



EQUALITY DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION POLICY

APPROVED BY	Board
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1. INTRODUCTION

Unity is a housing association with a social purpose to fight racial inequality. We aspire to a world where no one is discriminated based on a characteristic, and people are guaranteed to be treated fairly and equally according to their needs. This means challenging inequality, discrimination and unfairness is central to what we do.

While housing is our core business, and we aspire to provide our tenants with a great service, we are driven by our commitment to bridge the inequality gap. That is why we help to regenerate communities, provide opportunities for people to improve their life chances and try to be a voice for people who are under-represented.

In carrying out both our core business and social purpose we provide services to customers, employ staff, engage contractors, and develop partnerships with stakeholders and other organisations. We believe Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) is directly relevant to our business, and good for business.

We aim to treat staff fairly because it encourages them to put their talent and skills at our disposal, and we know people working in this way produce better results for the company. We value diversity because a melding of different experiences and ideas makes us stronger at solving problems. And we encourage our colleagues to be their true selves because people at ease perform at their best and do their best for Unity.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to explain what EDI means to Unity, demonstrate its importance to our business and outline the core principles, beliefs and practises we expect to see embedded in our staff and throughout the company. We want EDI to guide and influence how we treat people.

Our EDI Strategy sets out the commitments, objectives, and goals we have set ourselves over the next five years to ensure the culture of Unity is compliant with this policy.

3. SCOPE

This policy applies to every person we engage with during our business. That is customers, commercial tenants, clients, employees, contractors, partners, stakeholders, and job applicants. It also applies to board members, resident representatives, referral agencies and volunteers who represent Unity or our customers.

Any external contractors, third parties or sub-contractors providing services based on a specification set by Unity are responsible for adhering to this policy. Unity will monitor their performance and take all necessary steps to ensure good performance and appropriate behaviour. Any issues that arise contrary to this policy will be taken very seriously and corrective action taken.

4. WHAT IS EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion are often used interchangeably, but they

have different meanings and consequences, and place different responsibilities on us.

4.1 Equality

Equality is about treating people fairly. It often means finding different ways to ensure everyone is given the same opportunity or standard of service. Hence it does not mean treating everyone the same but being flexible, adjusting one's approach to ensure specific needs are considered.

Unlike diversity and inclusion, there is a legal requirement to treat people equally. The 2010 Equality Act outlaws' unequal treatment and victimisation by making it illegal to discriminate against certain groups of people purely on the grounds of their personal characteristics.

4.2 Diversity

Diversity is about welcoming and valuing difference both between individuals and groups of people. It means appreciating that everyone is unique, and recognising the importance and value in this. Our mission relies on getting to know our local communities, which all have very distinct and diverse identities, and catering for their needs.

Valuing diversity is the exploration of these differences in a safe, positive, and nurturing environment and moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each person.

Diversity acknowledges people's differences and works with these differences to create a fairer and more productive workplace by drawing on the cultures, talents, lived experience and ideas of a broader range of people.

4.3 Inclusion

Inclusion is the practice of ensuring that people feel a sense of belonging and support from the organization and are given an opportunity to contribute, to have a say and for their voices to be heard.

In Unity we aspire to have an inclusive culture in which people feel respected and valued for who they are whether as individuals or part of a group. This creates the environment for our staff to do their best at work.

4.4 Relating EDI to our core business and social purpose

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion are different, but interconnected, and need to be progressed together as one cannot flourish without the other. For instance, while treating people fairly will encourage them to give their best, this will backfire if we don't show we value their contribution and ensure they are included. So, EDI is only meaningful if we are prepared to go all the way and that is Unity's intention.

The responsibility EDI places on all of us is to recognise people who are different, and where necessary take measures to ensure they are given equivalent opportunities and standard of service as everyone else.

5. **Our responsibilities**

EDI place four responsibilities on Unity: moral, business, legal and regulatory.

5.1 Moral

The principles of equality, diversity and inclusion are about social justice and fairness and as a social landlord, we have a responsibility to uphold these.

5.2 Business responsibilities

These can be summarised as follows:

- Customer service – we demonstrate our commitment to EDI in the way we provide services to people, knowing our customers, understanding their needs and tailoring services to meet their diverse needs.
- Changing society – EDI is becoming more important in the world in which we do business. We must appreciate and respond to these changes to undertake business successfully.
- Recruitment/retention – a workplace embracing EDI will have better results and the organisation responsible for it will become employer of choice, able to attract and retain the best talent.
- Competitive edge – having a diverse team brings different experiences and outlooks together which help us identify diverse requirements, explore new business opportunities and solve complex problems.
- Reputation – creating an inclusive work environment can encourage loyalty, teamwork and maximise performance.
- Risk management – there are risks associated with non-compliance that are avoided by aiming for full compliance

5.3 Legal

The Equality Act came into force in October 2010. It legally protects people with a personal characteristic from discrimination, harassment, and victimisation, both in the workplace and in wider society. There are nine protected personal characteristics:

- Race
- Sex
- Disability
- Religious beliefs
- Sexual orientation
- Age
- Pregnancy or maternity
- Marital status or civil partnership
- Gender reassignment

As outlined in the Act, the Public Sector Equality Duty requires housing providers to give 'due regard' to promoting equality which involves:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics
- Taking steps to meet the need of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people
- Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

Unity expects all employees to carry out their duties in compliance with the Act

and actively to promote equality.

