

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

2020-25



OUR VISION IS:

TO CREATE THRIVING COMMUNITIES AND PLACES PEOPLE ARE PROUD TO CALL HOME

OUR VALUES ARE:

ENGAGE • EMPOWER • INNOVATE • DELIVER

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1. INTRODUCTION

We are guided by vision to create thriving communities and places people are proud to call home. Equality, diversity and inclusion is inherent to this, and the diversity of the people we serve and employ is one of our main strengths. Equality, diversity and inclusion must therefore be firmly embedded in everything we do. We aspire to understand, reflect and meet the needs of the diverse communities we serve by providing services that are accessible and inclusive.

At Lewisham Homes we are committed to promoting a culture that actively values and respects people's differences, and where diversity is celebrated. We recognise that people from different backgrounds and with different experiences can bring valuable insights to the workplace and enhance the way we work and deliver services to our residents. We believe that equality, diversity and inclusion should be embedded within all aspects of the business, and this belief is a continuous thread that runs all the way from our Board to our customer-facing employees delivering on the ground.

This strategy

- Includes our role as an employer and as a landlord, providing homes, delivering services and building community cohesion; and proportionately extends to the activities of our contractors, suppliers, partners and volunteers.

- Provides a framework for ensuring our services, policies and procedures avoid disadvantaging our residents, customers and employees on the basis of the characteristics defined in the Equality Act. It also affirms our commitment to prevent discrimination and our holistic approach to diversity in understanding the importance of intersectionality and how employees and residents with multiple identities define their experiences.
- Supports the delivery of our Corporate Plan 2019-23 and our cultural ambitions. It is closely aligned and overarches our commitments in our People Strategy, Community Engagement Strategy and Customer Experience Strategy.
- Will enhance the services being delivered to our residents and will help create a great place to work for all staff. This strategy sets out our equality, diversity and inclusion aims for staff and residents, and how we will deliver them over the next five years.

Inclusion – statement of intent

We are committed to inclusivity and have developed an inclusion statement for our staff and residents. We will strive to have an inclusive culture where individuals, teams and the organisation as a whole are strengthened by diversity and represent the

communities we serve. When people from different backgrounds, with varied experiences and unique points of view, come together, this makes our outlook broader, makes us stronger and more able to help the wide range of residents we serve.

An inclusive workplace culture allows people to thrive at work, regardless of their background, identity or circumstance. Inclusion is what's needed to give diversity real impact, and drive towards a world of work where all employees are empowered. Whilst diversity and inclusion often go hand in hand, inclusion is about individual experience and allowing everyone at work to contribute and feel a part of an organisation. We have developed a inclusion statement of intent to demonstrate our commitment to being an inclusive employer

2. CONTEXT

Beyond our legal responsibilities

In line with London Borough of Lewisham as a public body the Equality Act 2010 requires Lewisham Homes to meet certain statutory duties. The purpose of the statutory duty is to assist public bodies to tackle persistent and long-standing issues of disadvantage.

The Equality Act 2010 replaced several UK equality laws with one single Act. The Act protects people from discrimination on the basis of nine 'protected characteristics' which are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief (including lack of belief), sex and sexual orientation.

The Equality Act also introduced a new Public Sector Equality Duty, replacing the previous race, disability and gender duties. It requires Lewisham Homes to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act;
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

We are also committed to the principles of Human Rights which are fairness, respect, equality, dignity, and autonomy. These principles underpin the Human Rights Act. We will adopt a human rights-based approach which means we will ensure both the standards and the principles of human rights are integrated into policy making, the day-to-day running of our services, and the management of our staff.

The Localism Act 2011 places a greater emphasis on local accountability and decision-making. It introduced changes to support communities to identify and drive local priorities and shape local services.

The Hackitt Review highlighted a number of concerns about inequality, accountability, and highlighted the issue of stigma in social housing. The subsequent expected legislation will place duties on housing providers including engagement plans for each high rise building.

Our community profile

Lewisham is a vibrant, culturally rich and inclusive inner London borough. It has a population of 306,000 people, and this is forecast to increase by approximately 0.9 per cent per year to more than 340,000 in 2028. Lewisham is the 15th most ethnically diverse borough in the country. In the 2011 Census, 46.4 per cent of Lewisham's people were from a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) background.

