

Equalities Strategy

2013-16

May 2013

Version 1.2

River Clyde Homes Vision

River Clyde Homes' vision is an Inverclyde with exceptional housing and vibrant communities

River Clyde Homes Mission

River Clyde Homes' mission is to enhance peoples' lives and communities through high quality homes and services

River Clyde Homes Values

- Partnership
- Integrity
- Expertise
- Service excellence

River Clyde Homes Objectives

- Excellent customer experience
- Sustainable homes and places
- Improved energy efficiency and reduced fuel poverty
- An efficiency company
- A growing company
- Safer and better supported customers
- Diverse, committed & empowered workforce

Version Control

Author	Version	Date	Changes made / Comments
Business Planning & Performance Manager	Draft 1.0	13 th May 2013	
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1. Introduction

Purpose of this strategy

- 1.1 The main purpose of this strategy is to develop the capabilities that will allow River Clyde Homes to mainstream equality objectives throughout all of our services offering equal opportunities to all staff and customers.
- 1.2 Mainstreaming will result in the implementation of our equality objectives into practice across all areas of the business.
- 1.3 The development of this strategy will ensure that River Clyde Homes is able to comply with all legal and statutory duties imposed by law, in particular the requirements of The Equality Act 2010. The Act sets out a range of protected characteristics in respect of which discrimination is unlawful:
 - Age
 - Disability
 - Gender re-assignment
 - Marriage and civil partnership
 - Pregnancy and maternity
 - Race
 - Religion or belief
 - Sex
 - Sexual orientation
- 1.4 A range of tools will be developed as part of the strategy that will ensure all policies, procedures and services are made accessible to all. This will be done through the use of an Accessibility policy and Equality Impact Assessments (EIA).
- 1.5 The outcomes of this strategy will enable River Clyde Homes to deliver on its main objectives to provide an excellent customer experience, safer and better supported customers as well as contributing to a diverse, committed and empowered workforce.

Impact of strategy

- 1.6 Mainstreaming equalities throughout the organisation will ensure:
 - That our housing services meet all relevant law and good practice guidance concerning equal opportunities.
 - We audit all our organisational policies and procedures so that equality objectives are promoted throughout all of our services. This is done through our action plan.
 - We work actively with organisations in the public, voluntary and private sectors to promote our equality objectives in all local communities in Inverclyde.
 - We provide services that take account of the needs of individual tenants and service users; this is done through our communication strategy and accessibility policy.
 - We provide tenants and service users with accurate advice and information about our services or those delivered by partner agencies.

- We appoint consultants and contractors using robust tendering procedures so that organisations deliver services that reflect our equality standards.
- We assess the needs of our staff and provide appropriate equality training linked to their jobs. We also provide training to Board members, as well as providing training to tenants as part of our tenant participation strategy.
- We monitor how effectively the equality policy is implemented through a comprehensive monitoring system; this system is based on a number of qualitative and quantitative performance indicators.
- We implement positive action equality programmes in line with law and good practice guidance. For example, we encourage people to use our services or seek employment with River Clyde Homes.
- We consult with tenants and other service users when developing and/or reviewing the equality policy; this is covered in our Tenant Participation Strategy.
- We address any complaints about this policy or other equality matter through our complaints system. Information on this system is provided to tenants and other service users.
- We process equality information that we collect about employees, tenants and other service users in line with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998. We use this information to provide appropriate services, including making reasonable adjustments as required in law.
- We achieve Social Housing Equalities Framework (SHEF) accreditation

1.7 The collection of relevant equality data in conjunction with Steps to Excellence, step 12 – Improve Customer Profile, will ensure that we have the correct information to be used to tailor services for customers in the future.

1.8 In delivering our public functions, we will seek to eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people.

Links to organisational Vision, Mission and Business Plan objectives

1.9 Understanding the different needs of customers will help River Clyde Homes' to shape services to realise the vision to create 'an Inverclyde with exceptional houses and vibrant communities.

