

Muir Group Housing Association Ltd

Single Equality Scheme

Introduction

This is Muir Group's first Single Equality Scheme and Action Plan. It is intended to be a dynamic document focusing on housing and equality issues to help coordinate and guide our work, demonstrate our commitment to equality and demonstrably improve the housing and employment situations of members of the community who are disadvantaged or receives less favourable treatment on any grounds, but in particular in the areas of the core strands of equality covered by national legislation and the Single Equality Act 2006. These are Age, Disability, Gender, Transgender, Race, Religion or belief, Sexual Orientation.

Aside from our legal duty to comply with the current equality legislation, our commitment extends to being proactive in ensuring that everybody who comes into contact with Muir Group is treated with respect, dignity and fairly.

This Scheme exists within the context of Muir Group's over-arching Equality and Diversity Strategy and Policy, which outlines how we will fulfil our legal, regulatory, social and moral responsibilities to promote equality of opportunity to all members of the communities in which we operate and in all policy and service areas.

One of the key priorities within Muir Group's corporate strategy is:

'To ensure we promote equality and diversity in the provision of housing stock, housing management and maintenance services, and to ensure the Association employs and meets the needs of a diverse workforce and is led by a Board and Committees that reflect the communities in which we operate'

As a provider of affordable housing to those in need, Muir Group has, in its areas of operation, the ability to reduce the disadvantages experienced by local residents by ensuring that the services we provide are tailored to the needs of the communities and individuals we serve. Muir Group is committed to promoting the equality of opportunity to all sectors within our communities and ensure that the public have equal access to all the services we provide.

Muir Group recognises that its ability to meet these diverse needs can be, and is, assisted by employing a diverse workforce which is representative and reflective of the communities that we operate in. The importance of training for all our staff is key to ensuring that our workforce is equipped with the skills and knowledge to deal effectively with enquiries from customers and to deliver the required service. Muir Group invests significant amounts of time and resources in the development of its staff to this end.

Muir Group has an Equality & Diversity Policy and Strategy, which has been produced in consultation with staff, residents and other stakeholders. The strategy and this scheme are understood within the organisation. Both are reinforced through a comprehensive framework of learning and development.

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Muir Group strives to provide an open and supportive working environment in all of its offices and schemes where all employees are encouraged to reach their potential. Muir Group promotes a diverse workforce and seeks to have appropriate representation of all groups at every level within the organisation.

Having governance arrangements which reflect the composition of our customer profile and the communities we serve is equally important. As such Muir Group has set targets to achieve this and ensure that all Board and Committee members receive regular training to equip them with the knowledge and skills to perform their roles effectively.

At Muir Group we are committed to ensuring that our services are accessible to all our customers. We will seek alternative methods of access and service delivery where barriers perceived or real may exist that may make it difficult for people to work for us or use our services.

Muir Group is committed to equality of opportunity and equal access for all and will carry out its duty with positive regard for the following core strands of equality:

Age	Disability
Gender	Race
Transgender	Sexual Orientation
Religion and Beliefs	

However, it is also recognised that some people experience disadvantage due to their class, appearance, responsibility for dependants, unrelated criminal activities, being HIV positive or with AIDS, or any other matter which causes a person to be treated with injustice.

This Single Equality Scheme will aim to address disadvantage and discrimination wherever it is found in order to make our communities where we operate a more fair and equal place, in which to live and work.

Harassment and/or discrimination of anyone will be taken very seriously and will not be condoned or tolerated in any form in relation to service delivery or employment. Any reported incidents will be fully investigated and addressed in accordance with relevant policies and procedures.

Muir Group will meet and where possible surpass our legislative and regulatory requirements.

Muir Group will strive to be outcome focussed and report on what makes a difference to our staff and customers.

We also recognise our responsibility to embrace national and local government agendas regarding community cohesion, sustainability and through our partnership working strive to improve the quality of life for all our residents and the neighbourhoods where they live.

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We will implement a planned programme of Equality Impact Assessments which will enable us to assess the differential (positive and negative) impact of our services and policies across Muir Group.

What is a Single Equality Scheme?

A Single Equality Scheme sets out our plans for making equality happen for everyone living, working or comes into contact with Muir Group. The Scheme also includes a number of things we must consider. For example, our Action Plan must include measurements of progress for people in the areas of employment, access to our services and properties.