Lewisham is a very young borough, with a quarter of residents under 20 years old, so demand for housing will continue to grow in the future. However older residents and those with additional needs still comprise a major part of the population. 14.4 per cent of Lewisham's residents described themselves as living with a long-term health condition in the 2011 Census, compared to 17.6 per cent for England. The number of residents aged 85 and over also continues to rise. Lewisham is situated close to the centre of London, one of the wealthiest cities in the world. Yet, as in many London boroughs, our community still suffers from high levels of poverty, deprivation and inequality. According to the Department for Communities and Local Government's 2015 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), the borough ranked 48th

out of 326 local authorities (1st being most deprived). This is a marked improvement from 2011 when it was ranked 31st, yet Lewisham still remains well within the most deprived quartile of local authorities. As would be expected in a highly diverse inner London borough, there are significant variations in deprivation by ward, with concentrations in the far north and the far south of the borough.

Our staff profile

We are proud to have a diverse workforce representative of the borough and its residents, with 47 per cent of our workforce being from BAME backgrounds. Women represent 36 per cent of the workforce and this is growing. We are committed to attracting more women into the trade areas of the business which are predominately male. Currently around 12 per cent of our workforce is under 30, which is not fully representative of our communities. We are committed to working with local colleges and are increasing the number of opportunities we provide for apprentices. We are proud to be a disability-confident employer, and over 10 per cent of our workforce has a registered disability.

Socio-economic factors

The wider economic and political environment has provided a series of challenges to the diversity agenda and has brought to the forefront existing inequalities. It is likely to leave many challenging legacies for inequality.

The 2020 Black Lives Matter global movement highlighting racial inequality has refocused attention on wage disparity and representation issues in the workplace. We, along with our staff and partners in the council, support the Mayor's pledge, and commit to championing equality and inclusivity at Lewisham Homes.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created numerous challenges for employers, service providers and society. It has highlighted existing socioeconomic inequalities in health and appears to have amplified the gradients in poor health by age, sex, ethnicity, income and wealth, education and housing in the UK. The impact of social isolation and mental health has greatly intensified for many. Lockdown has been especially difficult for those that don't have a permanent home or outdoor space. There have been reports of several racially motivated attacks in the wake of the coronavirus as well as verbal harassment. Brexit and the increased national discussion on

immigration and asylum seekers has focused attention on a number of issues around ethnicity and religion. Both have been reflected in an increase in hate crime nationally.

The Casey Review: A review into opportunity and integration from the Department of Communities and Local Government considered what could be done to boost opportunity and integration in our most isolated and deprived communities, and created a range of challenges for local authorities and housing organisations.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission's report Being disabled in Britain: A journey less equal is a review into disability inequality in Great Britain. It gives comprehensive evidence of the difficulties people with disabilities can face across such areas as living standards, employment, access to services, crime and punishment, and education. Locally in Lewisham we have seen a steep rise in disability hate crime, due to increased awareness on the topic and improved reporting.

3. WHERE WE ARE NOW

At Lewisham Homes we recognise the need to do the right things around equality, diversity and inclusion. Lots of good work is already underway across the business, and embedded in many practices and behaviours. This strategy recognises a need to build on this good work and is our formal commitment to doing so for our staff and residents.

Residents

We record demographic information and any known health concerns or potential support needs. We are working to tailor our services to individual needs, and particularly to support groups that are more vulnerable. However, we know our data could be better and this will help us to do this more effectively.

Supporting residents to sustain tenancies is integral to our resident services directorate and to our approach to housing management; our welfare benefits team works to sustain tenancies. This includes help for residents to maximise income and resolve debt problems. We offer support for issues such as hoarding, domestic violence and for residents requiring adaptations to properties according to their needs. We have also worked to develop a more bespoke approach to tenancy sustainment, identifying residents who may be at greater risk of tenancy failure, and carrying out additional visits and welfare checks.

We provide services to our residents in person, over the phone and online. One of our objectives is to involve residents in shaping the future of how we make these services more accessible. Where we are designing new homes and carrying out major works and internal improvements, we are using accessible standards. Our sheltered housing residents benefit from an enhanced housing management model which provides additional support and social activities.

