

**REPORT TO: HOUSING COMMITTEE OF 15 NOVEMBER 2004**

**REPORT ON: HOUSING DEPARTMENT EQUALITIES POLICY**

**REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF HOUSING**

**REPORT NO: 720-2004**

**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1. To seek approval for the attached Equalities Policy (*Appendix 1*) which will help inform and drive the provision of housing services in Dundee and ensure that these services are accessible to all of Dundee's citizens.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1. It is recommended that Housing Committee:
- i. Approves and adopts the attached Housing Department Equalities Policy.
  - ii. Instructs that monitoring statistics are reported in the Housing Services Plan.

**3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 3.1. There are potential costs associated with possible adjustments to the access to premises and with the production of information in a variety of formats. These will be reported to Committee as required.

**4. LOCAL AGENDA 21 ITEMS**

- 4.1. The adoption of this policy will help ensure that:
- i. People live without fear of personal violence from crime or because of their personal beliefs, race, gender or sexuality.
  - ii. All sections of the community are empowered to participate in decision making.

**5. EQUAL OPPORTUNITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1. The adoption of this policy will assist in the realisation of the following objectives:
- i. The elimination of discriminatory practices and procedures which exclude people from participation in community life.
  - ii. The development of Dundee as a more family-friendly and barrier free city.
  - iii. Improvement in the awareness of diversity and of equality issues amongst City Council staff and the citizens of Dundee.

- iv. The involvement of, and consultation with, target groups on all issues affecting them.
- v. The adoption of measures to eliminate violence and harassment against people because of their race, gender, sexuality or connection to target groups.
- vi. A wide recognition of the way in which the City Council conducts, promotes, publicises and communicates its activities to the diversity of Dundee's citizens.
- vii. The identification of the needs of women, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and other target groups in any research or needs assessment undertaken.

## 6. **BACKGROUND**

6.1. In November 2002, Dundee City Council adopted 4 new Equality Schemes:

- The Race Equality Scheme.
- The Gender Equality Scheme.
- The Disability Equality Scheme.
- The Gender and Sexuality Equality Scheme.

6.2. While Dundee City Council has always been committed to providing services on a fair and equitable basis to all of its citizens, this step was taken to ensure that the Council complied with legislation that had been enacted over some years and to amendments to existing legislation. The relevant legislation comprised:

- Equal Pay Act 1970.
- Sex Discrimination Act 1975.
- Race Relations Act 1976.
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995.
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997.
- Human Rights Act 1998.
- Race Relations Amendment Act 2000.
- The Race Relations Act 1976 (Statutory Duties)(Scotland) Order 2002.
- McPherson Report.

6.3. The purpose in producing a specifically Housing Department Equality Policy is threefold:

- It enables the Department to ensure that it is operating within the parameters of the Corporate Scheme.
- It creates a benchmark against which compliance with statutory duties can be measured.
- It allows the Department to respond to the Regulation and Inspection requirements of Communities Scotland in terms of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.

All of these, taken together, help ensure that services are being delivered in a fair and consistent manner to all of the city's citizens.

**7. CONSULTATION**

- 7.1. The Chief Executive, Chief Officers and DFTA have been consulted on the content of this report.

**8. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 8.1. The following background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 were relied on to a material extent in preparing the above report.

Committee Report No 782-2002: Equality Schemes 2002/05.

**ELAINE ZWIRLEIN**  
**DIRECTOR OF HOUSING**

**November, 2004**

## HOUSING DEPARTMENT EQUALITIES POLICY

### 1. BACKGROUND

Dundee City Council Housing Department provides a diverse range of services to people across the city. The Housing Department wishes to ensure everyone has the same opportunity to access services and that services are provided that meet the needs and recognise and value the diversity of all our customers.

