

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Strategy

Introduction

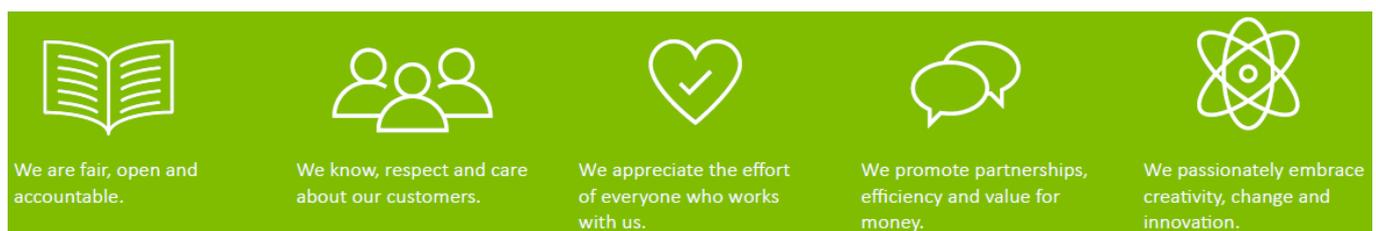
Great Places is more than just a landlord. We are a 'profit for purpose' business that provides a wide-range of services and works in partnership with others to help create vibrant, sustainable communities. We give back to our colleagues, customers and communities to help improve lives and make our society a better place for everyone.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion plays a central role in supporting the delivery of our social purpose, and it sits at the heart of everything we do. At Great Places we challenge discrimination because we believe that everyone should be treated fairly and equally. We celebrate the diversity of our people because our differences make us stronger. We support our colleagues to be their true selves because we know they will be at their best and do their best. We provide all our customers with a meaningful voice because everyone's opinion counts. We value the experience, skills and abilities of each and every person because that's what helps us innovate. And we listen because we want to grow and learn from each other. We believe that together we are greater.

Our EDI Strategy sets our approach to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, and outlines the commitments we are making over the next three years. It is a 'living' document that can be adapted in line with the changing needs of our customers, colleagues and partners, as well as the external environment.

Context

This EDI strategy is aligned to our corporate objectives and ambitions. Our vision is *Great Homes, Great Communities* and *Great People*, and we aspire to deliver this as a *vision driven* and *values led* organisation. Respecting equality, diversity and inclusion remains one of our key operating principles, and our values are the golden thread through everything we do:



The strategy has been developed to support the coming together of our two businesses following the merger between Great Places and Equity Housing Group in April 2020. We want to ensure that all colleagues and customers feel a sense of belonging to our new organisation, and that EDI is embedded within our integration programme so that all service re-design is carried out considering the diverse needs of all our people.

Our EDI commitments reflect the actions we need to take to help embed our new operating culture and our cultural indicators. Our commitment to creating a sense of belonging and inclusion is a key aspect of our GREATER Together ethos that will in turn support the overall achievement of this strategy. Following the development of our cultural indicators, our new behavioral competencies will define how colleagues bring this to life, especially through our increased focus on Respect, Empowerment and Reputation.

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Strategy

The EDI strategy also acknowledges the exceptional circumstances that our people and communities are currently facing due to the Coronavirus pandemic, and how disproportionately affected many of our colleagues and customers are. We know that our social purpose is now more important than ever, and we have the opportunity to play a meaningful role in tackling the inequalities in our society.

We have made it a key priority to ensure we know our customers even better and that we are aware of any additional challenges they may be facing. Where possible we will tailor our services to meet their individual needs, improving the support we offer and providing them with the best customer experience. As part of our commitment to EDI we will also ensure that we give all our people a meaningful voice. We will consult and engage with our diverse colleague and customer groups to ensure that all policies, procedures and service improvements meet their needs as protected under The Equality Act 2010.

We will also work closely with our local partners and the community and voluntary sector to ensure we are strategically aligned and helping each other in our shared ambitions. Our Community Investment Strategy will play a key part in helping us to deliver these ambitions. We will be exploring ways we can further enhance our role as a community anchor, identifying new and innovative opportunities for community investment to tackle local inequalities and create safer, more sustainable neighbourhoods. We will ensure our customers are at the centre of our decision-making and we will work together to shape our shared future.

