

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy

Date(s) reviewed: September 2023

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.

Scope: This policy applies to all members and colleagues of Bernicia Group, including Board Members, Trustees, Independent Committee Members, Directors, Involved Tenants, and colleagues whether full-time, part-time, fixed term, casual employees, and volunteers of Bernicia, as well as registered provider subsidiaries of the Group.

Definitions:

- Equality – Equality protects people in minority groups from being discriminated against on the grounds of group identity, i.e. age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. Equality is a legal requirement – it is the things we do to level the playing field.
- 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.
- Inclusion – Inclusion is the things we do to make everyone feel welcome.
- Positive Action – Positive action is that taken to try to counter the effects of discrimination in society and employment practices.
- EDI Impact Assessment Template and Guidance Notes

Date for review:

September 2026

Policy

1. Introduction

Bernicia is fully committed to the elimination of unlawful and unfair discrimination.

The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination, harassment, and victimisation in the workplace and in wider society. There are nine protected characteristics in the Equality Act. The protected characteristics are basically elements of human identity. The protected characteristics are as follows:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender Reassignment
- Marriage/civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion and belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation.

All our colleagues and tenants are equally important, but we recognise they may 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:

- Treating everyone equally, fairly and with respect.
- Ensuring there are no discriminatory practices in any aspect of our work and will be proactive in challenging prejudice, complacency, and lack of concern. Ensuring that equality of opportunity remains an integral feature of everything we do.
- Creating an environment free from discrimination.
- Achieving a diverse board and workforce, recognising the value of a wide range of talent and abilities.
- Making a contribution to the overall prosperity and well-being of colleagues and communities by addressing factors that leave people and communities socially isolated and excluded.
- Ensuring the make-up of our colleagues and tenants reflects the population of the areas in which we operate.
- Taking steps to mitigate the risks of modern slavery and human trafficking within our supply chain and in other aspects of our business.

The methods by which we will do this are set out in our Modern Slavery Statement.

- 1.2 In order to tackle injustice and inequality we have set out in this policy our intention to ensure discriminatory practices are eliminated and positive action taken where necessary.
- 1.3 To meet the communication needs of the diverse range of tenants, we offer interpretation, translation services and provide documentation in accessible formatting, with our website enabled with accessibility software to meet individual needs.
- 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

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

2.1 Governance

- 2.1.1 The Group recognises it can be better served by Boards that are representative of the communities which we serve. Consequently, our Board recruitment procedures conform to established equality principles, including that of positive action where there is under-representation.
- 2.1.2 We have an ongoing commitment to train all our Board members, Executive and Senior Leadership Team in equality, diversity & inclusion with the objective of:
 - Ensuring an understanding of 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 we are delivering on equality commitments.

2.2 Housing Services

- 2.2.1 We apply 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.
- 2.2.2 We are committed to providing accessible, non-discriminatory housing management, maintenance, and other related services to our tenants. This

includes the protection of tenants' rights in relation to racial and other forms of harassment.

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

2.2.4 In allocating out properties, we work in partnership with local authorities and their respective choice based letting schemes across the North East region. Choice Based Letting (CBL) Schemes are viewed as a fair, open, and transparent system of allocating properties. In addition, equality impact assessments have been undertaken as part of the Allocations policy.

2.3 Development

2.3.1 All our new homes are consciously designed to ensure our customers can live in a quality, safe, accessible, and welcoming home, and environment.

2.3.2 We will aim to consult with local communities, partners and stakeholders when designing and developing new homes to ensure the housing needs of our communities are met.

2.4 Employment and Training

2.4.1 We will aim to achieve an ability-based workforce, which reflects the working population mix in the areas in which we operate. We seek to:

- Remove barriers that may discourage access to employment within the Bernicia Group as set out in the Attraction, Recruitment and Selection Framework.
- Ensure that knowledge of vacancies reaches underrepresented groups.
- Ensure that no applicant or colleague 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 colleagues are promoted and treated fairly on the basis of their relevant merits and abilities
- Request and monitor colleague and tenant ED&I data for the purpose of ensuring underrepresented groups are identified
- Complete and publish our annual Gender Pay Gap report
- Carry out an EDI Impact Assessment when creating or reviewing a policy to ensure no-one is disadvantaged.

2.5 Suppliers, Contractors, and consultants

2.5.1 Suppliers, contractors and consultants working with and on behalf of us are expected to demonstrate commitment to equality and diversity and this is assessed at procurement, or as part of any on-going quality assessments. We are committed to work with suppliers, contractors, and consultants to understand any potential 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.

2.6 Working with Partners

2.6.1 In working with partners, we ensure that our 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.

2.6.2 When working with partners, we use our relationships to promote our commitment to equality and diversity.

2.7 Complaints

2.7.1 The Bernicia Complaints and Compliments Policy 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. The Zero Tolerance Framework outlines the process which should be used if any colleague or contractor feels that they have been treated in an unfair way within the scope of this policy.

3. Responsibility for implementation

- 3.1 Responsibility for the success of this policy lies with all colleagues and all other persons who are acting on behalf of Bernicia Group. Contractors or partners will have a responsibility to ensure that either this policy, or their own specific equality policy, is adhered to.
- 3.2 We will ensure that all colleagues are fully aware of this Policy. The policy will be reviewed every three years, or earlier should there be any requirement or legislation changes.
- 3.3 The People Team will ensure that this policy is up to date, incorporates best practice and is legally compliant.

4. Actioning the policy

- 4.1 In actioning the policy we will:
- ensure equality is embedded in every aspect of our 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 introduce or 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, colleagues 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 systems which provide the information with which to review the effectiveness of our EDI action plan.
- 5.2 The Governing Board has responsibility for monitoring progress and will receive reports relevant to the importance of 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 We will allocate appropriate resources to ensure full and effective implementation of this policy.

7. Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

- 7.1 An EDI Impact Assessment was completed on 29/09/2023.

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