

Title: Diversity Strategy 2015-18	Meeting: Board	
Report author: Muman Ali, Customer Insight & Diversity Coordinator	Date of the meeting: 16 th February 2015	
Item No. 9	Classification: Open	Report type: Decision
Business priorities: To be the best housing provider in Tower Hamlets. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Building one great organisation ▶ Delivering consistently brilliant customer service ▶ Supporting vibrant neighbourhoods ▶ Investing in homes to be proud of 		
Impact for customer: THH is committed to promoting equality and diversity among our customers, staff and the wider community. Our Diversity Policy drives our Diversity Strategy and Action Plan, which sets out our current priorities to improve the living and working environment for all of our residents, partner organisations and staff. These three principles outline our vision for equality and diversity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Accessible: We will provide services that are appropriate but flexible enough to meet people’s needs and preferences so that all residents can access the services they need and want. ▶ Inclusive: We will tackle poverty and inequality and help our residents fulfil their individual potential, to be part of communities and be able to participate in wider Tower Hamlets life. ▶ Fair and seen to be fair: We are a fair and ethical organisation and place to work. Decisions we make are fair, and everyone can see and understand why we made them. 		
Diversity impact: We have made substantial progress in recent years in relation to equality and diversity. Since being awarded the “Excellent” level of the Equality Framework for Social Housing in July 2013 - making us the first housing provider in Tower Hamlets and London with this accreditation, we continue to place the Equality Framework at the heart of our approach to improvement. In doing so, we can continue to deliver		

real and sustainable outcomes that make services more accessible, inclusive and fair for residents and staff.

As a public body the Equality Act 2010 requires us to meet certain statutory duties. In line with the Equality Act 2010, the draft Diversity Strategy 2015-18 will help us to:

- ▶ Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
- ▶ Advance equality of opportunity between people and community groups;
- ▶ Foster good relations between people and community groups.

Cost and Income Implications:

In the current economic climate, public sector providers are being asked to do more with less. Every action proposed in the draft Diversity Strategy 2015-18 has been based on what we have learned about our residents and staff in the last few years, and we know that delivering Vfm outcomes based on evidence and analysis will be crucial to improving performance and satisfaction overall.

We know that certain community groups will benefit from tailored support around financial inclusion, such as that which we have provided to the Somali community, non-English speakers and residents impacted by Welfare Reform.

Risk Management:

2.0 Political, Legislative and Regulatory Change

3.0 Making a Difference

5.0 Organisational Coherence

Summary:

As a business operating in Tower Hamlets, diversity is not optional, it is part of everything we do – both as a service provider and as an employer, not only in the public sector but in social housing too.

Our third Diversity Strategy builds on what we have achieved through the 2009 – 12 and the 2012 -14 Diversity Strategies, and outlines new evidence-based priorities moving forwards over a three year period.

Recommendations:

That Board:

1. **Approves the draft Diversity Strategy 2015-18 and Action Plan**
2. **Decide how frequently Board would like updates on the delivery of the Strategy, and how.** This could be through:
 - a) Quarterly review of progress through Diversity Scorecard;
 - b) Periodic reports on specific areas of strategic interest;

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The previous Diversity Strategy 2012-14 has supported THH in its journey in achieving strategic objectives and the overall vision in becoming the best housing provider in Tower Hamlets.
- 1.2 Through our Diversity Strategy 2012-14, Tower Hamlets Homes has delivered a range of improvements to services. By aligning the Diversity Strategy with the five outcome areas of the Equality Framework for Social Housing, we have ensured that we continue to develop the best housing services in Tower Hamlets, with services which are accessible, inclusive and fair for residents and staff.
- 1.3 Through extensive consultation with residents and the wider community, staff, and partners, new and continuing priorities have been identified to deliver further improvements in the draft Diversity Strategy 2015-18.
- 1.4 One-to-one discussions with Heads of Services have taken place and buy-in for the draft Diversity Strategy 2015-18 has been achieved from all Heads of services.