Legal and Regulatory Duties

The EDI strategy addresses how we intend to meet our legal obligations in line with equalities legislation and our duties as set out by the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing. The Equality Act 2010 contains statutory requirements stating we must provide protection for people against discrimination or harassment because they have, (are perceived to have, or are associated with someone who has) a protected characteristic.

We are also committed to the wider needs of other socially excluded communities or groups. This includes people on low incomes and facing food poverty, single parents, carers and young people leaving care, people with drug and alcohol dependencies, homeless communities and those living in areas of deprivation. Similarly, in the workplace we recognise the importance of valuing the neurodiversity of our colleagues so we can embrace and maximise the talents of people who think differently. This includes, amongst other colleagues, those who have autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia or ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder).

We will also ensure we adhere to the responsibilities of the 'Public Sector Equality Duty' so we can consider individuals when carrying out our day-to-day work. This means we must have due regards to:

Eliminate discrimination

Advance equality of
opportunity

Foster good relations
between different groups

We will also publish relevant and proportionate information to show compliance with the Equality Duty, and set specific and measurable equality objectives.

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Strategy

Under the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard registered providers set by the Regulator for Social Housing we are required to respond to the diverse needs of customers, and to:

- Treat all customers with fairness and respect
- Demonstrate that they understand the different needs of their customers
- Identify customers with additional support needs in relation to the equality strands

In addition, by implementing this strategy we will be complying with the European Convention on Human Rights and will be ensuring we meet all our other regulatory guidelines in this area. We will also ensure our EDI activities are in line with good practice across the social housing sector and beyond. We will do this through the networks that we are involved in, and by benchmarking our performance against the Chartered Institute of Housing's (CIH) Equality and Diversity Charter.

Where we are now

We have made great progress since the introduction of our EDI strategy in 2016, but we acknowledge that there is still much more we can do to make a lasting difference. Highlights of our achievements so far include:

We commenced Gender Pay Gap Reporting in line with new regulations under the Equality Act, and most recently carried out our first Race Pay Gap Reporting exercise. In line with the publishing of our gender pay gap a 'women in leadership' campaign was launched to mark the 100 year anniversary the female vote.

We delivered EDI training programmes on EDI Awareness, Unconscious Bias and Mental Health. Following the review of our EIA Framework, EIA training was delivered to Board, Leaders and Managers. We also participated in HDN Mentoring and were a founding member of the GMHP GAP Mentoring Programme.

We reviewed our Translations Policy & Procedure to centralise requests and enable more efficient monitoring of usage, costs and quality and published guidance to colleagues and customers. A 'One Voice for All' guide was also published setting out our corporate approach to EDI language and terminology usage.

We moved from Disability Confident Level 1 to Level 2, and became Stonewall Diversity Champions. We also introduced Colleague Diversity Champions roles to help embed our commitment to EDI across the business and a new EDI Specialist role was created to help us drive our commitments forward.

We monitor customer satisfaction levels and report on the EDI profile of all our housing allocations. We launched a range of community investment Initiatives to help support and engage with customers and young people within our communities, including the Mancunian Way Youth Outreach Programme

We analyse colleague perceptions of working here by protected groups, identifying trends and highlighting areas where we need to improve. We introduced a range of initiatives and awareness raising events to improve on this feedback and have actively been involved in EDI networks to learn and share best practice.

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Strategy

Moving Forward

The EDI strategy will develop and enhance the key equality themes from our previous strategy (*LGBT, Gender, Disability and Race equality*) to consolidate learning and help embed our approach across the business. We will continue to focus on making a lasting impact in the following 3 areas:

As an employer

As a service provider

As a community anchor

This EDI Strategy places an increased focus on inclusion. We want all of our people to feel a sense of belonging to Great Places, and to know that they are valued and respected for who they are. We will ensure our customers and colleagues have a meaningful voice, and that everyone is involved in driving improvements and shaping the decisions we make. We will encourage our customers and colleagues to reach out for help and support when they need us most, so we can help them to feel safe at home and in their communities.