The purpose of our Single Equality Scheme is to:

- Build upon our BME strategy, our Disability Equality Scheme and our Gender Equality Scheme, which includes transgender.
- To ensure the other three core equality strands (age, religion and beliefs and sexual orientation) are given equal prominence in our work to combat discrimination
- Find out what barriers are faced by people and take steps to remove them
- Tell people what our responsibilities are
- Explain how we make things fairer for people
- Make sure we meet our legal responsibilities
- Work in partnership with other organisations to prevent ignorance and prejudice in the wider community
- Show what has changed and set out our equality action plan on how we will put the Scheme into practice.
- Monitor and check what we are doing and report each year.

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Outcomes

The overarching outcome of this Single Equality Scheme is to be a 'fully inclusive' organisation. One where...

Corporate commitment and governance

- All staff members are 'diversity champions' and staff challenge themselves, others and the organisation to become more inclusive
- It has created a working environment which recognises and respects others and is free from unlawful discrimination or harassment
- It meets and where possible, surpasses relevant UK/EU legislation and KLOE 31
- All of its policies and services have been assessed to ensure they are fully inclusive and non-discriminatory with an EIA programme which is fully embedded across the organisations
- It can evidence improved community cohesion and demonstrate progress on addressing poverty, inequality and discrimination
- Builds homes which change with the changing needs of our customers and people waiting for properties

Employment

- It has a diverse workforce at all levels
- It has inclusive service provision and employment practices which we can show make a difference

Housing services

- Its customer access points, website and premises are fully accessible and staff go that extra mile to make a difference
- Its customers can access the full range of services it offers and are individually tailored to meet the diverse needs of customers, including cultural, language, literacy, health and social
- It has diminishing number of incidents and increasing satisfaction regarding ASB, other forms of harassment and Domestic Abuse
- It supports local partnerships and multi-agency approaches to improve the quality of life for customers

Resident involvement

- It ensures that involvement activities are reflective of the customer database and that they acknowledge and takes into account the variety of methods that can be used to ensure involvement from minority community members
- It can demonstrate that all of its customers, influence and shape policy and services

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How we have involved people in the development of the Scheme

We have consulted with our staff, our residents, our contractors and various agencies/community groups covering the diversity strands as well as other E&D practitioners within the housing sector to inform this Scheme

What the involvement told us

The responses enabled us to ensure all the latest legislation was covered, the correct terminology was used where appropriate and led us to extend the sections on the six core diversity strands to cover transgender and other forms of discrimination as the 7th and 8th strand respectively.

Customer Profile and Resident Satisfaction

We commenced an extensive customer profiling exercise over the course of 2008/9, which will give us detailed information on the make up of households against the core diversity strands and enable us to tailor and improve our services accordingly to meet the diverse needs of the communities which we serve.

To date we have information on 78% of our customers.

Our last STATUS survey was conducted in 2007. Headline results are as follows:

Overall satisfaction with the service provided was 85.9% of respondents (83.1% for BME respondents, 87% for respondents with a disability or long-term illness)

Satisfaction with the way Muir deals with repairs and maintenance was 81% (80% BME, 83% disability/long-term illness)

Satisfaction with opportunities for participation in management and decision-making was 69% (60% BME, 69% disability/long-term illness)

The Association has very little stock in areas of high BME populations and as such the Association has very few BME tenants and applicants.

A specific BME satisfaction survey is being undertaken in 2009 to gather more specific information as although BME satisfaction in the STATUS survey was high, it was not as high as other groups.

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Age Equality

Muir Group is committed to equality of opportunity both in service delivery and employment and we make a commitment to promoting age diversity by valuing contributions of employees and customers irrespective of age.

Muir Group aims to ensure that employment opportunities, career progression, employee support systems, involvement opportunities and service delivery are equally accessible to all people, regardless of their age.

This policy will assist to improve and develop relationships with employees and provide confidence that we can overcome any obstacles affecting the consistency of implementing effective equality practices.

