BRENT HOUSING PARTNERSHIP
EQUALITY SCHEME

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BRENT HOUSING PARTNERSHIP DRAFT EQUALITY SCHEME

FOREWORD

Message from the Chair of Brent Housing Partnership Board
Brent Housing Partnership has been working towards achieving equality for some time now, but we recognise that we still have a long way to go.

We welcome the opportunity that the Race Relations Amendment Act provides for public authorities to take a more active role in promoting race equality. Here in Brent, one of the most diverse communities in the UK, we are committed to promoting equality for everyone - irrespective of race, gender, disability, age or sexuality.

It is important to us to maintain and develop trust and support amongst all the communities that make Brent such an exciting and vibrant place to live and work.

We believe that we have a key role to play in promoting equality both as an employer and as a service provider. Equality of opportunity for both our community and our workforce underpins all that we do.

A lot of hard work has been undertaken to get us this far. We believe that the process of promoting equality in Brent must be continuous and must be undertaken in partnership with all our communities. We are committed to playing our part to the full. Our Equality Scheme sets out how we propose to do this.

Chair of Brent Housing Partnership Board

INTRODUCTION

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 (RRAA) was the legislative response to the findings of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry. The RRAA, which came into effect in April 2001, placed a general duty on all public authorities to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination
- Promote equality of opportunity
- Promote good race relations between people of different racial groups

There are two specific duties that every public authority must meet In order to comply with this general duty. These are:

- To prepare and publish a Race Equality Scheme (RES)
- To monitor the authority's employment procedures and practice

Brent Housing Partnership (BHP) is not a public authority as defined by the RRAA, and so is not compelled by law to produce a Race Equality Scheme.

However, BHP considers that it would be useful for it to draw up such a scheme in line with its overall commitments to promote equality. BHP has decided that its scheme will cover the promotion of all equality issues, rather than only concentrating on race equality issues as the RRAA requires. This wider approach to promoting equality reflects the way in which a number of public authorities have fulfilled their duties under the RRAA when preparing their Race Equality Schemes.

The Commission for Racial Equality, the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Disability Rights Commission, the Employers Organisation for local government with the assistance of the Audit Commission have collaborated to produce the Equality Standard for local government as a framework for addressing equality for race, gender and disability. BHP is working to follow the guidance set out in the Equality Standard.

THE CONTEXT OF BHP'S WORK ON EQUALITY

BHP is an Arm's Length Management Organisation (ALMO) that was set up in October 2002. It manages over 10,000 properties on behalf of Brent Council and provides services to over 3000 leaseholders that bought their homes under the Right To Buy legislation.

The 2001 Census provides confirmation of the diversity of Brent's population; Brent has a 54.7% Black and minority ethnic population, compared to an average of 8.7% in all of England & Wales. Only 1 authority has a more diverse population. Brent's white population includes the largest Irish community in England & Wales (6.9% compared to the national average of 1.2%). 8.4% of Brent's population was born in the European community excluding the UK and Ireland, compared to the national average of 2.3%, and Brent has the highest proportion of residents born outside the European Community at 38.2% compared to 6.6% nationally.

BHP employs around 180 staff of whom 60% are female and 40% male, 68% of black or minority ethnic origin and 30% are white.

BHP'S PRIORITIES
BHP's priorities are linked to the Government-set targets we have to meet. The first and most important priority is to bring all of our homes up to the Government's 'decency' standard.

Our other main priorities are to:

- Collect 96.75% of the rent due to us
- Reduce the time it takes us to relet a property that needs minor repairs to 30 days
- Reduce the rent loss due to our properties remaining empty to 1.1% of the rent due to us
- Complete 99% of all relevant repairs within the target times set by Government
- Keep the average number of days to completing non urgent repairs to under 10 days (the Government target is 11 days)
- Increase the overall satisfaction level of tenants with our services to 85% and ensure that our black and minority ethnic tenants are no less satisfied compared to our white tenants
- Fulfil the Government's targets covering equality in general and tackling harassment in particular
- Increase to 95% the number of responsive repairs for which an appointment was both made and kept

We will use our data collection and monitoring systems, together with the other methods we plan to use to set out in the Equality Scheme below to ensure that the ways in which we meet these priorities does not adversely affect the opportunities available to one group compared to another.

BHP'S COMMITMENTS TO EQUALITY
BHP has adopted its own equal opportunity policy (EOP) statement covering its roles as a provider of services, an employer and a leader of local public opinion. This states:

"BHP is committed to ensuring that the services we provide are relevant to the needs of all sections of the community and that our workforce represents the people we serve."

