



EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICY

1. Statement of intent

- 1.1 Arcon Housing Association Limited offers equal opportunities in the provision of housing and housing services, and in the employment of staff, and is opposed to discrimination at any level.
- 1.2 The policy applies to all individuals or groups of people applying for housing, for employment or for contracts with the Association. They will be treated equally irrespective of race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, appearance, sex, sexual orientation, physical or other disability, medical condition, marital status, age or religion.
- 1.3 The Association's Board Members and Staff are committed to equal opportunities in both their composition and methods of operation, abiding by the Race Relations Act, the Sex Discrimination Act, the Protection from Harassment Act, the Disability Discrimination Act, the Employment Rights Act, the Employment Relations Act and Equality (Age) Regulations and implementing the provisions of the Race Relations Housing Code of Practice in Rented Housing and Code of Practice in Employment.

1.4 This specifically means that:-

1.4.1 In carrying out its Equal Opportunities Policy, the Association will actively assist disadvantaged minority groups to benefit from its housing services.

1.4.2 It will seek to identify the needs of the disadvantaged minority groups in its area of operation by establishing close relationships with these groups.

1.4.3 To help it fulfil its commitment to equal opportunity, the Association will collect and monitor records of the ethnic and/or racial origin of all those applying to it for housing and all those seeking employment with the Association.

1.4.4 In hiring contractors and other agencies to work for it, the Association will be mindful of its commitment to equality of opportunity.

2. **Introduction**

2.1 The Association, in publishing this statement of policy on Equal Opportunity, records its commitment to equal opportunities and its recognition that some groups and individuals are disadvantaged in terms of employment and housing.

2.2 It is the Association's intention that its policy will address all areas of discrimination. To this end, the Chief Executive has been nominated as the person responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of the Equal Opportunities Policy and its implementation and supervision. This will include an annual review of the Policy and associated procedures to ensure that they comply with current legislation and best practice.

All aspects of personnel policies and procedures will be kept under review to ensure that they do not operate contrary to the Equal Opportunities policy.

- 2.3 The Association's policy on Equal Opportunities is applicable to all members and staff. The Association also aims to encourage co-operation from consultants and contractors, as well as tenants served by the Association. Consultants and contractors will be required to provide evidence of an Equal Opportunities Policy as part of any tendering process.

3. The meaning of discrimination

- 3.1 Discrimination can be direct, indirect or it can take the form of victimisation.
- 3.2 Direct discrimination means less favourable treatment on account, for example, of someone's sex, race, age or disability.
- 3.3 Indirect discrimination occurs when an unjustified condition is imposed which one group of people (for example one sex, race or disabled people) finds more difficult to satisfy even though, on the face of it, the condition itself does not appear to be discriminatory.
- 3.4 Victimisation occurs where an individual is treated less favourably because of having asserted a statutory right or having assisted a past or present colleague in doing so.

4. Provision of Housing

4.1 Allocation policy

The Association will ensure that all applications for, and allocations of, accommodation and other housing services are dealt with fairly and equally. The Association will ensure that the widest cross-section of applicants are encouraged to apply for accommodation and it will actively seek to attract applicants from minority/disadvantaged groups, by making contact with minority/disadvantaged groups in the area. The Association will set lettings targets each year and monitor actual lettings against these targets.

4.2 Tenants

The Association will encourage tenants to join the Tenants Forum or the Tenants Committee where their views will be incorporated into Board strategies and policies and it will also provide support to tenant and resident groups. The Association will be accountable to its tenants by providing newsletters, rent statements and an annual report.

4.3 Contractors and consultants

4.3.1 The Association will actively assist minority groups to benefit through its development, maintenance and housing management activities. The Association promotes participation and involvement from all sections of the community in order to develop its stock.

4.3.2 When engaging consultants and contractors, the Association will review their working practices to ensure that good practice, particularly in the area of equal opportunities and race equality and diversity, is followed.

5. Employment

5.1 Terms and Conditions

5.1.1 The Association is committed to achieving equality of opportunity in its employment policies, practices and procedures. The terms and conditions of employment will be reviewed periodically to ensure that they reflect best practice in relation to equal opportunities. The Association will not discriminate in the provision of general staff facilities and benefits.

5.1.2 All staff will receive training on the Association's Equal Opportunities Policy to ensure that they keep up to date with current best practice. All staff will be required to ensure that their personal conduct within the organisation, and in representing it to tenants and members of the public, reflects the organisation's Equal Opportunities Policy.

5.1.3 Any breach of the Association's policy will be treated as a disciplinary matter and dealt with in accordance with the Association's disciplinary procedure.

5.2 **Recruitment**

5.2.1 The objective of the employee recruitment process is the selection of the most suitable person for the job in respect of qualifications and capability. The Association's aim is to ensure that all job applicants and employees receive equal treatment. All staff involved in recruitment will be trained to ensure that selection is made on a fair and objective basis.

5.2.2 All posts will carry a job description and person specification, against which candidates will be assessed equally and fairly. Job descriptions will not contain requirements or conditions

which could be judged to be discriminatory or which cannot be shown to be justified.

5.2.3 Every opportunity will be afforded to applicants who are from minority ethnic groups and efforts will be made to rectify any under-representation of such groups in the staff employed. All disabled applicants who meet the minimum criteria for a post will be interviewed.