To achieve this we will:

- Adhere to the new Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006
- Follow the Code of Practice for Age Diversity in Employment (1999)
- Remove all unnecessary age-related criteria in our employment practice
- Provide recruitment, promotion and training on the basis of need, regardless of age.
- Ensure we fulfil our responsibilities to ensure equal access to services
- Ensure that staff are aware of the different aspects of age discrimination
- Ensure that staff are aware of the negative effects of age stereotyping
- Ensure that our database and information systems can identify age.
- Monitor the involvement of customers by their age
- Develop different methods to ensure involvement from all ages
- Ensure members of the groups engaged with Muir Group understand the clear message on the impact of age discrimination
- Use various methods to ensure the views of all age groups are heard.
- Work with our partners and others to eliminate age discrimination

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Disability Equality

Muir Group is committed to achieving disability equality and is committed to equality of opportunity, both in the provision of services and in our role as an employer. We will work towards, the elimination of unfair and unlawful discrimination against disabled people to ensure equal treatment in all our policies, procedures, practices and access to our services.

We recognise and operate within the framework of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995/2005 (DDA) which provides the following definition of disability:

'A physical or mental impairment which has substantial and long term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.'

This document will use the above definition of disability set out under the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995/2005 and subsequent amendments. However, our approach to disability equality is primarily based on the social model of disability, which states that disabled people face disadvantage not because of their impairments but because of attitudinal and environmental barriers. Therefore, our scheme focuses on breaking down or removing the barriers that disabled people face or working to prevent them from being created.

We appreciate the contribution of, and will work with, organisations that are controlled by disabled people.

We will adhere to the appropriate requirements of Building Regulations and we will continue to seek improvements in the areas of service delivery and access to communication by enhancing and increasing the availability of information using different media, other appropriate formats and sign language interpretation.

To achieve this we will:

- Recognise our responsibilities under the DDA and other legislation and will follow the relevant Codes of Practice for employment, premises and services
- Set out our approach to building appropriate accommodation for people with a disability
- Whenever possible, modify our procedures or equipment to make full use of an individual's ability and adapt our facilities as necessary to accommodate people with a disability
- Regularly audit our premises, services and processes
- Modify, where possible, to ensure all customer service points are fully accessible.
- Make sure that all our services and documentation are fully accessible.
- Consult agencies and community organisations for disabled people on the services we provide, and, where appropriate, develop services to meet this need
- Ensure our involvement activities are fully accessible to everyone
- Work with our partners to promote equal access
- Explore opportunity into employment with disability groups (Remploy/etc.)

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- Work with our partners, contractors, consultants and suppliers to promote understanding and good relations between people with different abilities.
- Commit to eliminating unlawful discrimination on the grounds of disability and the disadvantage experienced by people with a disability.
- Fulfil our commitments under the 'Positive about Disabled People' symbol and guarantee an interview to people with a disability if they meet the minimum essential criteria.
- Recognise that people with mental health problems experience discrimination in employment and as a signatory to the 'Mindful Employer' Charter for Employers who are Positive about Mental Health, we will fulfil our commitments by ensuring that our recruitment and retention policies and practices support people with mental health problems.
- Further develop an environment that encourages disclosure of a disability.
- Provide appropriate support to employees who become disabled during the course of their employment to enable them to stay in employment. The type of support will depend on individual circumstances but may include:
 - Providing specialist equipment or other auxiliary aids (this may require an assessment by the Access to Work Employment Service Disability Team)
 - Making reasonable physical adjustments to the workplace
 - Adjusting an individual's working hours or responsibilities - either on a temporary or permanent basis
 - Transferring the individual to a suitable alternative post
- Recognise that employees and residents may be associated with disabled people such as disabled children or other disabled dependants and we will ensure no unlawful discrimination within our policies and procedures to accommodate such needs.

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Gender Equality

The term 'gender' is popularly used interchangeably with 'sex' (male or female biology). Muir Group recognises that the term 'gender' is a social construct which refers to the masculinity or femininity of a person.

Whilst ideally a gender neutral approach will be followed, Muir Group acknowledges that women, more than men, may experience unfair discrimination and disadvantage in the workplace and society generally. However, it is recognised that men too can face discrimination for example if they are primary carers and can suffer domestic violence and harassment.

We recognise that we need the contribution of both women and men at all levels within Muir Group to make us an effective service provider and employer. We will endeavour to make full use of the perspectives, knowledge, skills and experience of all people within the organisation.