The first two years of the strategy will primarily focus on EDI within the integration programme and our ambition to come together as 'one team' following the merger with Equity Housing Group. We will also focus on how we can support our customers and colleagues most adversely affected by the pandemic.

We will create more opportunities for people to talk to us, and share experiences, so together we can decide the right actions to take. We will also explore ways in which we can strengthen our role as a community anchor to support those communities in most need. We will do this by identifying social investment and partnership opportunities, making the most of our skills and resources to help support wider neighbourhood regeneration.

Our EDI Commitments & Objectives

We have outlined 8 key commitments to advance our approach to EDI over the next three years. These commitments are underpinned by 12 key objectives which we will achieve during the lifetime of this strategy. These are supported by yearly milestones (appendix 1), with key deliverables outlined below.

1 *Creating an Inclusive Culture*

We will create an inclusive culture by ensuring everyone feels respected, listened to and that they are able to be their true selves at work

A key element of our strategy is to create a culture at Great Places where everyone feels able to be their true selves. We want people to talk openly about their experiences and know that what they say is valued and that it makes a difference. Our key objective under this commitment is that:

Over 90% of our colleagues will tell us that they feel a sense of inclusion and are able to be their true selves at work.

To deliver this we will:

Continue to deliver EDI Space to Talk sessions to enable our colleagues to have a meaningful voice

Re-launch our Everyone Counts forums so we can provide more opportunities for diverse colleague groups to share their feedback and influence strategic decision making

Analyse diverse colleague groups experiences of working at Great Places and their sense of belonging to the organisation

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Strategy

2 *Growing and Learning Together*

We will increase the knowledge and awareness of our people to ensure that EDI is culturally part of everything we do

Learning more about our diverse cultures, backgrounds and personal experiences helps us to open our minds and develop greater empathy and understanding for our fellow human beings. By recognising and valuing the diversity of our colleagues, we will help develop a culture of inclusion and respect, helping us to getting the best from everyone. By increasing the awareness of our colleagues they will also be better placed to support the diverse needs of our customer groups. Our key objective under this commitment is that:

At least 95% of colleagues will have completed mandatory EDI training and this is improving colleague and customer experience

To deliver this we will:

Agree mandatory EDI training for all colleagues, and develop new training modules to support managers and leaders in line with their EDI responsibilities.

Expand the EDI training offer to provide tailored training and development opportunities for front line colleagues and that aligned to the needs of their local customer groups.

Provide EDI training to our involved customers, including the Insight group, to enhance their awareness so they can help us to ensure our services are meeting everyone's needs.

3 *Representing our Diverse Communities*

We will identify and address barriers to recruitment and progression, and take positive action to ensure we are representative of our diverse communities

As an inclusive employer we must be confident that our recruitment processes are fair and that we do not discriminate against anyone. We must also ensure that everyone we employ is able to reach their full potential and that we remove any potential barriers to their personal development. We want our workforce and leadership teams to be reflective of our diverse customer groups. This will help us to be better placed to understand the challenges faced by our communities and how we may best respond to their needs. We have three key objectives under this commitment, they are:

Positive action has been taken to increase the representation of our diverse customer groups at Board and Leadership level

The Board has progressed towards its target of 20% Board membership from diverse ethnic communities

We hold accurate EDI data on our colleagues (with at least a 90% completion rate) and we monitor our recruitment and development practices to promote equality

To deliver this we will:

Carry out a review of our recruitment processes to identify any potential for bias, and implement processes to continually monitor trends in recruitment, selection and colleague development.

Launch new internal initiatives and participate in external programmes so we can better support colleague development, with a particular focus on enabling colleagues from diverse ethnic

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Strategy

communities to grow as managers and leaders.

Take positive action when recruiting at Board and Leadership level, with a targeted focus on increasing the representation of diverse ethnic communities.

4 **Enhancing our Customer Voice**

We will provide our customers with a meaningful voice and involve them in shaping our services to ensure they are inclusive of everyone's needs.

