

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy (November 2020)

Who this policy applies to:	This policy applies to all staff, Board & committee members and co-optees, volunteers, contractors, partners, tenants and service users.
Review Date (minimum every three years)	This Policy is subject to a review in 2022
Policy Author/Reviewer and Job Title	Shahron Shah, Chief Executive

1.0 Purpose and scope

- 1.1 Waltham Forest Housing Association (WFHA) is committed to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion. This commitment underpins everything that we do.
- 1.2 This policy is informed by the Equality Act 2010 (see section 4.0) and feedback from tenants, employees, Board members and co-optees.
- 1.3 This Policy applies to all staff, Board & committee members, co-optees, volunteers, contractors, partners, tenants and service users.

2.0 Definitions of equality, diversity and inclusion

- 2.1 Equality – Equality is about treating people fairly, with dignity and respect, and therefore not discriminating against a person or group of people because of (perceived) difference. Treating people fairly starts with ensuring that everyone has access to the same opportunities, including housing, employment and services.
- 2.2 Diversity – Diversity describes the differences between people and groups of people. We place a positive value on those differences because we recognise that diversity brings a valuable range of skills, experiences and insights and therefore better enables us to deliver our business objectives.
- 2.3 Inclusion – Inclusion is about people feeling a sense of belonging and investment, and, feeling respected and valued for who they are. Only when this is achieved, can people fully contribute, participate and thrive.

3.0 Our overarching Policy commitment

- 3.1 We are proud of our diversity and single minded about the continuous pursuit of fairness and equality in the way we treat our people, tenants and service users and how we deliver and improve our services. We will use our influence to uphold this commitment in all our relationships and in all opportunities to represent WFHA and the social housing sector.

4.0 The law

- 4.1 The Equality Act 2010 prohibits all employers and service providers (including educational establishments) from discriminating against, harassing or victimising individuals, on the basis of a “protected characteristic”.
- 4.2 The protected characteristics under the act are:
- 1.0 Age
 - 2.0 Disability
 - 3.0 Gender reassignment
 - 4.0 Marriage and civil partnership
 - 5.0 Pregnancy and maternity
 - 6.0 Race
 - 7.0 Religion and belief
 - 8.0 Sex
 - 9.0 Sexual orientation
- 4.3 The law is subjective. As an example, if a person finds remarks made about them, concerning a protected characteristic, offensive, then that person has been offended. The law only concerns itself with what the person experiences, it does not concern itself with the judgements of others.
- 4.4 Public sector organisations, and any organisation undertaking work on behalf of a public sector organisation, has a legal public sector equality duty in the workplace. This duty is to *prevent and eliminate discrimination, establish and promote equality and equal opportunities, and foster good relations between people with different protected characteristics*. Although Housing Associations are not classed as public sector organisations, WFHA has adopted this equality duty in the workplace.
- 4.5 Sexual equality and equal pay – in law and therefore at WFHA, equal pay means no less favourable pay, benefits and terms and condition of employment where different sexes are doing equal work.
- 4.6 Recruitment and selection are covered by formal policies for both staff and Board members. WFHA complies with the law in terms of taking action to ensure an equal, diverse and inclusive workforce:
- 4.6.1 All names and equality monitoring information supplied with application for vacancies is removed from an individual’s application pack immediately it is received. Such information is not viewed during the selection process.

- 4.6.2 We will consider making reasonable adjustments for a job applicant or employee with a disability. We will guarantee an interview to all disabled job applicants. We seek specialist legal and other advice where required.
- 4.6.3 We will take reasonable “positive action” to help applicants and employees where we consider they:
- Are at a disadvantage because of a protected characteristic and / or
 - Are under-represented in the organisation because of a protected characteristic and / or
 - Have specific needs connected to a specific characteristic.
- 4.7 Breaches of the Equality Act carry significant penalties related to *injury to feelings* and / or *loss of earnings*.

5.0 Organisational delivery / Regulation / Discrimination / Race and racism

5.1 Organisational delivery

- 5.1.1 Our commitments to our tenants, service users, employees, volunteers and Board members are delivered through:
1. Living our values, particularly our value of *Respect* (We respect people and communities through our belief in equality, diversity and inclusion. We believe we have more in common than things that separate us.)
 2. Our Governance Manual, Human Resources policies, operational policies, service delivery and strategic plans and procurement practices
 3. Equality Impact Assessments for changes to the above documents
 4. Provision of training, learning and development
 5. Appropriate Equality, Diversity and Inclusion accreditation (e.g., the Chartered Institute of Housing / Housing Diversity Network)
 6. Active membership of relevant organisations (e.g., the Housing Diversity Network)
 7. Liaison and shared initiatives with specialist organisations (e.g., BME London Landlords and BME National)
 8. An annual Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan

5.2 Regulation

- 5.2.1 As a social housing provider we are subject to regulations set by the Regulator of Social Housing.