The EOP expands on this basic commitment by stating:

- We aim to ensure that everyone has equal access to our services
- We recognise that services must be relevant, responsive and sensitive
- We aim to ensure that our contractors and others who deliver our services also share our vision and values
- We undertake to recruit, develop and retain the most talented people by valuing the varied skills and experiences they bring to BHP… and by encouraging an honest and open culture which values the differences between us, and
- We recognise the important leadership role we have in promoting and encouraging tolerance, fairness and equality

In addition to these commitments, Brent Council with whom BHP has the contract to deliver housing management services has certain expectations of BHP's performance on equality. These expectations include:

- Considering the equality implications in all aspects of BHP's work when developing policies, implementing them and monitoring their effectiveness.
- Reflecting the local community at Board level and as an employer
- Assessing tenant satisfaction and tenant involvement by race, gender and disability and addressing areas of dissatisfaction where necessary.
- Contributing to multi-agency work in Brent, for example on crime reduction and environmental issues

In 2003, BHP commissioned a review of its performance on equality. The review found much that was good in BHP's work both in service delivery and in employment. It also highlighted some areas where improvements were needed. These priority areas for improvement have been incorporated into the Action Plan attached to this Equality Scheme.

WHAT IS SUCCESS?

It is important to identify what we are aiming to achieve in developing our Equality Scheme. We are aware that it is sometimes easy when entering into such a complex process to lose sight of the end result and to focus solely on the process itself. BHP considers success to include:

- All service users, staff applicants and other stakeholders considering they have been treated fairly and equitably
- Improved confidence and trust of all Brent's people and communities in BHP
- An ability to demonstrate that we have provided leadership to other organisations with whom we work to enhance their appreciation of diversity issues

We will need to be able to demonstrate that we have made progress towards these measures of success. We consider that evidence of success will include:

1. A clear demonstration in survey, consultation and complaints work that:
   - All service users, staff, applicants and other stakeholders consider they have been treated fairly and equitably
   - Confidence and trust of all Brent's people and communities in BHP has increased

2. Representation of women, disabled people, black and ethnic minority people will increase at all levels in the organisation, in order that BHP is more reflective of the communities it serves.

3. We will seek to ensure that other organisations with which we work have adopted similar aims in terms of equality and implemented them.

HOW BHP HAS DRAWN UP ITS EQUALITY SCHEME

BHP followed guidance from the Commission for Racial Equality and other sources of good practice in drawing up its Equality Scheme.

First, senior staff completed a self-assessment grid to identify how BHP's policies and functions affected different groups and individuals in the community. This initial assessment included considering whether the function or policy in question

should be aiming to eliminate unfair discrimination; promote equality of opportunity; and/or promote good race relations.

Senior staff also reviewed whether there was any potential for different groups of people (for example black and minority ethnic; women; disabled people; older people; younger people; gay men and lesbian women) to be affected differently through the delivery of a particular function or policy.

Their assessment also considered whether BHP currently has any available data on the make up of service users for that function or policy.

The next step was to decide whether there was any evidence or reason to believe that policies or functions may be unfairly discriminatory. Here staff were looking to see if there was any existing evidence of differential outcomes for different groups. Was there also evidence of public concern (from surveys, complaints, service delivery monitoring) that there are significant differences in outcomes for some groups of people?

Finally, the self-assessment procedure sought priorities for action. These priorities are set out in the Action Plans for each year.

The draft Equality Scheme and Action Plan were circulated widely for comments to community groups, tenants and residents. The final document is available to staff on BHP's internal website for staff to comment, and also on our external website. Progress on the scheme is reviewed regularly by BHP's Equalities and Diversity sub-committee.

THE EQUALITY SCHEME

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act requires a Race Equality Scheme to:

- State the functions and policies the authority has assessed as being relevant to the general duty to promote race equality; and
- Set out the arrangements for meeting the duty by:
  - Monitoring its policies for any adverse impact on race equality
  - Assessing and consulting on the likely impact of proposed policies
  - Publishing the results of their assessments, consultation and monitoring
  - Making sure that the public have access to information and services an
  - Training its staff on the general duty

We have used this as the basis for our Equality Scheme. We have also gone beyond this guidance in one or two instances. (See 'Additional commitments' below for more details).

Relevant functions

We set out how we decided which of our functions we thought were relevant to the duty to promote equality in the earlier section on 'How BHP has drawn up its Equality Scheme'. Appendix One contains the full list of these relevant functions.