5.4 **Advertising**

All posts will normally be advertised internally and externally in relevant outlets to ensure the widest cross section of applicants. In order to encourage disadvantaged groups to seek information on vacancies, all recruitment and publicity material will actively reflect the Association's Equal Opportunities Policy. A statement regarding the Association's commitment to equal opportunities will be incorporated in all recruitment advertising.

5.5 **Training**

5.5.1 All employees will be given basic training so that they can uphold the Association's commitment to equality of opportunity.

5.5.2 All employees will receive a copy of this policy.

6. **The Board of the Association**

In the composition and operation of the Board, the Association will be mindful of its commitment to equal opportunity. Regular training will be available to all Board Members on equal opportunities best practice. The Board will review its own composition regularly and will take such steps as necessary in

order to achieve adequate representation in its membership from tenants, minority ethnic groups, the disabled and by gender.

7. **Black & Minority Ethnic Communities**

The Association will develop strategies to ensure that its policies and procedures support the recruitment and retention of people from BME communities to the Board, its Committees and the workforce and facilitate their progress to key decision making positions.

The Association will also develop a strategy to ensure that its management and development services respond to BME housing needs in all the local authority areas in which it operates.

8. **Responsibility**

8.1 All employees have the right to equality of opportunity and have a duty to implement this policy.

8.2 The Chief Executive and those involved in recruitment and training are responsible for ensuring that the aims of this policy are achieved and as such they will be trained appropriately.

8.3 Any employee who acts in breach of the content or spirit of this policy will be dealt with under the Association's disciplinary procedures. Acts of serious discrimination can amount to gross misconduct and may lead to dismissal.

8.4 The person in the Association with ultimate responsibility for ensuring that the Association, its employees and its agents adhere to this policy is the Chief Executive.

9. **Harassment**

- 9.1 Harassment is a form of unlawful discrimination and it will not be tolerated by the Association.
- 9.2 Harassment is unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct (often of a sexual or racial nature) which the victim finds objectionable and which fails to respect the victim's dignity.
- 9.3 Examples of harassment might include conduct or language which causes embarrassment, offence, upset or discomfort; display of pornographic material; suggestions of or actual physical contact; unwelcome ridicule or jokes; the use of offensive or embarrassing "banter".
- 9.4 If sufficiently serious a single incident can amount to harassment.
- 9.5 The Association will give urgent priority to re-housing those tenants who are victims of harassment and will take action, where possible and subject to the wishes of the victim.
- 9.6 The Association views harassment very seriously. Anybody at work suspected of committing an act of harassment against a colleague will be dealt with through the disciplinary procedure. Harassment can amount to gross misconduct and may lead to the dismissal of the harasser. Any tenant suspected of harassment will be dealt with according to the Association's policies relating to neighbour nuisance and according to the terms of the tenancy agreement. Harassment can lead to eviction.
- 9.7 The Association recognises that an employee who feels that he/she has suffered harassment may want to tackle the problem informally by speaking directly to the harasser in the presence of a third party who will record details of the meeting. If an employee wants assistance at

this informal level he/she should discuss the matter in confidence with the Finance Director.

- 9.8 If an employee prefers to make a formal complaint the matter should be reported to the Chief Executive. All such complaints will be dealt with sensitively and confidentially. An impartial investigation into the complaint will take place, each party having the opportunity to comment fully on the allegations.
- 9.9 The complainant will be kept informed of the progress of the investigation.
- 9.10 A report of the findings of the investigation will be supplied to each party. If the Association considers that the complaint is well founded it might be necessary (subject to the complainant's wishes) to separate the parties by relocating the harasser. A decision will be taken by the person carrying out the investigation as to whether or not disciplinary proceedings should be commenced
- 9.11 If the complaint is not upheld, nevertheless it might be decided that it would be sensible to separate the two parties if either party so requests and it is feasible.
- 9.12 Unless it is found that the allegation was made falsely and in bad faith (in which case the complainant may face disciplinary proceedings) the Association will ensure that the complainant does not suffer any detriment for having brought the complaint.

10. **Complaints**

- 10.1 The Association intends this document to have as wide a circulation as possible to promote the need for equal opportunity. If you have any

complaints, these will be dealt with in accordance with the Association's Complaints Procedure, which is available on request.

10.2 Other courses of action open to you include complaining to your local councillor, Member of Parliament, the Racial Equality Council, the Equal Opportunities Commission, Citizen Advice Bureau, the Independent Housing Ombudsman or The Housing Corporation.

11. **Monitoring the effectiveness of the policy**

Applicants for housing will be invited to complete an equal opportunities monitoring form to identify their ethnic origin and this information will allow the Association to monitor the Housing Management service it provides. The Housing Management Committee will set a target each year for housing ethnic minorities and the actual lettings against this target will be monitored on a quarterly basis. The Housing Management Committee will also annually monitor applications received onto and removed from the Association's waiting list as well as movements on the Manchester Housing Register.

The Finance & Business Development Committee will annually monitor job applicants and those recruited by the Association. The Board will monitor the composition of the Association's workforce by reviewing the RSR return and will also monitor the composition of the Board itself during its annual review. Periodic reviews of the Association's performance against CRE codes of practice for employment and rented housing will also be carried out. The Chief Executive(see clause 2.2 above) will also carry out an annual review monitoring the effectiveness of the Association's Equal Opportunities Policy and its implementation and supervision.