

equality and diversity

OUR STRATEGY, OBJECTIVES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

We believe that a diverse culture encourages greater ideas and wider thinking.

The only difference we see is the difference you make.

equality

**treating everyone equally with respect
valuing and celebrating diversity**

diversity

**creating a culture of recognising and
valuing differences**





Foreword

I am delighted to introduce Aspire's Equality and Diversity Strategy for 2007-10. Equality and diversity is at the heart of everything we do, in the services we provide to our customers, in how we work together and in the way we engage with our partners. It is about recognising and valuing difference, being inclusive and treating people as individuals; as we would want to be treated ourselves.

The Strategy sets out an unequivocal commitment to the principles of equality and diversity along with a clear direction

for Aspire in the future. But more than that, it ensures that equality and diversity is embedded into our core values and organisational culture. Everyone in Aspire has a role in delivering this and will do so within neighbourhoods, within our staff teams and through our partnership working.

I want everyone to really see and feel the difference that our commitment to equality and diversity brings, through tailored services, sustainable neighbourhoods and a tangible respect for all.

You can be assured of the support of the Board, our Equality and Diversity Champion and the Executive Team in delivering this agenda. I know I can count on your support, and I very much look forward to sharing this journey with you.

Sinéad Butters
Chief Executive



A positive culture of respect and fairness

Our Commitment

We are committed to creating a culture of respect and fairness, both in the communities we work in and in our working environment. In support of this we aim to promote equality and diversity in all areas of our operation including service provision, employment and governance.

We aim not only to follow legal regulatory guidance, but to be recognised as an example of good practice in this field.



Our strategy sets out our main equality and diversity aims and the framework for meeting these aims.

Strategy

This document summarises the key commitments and objectives that we are seeking to deliver through our new Equality and Diversity Strategy.

Our strategy states our commitments to reviewing, monitoring and consulting on work in these areas.

The strategy will enable us to raise the profile of equality and diversity, both internally and externally (for example with customers).

The Equality and Diversity Strategy was developed taking a number of different elements into account including: -

Where we are now, including our Audit Commission Inspection Report and consultant's findings

Legislation and regulatory obligations

Our corporate aims, values and strategic goals

Focus group feedback

Good practice

Stakeholder feedback

The Strategy has been developed to ensure that our corporate values are realised in all aspects of our work. It has been developed through consultation with internal and external stakeholders including staff, customers, non executive board members and our partners.

Our key corporate value for Equality and Diversity states:

'We treat everyone with respect and value and celebrate diversity.'

By this, we mean we will strive to treat everyone equally.

For Equality and Diversity our Corporate Aim is

"To promote diversity in all areas of activity"

In setting this aim we wish to ensure equality of access and treatment for all our customers.

The Strategy is a high level document covering all the main areas of the business and linking directly to the strategic goal for diversity:

'To be proactive in creating a culture of recognising and valuing difference, resulting in a positive experience for all our stakeholders and a positive working environment for all our staff'



What we mean by:



Equality

We are committed to providing equal treatment for people irrespective of race, disability, gender (including transgender), sexual orientation, religious belief and age.

We are committed to seeking equal outcomes, as well as equality of opportunities, in terms of the services we deliver to our customers and as an employer. This means our approach may require the different treatment in different cases in order to improve the quality of services provided to socially excluded groups, even though equality in terms of rights to services and opportunities for equal participation remain the main goal.

Diversity

We recognise that each individual is unique and hence recognise and value individual differences whether these are of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, socio-economic status, age, religious beliefs, political beliefs or other ideologies. We are seeking to create an inclusive culture where all people feel welcome, included and respected.

Social Model of Disability

We are seeking to adopt the Social Model of Disability in how we deliver and improve our services to customers. This approach recognises that some people have impairments which affect how they function physically or mentally. These people are disabled by the barriers that exist in a society that does not take account of their needs. These barriers may be in the physical, organisational or personal aspects of society – for instance stairs without lifts, information not available in large print, or people's negative attitudes.



Aspire Housing is totally committed to equality and diversity throughout all our activities.

Policy Statement

- We will not treat anyone less favourably because of their race, colour, nationality or ethnic origin, religion, gender, disability, age, Aids or HIV status, marital status, sexual orientation or anything else that causes a person to be treated with injustice.
- We will seek to identify the needs of disadvantaged, under represented and excluded groups within the areas we work and establish positive and effective relationships with these groups to inform our services and communicate with their members.
- We encourage applications for employment or housing from these under represented groups to achieve effective access to employment and housing with Aspire from these groups.
- We will collect and monitor records of the ethnic origin and gender, age, disability of all applicants for housing and employment.
- Our Equality and Diversity Strategy will be a major consideration in the hiring of contractors, the work agencies carry out on our behalf, and in the work we undertake with other agencies.
- We will be aware of our commitment to equality and diversity in respect of how our governance structure operates and how it is constituted.
- Our Board of Management has strategic responsibility for equality and diversity within Aspire.
- We will ensure equality and diversity awareness are key elements in our induction programmes and training courses for staff, Non-Executive Directors, our Tenants Panels and Contractors.
- All reports to decision-making force of the organisation must consider the equality and diversity implications of proposals, policies and procedures through the inclusion of an equality and diversity statement.
- We will comply with all legislation and regulatory requirements that relates to equality and diversity.



