



# **EQUALITIES AND HUMAN RIGHTS STRATEGY**

<b>Approved</b>	<b>March 2023</b>
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## 1. Introduction

West of Scotland Housing Association Group is committed to promoting and upholding equalities and human rights for all.

We believe that everyone has the right to be treated with dignity and respect, regardless of their background, identity or circumstances.

Our commitment to equalities and human rights is fundamental to our vision and values as a registered social landlord, charity, and registered society. We believe that promoting and upholding equalities and human rights is essential to achieving our objectives and making a positive difference to the lives of the people and communities we serve and the people that we employ. We will continue to work towards embedding equalities and human rights in all aspects of our work, and we will seek to continually improve.

This strategy aims to set out our approach to equalities and human rights as both a landlord and employer, in line with the requirements of relevant legislation and regulatory frameworks.

### **Our Vision:**

We go further to provide housing you call home

### **Our Strategic Aims**

WSHA's Strategic aims are to:

- Deliver outstanding service to all our customers
- Maintain and improve our homes and communities and develop new homes to meet local needs
- Be the best we can be for our customers, staff and volunteers
- Work with others to improve tenant's lives and deliver sustainable communities
- Be well managed and financially strong

### **Our Values**

- **Respect** – we treat everyone with empathy and kindness
- **Inclusive** – we aim to meet individual needs and recognise diversity
- **Integrity** – we act with integrity and honesty at all times
- **Improvement** – we aim to continuously improve what we do to benefit our customers, staff and stakeholders
- **Support** – we will be supportive in our approach with customers, staff and stakeholders

## 2. Regulatory Background

Our approach to equalities & human rights is also shaped by the requirements of the Scottish Social Housing Charter and the Scottish Housing Regulator. In February 2019, the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) put in place a new Regulatory Framework. This framework is clear in respect of SHR requirements in respect of

ensuring compliance with relevant regulation and legislation in respect of Equalities & Human Rights.

It is important that as a landlord, we must work to understand the individual needs of our customers and to delivery services that recognise and meet these needs. The SHR requires us to collect equalities data from our customers and use this to inform our decision making. We must also take equalities impacts into account when taking decisions that impact our customers.

There are Regulatory Standards of Governance & Financial Management in place and one standard is that we should conduct our affairs with honesty and integrity and this requires us to pay due regard to eliminate discrimination, advance equality and foster good relations across the range of protected characteristics.

Since this framework was put in place in 2019, we have carried out a lot of work in respect of improving our approach to Equalities and Human Rights to ensure compliance with these regulatory requirements and standards. Our Board is required to annually assess our compliance with these requirements and standards on an annual basis and produce an Annual Assurance Statement.

### **3. Context**

As detailed above, we have been focusing on improving our approach in respect of equalities & human rights over the past 3 years. In this period, the following has been achieved:

- Collection of equalities data for 70% of our tenants
- Collection of equalities data for all staff and development of workforce profile
- Process in place to collect equalities data for all housing applicants, job applicants, new employees and Board members
- Development of Equality, Diversity & Human Rights Policy
- Establishment of Equality, Diversity & Human Rights Working Group – made up of staff and tenants
- Development and implementation of Equalities Impact Assessment for relevant policies, strategies and decisions
- Establishment of Equalities & Diversity e-learning module for all staff (included in staff induction)
- Review of Customer Engagement and Care approaches in line with SHR Equalities Guidance
- Development & Implementation of Staff Equalities Action Plan including establishing a more diverse workforce
- Board and Staff Recruitment based on respective profiles.
- Focus on creating more diverse workforce in respect of our recruitment approach
- Leadership & Board training on completing Equalities Impact Assessments
- Equalities Audit carried out by BDO, our internal audits – moderate assurance and all recommendations have now been implemented

While we have made significant progress over the past 3 years, we are committed to continuing our focus in respect of equalities and human rights to not only ensure

compliance with the regulatory standards and legislation but to ensure that this is at the heart of what we do as a landlord and an employer. The strategy outlines our key objectives in respect of taking this approach forward.

## **4. Our Approach**

### **What is our Equalities Approach?**

Our approach to equalities is based on the principles of fairness, equality and diversity. We recognise that people have different needs and experiences, and we aim to provide services that are accessible and inclusive to all. To achieve this, we will:

#### **Promote equality of opportunity**

We will actively promote equality of opportunity for all, regardless of characteristics such as age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

#### **Eliminate discrimination**

We will continue to ensure that our policies and practices do not discriminate against any individual or group, and we will take action to address any discrimination that does occur.

#### **Foster diversity and inclusion**

We will actively seek to foster diversity and inclusion in all aspects of our work, including in our workforce, our tenants and service users, and our partners and stakeholders.