Diversity and inclusion are key themes in our community engagement and customer experience strategies. We have a vibrant programme of community engagement activities, with a focus on training and employment, young people, digital support, and health and wellbeing activities. Our Lewisham Homes Academy provides training, development and help to access work and training.

Social value and investment opportunities are centred around the four key themes in our community engagement strategy – training and employment, young people, digital support and health and wellbeing activities. We collect data about participants to ensure we are reaching all resident groups.

We have launched a new community engagement framework and are working to broaden engagement opportunities, ensuring we offer more choice and variety in how our audiences can interact with us and encouraging more representative engagement. A key part of this is our “partnerships” strand where we work with existing community groups to ensure the seldom-heard groups are represented. This includes work with organisations such as the Lewisham Disability Forum, the Young Mayor’s Office and Vietnamese community groups.

We have a new set of corporate service standards, which will underpin everything that we do, ensuring we are delivering excellent customer service to everyone we interact with, every time.

Staff

We are proud that the rich and vibrant ethnic diversity of our staff reflects the communities that we serve in the borough. We continue to celebrate and encourage this through our recruitment and staff development programmes.

Staff overall tell us Lewisham Homes is an organisation where equality and diversity is promoted. There is a culture of celebration with a range of events taking place each year

focused around black history, LGBTQ+ awareness, International Women’s Day, Holocaust Memorial Day and disability awareness.

We developed an inclusive leadership programme aimed at helping managers to develop inclusive leadership skills and the behaviours which have now become part of our new competency framework. We have also developed and rolled out a well-received internal communications campaign – “I’m Included”. This has helped us to engage staff at all levels about what inclusion means by sharing the thoughts and views of our diverse workforce through an engaging poster and video campaign.

36 per cent of our managers are from a BAME background and we recognise this is lower than our overall BAME workforce who represent 47 per cent of the workforce. Our leadership group is 20 per cent BAME and 20 per cent of the group have also declared they have a disability. Although our gender pay report for 2019 shows there is no overall gender pay gap at Lewisham Homes, we are taking steps to encourage more women to join us as skilled tradespeople. We will also be looking at how we support the development of our BAME and female staff across all professions and seniority.

We launched the dignity at work policy to support and sustain a positive working environment, free from any form of inappropriate or unacceptable behaviour.

4. WHERE WE WANT TO BE

The Board and executive team at Lewisham Homes are committed to equality,

diversity and inclusion in everything we do and this is a continuous thread that runs from our Board to our customer-facing employees. Fundamentally our strategy encapsulates what we believe is right and our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion having a high priority in all we do at Lewisham Homes.

We want to develop and expand our multi-agency approach by initiating and building

Partnerships, including our partnership with the London Borough of Lewisham, multicultural professional associations, academic institutions and other organisations across the borough. This is important for us to further our equality, diversity and inclusion ambitions for staff and residents.

Residents

We want to celebrate and support the communities we serve, improve life chances and reduce stigma. We have a diverse group of residents, reflecting the diversity of Lewisham borough as a whole.

We are committed to equality, diversity and inclusion being enshrined in everything we do and will make public commitments to deliver fair and accessible services. An equality impact assessment will be completed for all policies and we will sign up to the Chartered Institute of Housing's charter on equality and diversity. We will champion the "See the Person" campaign. We will ensure images and references to residents used in our internal and external communications are representative of, and celebrate the diversity of, the communities we serve.

We will use data to tailor our services and interventions to the needs of our residents. We will improve the quality and comprehensiveness of our information, particularly in relation to protected characteristics, vulnerable groups and household composition.

Every contact counts and we are committed to improving our systems, so we can record this information effectively. We will use analysis to identify underlying trends, and to inform the development of our services. We will build on our online offer, to provide more information for those who wish to engage digitally.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted that certain groups are more susceptible to the impact of the virus including those who are older, those from BAME communities, and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Our shared facility temporary accommodation requires residents to share bathrooms and/or kitchens. We are conscious that many of our residents will fall into one or more of these at-risk categories, and we are committed to ensuring our homes are as safe as possible. We will work with Lewisham Council and in line with the borough-wide COVID-19 control plan.

