



Black & Minority Ethnic Housing Strategy

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Black and Minority Ethnic Strategy

I Introduction

Westward Housing Group promotes equality of opportunity and fairness in its role as a major landlord, service provider and employer. In so doing, we recognise the contribution made by diverse communities to our local areas' economic, social and cultural well being. We strongly oppose all forms of unfair discrimination because this prevents individuals and communities from developing to their full potential and playing an active role in their neighbourhoods and communities

We operate with professionalism, integrity and openness and believe that everyone should be treated with dignity, respect and fairness. We appreciate that some groups or individuals may experience discrimination and disadvantage because of their age, disability, ethnic or national origin, nationality, race or colour, gender, HIV status, marital status, religion or belief, political beliefs, sexual orientation or any other irrelevant factors. It is therefore our intention to seek to redress this through positive action measures where possible.

We recognise that different people and communities may have different needs and this may sometimes mean providing a range of different services to meet these varying needs.

This policy sets out our commitment to promoting and practising equality and diversity, and dealing with any form of discrimination or harassment. It also sets out our plans for implementing, monitoring and co-ordinating progress towards the achievements of our objectives.

This policy is underpinned by relevant laws, Statutory Codes of Practice, the Housing Corporation's Regulatory Code, guidance from the statutory agencies such as the Commission for Equality and Human Rights and the Audit Commission, and others such as the National Housing Federation and the Chartered Institute of Housing.

2 Values and Commitment

We value diversity and treat everyone fairly and with respect, and do not tolerate any form of unfair discrimination, bullying or harassment against our residents, service users, customers, staff, contractors and board members.

Our Business Strategy is based on our values and commitment to 'work to equal opportunities principles'. The Business Plan for 2008/09 includes our vision 'to provide stronger, happy neighbourhoods by:

- Putting communities and their needs at the forefront
- Encouraging employment and training opportunities particularly for Westward residents
- Ensuring equality and diversity are fully reflected in all activities

We are committed to the elimination of racial discrimination in all its forms. In pursuing that commitment the Group accepts two fundamental principles set out in the Macpherson Report on the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence. These are the definitions on “institutional racism” and “racist incidents”

Institutional Racism is the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service for people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen and detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantages minority ethnic people.

A Racist Incident is any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person.

3 Collective and Personal Responsibility

All Board members and staff at Westward Housing Group have a responsibility to implement this policy and to ensure that their actions do not lead to unlawful discrimination.

Everyone at Westward Housing Group has a responsibility to ensure that this policy is put into practice. We expect a commitment from everyone to ensure that their action does not lead to unlawful discrimination, and that housing and specific service delivery needs of BME communities are met.

The Board will receive 6 monthly reports to monitor our performance and give future policy direction.

The Chief Executive, with the support of the Executive Team, has overall responsibility for ensuring the smooth operation of this policy.

All senior managers are responsible for actively promoting this policy in their specific area of responsibility. Deliberate acts of unlawful discrimination, including victimisation, harassment, instruction or pressure to discriminate, will result in serious disciplinary action, possibly including dismissal of employees and termination of contracts with external agents.

Westward Housing Group engages with a wide variety of organisations and individuals, such as contractors, consultants and suppliers, their commitment, support and co-operation to adhere to this policy is essential.

3.4 Sanctions

Deliberate acts of unlawful discrimination, including victimisation, harassment, bullying or pressure to discriminate, will result in serious disciplinary action, possibly including dismissal of Board members or staff, and termination of contracts with service providers.

4 Overall Policy Aims

In considering our specific responsibilities towards tackling the housing and other needs of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Communities we take account of the following:

- The Housing Corporation’s Regulatory Code and Guidance
- Race and Housing Inquiry: The Challenge Report 2001
- The Macpherson Enquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence 1999
- The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2001
- CRE Code of Practice in Housing
- Good Practice from various sources

This strategy is based on the following principles:

- Ensuring that there is no discrimination in the delivery of services
- Meet specific needs of BME tenants and communities
- Take forward and complement our Equality and Diversity Strategy

This policy needs to be read in parallel to our Equality and Diversity Strategy/Policy, and all other business policies.

