

TRANS-PENNINE HOUSING

POLICY

Equality & Diversity



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1. Introduction

Trans-Pennine Housing is fully committed to the principles of equality and diversity.

Each one of the company's staff, Board Members and contractors must adhere to the principles laid down in this policy and have an individual and collective responsibility to ensure that this policy is actively applied in practice.

2. Key aims

The key aims of this policy are to:

- identify and eliminate discrimination; and
- promote equality in all areas of the company's operations.

3. Statutory requirements and adherence to codes of practice

Trans-Pennine Housing recognises and supports the statutory requirements laid down in the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, which outlaw discrimination on the grounds of sex, marital status, race and disability.

In addition and in line with the National Housing Federation's publication, "Equality and Diversity - a framework for review and action", the company has extended this list of grounds to include the seven key headings of:

- Age
- Disability
- Faith
- Gender
- Race
- Ethnicity
- Sexuality

Trans-Pennine Housing strives to comply with service standards and guidance on equal opportunities issued by the government and relevant agencies such as the Equality and Human Rights Commission. In particular, the company will aim to meet the recommendations in the following documents:

- "Code of Practice in Rented Housing" - Commission for Racial Equality (CRE);
- "Code of Practice on Racial Equality in Employment" (CRE);
- "Code of Practice on Sex Discrimination" - Equal Opportunities Commission;

- “Race and Housing Inquiry Challenge Report 2001”;
- Audit Commission Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE);
- Housing Corporation Good Practice Notes.

However it is not enough simply to adhere to statutory recommendations, **Equality and Diversity must be embedded into the organisation**, and this will require a detailed Equality and Diversity Strategy across the Group. This will also include a review in line with the National Housing Federation framework for review and action, which will lead to an overall Equality and Diversity Framework, under which will sit the variety of plans required to meet our statutory obligations as well as best practice. This will also require ongoing monitoring through Equality Impact Assessments.

4. The Scope of the Policy

Trans-Pennine Housing believes that the principle of equality should embrace all the company’s areas of operation.

4.1 Governance

The company will strive to include representation from a full cross section of the community on the Board and other decision making bodies.

All Board Members will receive regular training on equality issues.

Monitoring information on equality issues will be presented to the Boards on a regular basis to ensure that the highest performance standards are being met and that the company is upholding the principles laid down in this policy. This will require reports at both the Trans-Pennine Housing Board and the local Green Vale Homes and Pennine Housing 2000 Boards.

4.2 Meeting housing need

The company will work closely with each organisation’s local authority to identify and address the differing housing and related needs of the local community, paying particular attention to the needs of minority communities and other groups facing discrimination.

Partnerships and joint working arrangements with relevant specialist agencies and organisations will be actively considered where objectives are related to equality issues.

4.3 Investment work and new development

New build development and improvements to existing stock or company premises will be carried out in full consultation with existing tenants, other service users (where appropriate), housing applicants (where practical) and staff. Differing needs (whether physical or cultural) will be given genuine consideration in the planning and design process, thus avoiding indirect discrimination against the need of any particular group or community. Where necessary advice should be sought from relevant agencies and organisations representing the needs of these particular groups or communities.

The company will be proactive and innovative in seeking housing solutions for all, as part of its commitment to developing sustainable communities.

4.4 Access to housing

The company will ensure that its letting and allocation policy and procedures are as clear, open, accountable and fair as possible, giving everyone an equal access to housing. This applies to both the allocations policies adopted within Green Vale Homes, and to the Choice Based Lettings (CBL) system introduced into Pennine Housing 2000.

The company will develop and maintain systems to monitor housing applicants and new tenants to ensure that no one group or community is discriminated against. Trans-Pennine Housing will work with each organisation's local authority to develop strategies with the aim of removing any barriers which may discourage applicants from certain groups or communities.

4.5 Housing and related services

Trans-Pennine Housing aims to ensure that its housing and related services can be easily accessed and meet the differing needs of all tenants and service users. The company considers consultation and tenant involvement as valuable tools in achieving this aim. It is vital that every tenant or service user is given an equal opportunity to express views about service delivery etc. or get involved. The company will take active steps to encourage involvement from disadvantaged or underrepresented groups.

A key part of this work is to undertake an information gathering exercise to fully understand our customers and their backgrounds in terms of the various equality areas (age, disability, faith, gender, race, ethnicity and sexuality). This needs to be addressed within the overall Equality and Diversity framework.

