under-representation.

2.2.3 We have an on-going commitment to training all our Board members in equality and diversity with the objective of:

- Ensuring the boards understand the business case for diversity.
- Enabling a clear and consistent leadership in its promotion throughout the Group.
- Providing members with the knowledge and expertise necessary to judge, from the reports they receive, whether the organisation is delivering on diversity.

2.3 Meeting housing needs

2.3.1 The Group applies the principles of equality and diversity to the provision of housing and other services. We work with partner organisations to assess and discuss issues to meet the needs of local communities and individuals.

2.4 Development

2.4.1 We consult with local communities and authorities in order to develop appropriate and sensitive housing solutions.

2.4.2 In addition to this our development team considers “designing in” safety features in line with “Secure by Design” standards which have been proved to achieve a reduction of crime risk up to 60%”, helping to ensure all of our tenants can live in their properties free from harassment.

2.5 Access

2.5.1 In allocating its properties Bernicia works in partnership with Northumberland Homefinder Scheme, Tyne and Wear Regional CBL, Durham Key Options and Tees Valley Compass which offer choice based letting across the North East region. Alongside the CBL system we operate Transfer and Exclusion Policies. CBL is viewed as a fair, open and transparent system of allocating properties. In addition equality impact assessments have been undertaken as part of the CBL and Transfer and Exclusions Policies.

2.6 The Housing Service

2.6.1 The Group is committed to providing accessible, non-discriminatory housing management, maintenance and other related services to its tenants. This includes the protection of tenants' rights in relation to racial and other forms of harassment.

2.6.2 We recognise that we must consult with tenants who may face discrimination to ensure that we are meeting their needs.

2.7 **Tenant Involvement**

2.7.1 Tenant participation and involvement activities are widely promoted to ensure that the diverse range of people who live in our properties can be included in these activities.

2.7.2 Attempts are made to remove any barriers to involvement that may exist, including transport and supporting costs of childcare.

2.8 **Employment and training**

2.8.1 Bernicia Group will aim to achieve an ability-based workforce, which reflects the working population mix in the areas in which the association operates. Bernicia Group seeks to:

- Remove barriers that may discourage access to employment within the Bernicia Group.
- Ensure that knowledge of vacancies reaches underrepresented groups.
- Ensure that no applicant or employee receives less favourable treatment on inappropriate grounds and that, where possible, they are given the help they need to attain their full potential to the benefit of Bernicia Group and to themselves.
- Operate work-life balance practices to enable people to be employed or remain in employment who have needs and responsibilities not just those protected by the law such as carers and parents
- Offer training and development opportunities on an equitable basis and ensure employees are promoted and treated fairly on the basis of their relevant merits and abilities.

2.9 **Contractors and consultants**

2.9.1 Contractors and consultants working with and on behalf of Bernicia Group are expected to demonstrate commitment to equality and diversity and this is assessed at procurement, or as part of any on-going quality assessments. Bernicia is committed to work with contractors, consultants and suppliers to understand the risks to the supply chain and implement systems and processes to ensure slavery and human trafficking is not taking place anywhere in our supply chains.

2.10 Working with partners

2.10.1 In working with partners the Group ensures that its methods of selection are fair and non-discriminatory and that partner organisations comply with our equality and diversity policy and do not discriminate in any way.

2.10.2 When working with partners, the Group uses its relationships to promote our commitment to equality and diversity.

2.11 Complaints

2.11.1 The Bernicia complaints procedure outlines a clear process which should be used if any tenant or service user feels that they have been treated in an unfair way within the scope of this policy.

2.12 Target Groups

2.12.1 This policy covers all aspects of equalities, both unlawful or not, but recognises that certain groups experience particularly severe discrimination and disadvantage. It has therefore prioritised the following categories (although the list is not exhaustive):

- age, physical appearance or other characteristics
- disability, whether mental or physical;
- transgender
- marital, family status and civil partnership
- pregnancy or maternity
- Race, colour, ethnic origin or nationality
- Religion or belief
- sex
- sexuality or sexual preference,

3. Responsibility for implementation

3.1 Responsibility for the success of this diversity policy lies with all Bernicia Group employees and all other persons who are acting on behalf of Bernicia Group.