Our customers are at the heart of everything we do. We want to make sure that they have an active role in all aspects of our business and that their views and aspirations drive our decision making processes. Over the next three years we are committed to getting to know our diverse customer groups better. Our two key objectives under this commitment are that:

We will hold accurate and up to date profiling information on our customers with at least 90% of customers contacted to provide this information.

We will use customer profiling information to help inform the way we deliver services, increase satisfaction and promote engagement with our diverse customer groups.

To deliver this we will:

Use customer profiling data to analyse delivery, performance and satisfaction with our services and identify areas where we need to improve.

Help our customers to become digitally enabled whilst also considering the barriers that some customers may still face when trying to access our services (including language and communication barriers) and explore the best options to support them .

Target diverse customer groups and provide a range of options to engage with us to ensure they can have their say and be actively involved in our decision making processes.

5 **Finding Strength in Partnership**

We will work alongside our partners to promote inclusion, help tackle inequalities and respond to the adverse impacts of the COVID pandemic

We know that we cannot achieve our EDI commitments without the support of our partners. We recognise that we will need to work across all our local authority areas to help tackle the inequalities specific to our local neighbourhoods. Our Key Objective under this commitment is that:

We have increased our role as a community anchor and can demonstrate through our community investment activities that we are making a positive impact in reducing inequalities.

To deliver this we will:

Identify opportunities for community investment to tackle inequalities, help local communities most adversely affected by the pandemic and to support customers who are experiencing hate crime or domestic abuse.

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Strategy

Work with our procurement partners and local suppliers to explore how we can best use our spending power to support our EDI commitments and to help us create more inclusive and sustainable communities.

Continue to develop our Independence and Wellbeing offer, working with partner agencies to provide specialist services and expert support to those who need it most.

6 ***One business for all***

We will ensure that our post-merger integration programme is delivered in line with our commitments to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

As we continue with our integration programme it is important that EDI is the co-pilot of our journey. It is particularly important for the creation of our 'one-team' ethos, ensuring everyone who works at Great Places feels respected and that they belong here. A commitment will also be made to embedding EDI considerations in service re-design along with our 'best of both' approach. We have two key objectives under this commitment, they are:

By the end of integration our operating model will meet the needs of our diverse customer groups

Colleagues feel they have been treated fairly throughout the integration process

To deliver this we will:

Carry out Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) on reviews of key strategies and policies, and any proposed changes to the way we deliver services to our customers.

Ensure that when we implement new systems they are able to support our EDI commitments, with a key focus on configurations for the Aaeron System and the design and accessibility of our new corporate website.

Engage with our colleagues and customers throughout the integration process to keep them updated and ensure everyone has the opportunity to share their feedback and help shape our shared future.

7 ***Leading the way***

We will be recognised as an organisation that is committed to equality, diversity and inclusion, and be an employer of choice

Our People Strategy sets out our ambitions to attract the best, and to do this in a competitive marketplace we need to stand out for the right reasons. Being recognised as an employer who is truly committed to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion plays a significant role in attracting new talent. To help strengthen our reputation we need to improve the way we promote our commitment and celebrate our successes. Our Key Objective under this commitment is:

To increase our reputation as an inclusive employer and attract a more diverse range of talent.

To deliver this we will:

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Strategy

Increase the EDI focus on our website and social media channels, promoting our inclusive culture and raising awareness of the inequalities faced by our diverse communities.

Share our successes with colleagues, customers and partners so that they can become our best advocates and also help increase our reputation as both an employer and landlord of choice.

Continue to benchmark our performance through external accreditation programmes, and assess how we are perceived as an inclusive employer through reputational surveys.

8 *Planning for a better future*

We will continue to engage with our customers, colleagues and partners to help shape and develop our long-term approach to equality and inclusion

Over the next three years we will continue our conversations to help plan our longer term approach. The pandemic has further highlighted the inequalities present in our society, and we do not yet know the full impact it will have on our communities. Our Key Objectives under this commitment is that:

We have agreed a long-term vision for EDI beyond the life of this strategy

To deliver this we will:

Continue to consult and engage with our customers and colleagues so we can listen to their concerns and identify further ways we can support them.

