



H O U S I N G A S S O C I A T I O N

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICY FEB 2014

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IN LARGE PRINT, ON TAPE AND IN A VARIETY OF
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VERSION IN A DIFFERENT FORMAT**

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1. INTRODUCTION

Ruchazie Housing Association strives to be an equal opportunities organisation and is committed to providing fairness and equality of opportunity in all aspects of our work.

Our aim is to promote an environment of respect, understanding, encouraging diversity and eliminating discrimination by providing equality of opportunity for all.

The following equal opportunities statement therefore summarises our overall aim in this area:

Ruchazie Housing Association will aim to treat all individuals or groups of individuals equally, avoiding unfair discrimination on any grounds in relation to service delivery, opportunities or employment

Ruchazie Housing Association will seek to promote and to achieve equality of treatment and opportunity for all without discrimination or prejudice on any grounds including:

- Age
- Disability
- Race
- Religion and belief
- Sex
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Sexual orientation
- Gender reassignment

The above are known as 'protected characteristics' or the grounds upon which discrimination is unlawful under The Equality Act 2010.

The omission of other groups should not be interpreted as condoning discrimination or indicating a lack of commitment to extending equal opportunities principles to them.

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE POLICY

Ruchazie Housing Association aims to ensure that it provides equal opportunities:

- In the services we provide to residents, applicants, clients and to members of the public.
- In access to membership of the Association, the Management Committee and generally everyone who wishes to become involved in the governance and overall management of the Association.
- In the recruitment and employment of staff.
- In relation to the hiring of contractors / consultants.

Additionally, we aim to ensure that all residents are made aware of our commitment to equal opportunities and also that our staff are aware of the Association's commitment to and obligations in relation to equal opportunities.

We consider any form of, direct or indirect, discrimination to be unacceptable, in terms of good practice, social justice and legal duty.

Direct Discrimination: Treating a person differently from another because of a protected characteristic.

Indirect Discrimination: Putting in place a rule or policy or way of doing things that has a worse impact on someone with a protected characteristic than someone without one, when this cannot be objectively justified.

Discrimination by Association: This is when a person is discriminated against because they are associated with someone who has a protected characteristic.

Discrimination by Perception: Occurs when someone is discriminated against because they are wrongly thought to have a particular protected characteristic or are treated as if they do.

Harassment: Unwanted conduct (either actions or words) related to a protected characteristic which has the purpose or effect of violating someone's dignity or which creates a hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for someone with a protected characteristic.

Victimisation: Treating someone badly because they have taken (or might be taking) action under the Equality Act on their own behalf or in support of someone else.

3. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND REGULATORY COMPLIANCE

Ruchazie Housing Association will have full regard to the requirements of the Scottish Housing Regulator's 'Performance Standards' (and subsequent Scottish Social Housing Charter Indicators) in its approach to equal opportunities.

GS2.1 Equal Opportunities: We embrace diversity, promote equal opportunities for all and eliminate unlawful discrimination in all areas of our work.

Some of the other Performance Standards which also influence this policy:

GS3.1 Responsiveness to service users: We place the people who want to use our services at the heart of our work. We treat people with respect and are responsive to their views and priorities

AS1.3 Tenancies: We offer the most secure form of tenancy compatible with the purpose of housing. The agreement makes clear the rights and duties of the tenant and landlord. We act to uphold these rights and duties in a fair and responsible manner.

GS1.2 Policies and Procedures: We have high quality written policies and procedures to guide our actions.

GS1.3 Commitment to continuous improvement: We actively strive for continuous improvement in all that we do.

GS1.4 Resource Management: We make best use of our people and our physical resources to achieve high efficiency, best value, continuous improvement and to deliver high quality services that meet the needs of our service users.

The Scottish Social Housing Charter

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 made provision for the establishment of the Scottish Social Housing Charter in which the Scottish Government sets out the standards and outcomes that social landlords should aim to achieve when carrying their housing activities.

The Charter was approved by the Scottish Parliament in March 2012 and it came into force on 1 April 2012.

The Scottish Housing Regulator uses Charter Indicators to monitor and assess landlords' performance.

The Association will have full regard to these requirements in its approach to equal opportunities.

1. Equalities: Social landlords perform all aspects of their housing services so that:

- Every tenant and other customer has their individual needs recognised, is treated fairly and with respect, and receives fair access to housing and housing services.

