

## Equality and Diversity Policy

| Version Control |              |               |             |               |                  |                  |
|-----------------|--------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|------------------|------------------|
| Version         | Date drafted | Date approved | Approved by | Date reviewed | Next review date | Owner            |
| Final v1        | 12/01/2024   | 29/01/2024    | Board       | N/A           | 12/01/2027       | Finance Director |

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1. Westmoreland Supported Housing Limited (WSHL) wants to make sure that we deliver services that are inclusive, fair, accessible to all and which respond and support the needs of our customers. We also recognise the value that diversity brings to the workplace and want to ensure that our Board, employees and contractors reflect and represent a wide range of views and backgrounds.
- 1.2. Equality ensures people are treated fairly and given fair chances. It recognises different needs and promotes fair and inclusive opportunity, access, participation and contribution. Diversity acknowledges and respects differences within and between groups of people.
- 1.3. We aim through this policy and training to ensure that all Board Members, employees, potential employees, residents, potential residents, contractors, suppliers and agency services are made aware of our commitment to equality and diversity.
- 1.4. This policy will enable us to:
  - Deliver a good regulatory compliant standard of customer service which ensures all customers are treated fairly and with respect
  - Actively research and provide suitable services sensitive to diverse customer needs
  - Ensure all employees know and meet equality and diversity principles
  - Provide an environment where people feel included and can make choices
  - Ensure that at work all employees can grow and develop

### 2. Legal and Regulatory responsibilities (not exhaustive)

- 2.1. The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard (2017) requires registered housing providers to:
  - Treat all tenants with fairness and respect
  - Demonstrate that they understand the different needs of their tenants

2.2. Relevant legislation includes:

- Equality Act 2010
- Public Sector Equality Duty 2011
- Human Rights Act 1998

### 3. Definitions

3.1. **Protected characteristics** – these are protected characteristics that are covered by the Equality Act 2010 and are as follows:

- Age – people of all ages are protected under the Equality Act 2010. Some acts of direct or indirect discrimination can be justified if it is ‘a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim’.
- Disability – a person is disabled if they have a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. There is a duty to make reasonable adjustments to assist in overcoming the disadvantages of the impairment. Individuals are also protected from discrimination arising from something connected with their disability where it could be reasonably expected that the business would know that the person has a disability. It is also unlawful in most circumstances to request information about the health of job candidates prior to making a job offer. Employees who are disabled or become disabled are encouraged to inform their employer so that appropriate support can be explored.
- Gender reassignment – transsexual people who propose to, start, or complete a process to change their gender regardless of whether or not this involves medical procedures are protected under the Equality Act 2010. An employee who is absent due to such procedures cannot be treated less favourably than if the absence was due to sickness, injury or some other reason.
- Marriage or civil partnership – the Equality Act 2010 protects employees who are married or in civil partnerships from discrimination on account of this status.
- Pregnancy and maternity – female employees and applicants are protected against discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy and maternity during the period of pregnancy and any statutory maternity leave.
- Race – individuals are protected against discrimination on the grounds of colour, nationality and ethnic or national origins.

- Religion or belief – individuals are protected against discrimination on the grounds of their religion or lack of religion and belief or lack of belief. A religion can be any religion that has a clear structure and belief system. A belief can be a religious or philosophical belief that affects a substantial aspect of human life and behaviour. Political beliefs are not protected.
  - Sex - refers to both men and women.
  - Sexual orientation – refers to bisexual, gay, heterosexual and lesbian people.
- 3.2. **Direct Discrimination** - constitutes less favourable treatment of one person than another, or than another would be treated, because of one or more of the protected characteristics outlined above. Equally, direct discrimination can occur where there is less favourable treatment of an individual because they have, or are thought to have a protected characteristic (perceptive discrimination) or because they associated with someone who has a protected characteristic (associative discrimination).
- 3.3. **Associative Discrimination** - is direct discrimination involving less favourable treatment of a person because they are associated with someone who possesses one or more of the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex and/or sexual orientation.
- 3.4. **Perceptive Discrimination** - is direct discrimination involving less favourable treatment of a person because it is perceived that they have one or more of the following protected characteristics even though they do not: age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex and/or sexual orientation.
- 3.5. **Indirect Discrimination** - is when a provision, criterion, rule, policy or practice of the business which is applicable to all employees or applicants equally, is applied but has a disproportionate effect on an individual or group of individuals who share one or more of the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation and/or marriage and civil partnership, and cannot be shown by the business to be a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.
- 3.6. **Victimisation** - is when a person is treated less favourably than another employee or candidate because the individual has made or supported a complaint or raised a grievance under the Equality Act 2010 or is suspected of doing so.
- 3.7. **Harassment** - is 'unwanted conduct related to a relevant protected characteristic, which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual'. Relevant protected characteristics are as follows: age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex and/or sexual orientation. Employees can complain of harassment even if the offending behaviour is not directed at them and even if they do not have the protected characteristic themselves.