This policy has been developed in accordance with the principles of Dundee City Council's Equality Schemes which state that:

*“Dundee City Council recognises that people may be discriminated against because of race, colour, ethnic and national origins, marital status, domestic circumstances, gender, sexuality and transsexualism, age, class, ethical or religious belief, intellectual or physical disability, mental illness, trade union activity, long term unemployment or because they have AIDS or are HIV positive.*

*Our aim as a City Council is to create a Dundee where everyone has choice of, and access to, goods, facilities, services, jobs and opportunities to participate on equal terms”.*

It also takes into account the legal duties and recommendations contained in the following:

- Equal Pay Act 1970.
- Sex Discrimination Act 1975.
- Race Relations Act 1976.
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995.
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997.
- Human Rights Act 1998.
- Race Relations Amendment Act 2000.
- The Race Relations Act 1976 (Statutory Duties)(Scotland) Order 2002.
- McPherson Report.

To facilitate the monitoring of performance on Equality and Diversity over the longer term the Council has adopted an Equality Standard under 6 headings:

1. Identifying and Meeting Needs.
2. Preventing and Removing Barriers.
3. Promoting Inclusion.
4. Communicating Information on Services.
5. Consulting Service Users.
6. Ensuring Access to Services.
7. Employment Practice.

To achieve these long term objectives the Council will adopt a mainstream approach, defined in the Scottish Executive Equality Strategy as:

*"The systematic integration of an equality perspective into the everyday work of (local) government, involving policy makers across all departments as well as equality specialists and external partners".*

## 2. **HOUSING SERVICES**

This policy sets out how the Housing Department will promote and strive towards equality of opportunity in how services are delivered, through the commitment of all staff to the policy. Equalities issues associated with employment and working practices are covered in other Council documents. Included in the 4 Strategic Objectives of Dundee's Local Housing Strategy is "Assist People in Need". This objective will devise actions to:

- Remove the need to sleep rough.
- Provide bespoke housing or adapt existing housing for particular needs.
- Provide housing support services to vulnerable people.
- Ensure equality of access to housing and related services.

## 3. **COMMUNICATION AND PARTICIPATION**

The Housing Department recognises that the implementation of our equal opportunities policy requires the support of all of our community partners. To this end we will consult Dundee Federation of Tenants Association, Tenants and Residents Groups, Community Councils, BME Community Groups, Dundee Disability Network, Tayside Society for the Deaf, Dundee Blind and Partially Sighted Society, clients, carers and other service users in the planning and delivery of our services.

We will try to increase participation from traditionally under-represented groups such as women, younger people, disabled people and BME groups through our Tenant Participation Strategy. We will ensure the availability of a variety of opportunities to participate.

Tenants and Residents Groups will have an equal opportunities clause in their constitution prior to receiving funding. An Equal Opportunities Training Pack will be given to all Groups and additional training will be offered.

Through the use of customer satisfaction surveys we will listen to our customers' views on current services and on how improvements can be made.

## 4. **ACCESS TO SERVICES**

All publicity material will be written in plain language. The Housing Department will be sensitive to the needs of people whose first language is not English. We will promote the availability of information in a variety of formats, such as large print, Braille, community languages and through sign language interpreters. Facilities such as Minicon will be made available for hard of hearing clients. Customers who have difficulty reading or who have other communication needs, will be helped to fill in forms.

The Housing Department will improve physical access to all offices. We will carry out improvements to access following consultation with service users. To improve access to our services we will arrange, on request, out of hours home visits and emergency service, including evening or weekend visits.

Telephone interviews will be undertaken where users have difficulty in getting to offices due to medical, work or family circumstances.

The Housing Support Team can help people who have difficulty keeping Council tenancies.

These services will be publicised widely and appropriately.

## 5. **RESPONSE TO DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT**

The Housing Department will continue to play a full role in the work of the Racial Incident Multi Agency Panel. To facilitate this, the Housing Department will treat all incidents of racial or other forms of harassment seriously, and specifically, will recognise that any incident is racist if it is perceived to be so by the victim or any other person.

Tenants are informed, when signing up for a Council house, that discrimination and harassment are unacceptable forms of behaviour and that action will be taken against any tenant found guilty of such behaviour. They are also advised on what action they should take if they themselves experience discrimination or harassment.

