

Equality Policy for South Lakes Housing Tenants' Committee and Residents Associations



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South Lakes Housing Tenants' Committee Equality and Diversity Guide

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Equality and Diversity Guide

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South Lakes Housing Tenants' Committee Equality and Diversity Guide

Introduction

South Lakes Housing (SLH) wants its homes, estates and neighbourhoods to be places where people choose to live, want to stay and where they can enjoy a good quality of life. Equality and Diversity is a very important to making this goal a reality.

Residents Associations and Tenants' Committees are required by SLH to have an Equality Policy and action plan, and to carry out an annual review. They have a real opportunity to make life better for every resident and tenant by using the policy and working to complete the action plan in a positive way.

This guide has been written especially for South Lakes Housing Residents Associations and Tenants' Committee. It is designed to provide more background information about Equality and Diversity.

SLH Tenants' Committee has reviewed Equality Policy and this booklet. It is designed to help residents and tenants committees to promote equality, to eliminate unlawful discrimination and to encourage good relations between people from different groups, experiences and backgrounds.

1. How do Residents Associations and Tenants' Committee use the Equality and Policy?

Residents Associations and Tenants' Committee have a part to play in making sure our homes, estates and neighbourhoods are places where people can live well. The policy explains how each association can work to make sure that every tenant and resident of South Lakes Housing can live in a safe home and neighbourhood which is good for everyone.

Guidelines

1. Arrange and run meetings in line with the policy.
2. All committee members should demonstrate that they have acted fairly, transparently and proportionately in dealings with individuals.
3. When you work with South Lakes Housing or any other agency to improve things, you want to make sure you are speaking for everyone. This is why you must strive to make everyone feel welcome and safe in the group.
4. Publicise all meetings using a variety of media
5. Make sure publicity is put out where people can see or hear it and that it comes in a language they can understand.
6. Choose meeting places carefully so that as many people as possible can get in and feel comfortable and safe to go there.
7. Help people to overcome obstacles such as childcare, transport etc.
8. Offer to provide sign language and community languages interpreters for meetings.
9. Listen to what all people are saying in your neighbourhood
10. Challenge any behaviour or language that may upset or insult people and create an unwelcoming atmosphere. (Before the meeting starts it would be a good idea to remind people that inappropriate behaviour is not acceptable)
11. Improve the atmosphere on your estate through speaking up on behalf of the victims of discrimination and harassment.

3. How do we know what behaviour is not ok?

It is not OK to

- Make jokes about people because of their age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation. Humour is an important part of getting on together and a way to 'break the ice'. Humour works well when it is used in a way which doesn't put people down on the grounds of their age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation.

It is not ok to

- Make negative assumptions about people because they belong to a certain group of people (all young people, all Asians, all single parents, all white people....are like that)

It is not ok to

- Describe or talk to people in a way that may be seen as an insult or threat.

What should we do if people behave in a way that is not ok?

- Tell the person in question that their behaviour or language is unacceptable (try to do this in a discreet way unless the behaviour is clearly discriminatory)
- Support people who challenge behaviour that is not ok. No person should be laughed at or victimised for speaking out about what they find offensive. People should feel confident to challenge offensive comments and behaviour.
- Expect the person in question to apologise immediately (or at the earliest opportunity) for offensive behaviour or comments. If the person continues behaving in an unacceptable way and does not apologise for any upset they may have caused, they will be asked to leave the meeting. The individual will be contacted within one week and given an opportunity to apologise in writing before the next meeting. If the committee decides, the individual in question can also be asked to do some equality training
- If they refuse to apologise or / and attend a training course, they will be excluded from all future Tenants' Committee and Resident Association meetings.
- The committee chair will let SLH customer services know so that the incident can be recorded and addressed.

4 What does Equality mean?

This means making our homes and neighbourhoods welcoming and safe to everyone. The Equality Act 2010 says that this fair treatment is for everyone regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation. These are called Protected Characteristics. People are sometimes treated unfairly because they are different and the law protects them from illegal discrimination.

If we make sure we treat everyone with dignity and respect and where we value people as different individuals we are likely to make equality a day to day reality. The Human Rights Act 1998 is very clear that social housing is provided in a way which is compatible with human

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rights. We can also expect the same in return from other tenants and residents, SLH staff and contractors.

Equality also means taking action to challenge inappropriate behaviour that threatens the well being of people in our community.

5. What does Diversity mean?

A focus on diversity makes us realise that everyone is unique. Whatever protected characteristics people have their individual diversity means that we cannot make assumptions about people on the basis of their outward appearance.

