



EQUALITY & DIVERSITY POLICY

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Almond Housing Association Limited (AHA Ltd.) is committed to the promotion of equal opportunity and to combating discrimination, direct or indirect, in:

- a. designing new and upgrading existing housing, including special adaptations;
- b. allocating housing;
- c. providing housing and maintenance services to tenants and factored owners;
- d. recruiting members of AHA Ltd. and to the Board of Management;
- e. employee recruitment and employment practices.

1.2 AHA Ltd. will seek to provide full equality of opportunity in carrying out the above activities and to ensure that, under current legislation (the Equality Act 2010), we do not discriminate against anyone on the grounds of:

- gender (sex)
- marriage or civil partnership status
- age
- ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality (race)
- religion or belief
- disability or health problem (provided that, in the case of recruiting employees, the disability or health problem does not prevent them from carrying out their duties, with appropriate equipment or adaptations etc.)
- pregnancy or maternity status
- sexual orientation
- gender reassignment.

2.0 RESPONSIBILITIES

2.1 Board of Management

- To ensure that there is in place an Equality and Diversity policy which complies with current law, statutory guidance and good practice.
- To ensure that all Board Members implement and comply with the policy at their meetings, in making decisions and carrying out activities on behalf of AHA Ltd.
- To monitor compliance with the policy.

2.2 Management

Chief Executive: To ensure that:

- the policy is communicated to all employees and implemented throughout AHA Ltd.;
- all policies, procedures, publications, information material, advertisements, application forms etc. do not contain any statements or conditions which would breach this policy.

Head of Corporate Services: To ensure that:

- Board Members, Heads of Section and employees receive advice and training on equality and diversity matters as required.

Heads of Section: To ensure that the policy is implemented within their Section, and that other relevant policies and procedures reflect and comply with this policy's principles (see Appendix 1 for relevant policies).

2.3 Employees

- To ensure that they comply with the policy in their day-to-day activities.
- To report any instances of actual or suspected discrimination covered by this policy and/or challenge any discriminatory behaviour they come across.

3.0 DESIGN AND UPGRADING OF HOUSING

- 3.1 AHA Ltd. will ensure that all new housing is designed to current housing for varying needs. For further details see our current Design Brief.
- 3.2 AHA Ltd. will seek to ensure that, subject to the physical constraints of each site and the identification of need following assessment and consultation with partners, each new development incorporates the provision of housing for those with special physical or learning needs, including 'wheelchair accessible' homes.
- 3.3 AHA Ltd. will seek to ensure that, where appropriate and/or possible, planned maintenance projects include bringing the properties up to housing for varying needs standards.
- 3.4 AHA Ltd. will seek funding annually from the Scottish Government and whenever possible include additional funding in our annual budget, for the provision of specialist aids or adaptations to existing properties so that those with specific disabilities may continue to live in their home with as much independence, privacy and dignity as they wish to have.

4.0 ALLOCATION OF HOUSING

- 4.1 AHA Ltd. will maintain an open housing list through the West Lothian Common Housing Register and will seek to avoid being seen as inaccessible to those with housing need. Applications may be submitted at any time.
- 4.2 AHA Ltd. will seek to ensure that in considering each application for housing and in making decisions on the allocation of housing we do not discriminate against any groups or individuals on any of the grounds detailed in para. 1.2.

5.0 PROVISION OF HOUSING MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE SERVICES

Housing Management Services

- 5.1 AHA Ltd. is committed to providing equal access to all our housing management services and will, through implementing our housing policies and procedures, seek to ensure that we do not discriminate against any groups or individuals on any of the grounds detailed in para. 1.2.

Consultation & Participation

- 5.2 AHA Ltd. will engage in regular consultation with our tenants and other users of our services with a view to providing affordable, quality accommodation in a suitable environment. We will seek regular feedback on the provision of our services through ad hoc surveys or questionnaires, major tenant satisfaction surveys and tenant scrutiny activities.
- 5.3 AHA Ltd. will encourage the involvement of all tenants in our activities, in particular through membership of the Association and the Board of Management, through Tenant Focus Groups and the holding of regular Tenant Roadshows and other conferences/events.

Information to tenants

- 5.4 In order to maximise access to services, AHA Ltd. will provide all tenants with full, clear and accurate information about their tenancy in their Tenancy Agreement, Tenant Handbook and other leaflets, and on our website etc.
- 5.5 Where required AHA Ltd. will provide information, application forms, guidance notes etc. in other formats and/or use translation services, to ensure that all groups have equal access to the information etc. that they wish to or need to have.

Referral arrangements

- 5.6 AHA Ltd. will establish referral arrangements with appropriate agencies. When considering an application from such an agency, we will seek to ensure that the agency's Equality and Diversity policy is consistent with this policy.