Summary of our strategic aims

Customers



- Access to housing is fair and equitable to people from all groups within our community.
- We will provide housing services of a high quality recognising the diverse needs of the local communities we work with. Examples include responsive repairs and maintenance services and supporting / providing necessary adaptations to properties.
- Providing a responsive customer services function that seeks to ensure full accessibility for all tenants and customers, including providing information in appropriate formats to meet the communication needs of our customers.
- We will continue to encourage resident and service user involvement in the work of the organisation using a range of different mechanisms. We will identify barriers that may deter people from getting involved, such as language barriers and work to remove these. We will seek to ensure this involvement is representative of the communities we serve.
- We will not tolerate harassment and domestic abuse and will work closely with other agencies to tackle such cases.
- We will seek to consult during the planning and implementation of our development and regeneration work with all relevant stakeholders.
- We will work with local agencies to promote community cohesion, encouraging positive action and respect.
- We will ensure our contractors, consultants and suppliers demonstrate their commitments to equality and diversity before work is awarded. We will monitor their performance on a regular basis, providing briefings and training as appropriate. We will actively support the recruitment of minority contractors where they are able to meet our quality standards.

Governance

- We will work towards a Board of Management that is representative of the communities we serve. We will ensure that all board members develop the relevant skills and knowledge to drive our achievements in equality and diversity.

Staff

- We will continue to improve the understanding of equality and diversity among our staff, board members and customers so that they can sensitively address the needs of individuals and different communities. To support managers in promoting and implementing equality and diversity, we will establish Diversity Champions in all departments to help to develop a positive corporate culture.

Employment

- We will continue to develop our employment practices to ensure equality of opportunities for all our staff in development, training and advancement opportunities.
- We will treat all job applicants fairly and equitably. We will strive to have a representative workforce seeking to encourage applicants from under represented groups.





Responsibilities

Everyone throughout the organisation has a role in ensuring that our approach to diversity as outlined in the strategy is adopted successfully, and in particular:

- Our Board of Management has overall responsibility for setting the strategic direction. Our Executive team is responsible for ensuring the strategy is implemented throughout the business.
- We have a Board Champion who is responsible for driving forward Equality and Diversity best practice within the organisation.
- We have an Equality and Diversity Steering Group with representation from all areas of the Company that has the responsibility for supporting implementation of the strategy and monitoring progress.





Delivery, monitoring and performance reporting

The Strategy will become part of our key service plans and has an action plan with clear targets, through which its implementation will be directed and monitored.

We will be able to measure the success of the Strategy by monitoring the achievement of the action plan, through meeting our regulatory requirements and via a range of performance indicators developed to assess the impact of our approach.

However, we also recognise that the quality of our customers' experience of the services we provide is our real performance test.

We will regularly report progress against our targets and actions, and the results of this monitoring will be made available to our Board, staff, residents and other stakeholders through a range of media in line with the Company's Communication Strategy.



Action plan

Customers - Research & Analysis

Objectives	Action to Achieve
Ensure our services reflect the diverse needs of local communities. Actively help disadvantaged and under represented groups to benefit from our services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry out research to identify needs in relation to housing and related services • Use findings and existing contracts to identify gaps and implement recommendations to respond to these.
Ensure our accommodation is available in a fair and equitable way to people from all groups within our communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the above research, complete analysis of applicants, waiting list, lettings and tenancies against local population
Identify any barriers that may deter some people from becoming involved and to take action to help overcome such barriers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research potential barriers to involvement and plan to eliminate or reduce these barriers.

Customers - Review of Existing Services

Objectives	Action to Achieve
Ensure provision of a responsive and appropriate customer services function	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of the Customer Services Review Action Plan
Ensure our repairs and maintenance services take into account the diversity requirements of our tenants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job tickets to identify any special requirements. Contractors also to be notified where no job ticket is issued.
Ensure effective signposting to other agencies where we cannot meet the needs of applicants and current residents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review mechanisms for signposting and agencies used, improving where appropriate.

Customers - Review of Existing Services *continued...*

Objectives	Action to Achieve
Provide information in the appropriate formats to meet the communication needs of our customers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer profile data and local community profile data to identify main languages and formats that all corporate literature, forms etc. need to be translated. • Identify corporate literature to be translated. • Have in place translation services for other languages and formats (within 24 hours). • Implement communication preferences of our customers. • Publicise our commitment to translating services. • Develop communication standards for all corporate literature including minimum font size and plain English language. • Make the web disability compliant
Develop comprehensive Domestic Abuse Policy with full supporting guidance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review Domestic Abuse Policy in conjunction with relevant agencies input together with supporting guidance.
Ensure all contractors, consultants and suppliers have an Equal Opportunities Policy or sign up to Aspire's.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review procedures to ensure consistency and best practice across the organisation. • Publicise procedures to staff.
Ensure our properties and services are accessible to people with disabilities under the DDA.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry out follow up audit and report findings and recommendations to Executive Team.

