

Dartington Housing Association

BME Strategy

Strategy Statement

Section 2.7 of the Housing Corporation's Regulatory Code states that:

'Housing associations must demonstrate, when carrying out all their functions, their commitment to equal opportunity. They must work towards the elimination of discrimination and demonstrate an equitable approach to the rights and responsibilities of all individuals. They must promote good relations between people of different racial groups.'

The Association acknowledges this and is committed to the elimination of racial discrimination in any form. We will work towards achieving the standards set out in the Race Equality Code of Practice for Housing Associations. The Code assumes race equality to be an integral part of business planning, service delivery and review for any organisation that is:

'committed to... providing good and responsive housing and related services and amenities for those whose personal circumstances make it difficult for them to meet their housing needs in the open market'.

This Strategy therefore develops the ideas and vision set out in the *Challenge Report*. Our vision is one where:

- People from all ethnic groups have equal access to services and to our decision-making processes, and that BME communities are equally satisfied with the choices available and the quality of services they receive.
- We will work towards the successful social integration of BME communities in the areas in which we work.
- Our workforce reflects the communities we work in. Training, staff support mechanisms and career opportunities embrace staff diversity to meet the changing needs of staff.
- We are led by a Board that fairly represents the communities we work in, and who act as true leaders in promoting race equality.
- Any contractor, consultant or partner working with us fully acknowledges the need to promote race equality and delivers its business in a way that does so.
- Promoting race equality within a Best Value framework is part of standard business practice, where community diversity is recognised, respected and catered for.

The Association believes that emphasis should be placed on linking the role of communities and neighbourhoods, as well as in promoting joint working and building partnerships.

We recognise that neighbourhoods are not homogenous and are made up of mixed multiple identities that are constantly evolving and changing. We respect and appreciate such diversity in the community.

Standards

The Standards the Association will work towards are:

- To adopt the vision for race equality set out in the *Challenge Report*.
- To commit to meeting section 2.7 of the Housing Corporation's Regulatory Code.
- To adopt the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry definitions of "institutional racism" and a "racist incident".
- To prevent racial discrimination and harassment.
- To eliminate discrimination and promote good relations between different racial groups.
- To promote race equality and prevent social exclusion on the basis of race.
- To promote equal opportunities in the Association's services and activities.
- To identify corporate priorities, set targets, implement the plan and monitor its impact.
- To sustain involvement and communication with the association's stakeholders on how to continuously improve race equality.
- To carry out race equality audits as part of business and service reviews.
- To work to understand and respond to the needs and expectations of BME communities.

BME Demographics

Research shows that between $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{1}{3}$ of BME people have experienced racial harassment. Whilst in many rural areas there does not appear to be an apparent problem there are a high level of racist incidents relative to the size of the local ethnic minority population.

Economic deprivation, youth unemployment, low academic achievement, anti-social behaviour and community tensions act as "igniters" to political or other forms of extremism.

The Association has stock in areas where few BME people have historically lived. However, as increasing numbers of BME people are moving to "traditionally white" areas. BME groups and individuals in rural areas can experience a double form of isolation.

Analysis of the National Census 2001 results for the South West region showed that:

- 97.71% of people in the South West classed themselves as White.
- 0.76% of people in the South West classed themselves as Mixed, while other Black Minority Ethnic groups made up 1.55% of the South West population.
- Most residents in the South West identify with a religion, but less than the UK average.
- Christianity is the most common faith in the South West, at 74%.
- Other religious beliefs are held by 1.4% of the population of the South West.

This research proves that the South West has one of the smallest ethnic minority populations of all the English regions, both overall and as a proportion of the total population.

It has been established that by 2010 only 20% of the UK working population will be white, male, able-bodied and aged under 45. It is likely that there will be a proportionate demand for ethnically diverse services in the future.

Regulation and Application

In eradicating extremism, the Association will develop communication strategies that respond to inflammatory press coverage, as well as political and religious extremism. These will endeavour to counter the potential for exacerbating stereotypes about different communities.