If an agency does not have an acceptable policy they will either have to produce their own or agree to adopt this policy.

Rents & service charges

- 5.7 AHA Ltd. will seek to ensure that our rents and service charges are fair and affordable, and that rents are compatible with those of other local Registered Social Landlords for similar types of properties.
- 5.8 AHA Ltd. will ensure that when rent arrears occur, they are dealt with promptly, sensitively and fairly, and that every effort is made to resolve rent arrears issues and recover missed payments, before legal action leading to eviction is commenced.

Factored owners

- 5.9 AHA Ltd. will seek to ensure that the services we provide to factored owners and the charges we make for these services do not discriminate against any groups or individuals on any of the grounds detailed in para. 1.2.

Maintenance & repairs

- 5.10 AHA Ltd. will seek to ensure that all tenants and factored owners receive the same quality of service, that all properties are kept in good repair and the installations we maintain are in proper working order, and that in providing maintenance services we do not discriminate against any groups or individuals on any of the grounds listed in para. 1.2.

Management services

- 5.11 AHA Ltd. will seek to ensure that where management services are provided to us or on our behalf by another organisation, the provider of such services either has an acceptable Equality & Diversity policy or agrees to adopt this policy.

6.0 GOVERNANCE

Association & Board Membership

- 6.1 AHA Ltd. will seek to ensure that membership of the Association and participation in our activities are open to all and that we do not discriminate against any groups or individuals on any of the grounds listed in para. 1.2.
- 6.2 AHA Ltd. will ensure that all members have equal opportunity to be nominated for and elected to the Board of Management and to participate fully in Board meetings.

Procurement

- 6.3 AHA Ltd. will seek to ensure that any consultants, contractors or suppliers that we appoint either have an acceptable Equality & Diversity policy of their own or are willing to adopt this policy.
- 6.4 AHA Ltd. will seek to ensure that, as well as complying with all current statutory and good practice requirements, when we are making procurement decisions we do not discriminate against any groups or individuals on any of the grounds listed in para. 1.2.

7.0 RECRUITMENT

- 7.1 AHA Ltd. will advertise internally and externally simultaneously except where internal promotion is wholly appropriate (see para. 10.2 Advancement and Promotion). Applicants will be given clear and accurate information about vacant posts through advertisements, recruitment information and interviewing, to enable them to assess their own suitability for a post.
- 7.2 AHA Ltd. will not imply there is a preference for any one group (e.g. by the use of certain language) unless there is a 'genuine occupational qualification' which limits a post to a particular type of person, in which case this will be stated in accordance with current legislation.

- 7.3 For each vacant post AHA Ltd. will produce an accurate Job Description and Person Specification, to indicate the essential and/or desirable requirements for the job.
- 7.4 As part of our commitment to equality AHA Ltd. has adopted a Disability Policy Statement (Appendix 2) and is registered with Jobcentre Plus as a Disability Symbol User.
- 7.5 Application Forms will be in a standard format which will ask only questions relating to the necessary requirements for the post. Sections of the form that identify the applicant will be removed before short-listing takes place. AHA Ltd. will ensure that any health-related questions are solely related to the job requirements, unless we wish to ask if any special arrangements for the interview are required (see para. 7.13).
- 7.6 Advertisements and recruitment drives will be aimed at as wide a group of suitably qualified and experienced people as possible.

Shortlisting

- 7.7 Shortlisting will be carried out by at least two people to reduce bias and will be based on the requirements listed in the Job Description and Person Specification. All criteria will be applied to each application consistently.
- 7.8 AHA Ltd. will ensure that any applicant with a disability who meets the requirements for the post as detailed in the Job Description and Person Specification will be shortlisted for interview.

Interviews

- 7.9 Each interview panel will consist of at least two people to reduce bias. Board Members will be involved in interviews for the Chief Executive and Heads of Section. The interview panel will agree on the selection criteria before any interview is conducted, and will apply these criteria consistently. If required, the interview panel will be given guidance and training on the effect which generalised assumptions and prejudices can have on selection decisions.
- 7.10 Candidates will not meet any member of the panel before an interview, unless all are doing so on the same footing, so that all may be assessed objectively on the same criteria.
- 7.11 Interviews will be conducted on an objective basis and deal only with applicants' suitability for the job and ability to fulfil the job requirements. Applicants' potential will be taken into account.
- 7.12 Where it is necessary to assess whether personal circumstances will affect performance of the job (e.g. when it involves unsocial hours or extensive travel) this will be discussed objectively avoiding assumptions about marital status, children and domestic obligations. Information necessary for personnel records will be collected after a job offer has been made.
- 7.13 Any health-related questions will be strictly confined to the requirements of the post. If the applicant's capacity to undertake the duties is in doubt because of disability or health problems, the opinion of medical and other relevant professionals with experience of the care and treatment of the particular problem will be sought, with the consent of the applicant.