Work closely with our local strategic partners to ensure we are aligned with their priorities and that we are playing our role in tackling inequalities.

Review new and emerging inequalities, share best practice and take a proactive approach so we continuously improve and are best placed to realise opportunities to make a difference.

How will we know how well we are doing?

As well as monitoring our performance against our key objectives and performance indicators, we have set out milestones that we will use to monitor our progress. The milestones are attached as an appendix to this strategy.

An operational EDI action plan will also be produced at the start of each financial year. The plan will include SMART actions so that we can track our progress and ensure that people responsible for delivery are taking ownership of their actions. The EDI Action Plan will be monitored by the Diversity Champions and Everyone Counts Forums, with regular updates presented to the Leadership Team and the One Voice Committee. Updates will also be presented to the Board to ensure they have oversight of our EDI activity, and we will report our progress to involved customer groups so they may hold us to account.

We will also benchmark our performance externally through participation in external accreditation programmes (including CIH Charter, Disability Confident and Stonewall WEI), and through our local networks including GMHP's Diversity, Inclusion, Cohesion and Equality (DICE) group, Housing Diversity Network and Houseproud NW.

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Strategy

An annual EDI report will be produced to demonstrate performance against our EDI objectives and commitments. EDI key performance indicators will also developed and headline indicators captured within the corporate scorecard.

Value for Money

By successfully embedding EDI throughout the organisation we will ensure we deliver services in the most appropriate way and that we get things right first time. Our resources will be targeted appropriately to help reduce inefficiencies. We will ensure our customers receive services that meet their individual needs, helping to increase their levels satisfaction. In addition, by creating an inclusive culture within the organisation where colleagues feel valued and engaged people will be more likely to stay and therefore the costs associated with high colleague turnover will be reduced.

Risk

Implementation of this strategy will address the following risks:

- **Understanding customers changing needs and expectations:** Failure to address our EDI obligations will lead to services that do not meeting the needs of our diverse customer groups, resulting in low levels of satisfaction and high turnover in our properties
- **Reputational risk:** Failure to embrace EDI will damage Great Place's reputation amongst our customers, partners, stakeholders and funders. This it will make it difficult to attract new customers and put the organisation at a clear disadvantage when tendering for new service contracts and funding opportunities
- **Recruitment and retention:** A positive track record in EDI is essential to being competitive in the marketplace and being considered an employer of choice. By increasing our reputation as a fair and inclusive employer we will be able to recruit from the widest talent pool and attract and retain the best talent
- **Regulation:** Failure to adhere to the EDI standards set out in the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing could contribute towards to a regulatory downgrade

Implications For Customers

Our customers will continue to feel valued and respected by the organisation and services delivered will meet be tailored to their needs. All services will be accessible to everyone and information will be available in alternative formats. We will ensure that our customers are treated fairly and their differences are recognised and celebrated, creating diverse and inclusive communities. We will put customers' needs first and these will be at the heart of everything we do.

Environmental Implications

If this strategy, and associated action plan, are fully embedded and delivered, we will be enabling our customers to live in their home and communities in a sustainable and independent manner. Customers will be supported to manage their homes in an environmentally friendly manner, and information on the actions that we are taking to reduce our carbon footprint will be communicated in an accessible way.

Conclusion

This EDI strategy sets out Great Places' commitment to EDI from colleagues, customers and communities perspectives, embedding EDI principles at all levels of the organisation. We expect all

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Strategy

colleagues, customers and partners and third parties delivering services on our behalf to adhere to the principles set out in this strategy to ensure everyone feels valued and is treated fairly and with respect.

Links to other strategies

The strategy supports and influences other key colleague and customer strategies/policies, including:

Development Strategy	Customer Experience Strategy	People Strategy
Community Investment Strategy	Customer Voice Strategy	Learning & Development Policy
Anti-Social Behaviour Policy	Wellbeing Strategy	Family Friendly Policies