

***FORTH HOUSING ASSOCIATION LIMITED***  
***EQUALITIES POLICY***

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# **FORTH HOUSING ASSOCIATION LIMITED**

## **EQUALITIES POLICY**

### **1.0 General Context**

1.1 The equality policy represents a key strategic policy of Forth Housing Association. This arises due to its focal concern in developing sustainable communities and its commitment to equal opportunities in its role as a provider of housing to those in housing need, and, as an employer . (1)The Association is referred to generally as “we” throughout this document.

We have developed this policy for **four** principal reasons, namely to:







-  ensure that our services meet law and good practice requirements;
-  satisfy principles of effective governance;
-  address any form of discrimination or harassment in our area of operation ; and
-  promote equality throughout all of our services by ensuring that no one is excluded from access to our services through discrimination.

The policy outlines our strategy for achieving effective implementation of our equality policy objectives.

The method of implementing this strategy is incorporated into our Business Plan objectives.

1.2 The individual sections of this policy explain key components of our equality strategy.

These components are:

-  our policy aims and objectives;
-  the policy focus and action planning;
-  committee and staff training;
-  monitoring performance;
-  promoting equality; and
-  policy review.

### **2.0 Background**

2.1 We are committed to promoting an environment of respect, understanding, and eliminating discrimination by providing equal opportunity for all. As the Government continues to tackle discrimination and promote equality a number of new and updated pieces of legislation have come into force. We support the Government in its aim in promoting a culture of dignity and respect for all and eliminating discrimination.

Sustainable communities are communities that are areas in which people want to live and work and that are free from discrimination and harassment.

### **3.0 Scope**

3.1 A commitment to this policy is required from all staff, Committee members and others with whom we may work (eg contractors). We also expect the same commitment from all those who receive a service from us and we will promote this policy in all our dealings with them.

### **4.0 Legal context and policy objectives**

4.1 This section outlines the legal context in which we operate as this regulates our equality policy and related action plan.

This summary covers the following issues:

- legal developments;
- equal opportunities defined; and
- our equality objectives.

The main law relating to equal opportunities is contained in Appendix 1.

### **4.2 Legal developments**

Promoting social inclusion through comprehensive equality programmes is central to Scottish Parliament strategy. This commitment to equality is reflected in the current legal framework that has evolved to address many forms of discrimination. The law relating to equality covers both employment and service issues, as does this policy in its policy objectives and action plan.

Although the law is complex and increasingly diverse in the issues that it embraces, we integrate legal requirements throughout our services. This means that legal duties are built into general policies and practices thus ensuring that we meet our legal obligations. This process is sometimes referred to as “equality mainstreaming.”

The law covers primary law (Acts of Government (2)) and secondary legislation (Statutory Instruments) that introduce the detailed procedures relating to primary law. Our policies and procedures take primary and secondary law into account.

### **5.0 Equal opportunities defined**

5.1 The Scotland Act 1998 defines equal opportunities to mean:

“ ... the prevention, elimination or regulation of discrimination between persons on the grounds of sex or marital status, or racial grounds, or on grounds of disability, age, sexual orientation, language or social origin, or of other personal attributes, including beliefs or opinions such as religious beliefs or political opinions”

(Schedule 5, L2)

This means that all of our services should address discrimination based on any of these grounds.

Equality is making sure people are treated fairly and given fair chances. Equality is not about treating everyone in the same way, but recognises that their needs are met in different ways. Equality focuses on those areas covered by the law namely the key areas of race, gender disability, nationality, religion, belief, sexual orientation and age.

## **6.0 Our equality objectives**

6.1 Our equality objectives detail the principles that we will implement throughout all housing services. These reflect, in effect, our standards that we use to measure policy implementation. The principles express general commitments and these are then integrated throughout actual organisational services. Each individual policy contains, therefore, its own specific equality commitments that derive from the objectives detailed below. These elements are implemented into our action plan that is the practical document used to mainstream equality effectively. In short: effective mainstreaming of equalities depends on the implementation of all of the equality principles detailed below.

### **6.2 Equality law and good practice**

We provide housing services in line with legal requirements and taking account of good practice guidance.