1.10 River Clyde Homes' values are

- Customer first, performance driven
- Acting with integrity, being professional
- Respect for each other, our partners and our environment
- Embrace innovation, challenge expectations
- Spend our money wisely

The implementation of this strategy will help to achieve to achieve these values through:

- Understanding customer needs will enable us to design services around the needs of the customer, putting them at the heart of what we do

- Understanding the needs of the customer will also allow us to spend our money wisely by providing a service focuses on the real needs of people accessing our services
- Increased equalities awareness will promote respect for all stakeholders

1.11 River Clyde Homes' objectives are:

- Excellent customer experience
- Sustainable homes and places
- Improved energy efficiency and reduced fuel poverty
- An efficient company
- A growing company
- Safer and better supported customers
- Diverse, committed and empowered workforce

Implementation of the strategy will help to achieve these objectives through:

- By understanding the needs of customers, we can enhance the service provided to contribute to an excellent customer experience
- Customers can be better supported through equal access to more tailored services
- Increased awareness of equality issues will empower the staff to provide better more informed services to customers and will encourage partnership working with all relevant partnership agencies such as Social Work, Community Mental Health Teams and the NHS
- By embedding equality themes throughout the organisation, staff will have the opportunity to develop their skill base to assist in the strive for excellence across the organisation

2 Background

Current Approach

- 2.1 There is currently no strategy in place to mainstream equalities throughout all services, policies and procedures.
- 2.2 Basic equality information is held for all employees and Board members.
- 2.3 Limited equality information in relation to ethnicity, age, gender and disability is held for some customers but not all.
- 2.4 Ad-hoc equalities training is provided however there is currently no targeted approach to this.
- 2.5 The current Equality, Diversity and Inclusiveness policy was agreed by the Board in September 2011. External analysis of the policy has indicated that the policy is not fit for purpose.
- 2.6 An associated Equality, Diversity and Inclusiveness action plan was also developed in September 2011 however this has not been progressed.

Achievements

- 2.7 An equalities awareness day was held for customers in June 2010. Feedback received from the event identified:
 - More positive action is required in conjunction with policy and procedure development
 - Greater focus on particular equality groups is required
 - More work to be done to foster relationships between young and older people
 - The need for attitudinal change both in staff and customers
 - Social background as a prominent equalities issue in Inverclyde which has implications for educational attainment as well as literacy and numeracy issues
 - Equality awareness needs to be a “business as usual” activity
 - Imbalance between the aspirations of the community for aids and adaptations and the organisations ability to deliver on these aspirations
- 2.8 This was a positive event which engaged with a wide range of groups from across Inverclyde, however the lack of any strategy to give the equalities agenda emphasis within the organisation resulted in feedback not being acted upon.
- 2.9 All employees received equalities awareness training in April 2010. No further training has been provided to date.

3 Context

National Drivers

- 3.1 Compliance with the Equality Act 2010 as detailed at paragraph 1.3 drives the need for a robust strategy that ensures customers and staff in the protected characteristics are not discriminated against.
- 3.2 The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 introduced the Scottish Social Housing Charter and the first outcome of this Charter is relevant to our equality action plan. We embrace diversity, promote equal opportunities for all and eliminate unlawful discrimination in all areas of our work.

Social landlords perform all aspects of their housing services so that:

- Every tenant and other customer has their individual needs recognised, is treated fairly and with respect, and receives fair access to housing and housing services.

This outcome describes what we as a social landlord, by complying with equalities legislation, should achieve for all tenants and other customers regardless of age, disability, gender re-assignment, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. It includes landlords' responsibility for finding ways of understanding the different needs of different customers and delivering services that recognise and meet these needs.

- 3.3 A number of indicators contained within The Scottish Social Housing Charter statistical return also drive the need for a more robust approach to delivering services that provide equality for all:
 - Indicator 1: Percentage of tenants satisfied with the overall service provided by their landlord
 - Indicator 2: Ethnic origins and disability details of service users, staff and governing body members
 - Indicator 3: Percentage of tenants who feel that their landlord is good at keeping them informed about their services and decisions

- 3.4 The public sector equality duty requires organisations to promote their equality strategy to support provisions in law relating to the duty.