6. Why Equality and Diversity?

Diversity is essential to a rich and fulfilling life and is a natural process. Equality is dominated by laws and guidelines based on giving everyone a fair chance. By combining the appreciation that everyone is unique with the laws around equality we can truly create an inclusive society. Diversity without equality is 'survival of the fittest'. Equality without a focus on diversity has the potential to make inappropriate assumptions about people based on historical stereotypes. A combination of the two enables a fair, non-discriminatory way of enhancing our communities.

7. Protected Characteristics : Equality Act 2010

People are protected by the Equality Act 2010 if they have the following 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).

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

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.

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Sexual orientation Whether a person's sexual attraction is towards their own sex, the opposite sex or to both sexes

(For comprehensive information on the Equality Act see the Equality and Human Rights Commission website)

8. The Human Rights Act 1998 : Key areas for Social Housing

It is important for society that social housing is provided in a way which is compatible with human rights. Human rights are about treating people with dignity and respect. These values should be basic standards for any public service. Human rights have special significance in relation to social housing. Quality of housing can have a huge impact on wellbeing. Inadequate housing increases the risk of severe ill health and disability; it can also lead to poor mental health, lower educational attainment, unemployment and poverty. The importance of housing is recognised in the United Nations Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which includes 'the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate ...housing'. Protecting people's human rights in housing is therefore important in its own right.

There are 16 articles in the act. The most relevant for Social Housing are

Article 6: Right to a fair trial

Article 8: Right to respect for private life, family life and the home

Article 14: Prohibition of discrimination

(For further information see Human Rights at Home published by Equality and Human Rights Commission available on the SLH website)

Useful contacts, links and further information

- SLH staff
- South Lakes Housing Website
<http://www.southlakeshousing.co.uk>
- Equality & Human Rights Commission
<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com>
- Local Government Association
<http://www.local.gov.uk>
- Cumbria Equality Resource Centre
<http://equalitycumbria.org>

Equality and Diversity Policy

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1. Equality and Diversity Policy

Membership of the Tenants' Committee is open to all tenants and leaseholders living in South Lakes Housing properties.

All members of the Committee will

- Actively promote equality and diversity
- Not unlawfully discriminate against people because of Age, Disability, Gender reassignment, Marriage and civil partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race (this includes colour, national origin, nationality, ethnic origin), Religion and Belief, Sex or Sexual orientation. (Equality Act 2010 - Protected Characteristics – see page 4 for more information)
- Behave in a kind, respectful, calm and courteous manner towards everyone

The committee will work hard to

- Publish its commitment to equality and diversity
- Recognise residents and tenants rights to respect for private life, family life and the home
- Work to ensure that everyone in the community is able to take part in all the Associations activities
- Work to have a committee that reflects the community we represent
- Engage with people from minority groups in our community
- Make sure our meetings are accessible
- Challenge unacceptable behaviour especially on the grounds of protected characteristics
- Make sure that staff (if we have any) are treated fairly and equitably
- Arrange equality and diversity awareness training for committee members and anyone involved in recruiting staff and volunteers
- At least once every year/ when new legislation is introduced review our progress, using the Equality Checklist below.

2. Equality Checklist

Once a year/when new legislation is introduced the Committee should ask the following questions and record the answers. If the answers are 'no' or 'don't know' the committee should complete the action plan over the page and monitor progress at meetings. It is also a good idea to record successes and achievements.

1. Where have we published our Equality and Diversity Policy?
2. How do each of members promote equality?
3. Do we know whether our committee is representative of the residents?
4. What more can we do to make the committee represent all our residents?
5. Do any of our residents feel excluded or feel that their needs are not being met by the work of the committee?
6. Do we respect people rights to a private life? Has any one complained about how we do things?
7. Are we clear about who are the minority groups in our community and are they included?
8. Are our meeting venues accessible?
9. Do all our tenants have access to digital information if we use it?
10. How successful do we feel we are at challenging unacceptable behaviour on the grounds of protected characteristics?

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11. How do our staff feel (if we have them) about how they are treated?
12. Have we provided any Equality and Diversity training or events for committee members?
13. Do we have a record of who has been involved in our activities? Can we break these down by Protected Characteristics
14. Have we sent our findings to SLH as part of the agreement to receive funding?

3. Equality Action Plan

What are the answers to the checklist telling you about what improvements you need to make?

Tenants Committee and Residents Associations should produce a simple action plan to address any negative findings.

The chairperson is responsible for making sure this is considered several times a year in addition to the annual checklist.

Issue/answer	What we will do to improve?	Who will do it?	When will it be completed?	Did it work?

The purpose of this action plan is to make life better for everyone - not to produce a plan that sits on a shelf and is never used.

4. For further information

About how to make the most of this policy and to learn more about Equality and Diversity see the South Lakes Housing Tenant's Committee Equality and Diversity Guide or the links below.

- South Lakes Housing Website
<http://www.southlakeshousing.co.uk>
- Equality & Human Rights Commission
<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com>
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