2.0 Diversity Strategy 2012-14 Achievements

- 2.1 Following our successful peer review in 2011 at the "Achieving" Level of the Equality Framework, we committed to being self-assessed and formally accredited at "Excellent" - the highest level of the Equality Framework. Through the Diversity Strategy 2012 - 14, targeted work based on insight and identified areas in need of improvement, saw THH awarded at this level in June 2013 - making THH the first housing provider in London to be accredited at this level.
- 2.2 We have won several national and regional awards relating to equality and diversity, including:
 - TPAS 2012, 2013 and 2014 Excellence in Equality and Diversity awards for The Somali Tenants Engagement Project, We Speak Your Language Community Language Honorarium and the LGBTe Engagement Project;
 - TPAS 2013 Regional Excellence in the Community Award;
- 2.3 THH was accredited with the Customer Service Excellence accreditation for the whole organisation in November 2012.

- 2.4 In 2015 THH was named number two in the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index Top 100, making THH the top housing provider and best employer of choice in the sector for lesbian, gay and bisexual jobseekers and workplace equality.
- 2.5 Working towards a workforce that reflects the community, targeted work has seen an increase in BME staff to 60% of the workforce compared to 52% in 2010.
- 2.6 Recruited THH's first ever Somali caretaker followed on by another Somali colleague in Rents. Currently we have five Somali colleagues working at THH.
- 2.7 Worked directly with specific community groups to improve opportunities to engage and support community cohesion – Youth Ambassadors, Multi Faith Project, LGBT engagement, Somali tenants, etc
- 2.8 Achieved 82% rating from residents who told us that we treat them fairly when delivering services

3.0 **Delivery of our next Diversity Strategy 2015 -2018**

- 3.1 Our Diversity Strategy 2015-18 aims to create neighborhoods and workplaces where residents and staff feel acknowledged as uniquely different, but equally valued, develops a diverse workforce to meet the needs of the community and ensures that a segmented approach to customer service results in accessible, inclusive and fair services for all.
- 3.2 The delivery of tangible positive improvements is being delivered through the Diversity Scorecard, Diversity Champions Network, LGBT Staff Network, Women's Network and Straight Allies Network.
- 3.3 Where commissioned, the Business Development Team provides skills, knowledge and expertise in identifying areas for improvement and turning evidence of inequality and poor performance into action to rectify this.
- 3.4 Through consultation with SMT, Heads of Services, LBTH and community partners, priority areas for improvement have been identified as:
 - **Meet the diverse needs of residents** - by knowing our customers;
 - **Promote financial inclusion** - through partnership and leadership;
 - **Promote resident scrutiny and interculturism** -through effective resident engagement, community cohesion and empowering residents;
 - **Support vulnerable residents** – by delivering accessible homes, inclusive neighbourhoods and excellent customer care;

- **More women and BME staff in senior roles** – by having a workforce that reflects the community, improving the recruitment and career progression of women and BME staff at all levels of the organisation.

4.0 **Monitoring progress of Diversity Strategy 2015 -2018 action plan**

- 4.1 In addition to the role of coordinating the delivery of the Diversity Strategy 2015 - 18 action plan, the Business Development Team will also monitor and record the progress made on agreed in-year actions to facilitate the coordination.
- 4.2 Monitoring progress of the action plan will be aligned with the existing method of reporting through the Diversity Scorecard, an internal dashboard produced quarterly to monitor various aspects of work that are already included as part of THH's commitment to equality and diversity. These include the monitoring of resident profile information, workforce profile, customer satisfaction based on key customer segments, etc.
- 4.3 The Diversity Scorecard is currently used to keep SMT updated on any work that is taking place or of interest on the equality and diversity agenda. This document is also open to the organisation and is accessible via the THH intranet page.
- 4.4 Going forward we aim to keep the Board updated similarly through the Diversity Scorecard. Variations of the Diversity Scorecard can be formulated to suit the needs of the Board in terms of content and frequency of reporting progress on the Diversity Strategy action plan.