8.0 EMPLOYMENT

- 8.1 AHA Ltd. will develop, implement and monitor good employment procedures and practices for all employees and will seek to ensure that we do not discriminate against any groups or individuals on any of the grounds listed in para. 1.2.
- 8.2 AHA Ltd. will not discriminate against part-time employees. Conditions of service will apply equally to part-time employees on a pro-rata basis.
- 8.3 As part of our commitment to health and safety and the general well-being of employees AHA Ltd. will encourage them to raise any concerns about health issues with their manager at any time. Each employee will be given the opportunity to discuss any health-related issues at their annual personal development & review meeting, as part of our ongoing support arrangements.
- 8.4 AHA Ltd. undertakes to consider the institution of positive action programmes if there is evidence that members of particular groups are under-represented, within both the total staff complement and within individual employee categories.

9.0 LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

- 9.1 AHA Ltd. will not discriminate on any of the grounds listed in para. 1.2 in the provision of learning or development opportunities. Appropriate training will be provided to enable employees to perform their duties effectively, in accordance with our objectives and budget.
- 9.2 AHA Ltd. will ensure that all employees and Board Members receive appropriate equal opportunities training, information and advice, including attending at anti-discrimination courses as required.

10.0 ADVANCEMENT AND PROMOTION

Advancement

- 10.1 Initial placement on the incremental scale will be approved by the Chief Executive, following a recommendation by the interview panel. The new employee's incremental placement will be considered on the basis of their skills, experience and the expertise that they bring to the job, and with reference to current salary levels in AHA Ltd.. Advancement on incremental scales will be in line with current Conditions of Service.

Internal promotion

- 10.2 AHA Ltd. recognises the benefit of using existing talents to the full, in the interests of both employee morale and our business, and will consider internal career promotion as appropriate. In so doing we will ensure that we do not discriminate against any employee on any of the grounds in para. 1.2 above.

11.0 HARASSMENT, VICTIMISATION AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Tenants, applicants & factored owners

- 11.1 AHA Ltd. will respond promptly and sensitively to all reports of alleged discrimination and harassment from tenants, applicants, factored owners and any other users of our services. In dealing with reports of harassment we will seek to ensure that we do not discriminate against any groups or individuals on any of the grounds listed in para. 1.2.

- 11.2 AHA Ltd. will ensure that all damage to our properties, including graffiti, which is linked to alleged or actual harassment, is dealt with promptly.

Employees

- 11.3 AHA Ltd. will deal sensitively and effectively with any complaints by employees of direct discrimination, discrimination by association or perception, sexual harassment, racial harassment or third party harassment. AHA Ltd. will protect employees raising such grievances from victimisation.

Discrimination by association occurs when someone suffers discrimination because they have a family member, friend or colleague who has one of the characteristics listed in para. 1.2.

Discrimination by perception occurs when someone suffers discrimination because others think they possess a particular protected characteristic listed in para. 1.2, even if the person does not actually possess that characteristic.

Sexual harassment may be defined as;

- (a) unnecessary touching or unwanted physical contact;
- (b) suggestive remarks or other verbal abuse;
- (c) leering at a person's body;
- (d) compromising invitations;
- (e) demands for sexual favours;
- (f) physical assault.

Racial harassment may be defined as: "Words or actions against a person or group of people, which may include attacks on property as well as on the person, because of their colour, race, nationality or ethnic or national origins, which results in the person or group feeling humiliated, offended or degraded". (*Equality & Human Rights Commission*)

Third party harassment is where employees are harassed by others (non-employees), e.g. tenants, members of their household, contractors' operatives or other members of the public.

- 11.4 If any employee considers that they are suffering from unequal treatment on the grounds in para. 1.2, they will be encouraged to report this, and may make a complaint which will be dealt with through AHA Ltd.'s Grievance procedure. A concern may also be raised by using our Grievance procedure or Whistleblowing policy.
- 11.5 AHA Ltd. will follow current guidance and good practice, such as in the Acas guides, when investigating and dealing with reports of discrimination, harassment etc., and will seek to ensure that all reports are dealt with as confidentially as possible, given the circumstances in each case.

12.0 SUPPORT

- 12.1 Any employee with a disability or any other serious, chronic or debilitating illness will not be required to adopt different work practices or otherwise have their Job Description amended as a result of their condition. The exception to this rule will be where the employee requests a change which is approved, provided that the employee continues to be able to undertake their duties and/or does not pose any health and safety risk to themselves or their colleagues.

