



# **Gender Equality Scheme February 2009**

## Foreword

Wakefield and District Housing (WDH) intends to use the Equality Act 2006 and Gender Equality Duty as a platform to continue our work on gender equality. The duty also provides WDH with an opportunity to make some real change to the lives of men and women in the Wakefield district by delivering services that best suit their needs.

WDH welcomes the opportunity to identify and address any barriers to the provision of WDH services or the recruitment and retention of employees for people who identify as transsexual.

WDH has always aimed to not only to meet the minimum standards of equalities legislation but also to exceed them.

I look forward to the challenge of implementing the Gender Equality Duty and the contents of this Scheme.

**Kevin Dodd**  
**Chief Executive**

# Gender Equality Scheme

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## 1. Introduction

### The Gender Equality Duty

The Duty to promote gender equality is part of the Equality Act 2006 (the Act) and came into force for public authorities in April 2007. The 'general duty' states that all public authorities need to have 'due regard' to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination.
- Eliminate harassment.
- Promote equality of opportunity between men and women.

As part of the duty, public authorities are also required to eliminate discrimination and harassment against transsexual people.

Designated public authorities, such as Local Authorities, the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) and the Audit Commission, have a specific duty to produce a Gender Equality Scheme (GES).

The TSA has said that housing associations should 'develop appropriate outcome based gender equality action plans of their own.' The TSA has also revised its regulatory requirements to take account of the new Duty and updated its good practice guidance (Good Practice Note 8).

WDH welcomes the additional responsibility the Duty places on public authorities.

WDH will consult with stakeholders on the Scheme and a Scheme Action Plan will set out what our priority issues are, what outcomes we will expect and who will be responsible for achieving the actions.

## 2. Definitions

### What is Gender?

The word 'gender' in terms of the Equality Act 2006 refers to men and women. A male to female or female to male transsexual person is recognised as a woman or man for all purposes in law.

The law defines transsexual people as those 'undergoing, intending to undergo, or having already undergone gender reassignment'.

The Gender Trust gives the following definitions:

**Transsexual:** 'A person who feels a consistent and overwhelming desire to transition and fulfil their life as a member of the opposite gender. Most transsexual people actively desire and complete sex reassignment surgery'.

**Transgender:** ‘A term used to include transsexuals, transvestites and cross-dressers. A transgenderist can also be a person who, like a transsexual – sometimes with the help of hormone therapy and / or cosmetic surgery – wishes to live in the gender role of choice, but has not undergone, and generally does not intend to undergo, surgery’.

WDH is committed to reaching out to people of both genders or who identify as transsexual. Links with female orientated and transsexual organisations need to be established both for future consultation and to ensure the success of this Scheme.

### 3. Gender Statistics

These are taken from the Equal Opportunities Commission, now the Equality and Human Rights Commission, Facts About Women and Men 2006, as these are the latest figures available on this subject.

1970s	2006
25% of both boys and girls in England and Wales passed five O’Levels by the time they left school.	49% of boys and 59% of girls in the UK gain five high grade GCSEs or equivalent by age 16.
Nine out of ten men and six out of ten women of working age were in employment.	Eight out of ten women of working age were in employment.
Around one in ten professionals were women.	Around four in ten professionals are women.
The gap between women and men’s full time hourly pay was 29%.	The gap between women and men’s full time hourly pay is 17%.
Half of mothers with dependent children worked, including over a quarter of mothers of under fives.	Two thirds of mothers with dependent children worked, including over half of mothers of under fives.
There were only 27 women Members of Parliament or 4.3% of the UK Parliament.	Over 125 women Members of Parliament or 20% of the UK Parliament.

### Employment Opportunities

In 2004, the EOC reported that a third of women in some sectors take part time jobs below their potential, due to lack of opportunities for flexible working. In addition, one in five women returning to the same employer after maternity leave came back to a lower grade or level of job. Male employees are sometimes disadvantaged by employers who do not recognise their childcare responsibilities.

In our sector, although women make up 66% of the housing association workforce nationally, they are under represented at senior management and at Chief Executive level, as at June 2009.

## Equal Pay

The law says that men and women are entitled to equal pay for work of equal value. However, a study carried out in 2006 by the Equal Opportunities Commission highlighted that women in full time employment earned 17% less per hour than men.

## Governance

According to recent Regulatory and Statistical Returns (RSR) data, women are underrepresented on Housing Association Boards, 61% of Board members are male and 39% are female.

