

The Diversity Strategy 2009/12

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1 Introduction

Waltham Forest is a north-east London borough with a population of 222,300 - making it one of the most densely populated outer London boroughs. Waltham Forest is a multicultural borough with a high proportion of people from a black and minority ethnic background and the third largest Muslim community in London. The newest ethnic communities come from Poland, South Africa and Lithuania.

The proportion of residents who are of working age is similar to the London average and there are a high proportion of children and young people. The population is expected to grow steadily over the next two decades.

Many Waltham Forest residents live in areas of high deprivation. More than a third of children live in households that are below the official poverty level. Poor standards of health and education, low household incomes and high benefits dependency are concentrated in the poorer areas to the south of the borough. Life expectancy for residents in the north of the borough can be as much as five years higher than for those in the south of the borough. Almost a fifth of working age residents have no recognised qualifications.

Waltham Forest has a relatively small economy, with fewer business and jobs than most other London boroughs. Unemployment rates are amongst the highest in London with one in four people are economically inactive, and 16% of working age residents claiming benefits

The 2007 Housing Needs Survey reported that 22% of the residents within the borough live in social housing. In 2009, there were 14,341 households on the local authority's waiting list.

This strategy is central to achieving Ascham Homes' vision to work together to provide quality homes in a thriving community

Ascham Homes cannot achieve its priorities of:

- Listening and responding to your needs
- Achieving very high resident satisfaction through service improvement
- Community impacts through joint action

unless customers' diverse needs are taken into consideration.

Ascham Homes opposes all forms of discrimination on the grounds of age, disability, gender, race, religion or sexual orientation. We recognise that discrimination creates barriers to achieving equality for all people.

2 The context of Ascham Homes work on equality

Ascham Homes is an Arm's Length Management Organisation (ALMO) that was set up in May 2003. It is the managing agent providing a landlord service to the London Borough of Waltham Forest. Ascham Homes Board has set six strategic objectives for Ascham Homes and they are to:

- provide efficient and effective housing services to residents
- deliver Decent Homes by 2011
- enable residents to be involved and influence the services they receive
- provide a safe and pleasant environment for our residents
- ensure we respond to the diverse needs of all our residents
- improve and develop our business through innovation and learning

The diversity objectives set out in this Strategy supports the achievement of all of these business objectives.

Ascham Homes contributes to the LBWF Sustainable Community Strategy through participating in the SafetyNet Local Strategic Partnership meetings to address equalities and diversity issues. Ascham Homes has a key role in implementing the LBWF Housing Strategy particularly, in this context, facilitating involved and inclusive communities and delivering a good quality safe public realm. The Housing Strategy Action Plan provides for a number of detailed tasks for Ascham Homes to support these objectives. In addition Ascham Homes works with LBWF to deliver the objectives set out in the multi-agency gender, race and disability schemes.

Much progress on diversity has been made since the Diversity Strategy was launched in 2006, this new Diversity Strategy builds on these achievements and looks forward to delivering further improvements in the coming three years.

3 Ascham Homes diversity priorities for 2009/12

Ascham Homes' diversity priorities for the three year period 2009 – 2012 are set out under 3 main themes as follows;

Embed the delivery of equality and the removal of barriers to it into the design and delivery of services by

- keeping abreast of legislative and best practice developments in the field
- carrying out and publish equality impact assessments of all new policies
- ensuring performance information on diversity is analysed to inform service improvements and reported regularly to the Board
- providing cultural and equality awareness training for the Board, staff, tenant groups, community groups and partners
- making routine use of customer-specific, customer-declared information to improve services
- maintaining a high level of awareness of the profile of our existing and new customers

Promoting respect for diversity in the community by

- fostering community cohesion and tackling social exclusion
- tackling harassment particularly domestic violence, race-related harassment, disability related harassment, and homophobia
- tackling anti-social behaviour

Reducing the effects of current disadvantage by

- contributing to the delivery of the outcomes set out in LBWF's multi agency race, disability and gender schemes

- working with partnering contractors to adopt the 'respect for people' Egan principles throughout the supply chain on our capital works, planned maintenance and responsive repairs programmes
- communicating clearly and effectively, providing accessible interpretation services and translations of key customer-facing documents
- implementing the Prosperity and Income Strategies
- implementing actions to improve services and customer satisfaction for race, gender, disability, age, faith and sexuality customer groups

4 Policy statement

When we make plans and policies, we will:

- design services to meet the diverse needs of customers
- ensure that plans and policies do not adversely impact on particular groups
- ensure that staff, customers, community groups, contractors and other partners are aware of our Diversity Strategy and policy.

When we work in partnership we will:-

- publicise this Diversity Strategy widely and positively
- encourage the involvement of Waltham Forest's diverse tenants and leaseholders in decision making and developing services
- actively consult with all sections of the community of Waltham Forest.

