



Equality and Diversity Policy			
Last Reviewed	April 2011	Next Review	April 2013
Responsible Officer	Executive Director (Resources)		

1. Policy statement

Freebridge Community Housing is committed to eliminating discrimination and achieving diversity in all our activities. We recognise that people are different and aim to ensure that we treat each individual with dignity and respect.

We are committed to developing an organisational culture which values people from all sections of the community. This will involve creating an environment that capitalises on everything that makes people unique and gives everyone a fair and equal chance to be successful.

The Association recognises that some kinds of difference, discrimination or disadvantage are shared and experienced by particular groups. For example on the grounds of gender, gender reassignment, ethnic origin, race, nationality, disability, sexual orientation, religious or political beliefs, age, marital or family status, rural location, caring responsibilities or ex-offenders.

2. Definitions

Discrimination. It is unlawful to discriminate against a person, directly or indirectly on the grounds of protected characteristic.

Protected Characteristics. Where we had previously referred to "strands" or "equality strands" in respect of different groups, the Equality Act - introduced in October 2010 - made a number of changes. Equality is now defined in terms of people's "protected characteristics".

- Age. Where this is referred to, it refers to a person belonging to a particular age (e.g. 32 year olds) or range of ages (e.g. 18 - 30 year olds).
- Gender reassignment. The process of transitioning from one gender to another.
- Marriage and civil partnership. Marriage is defined as a 'union between a man and a woman'. Same-sex couples can have their relationships legally recognised as 'civil partnerships'. Civil partners must be treated the same as married couples on a wide range of legal matters.
- Pregnancy and maternity. Pregnancy is the condition of being pregnant or expecting a baby. Maternity refers to the period after the birth, and is linked to maternity leave in the employment context. In the non-work context, protection against maternity discrimination is for 26 weeks after giving birth, and this includes treating a woman unfavourably because she is breastfeeding.
- Race. Refers to the protected characteristic of Race. It refers to a group of people defined by their race, colour, and nationality (including citizenship) ethnic or national origins.
- Religion and belief. Religion has the meaning usually given to it but belief includes religious and philosophical beliefs including lack of belief (e.g. Atheism). Generally, a belief should affect your life choices or the way you live for it to be included in the definition.
- Sex. A man or a woman.
- Sexual orientation. Whether a person's sexual attraction is towards their own sex, the opposite sex or to both sexes

Direct discrimination consists of treating a person less favourably than others are or would be treated in the same or similar circumstances according to the above categories.

Indirect discrimination consists of applying a requirement or condition which, although has been applied to all, has the effect of disadvantaging people (according to the above categories) unless the practice can be justified.

Victimisation is when an individual is treated detrimentally because they have made a complaint or intend to make a complaint about discrimination or harassment or have given evidence or intend to give evidence relating to a complaint about discrimination or harassment.

Harassment is unwanted conduct that violates a person's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment having regard to all the circumstances and the perceptions of the victim.

A **racist incident** is defined as “**any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person**” (Stephen Lawrence Inquiry 1999).

Disability. A disabled person is defined as “someone who has a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse affect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities”. Long term means that the effect of the impairment has lasted or is likely to last for at least 12 months.

Community cohesion. A cohesive community is one where, there is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities; the diversity of people’s different backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and positively valued ; those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities; strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds and circumstances in the workplaces, in schools and within neighbourhoods.

3. Policy objectives

Freebridge Community Housing will aim to:

- Encourage a corporate culture where equality and diversity is treated as a core value.
- Be aware of all forms of discrimination in its operations, activities and dealings with communities and strive to eliminate them.
- Provide information which is non-discriminatory in content, accessible to all and actively promotes equality.
- Provide choice, access and quality of services that meet the diverse needs of all communities in which we work.
- Take prompt responsive action in all cases of harassment and conflict.
- Work towards promoting better understanding and integration in our communities.
- Work with or employ organisations who reflect the communities we work in and who are able to demonstrate their commitment to equality and diversity.
- Comply with our regulatory and legal equality responsibilities as a minimum.

4. Responsibilities

Board and management:

The Board has a corporate responsibility for ensuring that equality & diversity is promoted and that this policy and strategy underpins all aspects of the Association’s work. The Executive Team have responsibility for developing the organisational culture in which this policy can operate effectively and for ensuring it is implemented. Managers are individually and corporately responsible for ensuring that equality and diversity are promoted and that the policy and strategy is implemented in their particular areas of responsibility.

Staff, contractors and suppliers:

All staff have a responsibility to ensure that the policy is incorporated into their work related activities. All employees, contractors, board and committee members are expected to abide by this policy. Freebridge operates a zero tolerance approach

towards discrimination. Any breach will be taken very seriously and could result in disciplinary action or contracts being removed.