Westward Housing Group operates across Devon and Cornwall. We have homes in all the major towns and cities in both counties including Plymouth, Torquay, Exeter, Totnes, Newton Abbott, Bideford, Torridge, Tiverton, Truro, St Austell, Bodmin, Bude and Callington. According to the Census 2001, BME population in Devon and Cornwall is less than 1%, compared with 8.5% for Great Britain. The majority of our homes are in Torbay, where the BME population is 1.2%. We are also aware that BME communities are generally represented amongst the younger population. However, as BME communities are so small in numbers, we recognise that they may face multiple disadvantages and will not have the traditional support networks found in areas of high BME populations. Therefore, as a Registered Social Landlord, we fully recognise additional responsibilities on us to promote fairness for BME communities.

Figure 1: Distribution of BME communities in Devon and Cornwall by Local Authority.

Local Authority	% BME	Number BME
Exeter	2.4	2,667
Plymouth	1.6	3,849
Carrick	1.3	1,142
Torbay	1.2	1,555
Penwith	1.1	693
Restormel	1.1	1,051
Teignbridge	1.0	1,209
Torridge	1.0	589
North Devon	1.0	875
South Hams	0.9	736
Kerrier	0.9	832
West Devon	0.9	439
North Cornwall	0.9	724
Mid Devon	0.8	558

East Devon	0.7	878
Caradon	0.7	557

Source 2001 Census

5. Scope of Strategy and targets for 2008-09

- Partnership working to meet unmet housing needs
- Allocation of homes
- Provision of services
- Tenant involvement
- Working with others to promote fairness
- Extending business opportunities for BME communities

i) Partnership working to meet unmet needs

Aim

To ensure that we identify and take steps to meet the housing needs BME communities in our area.

Westward Housing Group works in partnership with 15 local authorities, other local community, voluntary and religious agencies to try to meet housing needs of all sections of the communities in which we work. We forge links with appropriate groups so that disadvantaged communities improve their access to social housing

Action and targets

Very little is known about the needs and family structures of BME communities in the areas where we operate. We will work with the following to identify the specific needs and aspirations of various groups:

- Our own BME tenants
- Other Social Landlords
- Local religious, voluntary and community organisations

We will learn from good practice elsewhere, for example, how BME needs are being met in other parts of the South West and improve our understanding of the ethnic make-up of our community, and update our housing management database using:

- Census data and Neighbourhood Statistics
- Latest Tenant Survey and feedback on specific services
- Local Housing Needs Surveys and Registers
- Lettings, CORE statistics, transfers, refusals
- Complaints analysis
- Service Reviews
- Resident Involvement, for example Service User Groups

Use this information to improve our strategies and plans

Develop partnerships with local authorities, other housing associations and specialist BME agencies to help us understand the needs and aspirations of the BME groups in

our area, and help them access our housing. We will also feed into local authorities' Housing and Community strategies.

Research and assess BME needs and establish best practice to improve our services to the BME community (for example by looking at how other housing associations deal with these issues in other parts of the country.)

We currently work with a number of BME organisations including Plymouth and District Racial Equality Council and the Torbay Race & Religious Priority Action Team (TORPAT)

Target

To identify other local BME organizations and assess opportunities for joint working.

ii) Allocation of homes

Aim

To ensure that lettings to BME households are at least high as their incidence in our local communities.

As a social landlord it is important that our homes are available to all people in the communities in which we work. The aim of the Lettings and Allocations criteria, policy and procedures is to let to those in greatest need. We will review all documents to ensure that they are non-discriminatory. Where necessary, we will introduce local lettings plans.

Action

- Make sure that the percentage of annual lettings to BME households is the same as the percentage of BME applicants on the waiting list
- Investigate the demand/need for transfers from BME tenants as identified in the latest Tenants' Survey
- Check the quality of lettings to BME households through the new tenants survey
- Monitor transfers, mutual exchanges, Shared Ownership and Right to Buy applications by ethnicity (in addition to disability and age)

Target

3% of all lettings will be let to BME communities.

3% of all sales will be to BME communities.

iii) Provision of Services

Aim

To ensure that BME tenants are given an appropriate service to meet their specific needs and circumstances, and that they are as satisfied as others with the services we provide.

We recognise the need to provide access to interpreters for minority languages.