Race equality and diversity will be included within:

1. How services are planned:
 - a. How information on the diversity of customers and the community is used to develop and improve products and services.
 - b. What policies, guidance and training are in place on Equality and diversity issues.
 - c. How equality and diversity issues are “mainstreamed” into the business planning, risk and operational management of associations.
2. How services are delivered:
 - a. How we ensure that our services are easily accessible to all.
 - b. That staff and Board members are aware of their obligations in respect of equality and diversity issues.
 - c. That the quality of service provided is equally good for all tenants and residents.
3. How tenants and residents are involved with and consulted on the management of their homes:
 - a. The range of involvement and consultation techniques used.
 - b. How we ensure that we involve and consult with vulnerable and marginalised communities.
 - c. How we involve and consult with stakeholders, including those working with and on behalf of vulnerable and marginalised groups within the community.
4. How outcomes for tenants and residents are monitored:
 - a. The range of performance indicators and other information on equality and diversity issues that are recorded and reported.
 - b. That our performance is at the same high level for all tenants and residents.
5. How performance, policy and practice are reviewed and evaluated:
 - a. The programme and scope of service reviews carried out.
 - b. How the views of tenants and residents from diverse communities are used to inform service reviews.
 - c. The targets for improvement that are set following service reviews.

The Association will endeavour to achieve the best possible performance on Race Equality and Diversity in the following ways:

- Understanding the diversity of customers and their needs is at the heart of any effective system of delivering high quality services.
- We will look at the products and services provided to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of the community. Taking account of the diversity of these communities will be crucial to developing the right products and services for the future.
- By ensuring continued demand for products and services which are relevant to the needs of the communities in which they are provided. Taking account of the diversity of customers and their aspirations when doing this will keep the appeal of these products and services as broad as possible and help sustain long term demand.
- Good performance on Race Equality and diversity is increasingly becoming a criterion in the selection process for partnerships.
- Recruiting the best staff.
- Delivering the best leadership by ensuring it reflects the diversity of the community.
- Building and protecting a good reputation. Poor performance on Race Equality and Diversity can lead to bad publicity and could damage our reputation.

Definitions

The Association accepts two fundamental definitions set out in the Macpherson Report:

1. *Institutional Racism*: this is the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service for people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen and detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantages minority ethnic people.
2. A *racist incident* is any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person.

Other definitions accepted by the Association include:

“*Black and minority ethnic (BME)*” represents all ethnic minority groups, including Irish people.

“*Race equality*” means fair and equal treatment for all people regardless of race, colour or creed, and the recognition of cultural and ethnic diversity, which enables people from all ethnic groups to achieve their potential, and not be subject to racial prejudice and discrimination.

“*Communities*” is a broad term that describes the people whose lives are affected by the work of housing associations and whom housing associations aim to serve. There are no geographical boundaries, and we should satisfy ourselves who the ‘communities’ we work with are.

Discrimination

All our tenants have the right to feel secure in their home. Racial harassment or discrimination in any form will not be tolerated by the Association.

Allegations of racial discrimination and harassment will be handled promptly and with sensitivity. Appropriate understanding and support will be provided, if necessary through a third party. The Association will take positive action to address any such allegations, including legal action.

The Association will report and record racist incidents, in line with the Home Office Code of Practice and its "Minimum Data Content" recommendations.

The Association will ensure that tenants, service users, staff, Board members, contractors and consultants are aware that racial harassment or discrimination will not be tolerated.

The Association will ensure service users are aware that they do not have the right to refuse a service from members of staff or contractors on racial grounds.

Staff and contractors will be made aware that they do not have the right to refuse to provide a service to tenants on racial grounds.

The Association will display policy information on racial harassment in public areas.

Racist Incidents

The Association will take action to minimise racist incidents by:

- Setting out the Association's policy and action plan to prevent and tackle racist incidents across key business areas including governance, employment, services, resident and community development..
- Setting out how the Association will communicate the message to residents that racial harassment is prohibited.
- Asking BME residents about their experience of racist incidents to help identify whether there are gaps between actual and reported racist incidents and to identify what improvements are needed in the way in which we respond to incidents and support those at risk.
- Highlighting tenants' race equality obligations before they sign their tenancy;
- Taking prompt action against those who are not meeting their tenancy obligations towards race equality;
- Training staff on the promotion of race equality;
- Making best use of the existing resources available to support people experiencing racist incidents;
- Training staff on how to identify a racist incident, how to report it and how to follow up the reporting through prompt positive action;
- Informing staff and tenants about how we are working with police, support groups and other agencies that can help tackle racist incidents.