Tenants

Freebridge Community Housing expects that all tenants treat our workers with respect and courtesy. It is not acceptable for our workers to be subjected to harassment, bullying or discrimination, including verbal or physical abuse. Such incidents will be investigated and, if proved we will take suitable action upon the perpetrator, which could result in the withdrawal of services and possibly legal action.

5. Strategy

5.1 Corporate culture

Freebridge Community Housing will ensure that staff, tenants and stakeholders are made aware that equality and diversity is one of its core values. We will adopt a zero tolerance policy towards discrimination. We aim to develop a culture where equality and diversity issues are discussed openly on the basis of facts not assumptions. We are committed to ensuring that all staff, tenants and stakeholders believe the organisation takes decisions in a fair and open manner.

5.2 Governance

Freebridge Community Housing will include equality and diversity issues into its governance and planning mechanisms so that the decisions we make are more relevant to the needs and circumstances of the people we serve. It is essential that the Association's Board are representative of the communities they serve so that they are able to understand the issues faced by those they seek to provide housing and services for. We will aim to increase the numbers of applicants from all diverse groups. However we will balance this with the need for experience and relevant skills and where necessary, we will actively seek alternative methods of gaining the views of diverse groups. We will provide training on equality and diversity to board members so that they are comfortable discussing the issues and are able to demonstrate their personal commitment to it.

5.3 Employment and training

Freebridge Community Housing wants a diverse workforce which has the skills and understanding to achieve the organisation's goals. We therefore aim to increase the numbers of applicants from all diverse groups as well as increasing the number of diverse people employed in more senior positions. Freebridge is committed to recruiting staff who meet the required competency profile for the job they have applied for, irrespective of their background. Through a thorough and rigorous process, we ensure that we only measure skills and/or attributes which are clearly relevant to the job. Applicants with a disability, who meet the minimum person specification requirements for the job, will automatically be shortlisted. We will consider our methods and locations for advertising vacancies to ensure they reach an appropriate target audience.

We are committed to ensuring that staff have an equal opportunity to develop their potential; progress within the organisation and are treated fairly and without unlawful discrimination. We aim to develop a working environment where harassment is unacceptable and where individuals are able to bring complaints without fearing prejudice.

Freebridge will endeavour to provide training and development programmes and events that meet the needs of individuals. We will include specific equality and diversity training that raises awareness and ensure that equality and diversity issues are included in other relevant training.

We will monitor the staff profile, satisfaction, recruitment, promotion, training, study opportunities, complaints, grievances and reasons for leaving to ensure there is no significant difference between groups.

5.4 Communication and access to information and services

Freebridge Community Housing believes that effective two way communication between its tenants, staff and stakeholders is key to delivering services that meet the needs of individuals.

We will ensure that the information provided is in an appropriate format, non-discriminatory in content and actively promotes equality and diversity where possible. Information will be provided in alternative languages and formats and interpreters made available on request. We will also promote English language classes to newcomer communities whose first language is not English in order to help integration and foster better community relationships.

We will ensure that our offices open to the public are accessible under the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

5.5 Housing management

Freebridge Community Housing aims to provide services that meet the diverse needs of our tenants across all types of provision. We believe that tenants should be able to access housing and support services with ease and that the quality of our service is the same for all residents. We also aim to ensure that our residents receive the right level of advice, support and benefits to meet their needs.

We will work with local authority partners to ensure we meet housing needs in our area of operation. We will monitor nominations to ensure they are representative of housing need. Where nominations are not in line with housing need we will raise our concerns with local authority partners.

We will monitor repairs reporting, rent collection, cases of Anti-social Behaviour and tenant satisfaction across the range of our services to identify, investigate and attempt to eradicate any significant difference between groups.

5.6 Tackling harassment and conflict

Freebridge Community Housing recognises that conflict does arise between individuals and groups because of their minority status. We believe that all forms of harassment (including racial harassment) should be tackled promptly using a victim centred approach. We will send out a clear message that all forms of harassment will not be tolerated. Freebridge will monitor cases, actions taken and outcomes. We will seek feedback from tenants who have reported harassment to us on how satisfied they were with the service and outcome.

5.7 Tenant empowerment

Freebridge Community Housing aims to better understand the diverse needs of its tenants. We will increase opportunities for the involvement and development of tenants and communities, ensuring that their views form an integral part of our decision making processes.

We will take into account the individual circumstances of tenants attending meetings, ensuring the location is convenient and accessible and that it is held on a day and time that encourages participation by diverse groups. We will work together with residents groups to ensure that they are representative of the communities they serve.