Measures to deal with harassment are contained within the Housing Department's Anti-Social Behaviour Policy and in the procedures of RIMAP. Responsibility for addressing all types of anti-social behaviour, including harassment, rests with the Anti-Social Behaviour Team who will liaise with all appropriate agencies to ensure a co-ordinated response to the issue. Every effort will be made to identify the perpetrators of harassment and appropriate action will be taken against those identified.

Full support, including the services of Victim Support, will be offered to victims of harassment. While it is not the intention of the Housing Department that the victim should suffer again by being forced to move house, such a move will be considered at the request of the victim.

All staff will be trained on how to recognise discrimination and harassment and what action should be taken in response. In addition, all staff will receive training on this policy to ensure that they are fully aware of their position in law and the implications of this policy. Individual training needs will be identified through the Employee Development Scheme.

## 6. **ALLOCATION OF HOUSING**

The Housing Department will let its houses in accordance with its published allocation policy which is widely available to the public and can be made available in a variety of formats, as identified in the section on "Access to Services" above. An appropriate appeals mechanism is in place and widely publicised. Records of the gender, ethnicity, religion and disability of applicants for housing will be kept, in accordance with Census and CRE categories. Reviews of the allocation policy will take equality issues fully into account.

## 7. **PARTNERSHIP WORKING**

The Housing Department will continue to work with other agencies to ensure that the housing needs of all our customers are being met. We currently work with Communities Scotland, NHS Tayside, Social Work and appropriate voluntary organisations.

Planning for new developments and initiatives will take full account of the needs of all of our customers, as identified through housing needs studies and in consultation with other housing providers, statutory and voluntary agencies.

The Housing Department will ensure that all organisations entering into partnership with the Council have an effective equal opportunities policy in place. In awarding contracts the Housing Department will ensure that the contractor's equal opportunity policy is fully considered and taken into account.

## 8. **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY**

Overall responsibility for the implementation of the policy and implementing appropriate corrective action lies with the Housing Department Management Team.

## 9. **EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES**

The success of any policy, and in particular one which addresses sensitive issues, depends on the degree of commitment of the employees of the organisation. Employees, therefore, have a major responsibility for ensuring that the policy is applied in practice.

To facilitate this all employees **will**:

- Co-operate with all measures introduced by Dundee City Council to ensure equality of opportunity and the elimination of discrimination.
- Challenge discriminatory behaviour and draw any such instances to the attention of their Line Manager to allow appropriate action to be taken.

Employees **will not**:

- Harass, abuse or intimidate service users or other members of staff.
- Practice discrimination against colleagues or members of the public seeking to use the service.
- Encourage other employees to practice discrimination.
- Victimise anyone who has complained or provided information about discriminatory practices.

A condition of employment is that employees must at all times adhere to equal opportunities policies and codes of conduct issued by the Council. General Council policy renders staff liable to disciplinary action if they knowingly and deliberately discriminate.

- For the guidance of staff the following are examples of discrimination or harassment:
- Insensitive jokes or comments.
- Name calling.
- Differentiating between various members of the community when providing advice or support.

## 10. **MONITORING AND REVIEW**

An equal opportunities policy, by definition, cannot be a static document. Changes in legislation, in Council policy, and in individual and collective aspirations of customers and clients create the need for a continuing monitoring and review process which is clear and transparent.

The Housing Department is committed to ensuring that such a procedure is in place and is working in practice. This will be facilitated through reference to:

- Dundee City Council Housing Services Plan
- Dundee City Council Equality Schemes
- Dundee City Council Equality and Diversity Monitoring and Action Planning Framework
- Communities Scotland (Housing Regulation and Inspection) Guidance and Activity Standards, and Good Practice Guidelines.
- CRE Scotland Code of Practice and Guidance on The Duty to Promote Race Equality.

All Housing Services are subject to periodic reviews. The Housing Department will ensure that any reviews contain an examination of the policy to ensure that it does not operate in a way that may be discriminatory or may disadvantage any particular group.