3.2 Contractors or partners of Bernicia Group will have a responsibility to ensure that either this policy, or their own specific equality policy, is adhered to.

3.3 Bernicia Group will ensure that all employees are fully aware of this Equality Diversity and Inclusion Policy. The policy will be reviewed every three years, or earlier should there be any requirement or legislation changes.

4. Actioning the policy

4.1 In actioning the policy the organisation will:

- seek and use the fullest possible factual information on the existence and needs of communities and groups of people who may have experienced discrimination, wherever possible with their participation and involvement,
- ensure equality is embedded in every aspect of the organisation's work by:-
 - training
 - information - equality databases
 - including equality and diversity in all policy development.
- assess the impact on the diverse range of people who are our service users whenever we change a policy, with a view to ensuring that our services are equally accessible to all.
- strive to continuously improve our performance in this area by:-
 - keeping up to date with legislation, regulatory and other requirements
 - ensuring we have up to date information about the areas we work in and the housing needs of those who live in those areas
 - considering recommendations of reports that come out from time to time
 - considering good practice of other organisations
 - feed into action plans where monitoring has shown that action needs to be taken
 - drawing up SMART action plans which take into account all of the above points as well as results of consultations and action plans and which, where possible, have measurable targets

4.2 In cases of a breach of this policy, as of any other policy of the Group, individuals associated with the breach may be the subject of grievance and / or disciplinary procedures.

5. Monitoring the policy

5.1 We will develop and maintain monitoring systems which provide the information with which to review the effectiveness of equality policies and equality and diversity aims within all our policies. The aim is to identify discriminatory practices or outcomes and develop solutions through our equality action plan.

5.2 The Governing Board has responsibility for monitoring progress and will receive reports relevant to the importance of the organisation's equality work, including monitoring and analysis of information in respect of the housing service, employment and contractors and the results of any positive action initiatives against targets.

6. Resources

- 6.1 The Group will allocate appropriate resources, whether financial or staff, to ensure full and effective implementation of this policy.

7. Equality and Diversity

- 7.1 Equality and diversity is an important aspect of all the Group's Policies. This document summarises its policy regarding equality, diversity and inclusion in all aspects of the Group's work.

Glossary of Terms

Direct Discrimination

Someone is treated less favourably because of a protected characteristic.

Indirect Discrimination

A provision, criterion or practice is applied equally to everyone but has a different or worse impact on people with protected characteristics.

Perceptive Discrimination

A person is treated less favourably because they are believed to have a protective characteristic, even if they haven't.

Harassment

Unwanted conduct related to a relevant protected characteristic, which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile or degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual.

Victimisation

An employer treats someone less favourably because they have taken action under the legislation themselves or have helped someone else to do so.

Medical Model of Disability

A physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day to day activities.

Social Model of Disability

Systemic barriers, negative attitudes and exclusion by society disables people who have physical, sensory, intellectual or psychological impairments.

Vicarious Liability

Employers are responsible for acts of discrimination done by employees in the course of their employment.

Occupational Requirements

Having a protected characteristic is necessary to carry out the duties of a particular job.

Positive Action

Offering training or encouraging applications from under-represented groups.

Modern Slavery

Under the Modern Slavery Act 2015 slavery is defined as "where ownership is exercised over a person; servitude involves the obligation to provide services imposed by coercion; forced or compulsory labour involved work or service exacted from any person under the menace of a penalty and for which the person has not offered themselves voluntarily."

Uncontrolled if printed – This may not be the latest version of the policy

All policies must be printed from Connect only – please make sure it is the latest version.