- 3.5 The Scotland Act 1998 defines equal opportunity to mean:

“The prevention, elimination or regulation of discrimination between persons on the grounds of sex or marital status, or racial grounds, or on grounds of disability, age, sexual orientation, language or social origin, or of other personal attributes, including beliefs or opinions such as religious beliefs or political opinions”

This definition is important for two main reasons. Firstly, it covers grounds beyond the protected characteristics such as social origin (or class). It also covers specific issues such as language and personal attributes.

Secondly, the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010, section 39, requires social landlords to take this definition of equality into account when delivering their services. For example, this Act requires social landlords to “act in a manner to encourage equal opportunities.”

This means that we, as a social landlord, must take account of these wider issues in our equality action plan.

- 3.5 The Equality and Human Rights Commission produces various statutory and non-statutory codes that provide guidance in implementing equality strategies. Guidance is also issued by professional bodies such as the Chartered Institute of Housing and the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations. We will take this guidance into account when developing our services.

Local Drivers

- 3.6 The Inverclyde Alliance Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) is an agreement between the partners of the Inverclyde Alliance and the Scottish Government, designed to improve the prospects of Inverclyde and to secure a better future for the people of Inverclyde.

The vision agreed by the Alliance for the area is:

'Getting it Right for Every Child, Citizen and Community'

The aim of the Alliance is to work in partnership to create a confident, inclusive Inverclyde with safe and sustainable, healthy, nurtured communities, and a thriving, prosperous economy, with active citizens who are resilient, respected and responsible and able to make a positive contribution to the area.

To deliver this vision, the Inverclyde Alliance, has agreed, with its communities, a number of strategic local outcomes:

1. Inverclyde's population is stable with a good balance of socio-economic groups.
 2. Communities are stronger, responsible and more able to identify, articulate and take action on their needs and aspirations to bring about an improvement in the quality of community life.
 3. The area's economic regeneration is secured, economic activity in Inverclyde is increased, and skills development enables both those in work and those furthest from the labour market to realise their full potential.
 4. The health of local people is improved, combating health inequality and promoting healthy lifestyles.
 5. A positive culture change will have taken place in Inverclyde in attitudes to alcohol, resulting in fewer associated health problems, social problems and reduced crime rates.
 6. A nurturing Inverclyde gives all our children and young people the best possible start in life.
 7. Inverclyde is a place where people want to live now whilst at the same time safeguarding the environment for future generations.
 8. Our public services are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people's needs.
- 3.7 As Inverclyde's largest social housing provider, River Clyde Homes has a role to play in helping to realise the Inverclyde wide vision and the introduction of a more robust approach to providing equal opportunity for all will help to achieve this in particular the aspiration for an inclusive Inverclyde.

4 Plan and Priority

Short Term Goals (Remainder of 2013)

- 4.1 A new Equality policy will be developed to mainstream equality objectives throughout all of our services.
- 4.2 An associated action plan will be developed which sets out how we intend to implement our equality objectives throughout all of our services. The plan will form an important part of our EIA framework to measure if policies:
 - Eliminate discrimination
 - Foster good relations among people with protected characteristics and other grounds
 - Promote equality objectives
- 4.3 A suite of performance indicators will be developed to measure how effectively we are meeting our equality objectives in practice.
- 4.4 The following policies will be developed which will form our Equality Impact Assessment framework:
 - Accessibility policy, checklist and associated procedures
 - Appropriate language policy, checklist and associated procedures
 - Harassment policy
 - Equality Impact Assessment policy, checklist and associated procedures
- 4.5 Achievement of Level 1 SHEF accreditation – ‘Developing’

Medium Term Goals (2014-2015)

- 4.6 Training for all staff and Board members on the use of the above documentation
- 4.7 Achievement of Level 2 SHEF accreditation – ‘Achieving’
- 4.8 Equalities customer profiling undertaken

Long Term Goals (2016 onwards)

- 4.9 Full mainstreaming of equalities objectives and themes across the organisation resulting in equalities being a business as usual activity
- 4.10 Equalities profiling information contributing to service design and provision
- 4.11 River Clyde Homes being regarded as a market leader achieving service excellence and providing genuine opportunities for all
- 4.12 Achievement of Level 3 SHEF accreditation – ‘Excellence’

5 Implementation

- 5.1 This strategy will be reviewed on an annual basis.
- 5.2 The review will take place in conjunction with staff, service users and the customer scrutiny panels to ensure the strategy meets the needs of all stakeholders and reflects up to date legislation and recognised best practice.
- 5.3 Progress on the implementation of the strategy will be monitored through the Steps to Excellence change programme under Step 03 – Strategies & Action Plans. This will be monitored on a monthly basis by the SMT and reported quarterly to the Board.

