



Equality and Diversity Policy

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1 Policy Statement

Cobalt Housing is committed to providing an environment free from discrimination, bullying, harassment or victimisation where all members are treated with respect and dignity. We recognise and value the contribution that people from all areas of the community can make to our work, and will seek to promote a culture that reflects this approach.

We will work to ensure that no one is disadvantaged on the grounds of any of the nine protected characteristics as outlined in the Equality Act 2010.

Through this policy, we will ensure that we meet our legal and regulatory responsibilities. In line with the Equality Act 2010, we are committed to:

- Eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
- Advancing equality of opportunity between people;
- Fostering good relations between people.

We will provide on-going training to our colleagues and Board members, partners and tenants to adopt a proactive approach, raise awareness, adapt our policies and services and challenge discrimination.

The policy is all applicable to all parts of Cobalt Housing.

2 Policy Aims

This policy highlights and celebrates Cobalt Housing's commitment to achieve "equality for all". In particular, the aims of this policy seek to address the needs of people with the following protected characteristics as recognised in the Equality Act 2010:-

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

Cobalt Housing recognises our requirements to eliminate the following types of unlawful discrimination:

- Direct Discrimination
- Direct Discrimination based on Perception and Association
- Indirect Discrimination
- Discrimination arising from a Disability
- Failure to make a disability related reasonable adjustment
- Harassment
- Harassment based on Perception and Association
- Victimisation
- Instructing, inducing or causing discrimination

This policy intends to cover everyone that Cobalt Housing delivers services to, everyone who works for us and those that deliver services for us to ensure we meet their needs.

We operate a zero tolerance policy towards discrimination. We will seek to promote equality of opportunity in the provision of services, employment, training, community involvement, and information provision.

In pursuit of this objective, we will:

- Recognise that people have different needs to be accounted for in the development and delivery of services
- Ensure our policies and procedures do not discriminate and promote diversity;
- Treat all individuals with respect and in accordance with our core values;
- Monitor compliance with our regulatory and legal requirements;
- Consider positive action that will support equality amongst the protected characteristics;
- Investigate promptly and thoroughly any complaints of harassment or discrimination;
- “Mainstream” the Equality and Diversity agenda in all that we do so that it forms an intrinsic part of the organisational culture.

3 Equality and Diversity Policy

In order to embed Cobalt’s commitment to Equality and Diversity, responsibility will reside at Board level, with clear lines of accountability cascading throughout the organisation. The commitments contained within this policy need to be applied by everyone in their day to day operations.

3.1 Service Provision

Cobalt Housing is committed to working towards the reduction and elimination of disadvantage that particular groups within the communities we serve may disproportionately experience. We will be mindful of our commitment to equal opportunity, whilst still endeavouring to achieve the highest standards of quality, service and value for money through the procurement of goods and services, appointing contractors, suppliers, consultants and other agencies to work for and on behalf of the Company.

We will ensure physical access to services for vulnerable and disabled persons and provide specialist support to disadvantaged groups where possible by establishing links with referring agencies.

By marketing our homes by using a variety of mechanisms, assessing and analysing housing need through a fair and consistent process we will monitor the allocation of lettings and the composition of application waiting lists.

Our organisational information is widely available in a variety of formats and we advertise signing and other translation facilities, to ensure that all sections of the community, and in particular people or groups who are most disadvantaged, can gain access to services.

Customer satisfaction levels are monitored on a regular basis with a view to improving services and specifically for those with protected characteristics.

3.2 Recruitment and Employment

Cobalt Housing aspire to have a diverse workforce, which has the skills and understanding to achieve its goals. We aim to ensure that all colleagues treat each other with dignity and respect and will not tolerate any form of discrimination or harassment within the workplace.

We aim to develop a culture where individuals can feel confident enough to bring complaints without fear of prejudice, and we will have the appropriate policies and procedures in place for dealing with bullying, harassment and its prevention.

Job vacancies are advertised in a variety of ways to maximise our potential for recruiting to a diverse workforce from the broadest cross section of applicants and all adverts will reference our commitment to equal opportunities.

We maintain robust and accurate equal opportunities information as a means of identifying areas of inequality, and look to have a colleague demographic that reflects the composition of the communities we serve.

Using a fair and systematic basis for selecting suitable candidates via a range of pre-specified criteria we ensure no applicant receives less favourable treatment than another.

3.3 Colleagues

This policy is available to all colleagues together with bullying, harassment and dignity at work processes which support our colleagues to operate within a safe and open environment.

Disciplinary procedures will not be used against any colleagues for a complaint made in good faith about discrimination or for giving evidence about such a complaint.

We make reasonable adjustments to ensure all colleagues are able to continue in employment with us and provide a well-being programme and offer the opportunity to request flexible working to ensure all colleagues can achieve a positive work-life balance, within service constraints.

We recognise that diversity is a key strength, and will seek to foster this further through the mechanism of collecting relevant colleague equality monitoring information. Having sound monitoring systems in place ensures we are able to fully assess the impact of our policies on colleagues and enables us to establish whether we are adequately preparing to meet diverse needs.

All personal information held is sourced and maintained securely and confidentially. Access to information is restricted to the Human Resources Team and those responsible for maintaining ICT security and systems.

3.4 Tenants and Customers

This policy is available to Cobalt Housing tenants and customers and we will endeavour to make regular contact with representative groups to provide support with the issues they face and allow them to access information and advice.

We regularly consult with all tenants and residents on the services they receive and encourage them to participate in the decision-making process and specifically with any tenants facing discrimination about their needs.

Tenants and customers are encouraged to adopt our equality and diversity principles. Membership of resident groups and forums is open to all including Board members who are representatives from the local community.

Cobalt Housing tenants are expected to adhere to this policy and the terms set out within their tenancy agreement by ensuring their behaviour respects Cobalt Housing's commitment to promoting community cohesion and the needs and cultures of all people within their community.

It is vital that we are able to recognise and understand who our communities are so that we can plan our services to meet the needs of these communities. Customer Profiling enables us to keep up to date with the diversity profile of our customers enabling us to respond accordingly. Whilst we are keen to encourage the disclosure of this information we recognise that the decision to disclose this sensitive information is a personal and individual decision. Customers are reassured that disclosure of this information is voluntary and is subject to the strictest levels of confidence and security and in compliance with the Information Security Policy.

3.5 Partners

Partners with whom we work with are expected to have their own Equality & Diversity Policy but in the absence of one, as part of working arrangements, we ask them to sign up to Cobalt's

3.6 Complaints

Cobalt Housing takes all claims of discrimination very seriously and will take appropriate action against those concerned. Discrimination occurs when someone directly or indirectly treats a person or a group of people unfavourably because of a protected characteristic. This covers all behaviour including remarks and insinuation, both verbal and non-verbal, which cause offence.

Any customer who feels they have been unfairly treated in any way has a right to use the Customer Feedback Policy. The customer feedback policy is available on request.

Any colleague who is subject to harassment, bullying or discrimination is encouraged to refer to the Dignity at Work Policy and seek guidance from a member of the Human Resources Team.

Applicants for employment concerned about the application of the policy should consult the Human Resources Team.