5.4 Regulatory

As a provider of social housing, we work in a regulated sector. Our Regulator specifies the requirements on housing associations through its Standards framework and under these standards, all housing associations must:

- Treat all tenants with fairness and respect
- Demonstrate that they understand the different needs of their tenants, including in relation to the protected characteristics and tenants with additional support needs

5.5 Other needs

We are also committed to meeting the wider needs of socially excluded communities and groups. This includes people on low incomes and facing food poverty, single parents, Carers and young people leaving care, people with drug and alcohol dependencies, homeless people and those living in areas of deprivation. Similarly, in the workplace we recognise the importance of valuing the neurodiversity of our colleagues and embracing and maximizing the talents of people who think differently. This includes those who have autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia or ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder).

7.0 UNITY'S POLICY STATEMENT AND GOALS

Unity is committed to ensuring that everyone it encounters, whether customers, employees, contractors, or job applicants are treated fairly in an environment that is free from any form of discrimination regarding the nine protected characteristics. Equality of opportunity is provided for all and both customers and staff will be given the opportunity to develop and realise their full potential.

All our policies, practices and procedures will be applied impartially and objectively, people will be treated with dignity and respect and their data will be protected.

Unity will not tolerate processes, attitudes and behaviours that amount to direct discrimination, associative discrimination, discrimination by perception, indirect discrimination including harassment by a third party, victimisation, and bullying through prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness, and stereotyping.

Unity recognises the importance of monitoring, reviewing, and reporting on this policy and will be measuring progress in meeting our policy statement.

7.1 EDI Goals

Set out below are our twelve policy aims that is the focus of our EDI strategy over the next five years:

- To have a Board and workforce that reflects the diverse makeup of the areas in which we operate

- To have employment policies that enable employees to fulfil their potential at work.
- To challenge stereotyping and discriminatory practices within our offices and Outside. Internally we will regularly review our policies and procedures to guard against discrimination (i.e., what we do and why we do it).
- To ensure training and development opportunities for employees are distributed fairly and according to need
- To regularly train staff on latest best practice in relation to EDI checking they are put into practice.
- Our pre and post procurement practices will ensure contractors and suppliers demonstrate (through monitoring and action) a genuine culture of inclusion and equality of opportunity.
- A zero-tolerance approach towards hate incidents, hate crime and domestic violence.
- To target Unity job vacancies at local people and to employ additional measures to encourage them to apply and to be shortlisted.
- To ensure victims and survivors of domestic abuse and serious antisocial behaviour are supported and signposted to the most appropriate agencies.
- To involve customers in shaping services seeking the widest possible range of representation of the protected characteristics.
- To increase awareness of diversity-related safeguarding issues including extremism and radicalisation, child grooming, child sex exploitation and modern-day slavery.
- To develop working relations with “third sector” agencies representing and supporting diverse communities and groups

8.0 Review, monitoring and capacity building

Monitoring is an essential component of our framework for translating goals into action. Unity undertakes monitoring to meet statutory requirements and achieve best practice. This is used to inform and improve our employment practices. If any discrimination is identified as a result, Unity will take corrective action to eliminate it.

The make-up of Unity’s Board and workforce, and employment practices are monitored by the HR& Governance Committee to ensure compliance with legislation and best practice. Statistics and analysis is provided in reports and the Committee meets quarterly.

Reports to the Operations Committee will also include EDI data on:

- Customer satisfaction
- Customer access and take up of the service
- Complaints
- Antisocial behaviour
- Customer involvement and participation
- Procurement, performance, and practices of contractors

EDI Performance data and statistics will be scrutinised and compared with recognised benchmarks such as the latest census to identify any areas of weakness and so that positive action can be taken when and where required.

We are working to move up from IIP silver to gold and as part of this process surveys are conducted regularly by an external organisation to obtain the views of employees and these include a section on EDI and the working environment. The survey results are used to identify the areas for improvement which are translated into an IIP action plan.

We want to retain our Customer Service Excellence accreditation and that means

undertaking qualitative customer surveys and receiving customer feedback and insight information about how we treat them every two years.

Unity will publish its progress and achievements on EDI in its annual report, which will include:

- Statutory progress reports (which cover some aspects of EDI)
- Our performance on employment practices, such as recruitment, promotion, turnover, grievances, training and development and performance management
- An analysis of diversity statistics across key protected strands.
- Progress against our goals

Capacity building

Unity is committed to ensuring that its employees are trained in EDI, and that managers are able to operate this policy. Specific training will be given on race, gender, gender identity, disability, sexuality, age, and religion or belief. There will also be training on key customer service issues, e.g., hate crime, recognising extremism, domestic violence, and hoarding.

EDI training forms an integral part of Unity's induction programme. Managers will ensure that all new entrants are made aware of this policy and the Bullying and Harassment and Whistleblowing policies.

This policy is available on Unity's intranet and website, and it will be promoted to all employees. EDI will be on the agenda at each team meeting.

9.0. RESPONSIBILITIES

In agreeing this policy, the Board is determining the culture of the organisation and the EDI behaviours and practices it wants to see in Unity.

The Senior Management Team have overall responsibility for ensuring Unity operates within a framework of promoting Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion.

Line managers are responsible for ensuring that employees understand Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and are aware of the reporting procedures.

All employees are responsible for promoting Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion and for ensuring that they neither intentionally or unintentionally discriminate, harass nor bully colleagues.

The Association expects employees who witness discrimination or harassment to challenge any individual's behaviour and where appropriate, inform their line manager or member of the Senior Management Team. Allowing discrimination, bullying or harassment to occur is unacceptable and can be perceived as engaging in those behaviours.