- 3.8. **Third Party Harassment** - is harassment as described above, of employees by other individuals who are not employees of the business e.g. clients and suppliers etc. The business may be liable when harassment has occurred on at least two previous occasions and is aware of the incidents and yet steps have not been taken to resolve the matter.

#### 4. **Scope**

- 4.1. This policy applies to all Board Members, employees, prospective employees, customers, contractors, visitors and suppliers; and covers employment, service delivery and all business activities, including for example:

- access to information and advice
- lettings and tenancy management
- rents and service charges
- customer engagement
- dealing with incidents like harassment (including domestic violence)
- procurement and supply
- governance
- asset management

#### 5. **Our commitment**

- 5.1. We are committed to the principles of Equality and Diversity in employment and service delivery and will adhere to the provisions of the Equality Act 2010, by opposing discrimination, victimisation and harassment on the grounds of all recognised protected characteristics. Equality and Diversity is core to our business and our aim is to ensure that it is reflected in all our policies, practices and services. Our Board will actively promote fairness and the elimination of prejudice in all the activities of the organisation with the aim of demonstrably exceeding the minimum legal requirements for equality.

- 5.2. We aim to:

- Treat everyone fairly, with dignity and respect
- Promote equality of opportunity for access to our homes and services
- Value diversity and talents of all individuals
- Identify barriers to employment opportunities, access to homes and delivering services and take positive action to promote equality
- Challenge prejudice, discrimination and harassment

5.3. We will:

- Oppose direct and indirect discrimination of any kind
- Support employees, customers and Board Members who challenge inappropriate behaviour
- Meet statutory and regulatory responsibilities
- Follow guidance from regulatory bodies and from the Equality and Human Rights Commission
- Seek to influence positively the practices of key stakeholders and partners
- Make explicit reference to equality and diversity issues in our business plans, strategies and policies
- Deal promptly, firmly and consistently with any cases of discrimination or harassment reported by customers or employees

5.4. The practical application is reflected in our recruitment, employment and service delivery policies and procedures.

## **6. Equality and diversity in our service delivery**

6.1. We believe embracing diversity will help us provide better services. We are committed to building and delivering services that are accessible, relevant and of use to the individuals and communities where we work. In our service delivery we will:

- Improve our understanding of our customers and their needs
- Recognise how we deliver services may need to be different for different individuals
- Have an accessible, fair and transparent process for letting our homes and work with local authorities who provide nominations to ensure it is applied
- Use a wide range of communication methods to help us meet diverse customer needs, including easy read documents
- Make available a range of ways in which customers can be involved in shaping and improving our services
- Make customers aware of our policy and their responsibilities
- Respond promptly to complaints of harassment and work with partners to prevent and reduce incidences of harassment.

## **7. Equality and diversity in our employment practices**

7.1. We recognise the benefits of a diverse workforce which understands and serves our diverse communities. In our recruitment and employment we will:

- Provide equal employment opportunities through fair recruitment and selection procedures so that those with appropriate skills and experience are appointed
- Communicate our recruitment advertising to a diverse range of potential applicants
- Work to recruit employees who ideally reflect the diversity of our communities

- Treat all employees on their merits and abilities, making any reasonable adjustments to enable them to do their job
- Apply equality and diversity to learning and development opportunities
- Provide a safe working environment where differences are recognised and valued
- Ensure employment opportunities are flexible to attract a variety of employees.

7.2. Everyone's attitudes and behaviours are important. Employees will be reminded of actions that are not permissible and unlawful when applied during the course of their employment whether or not this takes place within the immediate workplace. Failure to adhere to WSHL's Equality and Diversity policy may lead to disciplinary action.

## **8. Equality and diversity in appointing contractors, suppliers and consultants**

8.1. We will ensure our contractors, suppliers and consultants are aware of this policy and will work with those that have similar objectives. In appointing suppliers, contractors and consultants we will:

- Require our contractors and consultants working on our behalf to apply our equality and diversity principles
- Work with our contractors and consultants to encourage them to recruit people who reflect the diversity of the communities in which they work
- Use suppliers who are committed to equality and diversity

## **9. Monitoring and review**

9.1. WSHL will monitor our performance against this policy by collecting, as far as possible, data from applicants, customers, employees, board members, contractors and consultants. We aim to report on:

- Governance
- Staffing
- Lettings
- Customer satisfaction
- Reports of harassment
- Customer involvement

## **10. Policy review**

10.1. This policy will be reviewed every three years.