6 Action Plan

- 6.1 This equality action plan sets out how River Clyde Homes intends to implement its equality objectives throughout all of its housing services.
- 6.2 Our plan is based on two important theoretical positions that are derived from essentialism and systems theory:
- 6.3 In line with essentialist principles, we recognise that our organisational services – as contained in our plan - are regulated by law **and** good practice guidance. Compliance with law and guidance, in effect, constitutes the essential nature of River Clyde Homes as an organisation. For example, the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 requires us to ensure that equality objectives are mainstreamed into all housing services.
- 6.4 Systems theory has various forms and we apply this approach by recognising that all housing services are inter-dependent. Thus, and in order to achieve our equality objectives, all elements within our plan must be implemented holistically. This does not mean, of course, that all activities are implemented at the same time. Our plan represents a process as actions are continuously evolving. It is emphasised, in line with the systemic method, that our plan is not simply a checklist of activities, but a range of on going and evolving practices.
- 6.5 The method that underpins our plan is based on understanding two main points. Firstly, it is recognised that that the organisational practices are inter-dependent. Secondly, action plan elements must be in a structured manner if activities are to be implemented coherently and comprehensively.

• **Outcome – To provide an excellent customer experience**

Business plan priority	Strategy Actions	Lead	Date by	Links to other strategies
Ensure all policies promote equality objectives	Develop a refreshed Equalities Policy	Business Planning & Performance Team	June 2013	Customer Access & Feedback
	Develop a suite of performance indicators to measure how effectively we are meeting our equalities objectives in practice	Business Planning & Performance Team	June 2013	Customer Access & Feedback
Promote positive action to address historic patterns of disadvantage	Develop an accessibility policy and appropriate language use policy to ensure that equality mainstreaming and effective impact assessment is carried out	Business Planning & Performance Team	June 2013	Customer Access & Feedback
	Develop a harassment policy to address discrimination on all of the protected characteristics and other grounds such as social class or social origin	Business Planning & Performance Team	June 2013	Customer Access & Feedback
	Carry out Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) of all policies to ensure all policy gaps are identified and built into the policy process	Organisational Development Team	September 2013	Customer Access & Feedback
	Develop the equality framework for Social Housing Equality Framework (SHEF) accreditation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 1 – Developing • Level 2 – Achieving • Level 3 – Excellence 	Organisational Development Team	April 2014 April 2015 April 2016	Customer Access & Feedback
Identify the needs of all customers	Carry out equalities profiling of all customers	Business Transformation Department / Organisational	August 2014	Improve Customer Profile

		Development Team		
	Assessment of data collected	Business Transformation Department / Organisational Development Team	August 2014	Improve Customer Profile
	Review of services to ensure they meet the needs of customers	Business Transformation Department / Organisational Development Team	October 2014	Customer Access & Feedback
Ensure equality commitments are embedded across all services	Carry out audit of all strategies and action plans to ensure equality commitments are embedded	Organisational Development Team	November 2013	Customer Access & Feedback

- **Outcome – Safer and better supported customers**

Business plan priority	Strategy Actions	Lead	Date by	Links to other strategies
Ensure all public information is accessible to all customers	Use accessibility policy to evaluate all communications	Organisational Development Team / Communications Manager	August 2013	Customer Access and Feedback Communications

- **Outcome – Diverse, committed and empowered workforce**

Business plan priority	Strategy Actions	Lead	Date by	Links to other strategies
Identify equality needs of staff	Carry out a training needs analysis to ensure training is aligned to job competencies	Organisational Development Team	August 2013	Organisational Development
Ensure that staff deliver services in line with organisational objectives	Implement appropriate staff equality training	Organisational Development Team	January 2014	Organisational Development
Ensure that training provides value for money and enhances accessible services	Carry out an assessment of current training validation methods	Organisational Development Team	April 2014	Organisational Development