At WDH, currently there are nine women on the Board, 60% of the total composition of the Board. The number of Local Management Committee members who are currently female stands at 17 and the target for 2008 is 28. WDH will ensure that there is a focus on removing barriers to achieving equality in representation in the governance structure of WDH and at all levels within the employee body.

## Domestic Abuse and Violence

Domestic abuse affects both males and females of all ages, but women are more likely to experience 'repeated and severe forms of violence, and the violence they experience is also more likely to have a sustained psychological or emotional impact or result in injury or death', statistics from Women's Aid reveal.

Domestic violence can occur in a range of relationships including heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender relationships. The Government's Women and Equality Unit estimates that one in four women experience domestic violence in their lifetime and the Home Office reported in 2005 that one in six men experience domestic violence at some point. In 2006 a UNICEF report stated that nearly one million children in Britain might be suffering the physical and emotional scars of domestic violence. The latest figures show that from April 2007 to March 2008, 5,796 domestic violence incidents were recorded by police in Kirklees, down from 6,110 the previous year and 6,508 in 2005/2006.

Domestic violence comprised 20% of all recorded violent crime in the district.

The issue of forced marriages has been highlighted recently. The Forced Marriage Unit receives an estimated 5,000 calls a year. Birmingham based Ashram Housing Association reported that they have had 120 cases in the year up to March 2008.

Gender based violence remains a 'hidden' crime with the majority of incidents going unreported by both male and female victims.

As housing providers, we need to be clear on our responsibilities in relation to domestic violence and other forms of gender based violence. The TSA recommends that adequate provision is made for the victims of domestic violence and that services should be provided for gender groups as appropriate. They advise offering advice and support that recognises the particular barriers to communication with the victims of domestic violence.

## 4. WDH Corporate Vision and Values

Our Vision is to create confident communities throughout the district and beyond. People in confident communities feel safe where they live, trust the services they receive and are confident about their future prosperity and opportunities.

We have a challenging mission statement to achieve our Vision to inspire, transform and promote excellence. We will inspire our tenants and residents, employees, partners and the housing sector to deliver a transformation of the communities we serve. To do this we are committed to delivering a three star service, ensuring excellence runs through all aspects of our work, and judging ourselves through the eyes of others.

Our values are to be creative, inclusive and work with integrity. Working to these values will help us deliver excellence and become an employer of choice.

Our strategic objectives are to:

- Be a landlord of choice by putting the customer first.
- Adopt best practice in good governance to be a well managed business.
- Be a positive force through leadership and influence to develop the potential of our people.
- Be a partner of choice to create better places to live.

Our Vision to 2020 recognises that we will need to explore new ways of working and that this will be driven by a process of opening ourselves up to both external and internal challenge in the way that local services are provided to ensure that local communities receive appropriately high value services. Our Vision sets down that these expectations will be carried out honestly with total transparency and that our decisions will be made professionally and with integrity.

Our efforts as a social enterprise and our ability to raise the bar and make significant social impacts by 2020 will depend to some extent on how successful we are at delivering services for the optimum cost whilst maintaining quality and customer satisfaction.

We will look to maximise the impact of the strategy overall by working with others where appropriate. This will also be by investing our resource in local innovation to develop skilled workforces for the future.

Strategic Objective	Gender Equality Scheme Aims
Be a landlord of choice by putting the customer first	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All customers receive the same level of service, tailored to their individual need.</li> <li>• Customer satisfaction levels are the same, regardless of gender.</li> </ul>
Adopt best practice in good governance to be a well-managed business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All employees, partners and stakeholders understand, support and are committed to implementing the Gender Equality Scheme, and all decisions made by WDH are open and transparent to all communities.</li> </ul>
Be a positive force through leadership and influence to develop the potential of our people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employees of both genders are represented across the organisation at all levels.</li> </ul>
Be a partner of choice to create better places to live	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To create places where everyone wants to live, irrespective of gender.</li> </ul>

## 5. Policies to Ensure Gender Equality

### 5.1 Employment

WDH policies that support the recruitment and retention of women and men in the workplace include:

- Adoptive Leave Policy.
- Career Break Policy.
- Employee Recruitment Policy.
- Diversity and Inclusion Policy.
- Flexible Working Arrangements.
- Job Share Policy.
- Maternity Leave Policy.
- New and Expectant Mothers at Work Policy.
- Parental Leave Policy.
- Paternity Leave Policy.
- Term time Working Policy.

WDH will build links with organisations supporting transsexual people to ensure that our attraction and recruitment methods meet the needs of this group.