When we deliver services we will:-

- ensure that our services are relevant to customers and take into account different needs
- provide information about services that is clear, accurate and accessible to all
- treat all customers positively, regardless of age, disability, gender, race, religion or sexual orientation
- respond seriously to and investigate complaints of bullying, harassment, discrimination or victimisation.

As an employer we will:

- recruit and retain a workforce that reflects the expertise and diversity of our community
- welcome the special knowledge and skills that a diverse workforce contributes to Ascham Homes;
- provide equal access to training and development for all our staff
- listen to staff ideas and suggestions for improving services and ways of working.

5 Statutory duties

In line with current public sector duties on race, gender and disability Ascham Homes statutory duties are to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination
- promote equality of opportunity, and
- promote good relations between people of different groups

The duties are supported by codes of practice for example the Disability Code of Practice (Source: Human Rights Commission incorporating the former Disability Rights Commission) and the Commission for Racial Equality Housing Code of Practice. The codes assist to avoid complaints and litigation by adopting good practice. They also aim to advance the elimination of discrimination.

The functions and strategies/policies relevant to the general duty to promote equality are:

- Resident Involvement
- Partnering for decent Homes, planned maintenance and responsive repairs
- the Diversity Strategy
- the Procurement Strategy
- the Prosperity Strategy
- the Communications Strategy
- the Repairs Policy
- the Anti Social Behaviour Strategy
- the Resident Compact
- the Resident Empowerment Strategy
- the Workforce Development Plan and the Human Resources Strategy and Action Plan

In line with the requirements of these duties Ascham Homes will:

- monitor the employment procedures and practice
- carry out equality impact assessments
- publish the results of equality impact assessments, consultation and monitoring
- make sure that the public have equal access to information and services

6 The regulatory framework

The Commission for Racial Equality (now the Human Rights Commission) produced Equality Standard for Local Government as a framework for addressing race equality in 2000/2001. In light of recent developments in best practice and the development of alternatives to the original standard Ascham Homes considers that the Diversity KLOE, the Housing Code of Practice and the LBWF gender, disability and race schemes, when taken together provide the strategic framework within which to develop and implement its own approach to diversity and equal opportunity. This approach was endorsed by the Board.

7 The Equality Bill.

The Equality Bill is currently going through Parliament. The Bill will consolidate the UK's extensive existing equality legislation into one Act. It is expected to receive royal assent in spring 2010, with the majority of measures coming into force in spring 2011. Existing duties will be extended across all strands of discrimination law to listed public bodies. The

list of public bodies to which this new duty will apply has not yet been published The main provisions are:

- a duty landlords and managers of residential properties to make alterations for disabled people where it is reasonable to do so, to make lives easier for them (disabled people will need to pay for alterations themselves however)
- disabled people in their homes.associative discrimination and harassment - discrimination because someone is associated with someone else who would fall under anti-discrimination laws - will be unlawful across all strands of discrimination legislation
- in discrimination claims, tribunals will be given the power to make recommendations for actions by the employer which affect the whole workforce, not just the individual who brought the claim.
- employers will be able to take positive steps to recruit groups which are under-represented in their workforce where they have a choice between two candidates who are equally suitable. However, this is not the same as allowing positive discrimination, which will still be unlawful.
- there will be a new duty to consider what action to reduce so called 'socio-economic' inequalities, that is, family background or place of birth. This will affect how public bodies make strategic decisions about spending and service delivery.

8 Leadership and change:

- Board Members will promote Ascham Homes' commitment to equality and diversity and ensure adequate resources are made available
- the Executive Management Team will be responsible for the overall management and direction of our equality and diversity commitments.
- the Diversity Group will oversee this policy and monitor how far we are achieving our commitments.
- the Human Resources Team and the Diversity Group will advise and support equality and diversity work throughout the company.
- managers will make sure equality and diversity issues are core to service delivery and staff management.
- all employees will ensure that they are aware of this Strategy and take responsibility to promote equality and diversity and challenge discrimination.

9 The six strands of diversity

Whilst there is a core set of six diversity strands, these are not exhaustive and it is important to consider new and emerging groups such as migrant workers and asylum seekers and existing groups such as Travellers and Gypsies.

Sexual orientation. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) Ascham Homes recognises LGBT as a priority equality target group. LGTB customers experience discrimination as a result of their sexuality and gender identity respectively. Due to the prevalence of discrimination and lack of legislative protection previously afforded, many LGBT people are not "out" and it is therefore difficult to quantify the number of LGBT people. However, it is estimated that between 2% and 4% of the population are lesbian or gay i.e. between 200 and 400 of Waltham Forest council tenants/ leaseholders. This is a

significant number of people who may be particularly vulnerable to hate crimes and discrimination. Ascham Homes supports and consults with a number of LGBT organisations and services including the East London Out Project (ELOP), SafetyNet Partnership and Report It in order to identify priorities and areas for action.

Ascham Homes Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy (ASB) aims to raise awareness of homophobia and provide guidance on how to support those experiencing homophobia attitudes and behaviour.