Monitoring to assess adverse impact

BHP already collects data on disability, ethnic origin and gender of all the households we rehouse. We also collect this information in other ways, for

example when we carry out surveys, ask residents to complete satisfaction forms and when people make complaints. We use this information to check if the way we do things has an adverse affect on one group of residents compared to another.

We do not have this information for all our tenants and leaseholders at present but plan to obtain it as soon as we can. When we do, it will mean that when we assess the potential impact of new policies we will be able to do so in a more comprehensive way.

BHP assesses the impact of its current policies in other ways too. We take complaints from individual residents very seriously. If our investigations show that a complaint is justified, we will change any policies or procedures if necessary so that other residents do not suffer in the future.

We also seek the views of our residents when we are planning to introduce a new policy and on the impact of policies that are already in place. We do this through the Residents' Advisory Committee, the Area Housing Boards, through tenants' and residents' associations and through the specialist tenants' panels we have set up. We will continue to use these to help us ensure that current and future policies are fair to all.

In addition, we will seek the views of relevant community groups, schools, health trusts, the Police and others to help assess the likely impact of a new initiative and monitor the impact of our current work. We believe this will provide us with additional insights that will be useful to BHP in its quest to promote equality. We will put together a comprehensive mailing list of all these groups and organisations to help with this consultation process.

BHP as an employer

Employment is one of our Equality Scheme's relevant functions. The Race Relations Amendment Act sets out very specific duties for an employer of our size. These are that we should collect and monitor ethnic origin data covering who applies for our jobs, who gets them and how they are treated as employees.

We already do much of this. We also collect and monitor data covering disability and gender, as well as ethnic origin. Appendix Three gives details of the staff in post at the time we drew up the Equality Scheme. We plan to collect and monitor data covering age as well because we know this can affect the way in which applicants and employees are treated.

We will continue to report the results of our monitoring to BHP's Equality sub-committee and to the main Board. We will use the 2001 Census results to set initial targets against which to assess our performance. We will highlight where the data indicates we need to do more to promote equality in our role as an employer. For example, we already know that relatively few disabled people apply for our jobs so we are looking at ways in which we can encourage this to happen.

In addition, we will continue to develop the steps we have taken to be an employer of choice by providing excellent and flexible terms and conditions.

Consultation arrangements
BHP uses a variety of methods to consult staff, tenants and residents. The section above on monitoring mentions a number of them. In addition we seek tenants' and residents' views through our regular newsletters, through meetings and through regular surveys. We have also set up special panels of disabled, female and black and minority ethnic residents.

We try to make sure that we provide information in a form that people can easily understand. We will use these methods to consult tenants and residents about the Equality Scheme itself and when we carry out our reviews to assess what we have done to promote equality and what more needs to be done.

We know that some groups of our residents, for example young people, are under-represented in our current consultation arrangements. We are looking at ways to encourage more people from under-represented groups to have their say so that we consult as widely as possible. One way we will do this is to consult the community groups and other bodies mentioned in the section above on monitoring.

Monitoring the results of our work to promote equality
BHP currently publicises its work in a number of different ways. These include posting information on our website, through our newsletters, through articles in the local press, through leaflets, posters and at tenants' and residents' meetings. We will continue to use these methods to publicise the results of our work to promote equality. We will also work with local community groups to help us publicise our work so that more of Brent's residents get to hear about what we are doing.

The Equality Scheme Action Plan covers a three-year period, beginning in September 2003. For each of the three years, a detailed action plan is implemented and progress on the action plans is reported regularly to BHP's Equalities and Diversity sub-committee.

Progress on the Year 1 Action plan is set out in Appendix 2. Progress in year 1 was verified by an independent assessment carried out by the Housing Quality Network, which concluded that considerable progress had been made in achieving many of the specific points set out in the Equality Scheme's Action Plan, and that BHP staff and managers should take credit for the progress made in year 1. Points for further action arising from the HQN report have been reported to the E&D sub-committee where follow-up action has been monitored. These included the development of a framework for Equalities Impact Assessments, resulting in the HQN being commissioned to work with BHP in developing a framework and deliver training to key BHP managers in December 2004.

The Year 2 action plan is attached as appendix 3. A progress report will be submitted to the March 2006 E&D sub-committee, together with details of the agreed actions for Year 3.

A major success of the Equalities Scheme to date has been the increase in the proportion of BHP tenancies where the age, ethnicity and gender is known. This data is essential for monitoring take-up of services and ensuring fairness in service delivery. The 2003 Best Value report on BHP noted that BHP had

increased the proportion of tenants where ethnic origin is recorded from zero to 44% in three years, and that a further target had been set to achieve 70%. By November 2005, BHP had exceeded this target, by obtaining ethnicity data for 91% of tenancies, and obtaining ethnicity, age and gender data for 89% of all tenancies. A table summarising BHP tenancies by age and ethnicity (2001 Census classification) is attached as Appendix 4.