The Equality Act 2006

The Equality Act 2006 amends the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 by placing a duty on all public bodies to:

- Eliminate unlawful sexual discrimination and harassment including
- discrimination in pay; and
- Promote equality of opportunity between men and women.
- The duty places the responsibility on public bodies to demonstrate that they treat men and women fairly.

To achieve this we will:

- Demonstrate we are committed to complying with the statutory requirements governing gender
- Work to support and assist staff and customers subjected to Domestic Abuse
- Work towards an appropriate gender mix at all levels
- Tackle unfair treatment and harassment of staff or customers undergoing or has completed gender reassignment
- Create a flexible working environment where work and home balance requirements are recognised and supported in all areas and levels
- Ensure all staff are paid equally for the same work
- Ensure our services support gender equality
- Ensure that staff are aware of the negative effects of gender stereotyping
- Ensure that our information and management systems can identify gender
- Monitor the breakdown of involvement groups and other involvement activities deemed relevant by gender
- Ensure members of all our resident involvement activities understand the clear message from the Muir Group on the impact of gender discrimination
- Work with other agencies and community organisations eliminate disadvantage in

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this area.

- We recognise our duties under the Sex Discrimination and Equal Pay legislation and we are committed to achieving gender equality in employment and in the workforce at all levels
- As permitted under the positive action provisions of the Sex Discrimination Act, encourage male or female staff to progress to levels where they are under-represented by offering mentoring/secondment opportunities
- Recognise that part-time workers are predominantly women, often with dependant responsibilities. Therefore, we will not discriminate on the grounds of working pattern or caring/domestic responsibilities for any of our staff.
- Encourage all staff to take up employment opportunities where one gender is under represented in any area/level.
- Aim to create an environment, which is free from sexual harassment, sexist language and behaviour. We will set out clearly in the Employee Handbook the action that will be taken against staff if such issues occur.

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Transgender equality

We recognise that we need the contribution of both women and men at all levels within Muir Group to make us an effective service provider and employer. We will endeavour to make full use of the perspectives, knowledge, skills and experience of all people within the organisation. We recognise that this statement incorporates trans individuals or people undergoing gender reassignment.

Trans sex reassignment means those who are intending to, in the process of or who have completed sex reassignment. Sex reassignment is classed as any part of the process under medical supervision of moving from the birth gender to an acquired gender but does not necessarily involve hormones or surgery.

The Gender Equality Duty has placed the concerns and needs of trans individuals at the heart of equalities legislation and there are other pieces of legislation which give trans individuals protection in the workplace and for equal access to goods, services and facilities.

To achieve this we will:

- Demonstrate we are committed to complying with the statutory requirements governing gender recognition and gender reassignment.
- Tackle unfair treatment and harassment of staff or customers undergoing or who have completed gender reassignment
- Create a flexible working environment where gender reassignment requirements are recognised and supported in all areas and levels
- Ensure that staff are aware of the negative effects of transgender stereotyping
- Ensure that our information and management systems can identify trans status.
- Monitor the breakdown of involvement groups and other involvement activities, deemed relevant, by trans status
- Ensure members of all our the resident involvement activities understand the clear message from the Muir Group on the impact of transgender discrimination
- Work with other agencies and community organisations and eliminate disadvantage in this area
- Recognise our duties under the Sex Discrimination Act and the Gender Recognition Act for ensuring trans-gender equality in the workplace and in access to goods, services and facilities.
- Support employees undergoing gender reassignment through appropriate adjustments to the working environment together with managerial support to prevent any harassment.
- Not discriminate on the grounds of trans status or individuals undergoing gender reassignment.
- Ensure trans individuals living in our communities are treated equally and with respect.

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Race Equality

Muir Group recognises that anyone can experience racial discrimination and that such discrimination can have a powerful effect on their ability to gain equality of access to employment and a variety of services and facilities. We make a commitment to ensure that irrespective of racial or national origin, all people have the same rights of access to services and employment. All people will be treated with equality, dignity and respect when having any contact with Muir Group.

The term 'racial discrimination' is used to refer to people who may experience racism, discrimination, prejudice or victimisation on the grounds of their colour, race or nationality and, as a result, suffer inequality in their lives.

We have adopted the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report definition of a racist incident: **'A racist incident is any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person'**.