Legal Requirements:

This policy and its implementation will reflect our statutory and contractual obligations. This includes (but is not an exhaustive list):

The Equality Act 2010

The Human Rights Act 1998

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 & 2010

The Scottish Secure Tenancy Agreement

The Data Protection Act 1998

We will ensure that we comply with all regulatory, statutory and contractual obligations towards our residents, applicants, staff, clients and members of the public in implementing this equal opportunity policy.

We are committed to ensuring equality of opportunity underpins all of our policies, processes and procedures.

4. STAFF AND COMMITTEE RESPONSIBILITIES

We recognise that the success of this policy depends on the degree of commitment in practice by all members of our staff and Management Committee.

The Management Committee has the ultimate / overall responsibility for ensuring that the Association conforms to and implements the principles outlined in this policy in every area of our activities.

The Director is responsible for the day to day implementation of this policy, for monitoring its operational effectiveness and also to actively promote equality of opportunity.

We expect all members of staff and Management Committee to:-

- Apply/ implement the policy in their activities and work for Ruchazie Housing Association
- Challenge any discriminatory behaviour within the Association that they become aware of.
- Report to the Director any actual instances of discrimination.

In addition we will ensure that all agents, contractors or consultants we employ are committed to operating under the same equal opportunities principles i.e. to adopt and implement an appropriate equal opportunities policy of their own or abide by our policy.

5. COLLECTION OF EQUALITIES INFORMATION

Ruchazie Housing Association will seek to collect and monitor information that will allow us to ensure that no groups are discriminated against in relation to employment, membership or housing opportunities.

All information will be collected on a voluntary basis and kept in complete confidence.

Information will be gathered specifically on:

- Applications for housing
- Existing tenants
- Applications for membership
- Existing memberships
- The composition of the Management Committee
- The composition of staff
- Applications for employment

The following information will be collected and monitored:

- Gender
- Ethnic Origin
- Age
- Disability

There are certain areas however, where we believe that to ask individual details would be inappropriate and intrusive and, as such, it is our policy not to ask them.

These include questions relating to sexuality, religion, political beliefs and certain illnesses (unless medical points are being sought as part of a housing application). Therefore we will not set targets or/ and monitor our performance in these areas.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES TARGET SETTING AND MONITORING

We are committed to measuring our performance against the aims and objectives of this policy to ensure the promotion of equal opportunities.

This will be done by setting targets and monitoring performance against these.

The main objectives of monitoring are to:

- Identify if objectives and targets are being met
- Establish and highlight where possible inequalities may be occurring
- Determine which weaknesses or omission within policies, procedures or practices may be responsible
- Examine how policies or procedures may be improved to address inequality / improve equality

Frequency of monitoring reports to Management Committee:

- Housing list, suspended applications and lets made – Annually
- General membership – Annually
- Committee membership – Annually
- Contractors, consultants and agents – Annually
- Staff employed during year and overall staff complement – Annually
- Update / Review of Equal Opportunities Action Plan - Annually

7. COMMUNICATIONS IN SPECIFIC FORMATS

We will ensure that our publications / information on all relevant aspects of our activities are clear, easy to understand and do not perpetuate discrimination

Where required, information will be made in suitable alternative forms including other languages, audio tape, large print, braille or through the use of interpreters.

Please note that it is impracticable for us to have all possible formats available immediately.

Our commitment is, therefore, to produce documents in the formats required (or an interpreter if requested) within a reasonable period of time i.e. no greater than 10 working days.

All costs in relation to this will be borne by the Association.

8. PUBLICISING THE EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICY

To maximise awareness this policy is distributed to all employees, Contractors and Consultants, it forms part of the Committee Members Handbook and is made available to all tenants on request.

It is available on request, free of charge, to any member of the public from our Offices or via download from our website.

9. BREACHES OF THE EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICY

Ruchazie Housing Association will not tolerate discriminatory practices and breaches of equal opportunities legislation.

Any allegations against an employee or committee member will be investigated thoroughly by the Director. If the allegation is made against the Director, the investigation will be conducted by the Chairperson and a senior officer not directly involved. During these investigations advice may be sought from relevant organisations e.g. Employers in Voluntary Housing, the Association's solicitors etc.

The employee(s) / Committee member(s) involved should be advised, as quickly as possible, of the allegations and informed of how Ruchazie Housing Association is planning to investigate the matter. They should also be advised of their right to representation.

The Association's disciplinary procedures should then be used.