5.2.2 Relevant regulation is contained in our Governance Manual including:

- Arrangements for the diverse governance and leadership of WFHA.
- The Consumer Standard *Tenant Involvement and Empowerment*; providers must *understand and respond to the diverse needs of tenants and treat all tenants with fairness and respect.*
- Arrangements for governance reviews.

5.3 Discrimination

5.3.1 There are four types of discrimination:

- Direct discrimination – treating someone with a protected characteristic less favourably than others.
- Indirect discrimination – putting rules or arrangements in place that apply to everyone, but that put someone with a protected characteristic at an unfair disadvantage. It can be lawful to have specific rules or arrangements in place, as long as they are justifiable.
- Harassment – unwanted behaviour (linked to a protected characteristic) that violates someone’s dignity or creates an offensive environment for them. Please refer to our Harassment Policy.
- Victimisation – treating someone unfairly because they have complained about discrimination or harassment.

5.3.2 We know that individuals are more than the sum of one protected characteristic. Many people have interconnected and overlapping protected characteristics that exacerbate disadvantage and discrimination.

5.3.3 We know that many people operate from positions of privilege (e.g., inherent advantages possessed by a white person that the person may or may not be aware of) and / or unconscious bias (e.g., automatically favouring someone who looks like you). WFHA will ensure that these issues are addressed through appropriate learning and development opportunities.

5.3.4 We take a zero-tolerance approach to any form of discrimination and will use all sanctions at our disposal to deal with breaches of this Policy.

5.4 Race and racism – context and recent events

5.4.1 The Equalities Act 2010 defines race as a protected characteristic. Race can mean or include a person’s colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin. Race is not a scientific term and has no meaning in genetics.

- 5.4.2 The idea of racial characteristics stems from eugenics, which is the study of how to arrange reproduction within a human population to increase the occurrence of heritable characteristics regarded as desirable. Eugenics was developed in the 19th century, by Sir Francis Galton among others, as a method of improving the human race. It was increasingly discredited as unscientific and racially biased during the 20th century, especially after the adoption of its doctrines by the Nazis in order to justify their treatment of Jews, disabled people, gay people and other minority groups.
- 5.4.3 There are many forms of racism. In many parts of the UK, racism towards white Europeans is prevalent, particularly eastern Europeans and travelling communities. Irish people have also suffered racism. These kinds of racism are based on spurious beliefs that include judgements about the intelligence or morals of whole groups of people.
- 5.4.4 The subjugation of people of African and Caribbean origin, backed by a spurious and hateful denigration of the black skin colour imposed by Europeans, has meant that, uniquely in the history of the world, black peoples have been subjected to chattel, slavery, segregation and unequal treatment in the Americas and Europe for centuries. This form of racism combines a belief in white supremacy with power (i.e., the power to enslave) and some people believe that only this combination equates to racism.
- 5.4.5 Recently, the killing of George Floyd, witnessed as it was live on social media, and the Black Lives Matter movement that it spawned, has provided the world with an opportunity to deal with the problem of racism much more robustly.
- 5.4.6 There is no longer a middle ground between racists and non-racists. There are only anti-racists and racists in the world. Anti-racists not only accept the existence of racism, and institutional and structural racism, they take action to challenge it. WFHA is an anti-racist organisation.
- 5.4.7 Institutional racism is the collective failure of an institution or organisation that has power (e.g., to provide services), to respond effectively to individuals or groups of people because of their colour, nationality, ethnic or national background. It can be seen in processes, attitudes and behaviours.
- 5.4.8 Structural or systemic racism is the manifestation of racism in every aspect of society from health to education to housing to media to law and order to political power.

6.0 Data protection

- 6.1 Equalities data will be collected, stored, managed and retained according to our Data Protection Policy.

6.2 We will use anonymised equalities data to monitor and evaluate our performance in meeting our commitments under this Policy.

7.0 Responsibilities, monitoring and evaluation

7.1 The Chief Executive is responsible for reviewing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating this Policy, and related annual action plan, scrutiny of which lies with the Human Resources, Remuneration and Governance Committee, on behalf of the Board.

8.0 Review

8.1 This Policy is subject to review at least every two years.