### **6.3 Policies, procedures and practices**

We integrate equality matters throughout organisational policies, procedures and practices. This includes incorporation of legal and good practice guidance.

### **6.4 Recruitment policies and procedures**

We apply equality legal and good practice principles throughout our recruitment and selection process. Employment issues covering equalities are incorporated into employment policies.

The individual sections in this policy provide further information on key issues such as promoting equality, training and monitoring.

## **6.5 Addressing discrimination and harassment**

We actively take steps to address any form of unlawful or unfair discrimination (or harassment) within our area. This includes implementing positive measures to promote public awareness of the various forms of discrimination.

## **6.6 Service provision**

We provide services to meet the needs of individual service users, including making reasonable adjustments, as required. This is called providing “accessible services.”

For example, we hold meetings in venues that are accessible to disabled people.

Again, we provide public documents in plain language, will translate into relevant languages and in other formats such as large print and audio-tape, on request.

## **6.7 Information**

We ensure that public information is accurate and reflects law and good practice in plain language. This is essential to ensure that service users are aware of their rights. We also provide information in appropriate languages, on request.

## **6.8 Working with other agencies**

We work with a range of local agencies, in particular Stirling Council and Happy to Translate, to promote our equality objectives.

## **6.9 Appointing consultants and contractors**

We require any consultants and contractors that we appoint to have an equality policy that reflects our equality commitments or to agree to abide by our policy.

## 6.10 Training

We are implementing a comprehensive training strategy that ensures that staff and committee members receive ongoing equality training. The employee and Committee members' induction programme includes an overview of the equal opportunities policy.

## 6.11 Monitoring performance

We monitor all housing services through our performance indicators. This is essential to ensure, not only that our services don't discriminate, but actively promote equality matters.

## 6.12 Tenant consultation

We have established a tenant participation strategy that sets out how we consult with tenants and service users. This process includes consultation on key strategic policies such as the equality policy.

## 6.13 Complaints

We promote the rights of service users to make complaints if they are dissatisfied with how we operate this policy. We use the information gleaned through complaints to improve service delivery.




## 7.0 Section 3: Policy focus and action planning

7.1 The equality policy focuses on achieving effective mainstreaming of equality matters throughout all our services.

## 8.0 Promoting equality

8.1 This section outlines the range of actions that we take to promote equality objectives.

These are covered under the following headings:

-  accessible services;
-  publicity materials and information; and
-  positive action programmes.

## 8.2 Accessible services

We carry out regular reviews of services, including the physical condition of the housing stock. The purpose of reviews is to enable us to make reasonable adjustments, whenever possible, to eliminate physical barriers.

### 8.3 **Publicity materials and information**

We monitor the satisfaction of service users with the quality of information that we provide.

For example, we seek feedback regarding the accuracy and quality of our newsletter and other information leaflets. This assessment addresses such questions as to whether documentation is easily understandable.

### 8.4 **Positive action programmes**

Positive action programmes involve taking proactive measures to address barriers experienced by certain groups.

For example, people from black and minority communities and disabled people have traditionally faced barriers in accessing employment in housing.





We are working towards reducing these barriers.

## 9.0 **Committee and staff training**

9.1 We promote ongoing training for committee and staff members as quality training is essential for effective equality mainstreaming.

We assess training needs through our internal training strategy. This recognises that equality training should be linked to the specific job that staff do.




This means that equality training is diverse and covers a broad range of issues. These are explained by reference to:

-  induction;
-  legal and good practice matters;
-  organisational practice; and
-  monitoring performance.

For committee members, equality training focuses on policy development and monitoring issues as this is the main role of members.

### 9.2 **Induction**

This type of training involves mainly the provision of general information to new staff or committee members about:

-  our equality policy;
-  harassment policy; and
-  action plan commitments.

### 9.3 **Legal and good practice matters**

This type of training involves providing specific staff with more detailed knowledge of law and good practice guidance.

For example, we provide housing officers with detailed training on the Code of Guidance in Race Equality.

Again, we provide training to enhance staff awareness or consciousness of barriers to equality experienced by certain groups. For instance, barriers that people experience on grounds of age, disability, race, sex or sexuality.