We recognise that racial harassment is a crime, and ensure that our policies and procedures are designed to take swift action to investigate complaints, deal with perpetrators, and support victims and witnesses. We take steps to assist particular vulnerable groups who may fear harassment, by for example, incorporating design features, which enable people to feel secure.

Action

By regularly monitoring the quality of our homes and services by reference to particularly disadvantaged groups it is possible to identify unfair and discriminatory practices and outcomes. We will use information to identify areas where there is possible disadvantage for BME groups and will set targets for improvement where appropriate.

Informal and formal satisfaction surveys include information to allow analysis and compare satisfaction levels of different groups and by complainants.

We will also:

- Offer interpretation and translation facilities for people who do not speak English as their main language (via [Language Line](#) until local agencies can be identified)
- Offer staff who are well trained to deal with customers who do not speak English
- Provide information in other languages where needed

TARGET

We will:

- a) Identify local agencies who can offer translations and interpreting services to current and prospective tenants.***
- b) Review our Racial Harassment policy and procedures to ensure that they meet recognised good practice and include appropriate targets.***
- c) Conduct satisfaction surveys of our BME tenants to identify any specific issues or concerns including harassment.***
- d) Review our survey methods to allow for comparisons of satisfaction levels.***
- e) Ensure that facilities are in place to deal with communication barriers.***

iv) Tenant Involvement

Aim

To ensure that BME tenants given the opportunity to get involved and participate in the design and monitoring of services.

We will work with our existing tenant groups to monitor and set targets for the level of involvement of BME tenants. We will also assist them to achieve targets.

We recognise that some vulnerable groups, including BME tenants, may find it difficult to get involved in the existing tenant participation structures. We will find out from our BME tenants if this is a particular problem for them. If so, we will ask their views on alternative methods for that they can have equal access to tenant involvement.

Action

- Encourage all BME residents to join local residents groups and set targets to make sure that the groups reflect the local community
- Analyse BME satisfaction with participation from the last Tenants' Survey and address any issues
- With our partners in the Housing with Respect Project set up a BME advisory group by March 2008 for the tenants of all partner RSL's
- Continue to train Tenant Board Members and the Area Forums on diversity and the specific needs of BME residents

Target

We will:

- a) ***Establish with other Partners in the Housing With Respect project a BME Housing Advisory Group by March 2008.***

- v) ***Working with others to promote fairness***

Aim

To ensure that Westward Housing Group uses its purchasing power to promote the principles of fairness amongst all communities.

We will ensure that our moral and legal obligations to promote fairness are put into practice when awarding contracts to builders, consultants and suppliers, in accordance with our written procedures for appointment of external agents.

When engaging external agents to work on our behalf, we will require their commitment to conduct themselves in a manner reflecting the Group's Equality and Diversity Policy. Companies will be required to provide details of their own relevant policies. Assistance will be given to small firms where necessary to ensure that standards are met, by for example, asking them to agree to Westward Housing Group' Strategy/Policy.

Decisions on contracts awarded will be based on objective criteria to assess the agents' ability to carry out work to required standards, timetables and budgets.

Target

- a) ***We will review our procurement methods to enable us to use our purchasing power.***
- b) ***We will review our contractors code of conduct***

vi) Extending business opportunities for BME communities

AIM

To ensure that BME businesses are able to tender for work with Westward Housing Group.

We will review our procurement methods to ensure that BME businesses are made aware of services and goods purchased by RSLs, so that they can tender for business opportunities.

Target

- a) ***We will appoint at least one BME contractor or consultant on our approved lists of service providers.***

6. Action Plan for 2008/09

We will take appropriate action to meet the above aims and targets. The Board will receive progress reports every 6 months.

7. Performance Monitoring

We will check our customer profile against the census and our staff profile and set targets for the following areas:

- Membership of the Board
- Employment of Staff
- Contracts awarded for services
- Allocations and lettings
- Aids and adaptations
- Complaints handling
- Communication needs
- Repairs and maintenance
- Income management
- Anti social behaviour
- Tenant participation and customer satisfaction

The data will be reported to the Equality and Diversity Working Group and The Boards 6 monthly and used to further develop services which are appropriate to the needs of the whole community;