5.0 **Measuring better outcomes – Diversity Network Accreditation**

- 5.1 Tower Hamlets Homes has already achieved the highest level of the Equality Framework for Social Housing which will be reassessed in two years' time. In ensuring that THH is continuously delivering services that are accessible, inclusive and fair, there is a need to continue monitoring, measuring and benchmarking with other organisations to ensure our approach is up to date and reflective of issues impacting specific community groups.
- 5.2 The impact of the previous Diversity Strategies has shown how important equality and diversity is and how we can ensure that by providing services to meet the needs of residents, staff and the wider community can increase resident satisfaction amongst community groups.
- 5.3 To ensure that THH continues to improve services to meet the needs of residents through our work on equality and diversity, in 2015-16 we will explore utilising a new framework set by the Housing Diversity Network called the Diversity Network Accreditation.
- 5.4 The accreditation is a straightforward, robust and objective tool that reflects the way that housing providers work and is an outcome based accreditation model.

Work is underway to assess the value of this accreditation in helping THH realise our ambitions for our work on diversity.

6.0 VfM Implications:

- 6.1 By implementing a **more targeted and segmented approach** to communications and customer service, we can ensure that we get it right “first time” across a range of services – whether this is a repair, or providing opportunities to engage.
- 6.2 Through **service reviews**, identification of potentially impacted groups from Welfare Reform changes is likely to support early intervention and sign posting via partnership working, ensuring the sustainment of tenancies and rent collection.
- 6.3 By **providing tailored services** such as translated letters, documents and other communications as well as using the staff from the community language register. We currently save over £35k per month.

7.0 Legal Implications

- 7.1 The Diversity Strategy 2015-18 contains actions that ensure that we will work within all current and relevant anti-discrimination laws.
- 7.2 Below is not an exhaustive list of legislation, but includes:
 - Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974
 - Human Rights Act 1998
 - Fixed Term Employees (prevention of less favourable treatment) Regulations 2002
 - Civil Partnership Act 2004
 - Gender Recognition Act (GRA) 2005
 - Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006
 - Equality Act 2006
 - Work and Families Act 2007
 - Equality Act 2010
 - Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013

8.0 Crime and disorder implications

- 8.1 In responding to domestic violence, Neighbourhood Housing Officers are trained to identify and record domestic violence and make appropriate referrals including emergency accommodation. Training has also been provided to caretakers, technical staff, and to repairs contractors’ operatives. Effective monitoring will ensure that perpetrators are identified and appropriate action is taken and support provided to victims.
- 8.2 The Diversity Strategy 2015-18 outlines how we will work with our partners and the community to promote good relations between all groups and to develop

community cohesion. This includes working to reduce the incidence of hate crime, domestic violence and anti-social behaviour in our properties and neighbourhoods.

9.0 **Health and safety**

- 9.1 The Diversity Strategy 2015-18 proposes that we further improve how we respond to and monitor domestic violence and hate crime, ensuring that performance and satisfaction improves.
- 9.2 The Strategy also commits THH to combat harassment of staff based on any characteristics. Harassment relates to repeated, unreciprocated and unwelcome comments, looks, actions, suggestions or physical contact which is found objectionable and offensive and which might threaten an employee or create an intimidating or uncomfortable environment. The Equality Act makes employers potentially liable for harassment of employees by people (third parties) who are not employees, such as customers or clients.

10.0 **Conclusion**

- 10.1 By continuing to align the Diversity Strategy with the five outcome areas of the Equality Framework for Social Housing, we can ensure that we continue to develop the best housing services in Tower Hamlets, with services which are more accessible, inclusive and fair for residents and staff.
- 10.2 The refreshed Diversity Strategy will ensure that THH remains on target to achieve its vision and remains competitive with other housing providers and is able to measure and assess progress via the Diversity Network Accreditation that we hope to be working towards in 2015-16.

Appendices

Appendix A: Draft Diversity Strategy 2015-18

Appendix B: Draft Diversity Strategy 2015-18 Action Plan