### 9.4 **Organisational practice**

This type of training involves training on organisational policies and practices, including the equality policy and action plan. This ensures that training on equality matters is included in all training programmes. This is another example of how equality matters are mainstreamed effectively as part of routine activities.

### 9.5 **Monitoring performance**

This type of training is essential for a variety of reasons. Firstly, staff must be aware of why data are gathered and how we use this to inform planning and policy strategies.

Secondly, this training enables staff to answer queries raised by members of the public concerning data gathering.

Thirdly, monitoring is a key role for senior staff and committee members; and training enables them to evaluate equality trends critically.

## 10.0 **Monitoring performance**




10.1 Monitoring performance is an important part of effective governance. We collect and monitor information that will help staff and Committee ensure that no groups are discriminated against in relation to employment, participation or rehousing opportunities. This has a crucial role to play in



allowing us to determine whether or not all groups are being treated equally. We have, therefore, established a comprehensive range of performance indicators that we use to measure our performance. These indicators are incorporated into all individual policies and procedures and include equality indicators.

This section summarises some key issues that we presently monitor; these are divided into human resources and service matters.

It is stressed that indicators are reviewed on an ongoing basis and the list of issues monitored changes based on:

-  an assessment of local issues;
-  resources; and
-  capability of information technology systems.

- 10.2 Finally, it is noted that our indicators cover both quantitative and qualitative measures. Quantitative measures focus on “numbers of things”; while quality measures consider standards.








When monitoring service levels we will be aware of potential discrimination and will take all necessary steps to eliminate discrimination.

### 10.3 **Human resource monitoring**

The Director will have lead responsibility for monitoring human resources.

### 10.4 **Service matters monitoring**

This covers the following services:

-  allocations;
-  antisocial behaviour and harassment;
-  arrears and benefits;
-  development;
-  estate management;
-  maintenance; and
-  tenants' rights

#### **Note**

We monitor the issues below by reference to the grounds contained in the Scotland Act 1998. We may monitor different issues in respect to each activity based on information held on file.

### 10.5 **Allocations, Antisocial Behaviour and Harassment, Estate Management, Tenants Rights and Maintenance**

The Tenant Services Manager will have lead responsibility for monitoring equalities in allocations, anti-social behaviour and harassment, arrears and benefits, estate management, tenants' rights and maintenance.

## 10.6 **Development**

The Development Co-ordinator will have lead responsibility for monitoring equalities in development.

When monitoring service levels we will be aware of potential discrimination, and will take all necessary steps to eliminate discrimination.

## 11.0 **Policy review**

- 11.1 This policy will be reviewed at least every 3 years by the Management Committee and staff are responsible for ensuring that it meets legal and good practice requirements.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Legal framework

## **Equalities Policy**

### **Appendix 1: Legal guidance**

For well over 40 years, the UK has had in place a wide range of discrimination legislation which has sought to protect its citizens, ensure they are treated fairly and have equality of opportunity in respect to goods and services they receive, and in employment.

This following legislation has particular significance to housing associations and co-operatives:

- **Equalities Act 2010**

Prior to the introduction of the Equality Act 2010, discrimination legislation consisted of nine major pieces of discriminatory legislation, over 100 statutory instruments and considerable supporting documentation, including over 2,500 pages of guidance. These had been developed over a period of 40 years. As a result, discrimination legislation was complex and the implications for associations and co-operatives were often difficult to understand.

A key aim of the new Act was to harmonise discrimination law into a single act, which would be far easier for employers, service providers and public bodies to understand.

- **The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010**

Section 39 of The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010, which received Royal Assent in April 2010 states that:

Social Landlords, when performing housing services, must act in a manner which encourages equal opportunities and in particular the observance of the law for the time being relating to equal opportunities.

This in effect means that associations are expected to comply with the new Equality Act.

- **Human Rights Act 1998**

Although the Human Rights Act applies to public bodies and not directly to housing associations and co-operatives, recent case law as outlined earlier, means that it is possible that legal cases could be brought against associations and co-operatives under the Human Rights Act 1998, if they were carrying out an action deemed to be a function of a public body. It may well be good practice for housing associations and co-operatives to consider ensuring that their policies, processes and procedures take account of the Human Rights Act 1998 in a number of areas (for example allocations).