5.8 Community cohesion

Freebridge will work in partnership with people, groups, communities and other agencies to ensure that all groups can live together better and prosper. Factors such as ethnicity, nationality, age and class differences can spark conflicts that impact on the cohesiveness of a community. We will work towards understanding the different dynamics that shape the people in our communities and develop consensual strategies or common grounds on which they can work together. We will seek to work in partnership with minority-led organisations to improve the services we provide to minority groups.

5.9 Consultants and contractors

We will ensure that consultants and contractors are aware of the importance of equality and diversity to us. We will help them to understand the diverse needs of our tenants in order that they are better equipped to provide an efficient service to all sections of the community. Freebridge will where possible ensure that it employs consultants and contractors who reflect the community we serve.

Equality & Diversity (E&D) Action Plan 2011-13

Strategy Theme	Actions	Who	When
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corporate Culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop publicity material to promote E&D activities Develop an E&D calendar of events and issues to aid communication 	CE	To do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Governance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Board reports to highlight E&D implications E&D Reports Develop mechanisms for under-represented groups to inform the Board on key decisions Identify a range of equality issues the Board can support Provide specific guidance on what constitutes anti-gay bullying and harassment based on statutory examples of “outing” and perceived orientation Communicate findings from monitoring exercise to Board and staff including any relevant variation by any diversity strand 	ED(R) CE CE CE ADR CE	Ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employment & training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Obtain feedback on recruitment process from minority applicants Develop actions to address areas of staff under-representation Undertake an analysis of grievances to identify trends and common issues Undertake LGB education with staff Ensure diversity training and updates specifically includes LGB issues Include specific diversity awareness in Managers competency framework Ensure that diversity specific questions are included in management recruitment and appraisal processes Ensure Employee Assistance facilities are accessible to staff with protected characteristics. Monitor promotion by diversity strands Analyse exit interview themes by diversity strands Monitor training take up by diversity strands 	ADHR ADHR ADHR ADHR ADHR ADHR ADHR ADHR ADHR ADHR ADHR	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication & Customer Engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EIA delivered • Ensure Communications strategy includes guidance on E&D issues • Collect information about tenants' communication preferences • Develop Diversity section of intranet to include more specific resources. • Regular communication to promote inclusive nature of staff benefits • Promote relevant Diversity issues in FCH Bulletin • Include Stonewall logo on website (consider recruitment area) • Include more detailed questions around (eg. homophobic and racist) bullying in staff survey 	ED(R) CE ED(R)/ ED(O) ADICT ADCCE ADHR ADHR ED(R)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry out Equality Impact Assessment Program • Implement actions from EIAs • Maintain and monitor tenant profiling data • Develop actions to address areas of tenant under-representation • Use tenant profiling information to develop actions to improve customer service 	ED(R) ALL ADHM ADHM ADHM	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tackling Harassment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor ASB & harassment incidents 	ADHM	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tenant Empowerment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop actions to address areas of tenant under-representation • Include tenants with protect characteristics in service reviews 	ADCCE Relevant Manager	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Cohesion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in and support local partnership forums and minority led groups • Contribute to initiatives that support community cohesion • Develop virtual Employee Network Groups in connection with other organisations 	CE CE ED(R)	Ongoing Ad Hoc
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contractors & Consultants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor to ensure compliance with FCH policy • Involve in E&D training initiatives 	ADF ADHR/ ADAM/ ADPS ED(R)	Ongoing Ongoing Ongoing

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide updates and materials to support E&D policy • Include specific clauses in future contracts to enable terminations for breach o E&D policies 	ADF	
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Key

CE	Chief Executive
ED(R)	Executive Director (Resources)
ED (O)	Executive Director (Operations)
ADHM	Assistant Director of Housing Management
ADAM	Assistant Director of Asset Management
ADPS	Assistant Director of Property Services
ADHR	Assistant Director of Human Resources
ADICT	Assistant Director of ICT
ADF	Assistant Director of Finance
ADCCE	Assistant Director of Communications & Customer Engagement

6. Monitoring

We will monitor performance across the areas covered by this policy and report it to the relevant Board or Committee as part of our ongoing performance monitoring.

In addition we will have an action plan and accompanying outputs that will be monitored and reviewed by the Management Team and progress reported to the Equality and Diversity Working Group.

7. Review

This policy will be subject to ongoing review in the light of experience, changes in legislation and Association policy and meeting the needs of our stakeholders.

It is essential that all Association policies and practices are reviewed and amended to ensure that the objectives of the Equality and Diversity Policy and Strategy and resulting action plan are embedded in everything we do.