Making sure that the public have access to information and services
BHP's residents between them speak a variety of different languages. Some of our residents have sight or hearing impairments. Other residents have a learning disability. Many of our residents may have limited mobility. All of these factors affect the ability of our residents to gain access to our information and services. We are aware of this at BHP and have taken some steps to improve our accessibility.

Many of our staff are fluent in a number of different languages and can act as interpreters from time to time. We have translated some key documents into the seven main community languages spoken in Brent. We also use a telephone service that provides instant translations when we do not have an interpreter available. We use TypeTalk and have a minicom service for people with a hearing impairment. We provide information on tape, in Braille or in large print when requested. We can also arrange to have a BSL signer present, given two days notice, if needed. Our housing offices all contain design features that make them easier for people with limited mobility to use. We plan to check over the next year that all of our premises open to the general public are accessible, in line with our duties under the Disability Discrimination Act, 1995.

We therefore believe that we already largely comply with this part of the Equality Scheme's requirements. We will monitor carefully and consult our residents to ensure that we maintain this standard – and improve on it where we can.

Staff training
We do our best to recruit staff who share BHP's commitments to promoting equality. We also recognise that our staff must be properly trained to put these commitments into practice. We are therefore implementing a series of training programmes that will explain to staff what they need to do to implement the Equality Scheme's duty to promote equality. These include training in the Autumn of 2003 on serving disabled customers, successfully completed by 90% of staff. Training is also scheduled for board members in December 2005 and for all staff in March 2006. Training will also be extended to contractors through the Customer Care training programme. In addition, specific training programmes that relate to a particular policy or procedure will also make reference to the duty to promote equality. Some examples include training on tackling harassment, on dealing with neighbour disputes and on effective customer care.

We also plan to carry out a more systematic review of the training opportunities open to staff. The review will look at how staff find out about training opportunities, how easy they found it get the training they needed and how useful they think the training is. This should take place in Year Three of the Equality Scheme.

Additional Commitments

Partnership work
Our equal opportunities commitments highlight the importance we place on leading by example. We will therefore seek to promote our commitments to equality in our work with other organisations.

We work in partnership with a wide range of statutory and voluntary bodies. They include the health service, the police, departments of Brent Council, advice agencies and community groups. We already build this commitment to promote equality into much of our partnership work. We need to ensure we do this with all of our partnerships and that we monitor progress.

Placing contracts
We also need to incorporate our commitments to promote equality when we enter into a contract with a supplier. Much of our work at BHP is done for us by outside contractors. This ranges from major building works to auditing our financial records.

We already do this to some extent. For example, all our major contractors have to provide us with a copy of their equal opportunities policy before we will allow them to bid for work. We will be looking at this in more detail during Year Two of the Equality Scheme when we review our procurement arrangements.

Governance
BHP is governed by a Board. It is made up of Brent Council nominees, tenants' and residents' representatives and independent members. There are currently 16 Board members in post. 11 of these are male and five female. Six are of black or minority ethnic origin.

BHP's Board has 18 places. Six are Brent Council nominees, six are tenants' and residents' representatives and six are independent members. The Council nominates councillors in proportion to the political make up of the Council. The Area Housing Boards nominate the six tenants' and residents' representatives. The independent members are recruited by advertising in the local press and through contacting local organisations.

Currently women and black and minority ethnic people are under-represented on the Board. We aim to make the Board more representative of the local community over the next 2-3 years.

The Board is the body that is ultimately responsible for everything that happens in the name of BHP. We have already gone some way to make sure the Board takes into account our duty to promote equality by setting up the Equalities sub committee. We will also ensure that the Board gets regular reports on our progress in implementing our Equality Scheme and that Board members are properly trained. In addition we will ensure that our overall strategy and business plans make clear reference to our commitments to promote equality. The work of the Board is covered in Year Two of the Equality Scheme.

APPENDIX 1

BHP'S RELEVANT FUNCTIONS

We set out below BHP's functions that are relevant to our duty to promote equality, grouped according to the year when the function will be reviewed:

Year 1
Repairs
Right to buy
Human resources
Neighbour relations management
Tenancy management
Communications
Procurement

Year 2
Residents' participation
Board – strategy & policy
Customer service
Estate services
Brent building cleaning service
Services to leaseholders

Year 3
Rent collection and recovery
Management development
IT
Learning and development
Complaints
Major works