The design and maintenance of our homes will foster a sense of community and inclusivity by encouraging people of different backgrounds and tenures to mix, and enabling everyone to enjoy their neighbourhood. This will increase understanding and tolerance and help create cohesive, sustainable communities.

We will build on the work of the community engagement strategy and launch the engagement framework that will underpin our approach to involving residents. Residents will be involved in deciding where we spend community investment and social value money that will improve and strengthen communities and opportunities for our residents. Based on insight we will work proactively to involve residents and community groups from under-represented groups.

Residents will be encouraged to help shape the design and delivery of all of our services. We will review our model for delivery of front line services with residents to ensure it is delivering an inclusive and responsive service. We will review our offer to residents, in particular to those in our hostels, acknowledging that living in temporary accommodation often exacerbates other inequalities.

Staff

We will work towards a workforce that is, as far as practicable, representative of the communities we serve at all levels of the organisation. We will recruit, develop and retain a diverse, talented and motivated workforce that reflects the communities we work with. We recognise the need to attract more women to our workforce and will partner with local schools and colleges to support this commitment. We will seek to better understand any barriers to progression and implement actions to address them.

We are committed to creating a culture of inclusivity where staff and residents thrive, by delivering a programme of training and events that help to raise awareness and knowledge around culture, equality and diversity.

We are committed to engaging and empowering our staff, and to providing further opportunities for staff to have a voice through the creation of equality staff networks.

We want to raise awareness of hidden disabilities and neurodiversity in the workplace to create more inclusive workplaces where individuals can thrive.

Lewisham Homes is committed to being an employer of choice and we are developing

a framework for implementing new working practices which will enable our staff to work seamlessly across different locations, and at times that are more advantageous to both residents and employees. This, together with the launch of our new family-friendly policy, will support us in creating an inclusive culture for employees with children, older dependants or those

that have a disability. It will also help us to recruit and retain valuable staff who may otherwise have to leave work due to conflicting personal commitments.

We will build on the work of our people strategy to improve staff engagement and for our workforce to deliver our values and embed these in all that we do.

5. STRATEGY OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

We are committed to working with residents, customers, partners and employees to tackle the equality, diversity and inclusion issues that matter to them and to achieving shared objectives. Before writing the strategy we invited residents and employees to tell us about the equality, diversity and inclusion issues that matter most to them which we could address through the implementation of the strategy and action plan.

The overarching aim of this strategy is that at Lewisham Homes, equality, diversity and inclusion is an intrinsic part of daily working, the organisational culture and our service delivery. There are five overarching objectives that support the strategic aim and each has key objectives to deliver and an outcome to achieve:

Commitment

To continue to make a strong and visible commitment to equality and diversity, internally and externally.

Insight

To use insight to develop the organisation, design services and tailor interventions to be responsive to needs.

Involve

To encourage and facilitate the involvement of customers in shaping the design and delivery of high quality, accessible and continuously improving services.

Accessible

To provide high quality services that are accessible and deliver outcomes, and that are continuously improving.

Recruit

To recruit, develop and retain a diverse, talented and motivated workforce that reflects the communities we work with.

6. CONSULTATION

This strategy is the outcome of consultation with the Board, executive leadership team, the wider leadership group, our staff sounding board and our residents. The equality analysis assessment for this strategy has found no adverse impact on any particular group of residents or employees.

7. ACCESSIBILITY

This is a strategy document by Lewisham Homes. If you need help to understand it or if you have any questions, please contact us by phone on 0800 028 2028, email us at enquiries@lewishamhomes.org.uk, or visit our office. We can also provide accessible options that meet your needs including large print, audio or electronic formats, and we can provide written information in another language. We can also offer a meeting with a member of staff and an interpreter.

8. OWNERSHIP, MONITORING AND REVIEW

We will focus on achieving the five key objectives over the five year period 2020-2025. The action plan shows how these objectives relate to our five ambitions (landlord, placemaker, employer, partner, and enterprise). The action plan will be reviewed annually and supports the delivery of our objectives in the strategy and how these will be achieved and reviewed. This will be monitored by the Equality and Diversity Steering Group with quarterly updates to our Ethics & Remuneration Committee and reported and reviewed by the Board on an annual basis.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

2020-25



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