Ascham Homes priorities for this area of work are:

- to work closely in partnership with LGBT organisations and individuals to identify gaps in service delivery and priorities
- provide training to staff, particularly to those directly deal with cases of homophobia and domestic violence
- produce an ASB procedure for staff on homophobia and provide guidance on how to support those experiencing homophobia and to challenge homophobic attitudes and behaviour
- positively promote awareness about LGBT communities by producing articles and publishing in 'AHEAD' newsletter to residents.

Race The ethnicity/race profile of Ascham Homes customers is constantly changing, the profile develops over time and the priority here is to keep abreast of changes and change the way that services are delivered to meet the particular need of new customer groups. Work in the coming years around race will include publicising the new cultural awareness handbook, ensuring that translations and interpretation services are accessible, and carrying out gap analyses of our services to ensure fair and equal delivery.

Disability A sizable proportion of tenants state that they have a disability. The priorities for this area of work in the coming years will include making much better use of customer-volunteered, customer-specific information to improve service delivery through the iWorld "Flag" system and evaluating "Passporting/Discretionary" repairs for vulnerable customers and improving access to communal areas of estates.

Age The priorities around this area of work are to improve customer satisfaction of younger tenants, visit elders who have not contacted Ascham Homes in the last year, and improve the extent to which homes meet the Lifetime Homes Standard.

Faith Ascham Homes work in this area will include sensitivity around delivering services around major dates in the faith calendars, and more broadly supporting tolerance and understanding of all faiths.

Gender There are more female tenants than male. Ascham Homes priorities for this area of work include a professional and thorough approach to domestic violence, a range of security enhancements to estates, and use of CCTV to tackle anti social behaviour.

10 Performance and service improvement

The performance indicators and key measures of success appended to this Strategy set out a balanced scorecard of staff, customer and organisation measures to assess the success of the Diversity Strategy.

The Diversity Action Plan sets out the actions that Ascham Homes needs to take to deliver excellent services and achieve equality of opportunity.

The implementation of the Diversity Strategy, Action Plan and service standard will be monitored through a twice yearly report to Performance and Development Committee and Board. The report will include progress against the Performance Indicators and key measures of success. The Diversity Group, led by the Director of resources and Legal will monitor the implementation of the Diversity Action Plan and report any non compliance to the Executive Management Team on an exception basis.

11 The resident profile

The coverage of the resident profile is extensive and improving over time. The priority for the coming three years is to use the information in the profile to identify changes in the customer profile and change patterns of service delivery accordingly, and identify any gaps in service delivery.

12 Ascham Homes as an employer

The profile of Ascham Homes workforce is at April 2009:-

- No. of staff on payroll 202
- % Gender split equally 50/50
- % BME 48 White 52
- % Gay, Lesbian, bisexual and transgender 0.5 (please note this figure is taken from staff who have declared it)

Staff Profile	% Staff	% Female/Male	% BME	% F/M of BME
% Under 30	10	50/50	62	70/30
% 31-40	19	45/55	50	55/45
%41-50	34	68/32	56	78/22
%51-60	30	43/57	32	50/50
%61+over	7	20/80	27	0/100

13 Publishing the results of work and actions to promote equality

Progress on implementing the Diversity Action Plan is reported regularly to Ascham Homes Board/Performance and Development Committee. A concise annual report of progress in delivering services to diverse customer groups will be produced and publicised to customers and stakeholders. The Annual Report will include case studies. The results of equality impacts must be widely published, including on the internet. The schedule of forthcoming equality impact assessments is published on the website.

14 Training

Ascham Homes has an excellent track record of training. This will be continued in the coming years with a programme of staff (including partners), Board and tenant training.

15 Partnership work

Ascham Homes decent homes and repairs partners have demonstrated a strong commitment to diversity and equal opportunity in recruitment and service delivery evidenced by generally excellent levels of customer satisfaction. Partners have also delivered a very wide programme of activities to enhance community cohesion and tackle social exclusion. A summary of partners work will be included in the annual report

16 Governance

Ascham Homes Board has 16 places. Four are Waltham Forest Council nominees (Councillors), seven are tenants' and residents' representatives and four independent members and a paid chair. The Council nominates Councillors in proportion to the political make up of the Council. The Tenants Council nominates the seven tenants' and residents' representatives. The independent members are recruited by advertising in the local press and through contacting local organisations.

Currently women and black and minority ethnic people are under-represented on the Board. We aim to make the Board more representative of the local community over the next 2-3 years.

17 Diversity Service Standard

The Diversity Service Standard sets out the service standards around diversity that customers can expect to receive. The standard acts as a reference point for customers and staff. Performance in achieving the commitments given in the standard will be reported to Board twice a year

18 Communication

It is important that there is a steady stream of news stories demonstrating Ascham Homes commitment to diversity and equal opportunities and that these communications are in plain English to assist customers with low literacy and make good use of those who do not have English as a first language.

19 Review of this Strategy

This Strategy was published in December 2009. It will be reviewed by the Board every two years.