Access to Services

The Association believes that all people have the right to fair and equal access to the services that the Association provides. We will therefore aim to ensure racial equality in the following ways:

- Develop an action plan with timescales that sets out how we will meet the needs of BME communities and establish how performance will be evaluated.
- Consult staff to identify race equality targets for service areas, such as tenants' complaint processes and lettings.
- Train staff and Board members on race equality issues.
- Work with local authorities and our strategic partners to identify the needs and aspirations of BME communities in the local area.
- Explore how the housing association can provide a supportive environment for BME tenants who are isolated in their local area. Develop partnerships with BME organisations to look at how best to meet the needs of BME tenants.
- Where consultants and contractors deliver a service ensure that they promote race equality.
- Ensure service users are aware that they do not have the right to refuse a service from members of staff or contractors on racial grounds.
- Ensure staff and contractors are aware they do not have the right to refuse to provide a service on racial grounds.
- We will investigate and budget for translation services for when required.
- We will ensure any leaflets and newsletters for tenants and applicants are written in a plain English style.

The outcomes of promoting race equality through housing and service activity within the Association will be:

- People from all ethnic groups will have equal access to services and to our decision-making processes. Assistance will be provided to enable this if necessary.
- An increase in people from minority ethnic groups accessing services offered by the Association, including an increase in the number of BME residents housed and supported by the Association.
- Fair treatment, regardless of ethnicity, in all aspects of service delivery, including lettings, pursuing rent arrears, tenancy management and access to advisory services.
- BME communities will be equally satisfied with the choices available and the quality of services they receive from us.

Customers and the Community

In areas of economic deprivation, communities and neighbourhoods have experienced segregated polarised lifestyles; a sense of belonging and identity can be set against a backdrop of isolation, neglect and fear. In rural areas such as those prevalent in the South West, BME people can experience a double form of isolation. It is also the case that some communities are geographically divided not just by income and tenure but also according to race, ethnicity and faith. This is an issue that the Association endeavours to improve throughout all its activities.

Although communities can become segregated, there are strong positive forces that can work to the benefit of society. Neighbourhoods have the capacity to promote a shared sense of belonging with a strong, robust and inclusive identity that reflects the diversity of people that live in that community.

The responsibility for community cohesion rests with the whole community, including all residents and service providers. Resident involvement is therefore crucial. In promoting shared values and diversity, achievable targets and outcomes need to be set that can engage with everyone in the neighbourhood community.

In order to promote racial equality in the community, in particular with our tenants, the Association will:

- Consult with customers in terms of planning services. We will aim to ensure that BME communities are involved, and that their specific needs are considered in any consultation processes.
- Deliver a high standard of service to people from all backgrounds and provide services that are sensitive to differences in needs, language, culture, background, ethnic origin and religion.
- Use various methods of communication as appropriate. Research has suggested that literacy levels and strong oral traditions mean that the spoken word is more effective than written text when communicating with the BME community.

Recruitment, Employment and Volunteering

Unemployment rates for black and minority ethnic (BME) communities is 2-3 times higher than that of white communities. However, 50% of the growth in the working age population between 1999 and 2009 is set to come from BME communities. A governmental report in 2003 suggested that an “ethnic penalty” in the labour market impacts upon the opportunities of even the most well educated and senior individuals from minority ethnic communities.

The Association will endeavour to ensure that our workforce reflects the community we work in, with BME staff fairly represented. Training, staff support mechanisms and career opportunities embrace staff diversity to meet changing needs.

The Association will ensure that recruitment, selection and employment practices are carried out without discrimination or prejudice on racial grounds.

Publicly recognised cultural and religious festivals and holidays are acknowledged by the Association. Leave will not be unreasonably withheld from staff who may wish to celebrate such festivals.

In order to ensure racial equality in the workplace, the Association will:

- Annually review employment policy and practice in regards to racial equality.
- Provide training on race equality and respecting diversity for all staff.
- Monitor ethnically and evaluate staff promotion, take up of career development opportunities as well as staff use of complaints and grievance procedures.
- Consider the most appropriate ways to open up access for people from different minority ethnic groups to join the workforce.
- Staff with management responsibilities will need to be trained in race equality and their performance should be evaluated as part of the appraisal system.

Contractors and Consultants

The Association will make contractors and consultants aware that the association adheres to the Housing Corporation's Regulatory Guidance 2.7.7, which states that *'as a criterion for award of work or contracts and a condition for doing business, associations should pass on requirements in respect of staffing, customer satisfaction, and dealing with racial harassment...to their consultants contractors and suppliers'*.

All consultants, contractors, suppliers and partners will be made aware of the Association's policy on racial equality and will be expected to have their own similar policies or agree to observe those of the Association.

