

Tristar Homes Limited

EQUALITY POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

Tristar Homes Limited welcomes and values the fact that society consists of many diverse groups and individuals. We have a moral and legal responsibility to promote equal opportunities and we continuously strive to ensure that our services reflect the needs of all people living in the Borough. Everyone can expect to receive equal access to employment, promotion and training, as well as fair and equal treatment in respect of the services delivered by the Company.

We recognise that we live and work in a diverse society where everyone has individual abilities and needs, and all individuals at some time may need specific support and encouragement to meet their full potential. Ultimate responsibility for achieving the Policy's objectives lies with the Company's Management Board, however the co-operation and commitment of all employees is essential for the successful delivery of the policy's aims.

The policy guides the actions of the Company in its role as an employer, provider of services and commissioner of services, and overarches a range of policies and codes of practice.

We are working towards an environment where all Board directors, employees, customers and residents receive fair and equal treatment.

The Company will continue to develop and review policies, procedures and practices to ensure that its commitment under this policy is put into practice, and will seek to eliminate unfair and unlawful discrimination and remove barriers to equality of opportunity.

2. AIMS OF THE POLICY

Tristar Homes is committed to ensuring equality of opportunity covered in current laws and beyond and to continuous improvement in all aspects of our diversity and equality work.

We will achieve equality of opportunity by doing what we can to remove direct and indirect discrimination wherever it exists, and promoting cohesive communities.

We will not tolerate the less favourable treatment of anyone on the grounds of their:

- Age;
- Gender;
- Race, colour, ethnic, national or social origin;
- Disability, including those who are living with HIV or AIDS;
- Religion, beliefs, or non belief;
- Marital status, family circumstances, or caring responsibilities;
- Sexual orientation;
- Class, level of income, or housing circumstances; and
- Membership or non membership of trade unions, or involvement or non involvement in trade union activity.

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We will deliver equality by:

- Meeting all our responsibilities contained within relevant laws and codes of practice;
- Developing codes of practice not currently covered by legislation;
- Mainstreaming our work on equality, making it a central part of the way we operate, and making sure everything we do follows equality principles;
- Tackling all forms of bullying and harassment;
- Taking positive action to address social, economic and geographical disadvantage; and
- Evaluating the impact of our policies, services and activities and making changes where required to help ensure equality.

3. PUTTING THE POLICY INTO PRACTICE

Ultimate responsibility for achieving the Policy's objectives lies with the Company's **Management Board**, but the active involvement of all employees is essential for the successful delivery of the policy aims.

An **Equality Steering Group** has been established, led by the Board Director Diversity Champion and the Support Services Associate Director (designated lead officer for Equality and Diversity), to drive forward the Company's work on equality and diversity and develop and implement the Company's **Equality Plan**. The Group is made up of key officers, customer representatives and a critical friend from Stockton Borough Council's Equality and Diversity Team.

The Company works in partnership with Stockton Borough Council and is represented on the Council's **Community Cohesion and Diversity Group**, which co-ordinates the development and implementation of diversity and equality activities and promotes community cohesion across the Borough.

Diversity and equality issues are central to the way the Company carries out its duties, and are, therefore, core elements in the drive for continuous improvement.

We will:

- Set challenging equality objectives and targets in relation to employment, service delivery and carrying out our functions;
- Carry out impact assessments on existing and new policies, services and functions to help ensure that equality of opportunity is achieved;
- Use the Social Model of Disability as the basis of our approach to tackling disadvantage, promoting equality of opportunity and encouraging a positive attitude towards disability;
- Monitor employment, service delivery and other activities in relation to equality, to identify whether our policies and procedures are improving access to jobs, services and activities for communities and individuals facing discrimination and disadvantage;

The Company's Equality Plan identifies priorities for the delivery of policy commitments. The plan is reviewed annually to ensure a process of continuous improvement, with the ultimate aim of achieving all 5 levels of the Equality Standard for Local Government. The Equality Plan includes activities to meet the requirements of the Company's Race Equality Scheme and Disability Equality Scheme.

Interaction with other Policies, Services and Functions

A number of other strategies, policies, procedures and plans link to the Company's Equality Policy, including the Business Plan, Access to Services Strategy, Procurement Strategy, Customer and Community Involvement Strategy, Communication Strategy, Equality Needs Impact Assessment Procedure, Service Improvement Plan, Equality Plan, Equality Promises and the Succeeding Together Programme. In addition, implementation of the Company's impact assessment procedure ensures that our equality and diversity objectives are reflected in all strategies, policies, procedures and plans.

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4. EMPLOYMENT

The Company is committed to:

- ❑ Ensuring that all employees:
 - Are fully aware of the Company's Equality and Diversity related policies and practices and how it affects their work;
 - Understand any action plans relevant to them and their responsibilities for implementing them; and
 - Receive diversity and equality awareness training, with regular refreshers, to help them recognise the diverse needs of the people we serve and deliver good quality customer service.
- ❑ Developing a workforce broadly reflecting the communities in the Borough, by taking steps to make sure that people from groups currently under-represented in the Company's workforce are encouraged to apply for jobs.
- ❑ Including equality in all aspects of employment, from advertising vacancies, recruitment and selection, terms and conditions, learning and development, to reasons for ending employment. We will do this by:
 - ensuring advertisements include our commitment to promoting equality;
 - Including only the skills and qualities actually needed for the job, in advertisements, job descriptions and person specifications;
 - Advertising jobs using media that reach all communities and reviewing the use of media that target groups who are currently under-represented in our workforce, including national and specialist media;
 - Providing job details and accepting job applications in formats such as large print, Braille and audio, receiving job queries via e-mail, and making arrangements for the use of signers or interpreters if required in the selection process;
 - Valuing skills gained through non-traditional or informal work, like voluntary work and caring responsibilities. The competence gained through this kind of experience will be balanced against that gained through more formal routes;
 - Making sure that all job applicants, whether internal or external, show that they are qualified, motivated and competent to do the job;
 - Recognising and supporting the potential of all employees by offering opportunities for learning and development;
 - Monitoring recruitment, promotion, development opportunities and take up, pay, grievances and exit from employment;
 - Specifically addressing disability issues in accordance with Jobcentre Plus Positive about Disabled People Scheme. See the Company's Code of Practice on Disability Equality in Employment, Promotion and Training for further details; and
 - Developing good working relationships with organisations that support people from minority groups such as OpenHouse and the Shaw Trust, to encourage job applications and help create employment opportunities for people from groups currently under-represented in the Company's workforce.
- ❑ Keeping records of applicants and employees' race, gender, age profile sexuality and disability, to make sure this policy is effective.
- ❑ Developing, running and reviewing Work-Life Balance policies and procedures for employees.
- ❑ Making reasonable adjustments to the workplace to minimise the barriers to employment faced by disabled people.
- ❑ Making sure the working environment is supportive, accommodating and non-threatening by not tolerating any acts of discrimination or harassment through the Dignity at Work policy.

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- ❑ Recognising that trade unions can make a valuable contribution to equality and diversity and continuing to work closely with them to further develop the Equality Policy.
- ❑ Encouraging applications for Board membership from people from groups currently under-represented and ensuring the Company's Board membership and recruitment policies are fair and equitable.

5. PROVIDING SERVICES

The Company will:

- ❑ Operate services in line with the Company's values, and the priorities and principles identified in this policy document.
- ❑ Deliver services throughout the Borough to people who need them, without discriminating against, stigmatising or patronising people. Every customer, client or service user will be treated in a professional manner, with courtesy and respect.
- ❑ Ensure everyone is able to access our buildings and services easily.
- ❑ Carry out a programme of continually improving our working practices and information to ensure all are accessible to the public.
- ❑ Make sure employees are well trained and supported to deliver good quality customer service in line with this policy and the Succeeding Together programme.
- ❑ Make sure that services meet the needs of diverse communities by involving those communities in identifying their needs and making sure they are met.
- ❑ Ask customers how they prefer us to communicate with them, to ensure our services meet their needs.
- ❑ Produce a range of information about services, using Plain English, and make that information available in relevant languages, large print, audio tape and Braille as required.
- ❑ Offer the service of a professional interpreter for meetings and interviews with customers whose first language is not English or who require a signer.
- ❑ Ensure the availability of hearing loop systems in our reception areas, and a portable hearing loop for meetings and interviews elsewhere.
- ❑ Do what we can to ensure discrimination does not take place in our neighbourhoods, and encourage people to report incidents to us through the Offensive Incident reporting procedure and investigate incidents in accordance with our Generic Harassment Policy.
- ❑ Monitor access to, and satisfaction with, services to ensure everyone is being treated fairly.
- ❑ Make sure our policies, procedures and services do not discriminate against any members of the community by carrying out Equality Needs Impact Assessments.
- ❑ Give careful consideration to complaints received from minority groups to ensure that policies and practices are fit for purpose.

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6. WORKING WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS

The Company will work with its partners to promote equal opportunities by:

- ❑ Working with the Council and other public, private, voluntary and community groups in the Borough to make sure that diversity and equality policies and plans are developed in partnership, where appropriate.
- ❑ Sharing information, experience and examples of good practice on diversity and equality through links with other public, private, voluntary and community organisations in the Borough.
- ❑ Promoting equality within partnerships and other organisations and in dealings with the media.
- ❑ Ensuring all contractors, consultants and agents working on behalf of the Company have an equal opportunities policy and adhere to our equality and diversity principles.
- ❑ Ensure equality of opportunity in the process for submitting tenders for work and supplies

7. INVOLVING COMMUNITIES

The Company will work in partnership with Stockton Borough Council to:

- ❑ Develop and implement the Community Cohesion Strategy to support the involvement of communities in our planning and decision making.
- ❑ Target resources at communities facing disadvantage and discrimination to help them become fully involved in the social, cultural, political and economic life of the Borough.
- ❑ Make sure there is a range of appropriate mechanisms and consultation methods available to enable diverse communities to be involved in consultation and decision making.
- ❑ Develop effective working relationships with the diverse communities in the Borough through appropriate groups, forums and networks.
- ❑ Do what we can to ensure discrimination does not take place in our neighbourhoods and that people feel comfortable reporting incidents to us.

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8. MEETING LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

Legislation

The Company will work within all current and relevant anti-discrimination laws, including:

- Equal Pay Act 1970, and Equal Pay (Amendment) Regulations 1983
- Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974
- Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and 1986
- Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations 1999
- Race Relations Act 1976 and Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000
- EU Employment and Race Directives
- Employment Protection (Part-time Employees) Regulations 1995
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- Employment Rights Act 1996
- Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994
- Protection From Harassment Act 1997
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003
- Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003
- Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006
- Equality Act 2006

Codes of Practice

The Equal Opportunities Commission, the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), Disability Rights Commission, and Department of Education and Skills all produce codes of practice.

These codes give recommendations and guidance on how to avoid discrimination in employment. They contain advice on the policies that are needed to prevent discrimination in such matters as the recruitment and treatment of employees.

The Company's employment codes of practice are based on the codes produced by the above organisations.

Other Codes suggest steps to promote equality in service delivery, for example the CRE's Code of Practice on Racial Equality in Housing.

Policies and practices are continuously reviewed to include guidance issued in new and revised codes of practice.

9. FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information on diversity and equality can be obtained from the Company's Support Services Associate Director and Human Resources Manager.