12.2 Any employee who becomes disabled, or who contracts a other serious, chronic or debilitating illness will be given every form of support to enable them to remain at work and reasonable arrangements will be made with other employees to facilitate this objective. Where appropriate AHA Ltd. will obtain specialist medical advice to assist in making informed decisions.

13.0 REDUNDANCY, DISCIPLINE, DISMISSAL

13.1 AHA Ltd. will not discriminate unfairly or unlawfully in the application of disciplinary action, redundancy or dismissal and will ensure that policies and procedures do not have a disproportionate effect on any one group of employees.

13.2 AHA Ltd. will monitor the number and type of people terminating employment to establish why they are leaving and whether we need to take any action as a result of any trends etc. emerging.

13.3 AHA Ltd. will ensure that employees and Board Members responsible for discipline, redundancy or dismissal have received training in the objectives of this policy and their legal obligations.

13.4 If an employee fails to comply with this policy or with any related policies and procedures this may result in disciplinary action being taken at the appropriate level, depending on the seriousness of the circumstances.

13.5 If a Board Member fails to comply with this policy or with any related policies this will be regarded as a breach of the Board Members' Code of Conduct. A serious breach of the policy may result in the Board Member being required to resign.

14.0 IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW

14.1 We recognise that the existence of a policy in itself does not guarantee or provide equality in access, opportunity or outcome, and that the success of the policy depends on the commitment in practice of all Board Members and employees.

14.2 The Head of Corporate Services will provide an annual report on the implementation of this policy to the Board, normally at the June meeting.

14.3 Any action required to promote equal opportunities arising from the annual review will be incorporated in AHA Ltd.'s annual Business Plan.

14.4 The Head of Corporate Services will ensure that the Board of Management reviews this policy at least every five years.

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CURRENT VERSION 6.0 APPROVED IN	FEBRUARY 2016
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APPENDIX 1**POLICIES RELATED TO THE EQUALITY & DIVERSITY POLICY**

Para. no.	Policy Title
3.1 - 3.2	Development
3.3 & 5.10	Reactive Repairs, Cyclical & Planned Maintenance
3.4	Aids & Adaptations
4.1 - 4.2	Allocations; Suspension of Applicants
5.2 – 5.3	Tenant Participation
5.4	Customer Service & Communication
5.7	Rents; Service Charges
5.8	Rent Collection
5.9	Factoring
6.1	Membership
6.2 - 6.3	Procurement of Goods & Services
7.1 – 7.14	Recruitment & Selection
8.1 – 8.2	Staff Induction; Staff Appraisals; Flexible Working; Absence Management; Maternity Leave; Paternity Leave; Adoption Leave; Shared Parental Leave; Time off to Care for Dependents; Retirement
8.3	Health, Safety & Welfare
9.1 – 9.2	Learning & Development
11.1 – 11.8	Anti-Social Behaviour (including harassment of minorities); Staff Code of Conduct; Grievance & Dispute; Whistleblowing
13.1	Discipline & Appeals
13.4	Staff Code of Conduct
13.5	Board Members Code of Conduct

APPENDIX 2**ALMOND HOUSING ASSOCIATION LIMITED****DISABILITY POLICY STATEMENT****1.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 As part of our commitment to Equality and Diversity Almond Housing Association Limited is registered with the Employment Service as a Disability Symbol User. Using the sign is a positive step which gives a clear message to those with disabilities that we will recognise and make the most of their abilities, wherever possible.

2.0 COMMITMENTS

- 2.1 Our use of the symbol will let people with disabilities know that, as a minimum, we have made the following commitments to help them develop their job and career opportunities.

2.2 A Guaranteed Job Interview

All applicants with a disability who meet the essential criteria for a job vacancy will be offered an interview, and will be considered on their abilities.

2.3 Consulting Disabled Employees Regularly

Any employee with a disability will be asked, at least annually, what we can do to ensure they are able to use and develop their abilities at work.

2.4 Keeping Employees if they become Disabled

If an existing employee should become disabled, we will make every effort to ensure they can stay in employment.

2.4 Improving Knowledge

We will provide regular opportunities, formal and informal, for employees to develop their knowledge and awareness of disability issues, including training as part of Equality & Diversity education, so that staff may fulfil the commitments of this Statement.

2.5 **Checking Progress and Planning Ahead**

Each year we will:

- review these commitments and what has been achieved
- examine ways to improve on the commitments, if possible
- keep all employees advised on progress made, and future plans.

3.0 **CONCLUSION**

3.1 We believe it is right to display the Disability Symbol, as:

- it makes sense to have the widest possible choice when recruiting or developing employees, and if disabled people were excluded, the best person for the job might be missed;
- by having and implementing good employment policy and practices on disability, all existing employees will be treated fairly, should they become disabled.