#### **Engage with our communities**

We will engage with our communities to understand their needs and experiences, and we will seek to ensure that our services meet those needs and are responsive to those experiences.

### **What is our approach to Human Rights?**

Our approach to human rights is based on the principles of dignity, respect, and autonomy. We recognise that everyone has fundamental human rights that must be protected and upheld, and we aim to embed these principles in all aspects of our work. As a social landlord and charity, our approach has always been in line with Human Rights requirements and as a result our policies both as a landlord and employer go above and beyond the legislative requirements. Going forward our approach will be ensuring we are more aware of human rights implications in respect of what we do as a social landlord, business and employer.

To achieve this, we will:

### **Uphold human rights standards**

We will ensure that our policies and practices are consistent with human rights standards, including those set out in the Human Rights Act 1998 and other relevant legislation and frameworks.

### **Promote human rights awareness**

We will promote awareness of human rights among our staff, tenants and service users, and we will seek to embed a human rights culture in our organisation.

### **Provide effective remedies**

We will ensure that effective remedies are available to individuals whose human rights have been violated, and we will take appropriate action to address any human rights violations that do occur.

### **Work with partners and stakeholders**

We will work with our partners and stakeholders to promote and protect human rights, and we will seek to influence policy and practice at a local, regional, and national level.

## **5. Strategy Objectives**

### **5.1 To continuously improve the services we provide as a landlord in line with our approach to equalities & human rights**

To achieve this we will do the following:

- Carry out an equalities & human rights impact assessment for all policies and decisions that will impact our customers
- Ensure all staff have completed their e-learning module
- Deliver awareness raising sessions to teams in respect of human rights implications for social landlords (based on Equalities & Human Rights Commission Guidance)
- Further collection of Customer Equalities Data to increase our knowledge of our customers to assist to identify their needs
- Develop our Customer Profile and consider service improvements that can be made based on this profile
- Engage with communities and stakeholders to understand their needs and experiences, and to ensure that our services are responsive to those needs and experiences.

### **5.2 To incorporate equalities & human rights into our customer engagement and customer care approach**

To achieve this we will do the following:

- Regularly promote our customer engagement activities and encourage involvement through a range of methods
- Ensure that any customer engagement events are accessible to all customers
- Ensure our complaints procedure is accessible to all customers
- Continue to implement various customer service methods of contact to ensure accessibility for all customers
- To continue to engage with minority groups in our communities to ensure their views are heard

### **5.3 To ensure our customer communications are accessible to all customers**

To achieve this objective we will do the following:

- Commission an external accessibility review of our website and implement their recommendations
- Review and improve our office signage in line with our recent office disability audit
- Ensure all communications use Plain English principles and can be easily understood
- Develop customer communications plan based on our customer profiles and preferences
- Raise awareness to staff of our commitment to Happy to Translate and contacts for interpretation and translation services
- Actively promote diversity and inclusion in our customer communication

### **5.4 To continuously improve our approach as an employer in respect of equalities & human rights**

To achieve this objective, we will do the following:

- Development and implementation of our staff recruitment videos to encourage applicants for various backgrounds and abilities
- Review of HR policies to ensure that our equalities & human rights approach is embedded in our policies
- Actively promote diversity & inclusion internally to our staff
- Carry out an equalities & human rights impact assessment for all staff policies and key decisions that will impact staff

### **6.5 Incorporate our Equalities & Human Rights approach into our procurement and contract management approaches to influence our supply chain**

To achieve this objective, we will do the following:

- Include equalities and human rights in our tender templates
- Include equalities and human rights in our quality scoring where applicable
- Ensure all contractors and suppliers are aware of our equalities & human rights and our expectations of them in this respect

## **6. Relevant Strategies, Policies and Procedures**

This strategy is linked to the following WSHA strategies, policies and procedures:

- People & Culture Strategy
- Customer Engagement Strategy
- Procurement Policy and Procedures
- Equality & Human Rights Policy
- Customer Care Charter
- Equality & Diversity Policy (HR)
- Communications Strategy
- Data Collection Procedures

## **7. Monitoring and Reporting**

The Director of Corporate Services will lead on the implementation of this strategy. A report against progress on the strategy will be provided to Board on an annual basis.

A report on performance against the strategy will be delivered annually and will be issued to all tenants and published on our website.

The strategy will be reviewed every three years, however, we will develop an action plan on an annual basis which details the actions for the next year.

If you require further information regarding this strategy please contact Jennifer Cairns, Director of Corporate Services on 0141 550 5625 or at [Jennifer.cairns@westscot.co.uk](mailto:Jennifer.cairns@westscot.co.uk).

## **8. Action Plan**

An annual action plan will be developed to ensure that the Association delivers the action identified in relation to each objective. This will be regularly monitored and reviewed by the Corporate Management Team and Board.