## 5.2 Housing Provision

When developing new homes for single gender or transsexual households, WDH will adopt a partnership approach, working closely with other local social landlords, community groups and support agencies. WDH will consider:

- Accommodation requirements related to gender through consultation with community groups.
- Suitability of housing with regard to location, design, type, size and tenure.

WDH aims to provide excellent services that are fair, accessible and offer choice to women, men and people who identify themselves as transsexual.

## 5.3 Choice Based Lettings Policy

The TSA's Good Practice Note 8 on Diversity and Inclusion recommends that a housing association's Diversity and Inclusion Policy should include lettings as one of its key topics. WDH's current Choice Based Lettings Policy states that the overall purpose of the policy is:

'To allocate empty homes in a way that offers choice, meets people's needs and promotes the development of sustainable and balanced communities'.

WDH will review the current Lettings Policy to ensure that the needs of those experiencing domestic violence are being met.

## 5.4 Service Delivery

The TSA's statutory duty on gender arises out of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975. With regard to service delivery, responsiveness to requests for repairs and improvements should be determined by the condition of the properties only. WDH will work towards developing monitoring systems to identify repairs by gender and also identify transgender residents to ensure that they are receiving the same levels of responsiveness that any other resident would.

## 5.5 Complaints

WDH collects information on complaints in order to identify which areas of service customers are unhappy with. This information is used for learning and development purposes. WDH will produce statistics on complaints by gender to identify any inequalities in service provision and to address these if necessary.

## 5.6 Resident Involvement

The WDH Resident Involvement Policy and Strategy 2009 - 2012 seeks to provide a framework that gives every tenant the opportunity to be involved in and influence decisions that affect their homes at a level they choose. WDH will seek to ensure that involvement groups represent the gender split for different age groups and that transsexual people are represented on the groups wherever possible.

## **6. Assessing the Impact of Policies and Activities**

A Gender Equality Scheme must include a statement for the methods for assessing the impact of policies and practices on equality for men, women and transsexual people. This is to enable an organisation to identify how and where they might better promote diversity and inclusion.

All reports submitted to WDH's Board and Executive Management Team (EMT) include a mandatory equality impact section. WDH has developed its own full Equality Impact Assessment process. Impact Assessments are an audit tool that enables organisations to examine current or intended policies, practices and procedures and services for their impact on service users, employees and stakeholders. They are an essential part of achieving effective and people focussed policies and services that meet needs and objectives in a fair and equitable way.

WDH commenced the Impact Assessment process in March 2008. The process assesses practices and policies for a positive, neutral or negative impact against five diversity strands: age, disability, gender, race (including religion and belief) and sexuality. A full action plan for each area will be developed from any identified adverse or neutral impact that cannot be objectively justified.

## **7. Information Gathering and Performance Monitoring**

WDH already collects a wide range of diversity data, from the Continuous Recording (CORE) lettings system to Human Resources monitoring. However, it was recognised that a full diversity profile of our tenants was incomplete. To rectify this gap in knowledge, a full Tenant Census was sent to all residents in November 2006. The goal was to achieve a 60% return, which was achieved by April 2008 through a telephone and door knocking exercise.

Diversity monitoring at all stages of the recruitment process (application, shortlisting, interview and offer) is also carried out within WDH, as well as disciplinary procedures, grievances, promotions and resignations. The information gathered is used to highlight and investigate any potential differences in treatment.

Other mechanisms for capturing information such as surveys, complaints monitoring and consultation exercises are used as further sources of information to ensure gender equality. WDH will use the information it gathers to set appropriate performance monitoring targets for itself and its partners in the Decent Homes works, which will be monitored accordingly.

## **8. Reviewing the Effectiveness of the Gender Equality Scheme**

The GES will form part of WDH's overarching diversity and inclusion framework. This is monitored by the Diversity and Inclusion Group which is made up of representatives across the service areas. The Resources Committee will act as an external review team to the Scheme.

Ultimate responsibility for implementing the action plan will lie with the Board and EMT.

An annual report will be produced each year to report and review against progress on the action identified in the Scheme's action plan. Any additional priorities or changes will be agreed in consultation with customers. The annual report will be published and available on the WDH website and in alternative formats on request.

## **9. Gender Equality Scheme Action Plan and Priorities**

WDH's proposed actions relating to Gender Equality will be in the overarching Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan, which is currently being prepared.



## **Vision**

to create confident communities

## **Mission**

to inspire, transform and promote excellence

## **Values**

to be creative, inclusive and work with integrity

**delivering promises, improving lives**