Customers Development of New and Existing Services

Objectives	Action to Achieve
Review how we can contribute towards meeting the needs and aspirations of BME and other diverse groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to develop partnership links
Seek to ensure all new housing meeting the diverse needs of our communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure appropriate consultation and involvement when planning and developing housing.
Setting up a Local Disabled Lettings Scheme.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate feasibility of setting up a local disabled lettings scheme involving other agencies. • If feasible, setting up local disabled lettings scheme with other agencies.
Work with other organisations to promote community cohesion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with local partners and agencies to achieve the aims/objectives of the local community cohesion strategy and policy.
Support existing focus groups and create new ones where appropriate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing support for new and existing focus groups such as the Disability Focus Group.
Identify and meet the support needs of our tenants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyse customer profile information and identify tenants requiring additional support needs. • Those tenants identified contacted to see if further assistance can be provided
To develop an effective customer profile framework.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete customer profile data collection project. • Development of on-going customer profile framework • Implementation of framework.

Governance

Objectives	Action to Achieve
Non Executive Directors (NEDs) have the relevant skills to drive our achievements on equality and diversity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop recruitment policy for NEDs which ensures that potential NEDs have a positive attitude to equality and diversity. • Ensure that NEDs appraisal framework covers equality and diversity training needs and these are carried out.
Establish practical ways to improve the diversity of the Board and Committees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop recruitment policy for NEDs which encourages a wide range of applicants for the job.
Re-establish an Equality and Diversity Steering Group (EDSG) to drive the equality and diversity agenda.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-establish EDSG with customer representation, staff representation and Board Champion for Diversity.

Staffing and Employment/Staff

Objectives	Action to Achieve
Diversity Champions in all departments to promote equality and diversity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify Diversity Champions to promote and support equality and diversity.
Ensure front line staff (and contractors) are able to respond and deal with all forms of harassment and domestic abuse.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and deliver training on responding to all different forms of harassment to all front line staff and contractors
Integrate diversity awareness into Aspiring Leaders Program and all team building events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include diversity awareness in Aspiring Leaders Program. • Include diversity awareness in appropriate team building events.

continued...

Staffing and Employment/Staff *continued...*

Objectives	Action to Achieve
Replace code of conduct with more positive document setting out a behaviour code	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement revised behaviour code for staff.
To recruit competent staff who support our values and principles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review employment policies and practices to ensure no inadvertent discrimination and that best practice is followed.
Encourage recruitment and retention of people with disabilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guarantee interview where minimum essential criteria met. • Promote positive about disabled standard.
Ensure all staff have a basic understanding of equality and diversity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Induction training for new staff and training to existing staff.
Obtain staff views on culture of the organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyse staff survey results.
Ensure front line staff are fully trained in relation to communications with our customers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Induction training to relevant new staff and refresher training to existing staff.

Performance Monitoring

Objectives	Action to Achieve
To have an effective corporate performance monitoring framework in place including targets for housing services and staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an effective operational performance monitoring framework that complies with regulatory requirements as a minimum. • Develop an effective corporate performance monitoring framework. • Review targets for the provision of housing to black and minority ethnic people and disabled people. • Review targets for staff composition and recruitment.
Have systems in place to benchmark diversity practices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish benchmarking framework for equality and diversity practices (housing and employment).
To monitor the profile of customers who do get involved against our customer profile.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set targets for involvement covering age, gender, ethnicity and disability. • Develop monitoring and reporting systems.
Performance Management Review Framework monitors staff competencies and achievements in relation to equality and diversity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement competencies framework for all staff.
Consider developing generic equalities impact assessment framework to carry out impact assessments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry out a feasibility study for developing a generic equalities impact assessment framework. • Report and publish the outcome of the feasibility study. • Develop an equalities impact assessment framework.

Communication of the Strategy

Objectives	Action to Achieve
Ensure that our key stakeholders are briefed on the Strategy and Action Plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To communicate the Strategy and Action Plan
Ensure our key stakeholders are aware of our policies relating to equality and diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communicate our Equality and Diversity policies
Publish information on performance to key stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Publish performance information



- This information can be made available in
- Other languages
 - Large print
 - Braille
 - Audio tape
 - Computer disc.

If you would like information in another language or format, please ask us.

यदि आपको सूचना किसी अन्य भाषा या अन्य रूप में चाहिये तो कृपया हमसे कहे - Hindi

اگر این اطلاعات را به زبانی دیگر و یا در فرمتی دیگر میخواهید لطفاً از ما درخواست کنید - Farsi

اگر آپ کو معلومات کسی دیگر زبان یا دیگر شکل میں درکار ہوں تو برائے مہربانی ہم سے پوچھئے۔ - Urdu

Jeżeli chcieliby Państwo uzyskać informacje w innym języku lub w innym formacie, prosimy dać nam znać. - Polish

ئەگەر زانیاریت بە زمانیکی که یا بە فۆرمیکی که دەوی تکایه داوامان لی بکه - Kurdish



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