The Association will set targets and performance indicators to help promote race equality in service areas where consultants and contractors are employed. We will monitor and evaluate the targets and outcomes in consultation with BME and other residents.

Development

The Association will endeavour to produce stock portfolios that reflect local housing needs. This will lead to residents' profiles reflecting local community needs. BME residents will be fairly represented in those profiles with fair and equal access to suitably sized and appropriately designed high quality properties in the areas they want to live in.

The Association will consider the views and needs of BME residents and communities within plans for new housing developments, stock improvement programmes and in renewal and regeneration initiatives.

We will liaise with partner local authorities to regularly review the housing needs of BME communities and set out how the association will contribute to meeting identified needs.

We will develop ways of identifying how satisfied BME tenants are with their new homes, with improvements to their homes and with regeneration and renewal initiatives.

Leadership

The Association regards race equality performance as being at the heart of good governance and management. We acknowledge that the Association should be led by a Board that fairly represents the communities it operates in and which act as true leaders in promoting race equality. The Board should have a range of skills, experience and up-to-date knowledge and should be responsive to the views of service users.

The Association will carry out the following:

- Adopt the National Housing Federation's Code of governance, incorporating guidance on equality of opportunity.
- Set targets and performance indicators to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of action taken to promote race equality through board recruitment, support, retention and succession plans.
- Offer training sessions for people interested in becoming board members. There may be scope in undertaking general awareness training to increase community understanding of the housing association sector. Look at how to support BME board members.
- Set out race equality principles in board recruitment materials and in the terms and conditions of board members.
- Give Staff and Board Members appropriate training in anti-racist practices and make them aware of their responsibility for the implementation of the Equality and Diversity policy and this and other accompanying strategies.
- Consult BME board members to identify the type and level of support they would value having access to.
- Regularly review all policies and procedures to ensure they comply with these policies and strategies.
- Adopt a routine mechanism to add implications for race equality and equal opportunities to all future policies and reports.
- Produce a BME/diversity action plan that sets out what needs to be done, who is responsible for doing it and the timescales in which changes will occur. Build the implementation and monitoring of the action plan into Best Value and performance review processes.
- Involve the board in the evaluation of how the association is performing its race equality objectives.
- Develop systems that keep race equality on the housing association's agenda. This could include race equality as a regular item at board meetings, management meetings, and staff meetings.

Monitoring

The Association is required by its regulators to develop certain targets and carry out monitoring on BME issues, which are detailed below. It must be recognised that the Association has limited resources and low BME demographics in the areas in which it works.

Our regulators recognise that in areas of low BME population such as Devon it will often be impractical and undesirable to establish targets other than on a simple BME / Non-BME basis.

Specifically in relation to black and minority ethnic (BME) people, the strategy incorporates the following targets:

- Lettings: should be proportionate to BME housing need, or census data where this information is deficient, in the areas where the Association has homes.
- Tenant satisfaction: should be at least as high as for non-BME tenants.
- Dealing effectively with racial harassment: the Association will establish targets for reporting victim support and satisfaction, and action taken against perpetrators. We will comply fully with "*Tackling Racial Harassment: Code of Practice for Social Landlords*"
- Board Membership: the proportion of BME new appointments and re-appointments to the governing body should be the same as under "lettings" above. Regular monitoring on this will take place.
- Staffing: new appointments and promotions should achieve the same levels of representation as under the application of the "lettings" criteria.
- Tenants / Residents Associations: should reflect the ethnic mix of the Association's tenants in the relevant area.
- Suppliers, contractors and consultants: as a criterion for award of work or contracts and a condition of doing business, we will pass on requirements in respect of staffing, customer satisfaction and dealing with racial harassment to consultants, contractors and suppliers.

In addition to the above targets set, the Association will, taking into consideration its size and resources, carry out monitoring on diversity and race equality in the following ways:

- Develop and maintain appropriate performance indicators regarding all service activities, to capture information on diversity and ensure race equality. These indicators will be based on the targets above.
- Monitor the use of services by ethnicity to ensure equality of access.
- Collect ethnic information on the whole household, not just the applicant and develop information on future housing needs.
- Review current satisfaction feedback forms to ensure all ethnic and other origins of those replying are routinely recorded and reported.
- Identify racist incidents in performance reports regarding anti-social behaviour and harassment.
- Regularly report monitoring data to the Board of Management, and use it to enable further development of appropriate services.
- The Association will aim to benchmark its performance against other associations and organisations.