Any allegations made against a tenant / resident in the Association's property will be actioned in accordance with our Anti-Social Behaviour Policy and procedures.

10. EMPLOYER RESPONSIBILITIES

Lack of equal opportunities is not only a serious moral issue but also has a significant impact on business performance.

Studies have shown that high levels of motivation are achieved in an environment of respect and fairness.

Ruchazie Housing Association will aim to ensure that all employees are treated with fairness and respect and not be discriminated on the grounds of marriage & civil partnership, sex, race, disability, age, religion or belief, gender reassignment, pregnancy & maternity and sexual orientation, or disadvantaged by any conditions or requirements which cannot be shown to be relevant to performance.

We will therefore ensure all employees are provided with equality of opportunity in the course of their employment starting from recruitment and also ensure that employees are treated with fairness and respect from each other and from members of the public, committee members, and contractors.

We will implement fair and just employment practices ensuring that no job applicant or employee will receive less favourable treatment on any grounds.

We will ensure people are recruited and employees promoted solely on the basis of their own merit, experience, ability and potential. This applies throughout the entire duration of employment as all decisions will be based on only relevant merits.

To highlight our commitment to promoting equality and diversity from the beginning of the employment relationship, all vacancies will be aimed at as wide a group as possible.

The information contained in the advert and all vacancy literature will be clear and accurate to attract the most appropriate candidates from all groups across society, to allow them to decide their own suitability for the vacancy and whether they wish to proceed with applying.

For those that wish to apply we will ensure that all applications have clear instructions for completion and application forms will be free from personal questions that are not relevant to the vacancy and that may lead to discrimination.

We will provide an environment appropriate to the needs of those from all walks of life, and offer a culture that respects and values each other's' differences and promotes dignity, equality and diversity.

All contracts of employment will be issued in accordance with the job role and not the job holder. Employee's terms and conditions will be standard across all employees regardless of any of the protected characteristics. Employees will not receive less favourable terms and conditions for any reason other than relating specifically to the job role and the grade it attracts.

11. TRAINING

Equality and diversity good practice principles will apply throughout all training activities and resources.

The training requirements of Management Committee and staff will be regularly assessed to ensure that they have the necessary skills to effectively implement and monitor this Equal Opportunities Policy.

12. COMPLAINTS/ APPEALS

Anyone who is not happy/ satisfied with the service they have received as a result of this policy has a right to complain. Please see the Association's Complaints Policy for details on how to do this.

13. REVIEW/CONSULTATION

This policy will be reviewed every 3 years unless amendment is prompted by a change in legislation or monitoring/reporting reveals that a change in policy is required sooner.

Policy review will involve consultation with our tenants, other local groups / organisations as appropriate and our Management Committee.

We will take account of any views or representations in revising our policy and service provision to assist in the development of effective service delivery.

We will regularly publish information about our performance in equal opportunities through annual reports or other appropriate methods.

We will also seek feedback from tenants about the operation of this policy through regular satisfaction surveys and any other appropriate methods.

Appendix 1

Equal Opportunities Policy Summary

Equal Opportunity Statement

A commitment to equality of opportunity is one of our core values. We believe that access to work opportunities, housing and the services we provide should be based on merit, equality, fairness and need and that no one should be treated less favourably on the basis of their race, sex disability, age gender reassignment, marriage & civil partnership, pregnancy & maternity, religion or belief and sexual orientation. We expect everyone who works for us or with us to share these beliefs and to support us in trying to achieve this goal.

To help us achieve this we will:

Try through our policies, procedures and working practices to provide equality of opportunity regardless of anyone's sex, race, colour, ethnic origin, religion, disability, marital status, sexuality or age.

Provide training for our staff and committee members.

Develop action plans in specific areas and monitor our progress against them.

Record and analyse information on the sex, ethnic origin, age and disabilities of people who apply to us for jobs or housing (where this information has been provided) and take appropriate action.

Make sure that people who work with us, such as contractors, are aware of our commitment to equality and are willing to adopt the same principles.

Take account of equal opportunity issues when we make decisions about changes to our services of employment practices.

Take action when we consider that a member of staff, a service user or someone who works with us has acted in a way, which is not in keeping with our Equal Opportunities Policy or has caused unlawful discrimination or harassment.

Investigate and respond whenever anyone thinks we have not complied with our own procedures and have failed to provide an equal opportunity.

If you wish a copy of the full Policy Document on Equal Opportunities please contact the Association.

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