Discriminatory behaviour or acts of harassment will not be tolerated in any area of the company's activities by or towards tenants, staff, Board Members, service users or contractors. If such behaviour is encountered it will be addressed using all appropriate measures up to and including dismissal or possession proceedings.

Further information is contained in the Harassment Policy.

4.6 Employment

The company's recruitment policy is to employ the most suitable person for each position. The principles of equality and diversity are central to this process. Training will be given to all staff involved in recruitment to ensure they understand and apply the Equality and Diversity Policy.

Trans-Pennine Housing believes that, where possible, its workforce should reflect the community it serves and that all groups should be properly represented at all levels within the organisation. The company will strive to eliminate all forms of discrimination in the area of recruitment and employment and take positive measures to encourage employees and potential employees from under-represented groups to take up employment and promotion opportunities. In line with guidance from the CRE, these measures include:

- placing job adverts so they reach members of under-represented or disadvantaged groups;
- participating in training or job placement schemes targeting aforementioned groups;
- encouraging employees of these groups to apply for internal job vacancies;
- training for promotion or skill training for employees of these groups who show potential but lack experience and expertise.

In addition, it is company policy that all applicants with disabilities who meet the essential requirements for a suitable job will be given an interview.

Further information is contained in the Recruitment Policy.

Trans-Pennine Housing strives to provide a working environment which is pleasant, friendly, supportive and non-discriminatory. The company will take all reasonable measures to meet the different work-related needs of its staff. This includes, but is not confined to, providing disabled access to and around company office buildings and provision for staff who have a sensory impairment. In addition, the company will be sensitive to the different cultural and religious needs of its staff.

Trans-Pennine Housing will not tolerate racist, sexist, homophobic or any other form of discriminatory behaviour by any of its staff, Board Members, contractors, suppliers or consultants. Any such behaviour, if proven, will result in disciplinary action in line with the appropriate disciplinary procedure.

Again, in order to fully understand our workforce we will ensure that as far as possible we have relevant information from each employee that will allow us to ensure that we can treat all employees correctly and fairly in line with equality regulation, as well as being an employer of choice.

4.7 Training

Compulsory equality and diversity training is a vital part of the training programme for all staff and Board Members. In addition staff and Board Members will be required to attend “refresher” training sessions, as required, incorporating new legal or good practice developments in the area of equality. There will also be regular training for front line staff on specific issues including but not limited to racial harassment, cultural diversity and sensitivity, disability awareness etc.

It is vital that all staff and Board Members understand and value diversity in both the community and working environment. They must take equal responsibility for implementing the company’s Equality and Diversity Policy and it is the responsibility of the Board and the Chief Executive to ensure that compliance with the policy is achieved across the whole organisation.

4.8 Contractors, suppliers and consultants

To achieve and retain a place on the company’s approved list, contractors, suppliers and consultants must declare a commitment to upholding the principle of equality in all areas of their operation. They must also abide by the company’s Equality and Diversity Policy.

As outlined in the Procurement Policy, contractors, consultants and suppliers with a minimum of 10 employees will be required to demonstrate an active commitment to equality in areas of staffing/recruitment/customer service in line with the Housing Corporation’s Regulatory Code. Guidance to help achieve Housing Corporation expectations is available.

Any proven breach of the company’s Equality and Diversity Policy shall result in removal from the approved list.

Trans-Pennine Housing supports construction-related training or employment schemes, which offer assistance to under-represented or

disadvantaged groups. This support includes facilitating training or work placements with its partner organisations.

5. Monitoring and review

The composition of the workforce of Trans-Pennine Housing will be monitored in terms of ethnic origin, gender and disability and the other areas of equality to measure the effectiveness of the Equality and Diversity Policy and assess the need to address any under-representation. Similarly, job applicants will be monitored to assess the effectiveness of recruitment practices.

Housing applicants and tenants and service users will also be monitored (via lettings forms and tenant satisfaction surveys) to ensure that targets are being met in terms of meeting different needs and providing a fair and equitable service. This will require us to gather initial information on our customers to build a base of information on who exactly our customers are, and then to look at how best we can meet their needs.

The role of Trans-Pennine Housing’s Equality Group is to examine equality issues and examples of good practice, review and monitor the company’s performance in this area, and suggest innovative ways in which equality issues can be addressed both internally and externally. The group produces an annual report which goes to the Board.

The relevant Boards shall receive statistical and other information throughout the year relating to assessment of need, allocation, harassment and recruitment.

This policy will be reviewed in line with the relevant service review or at least every 5 years.

6. Responsibility for this policy

Responsible committee	Board
Policy development and monitoring	Board
Implementation	Director of Corporate Services