

Gender Equality Scheme

INTRODUCTION

“Rochdale Boroughwide Housing recognises that people who provide and use its services come from many diverse backgrounds, with different experiences and needs. We aim to ensure that no-one receives less favourable treatment because of race, ethnic origin, nationality, religion, cultural background, sex, sexuality, disability, domestic circumstances, illness, age, employment status, membership of trade unions or political beliefs. RBH also acknowledges that some people experience more than one form of discrimination.”

We are pleased with the progress we have made in promoting gender equality. However, we also acknowledge there is more work to be done. This Scheme will be regularly monitored, reviewed and developed in line with customers feedback, best practice and legislation. We are confident that during the next three years, by progressing the actions in our Plan, we will make accelerated progress in further promoting gender equality for both our staff and customers.

The Gender Equality Duty: What is it?

In 2005 the Government produced an Equality Bill with the purpose of ensuring that people are treated fairly and equally (i.e. are not subject to discrimination). Within this bill a Gender Equality Duty was established for the public sector. The new legal Duty places a requirement on public bodies to be proactive and to promote gender equality within their service delivery and employment. It is recognised that public authorities can make an enormous contribution towards removing the barriers to equal opportunities that exist in society.

The legislation outlines both a General Duty and Specific Duties

The General Duty

The General Duty requires that every public authority in carrying out its functions should:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment, taking active steps to comply with both the Sex Discrimination Act and the Equal Pay Act
- Take active steps to promote equality of opportunity between men and women when carrying out their functions and activities.

The Specific Duties

In addition, public bodies are required to comply with the Specific Duties which are:

- To produce and publish a Gender Equality Scheme (GES) identifying Gender Equality goals and actions to meet those goals
- To consult with employees and stakeholders in the development of the GES
- Monitor and review progress. The scheme will need to be reviewed every three years
- To publish an annual report on progress with the Action Plan
- To develop and publish an equal pay policy including measures to address promotion, development and occupational segregation
- To conduct and publish gender impact assessments of all legislation and major policy developments and publish their criteria for conducting such assessments)

RBH is committed to achieving equality of opportunity for all women and men and will work to promote sex equality within the workplace.

Both women and men can experience discrimination and disadvantage in terms of employment and service delivery, and may experience sexist behaviour both in public and in the home.

RBH will comply with the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and the Equality Act 2006 and will ensure that women and men receive:

- Equal access to services and resources
- Equal opportunity in employment, including career development
- Equal participation in the decision-making process

Preparation of the scheme

In preparing this scheme we have consulted employees, customers and trade unions. We have taken into account information which has been gathered and been considered relevant as to how our policies and practices affect gender equality in the workplace and in the delivery of our services.

We have considered the need to have objectives to address the causes of our gender pay gap.

Single equality scheme

RBH intends to fulfil its obligations under the Gender Equality Duty by ensuring gender-specific actions are incorporated into our Corporate Equality and Diversity action plan. This is monitored by the Equality and Diversity Steering group; our Board; and a dedicated Equality and Diversity officer.

Equality and diversity is a fundamental concept in RBH and equality objectives and targets are built into service planning across the organisation.

The Rochdale Borough Profile

According to the 2001 census, the total population for Rochdale borough was 205,357.

Gender

There were more females than males in the Borough: 105,652 (51.4%) compared with 99,705 males (48.6%).

Employment

Although similar numbers of men and women worked in distribution, hotels and restaurants, there was a distinct gender split in other sectors. The largest sector for male employment was manufacturing, where men made up 73% of the workforce. Similarly, women made up 74% of the workforce in the public administration, education and health, which was the largest sector for jobs for women.

Carers

1 in 10 people in Rochdale provided unpaid care in 2001 (similar to the national average), helping family, friends or neighbours with long-term physical or mental ill-health or disability or problems relating to old age. Of these, 4,802 people (2.3% of the population) provided more than 50 hours or more a week of unpaid care.

The Equality Standard for Local Government

The Equality Standard for Local Government has been developed to help local authorities achieve and maintain, through continuous improvement, the highest standard of equality in employment and service delivery.

In order to ensure that barriers preventing equal access to services and employment are identified and removed, RBH has adopted the Equality Standard for Local Government and make sure equality and diversity are embedded throughout the organisation.

The Standard consists of the following 5 levels for local authorities to achieve:

Level 1 – Commitment to a comprehensive Equality Policy

Level 2 – Assessment and consultation

Level 3 – Setting equality objectives and targets

Level 4 - Information systems and monitoring against equality targets

Level 5 – Achieving and reviewing outcomes

RBH has achieved Levels 1, 2 and 3. We are currently working towards Level 4.

Assessing Impact

RBH continues to carry out a programme of Equality Impact Assessments for our policies and procedures, including new ones. Managers have received appropriate training to enable them to carry out the assessments to ensure that they do not include words or potential outcomes that could adversely affect equality.

Positive Practice

In undertaking Equality Impact Assessments, RBH has identified a number of examples of where gender equality is highlighted.

Some of these include:

- A female gas engineer is employed on the installation team and can undertake all gas work for customers if requested
- The programmed repairs team can provide free crèche facilities at their open days
- We offer a child care voucher scheme to all employees, whereby staff can benefit from tax exemptions on childcare costs
- We offer a job- share scheme which is available for all employees including those in craft trades and manual posts
- The priority area team on Kirkholt has a baby changing room available and play area and range of toys and activities for children
- The Kirkholt drop- in centre has arrangements for customers to speak to male staff through their volunteer peer support group 'Men with voices'

Monitoring on Gender

RBH will review the Gender Equality Scheme and monitor progress on the Action Plan on an annual basis. In particular we report on progress towards our Equality and Diversity Action Plan to our Board each year.

Transsexual people

The gender equality duty is limited by existing UK law which protects transsexual people from discrimination in work and vocational training (including higher and further education) but not in regards to goods, facilities and services. A 1999 European Court of Justice case ruled that it was unlawful to discriminate in employment. The law protecting transsexual people against discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services was not changed, however a recent European Directive means that discrimination will be prohibited in these areas from December 2007.

Definitions and the difference between transsexual and transgender

Existing UK law provides protection for transsexual people, but not those identifying as transgender from discrimination at work. The law defines transsexual people as those undergoing, intending to undergo, or having already undergone gender reassignment. It does not protect those individuals who may define as androgynous or who cross-dress.

How we will review our Action Plan and monitor the Scheme

The corporate Equality and Diversity Action Plan is reviewed quarterly at our Equality and Diversity Steering group, and reported to the Board annually. It is intended to carry out a full review every three years.

Complaints or Comments

Should you have a complaint about this policy or about a failure to implement this policy please do so at any housing office or write to:

Complaints Co-ordinator
Rochdale Boroughwide Housing
PO Box 69, The Old Post Office
The Esplanade
Rochdale OL16 1AE.

Should you wish to:

- comment on this policy
- suggest improvements

please contact
Equality, Diversity & Support Manager
PO Box 69, The Old Post Office
The Esplanade
Rochdale OL16 1AE.

E mail rbh.policy@rbhousing.org.uk
Telephone 01706 273843