Muir Group has also recognised that by adopting the following definition of institutional racism from the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report we demonstrate our commitment to racial equality and valuing cultural diversity. This is:

'The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, creed or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people'.

Muir Group will work towards eliminating any institutional racism from its structures, operations, and policies and procedures by a process of continual review and improvement. We recognise that our services should be tailored to meet the needs of minority ethnic communities to ensure that the services are fair and responsive to their needs.

We acknowledge our responsibility to the local community and our workforce in ensuring that racism is eliminated in the way we deliver our services and in our employment practices.

To achieve this we will:

- Work to maintain full compliance in the Commission for Racial Equality Code of Practice for Racial Equality in Housing (2006)
- Strive to have a representative workforce that can sensitively address the needs of all communities
- Work to ensure our governance structure and membership reflects the community we serve
- Strive to create an environment, which is free from racial harassment and racist behaviour
- Take positive action to develop the appropriate level of diverse staff across Muir

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Group.

- Make sure that all of our services are accessible and available to all members of all communities
- Provide services relevant to people's needs, which respect their cultural identities
- Provide training for staff and Board members on cultural difference
- Make changes and improvements in response to the views expressed by specific communities and minorities.
- Take positive action to achieve a better balance where there is under representation of any particular group
- Ensure all our members understand the clear message from the Muir Group on the importance of race equality.
- Consistently use information from surveys and customers to improve our services
- Use various methods to ensure the views of underrepresented groups are heard.
- Work with our partners, contractors, consultants and suppliers to promote racial equality and eliminate racial disadvantage and racial harassment
- Work with a wide base of community organisations to ensure that our services are tailored to local need
- Demonstrate that we have an understanding of different issues of relevance to diverse need and different local communities
- Ensure that the needs of more new or hidden groups are understood. For example the needs of new migrants, Irish Travellers and Gypsies and Asian women, as distinct from the needs of the BME community as a whole.
- Understand that racial, cultural and ethnic identities are often inter-related with religion and belief.
- Encourage people from BME communities to take up employment opportunities and over and above advertising in standard recruitment media we will consider advertising additionally in other targeted recruitment media as deemed appropriate.
- As permitted under the positive action provisions of the Race Relations Act, encourage BME staff to progress to levels where they are under-represented by offering mentoring/secondment opportunities.

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Religion and Beliefs Equality

Muir Group recognises that religion is different from ethnicity and assumptions cannot be made about what religion, if any, a person may follow by judging their racial background. However, Muir Group acknowledges that a diverse workforce will have differing religious requirements and that two of these may be to pray at specific times of the working day or to celebrate different religious festivals.

To achieve this we will:

- Strive to create an environment which recognises and respects religion and belief and is free from unlawful discrimination or harassment
- Follow guidance and best practice on applying the relevant UK legislation
- Develop employment practices and services in ways which recognise and respect religion and belief
- Wherever possible, allow time away from work in order to pray or comply with other religious obligations will be facilitated
- Ensure that our information and management systems can identify our customers' religion and beliefs
- Improve the understanding of religion and beliefs among our staff so that they can sensitively address the needs of individuals and of different faith communities
- Give all staff access to a calendar of religious festivals
- Ensure that involvement activities are reflective of the customer database and that they acknowledge and takes into account the variety of methods that can be used to ensure involvement from minority community members with differing religious beliefs
- Ensure that any major events do not clash with other cultural events
- Ensure all members of the organisation understand the clear message on the impact of religious discrimination.
- Work with our partners, contractors, consultants and suppliers to promote cultural difference and equality and eliminate disadvantage.
- Provide appropriate training so that Board and Committee members and staff understand and can sensitively address the needs of different faiths, beliefs and religions.
- Aim to have a Board, Committee and staff who are culturally aware.
- Create a working environment which recognises and respects religion and belief and ensure our policies and procedures do not in any way discriminate, harass or victimise people on the grounds of religion or belief.
- Take account of different dietary requirements wherever possible and aim to be inclusive when providing training and social activities.
- Make reasonable adjustments for staff wishing to take leave for religious observances and festivals.
- Make appropriate provisions where religious activities have to be conducted at the workplace or during working hours.
- Support openness and tolerance of religion and belief but not to the detriment of other equality strands where they may be a conflict.

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Sexual Orientation Equality

Muir Group is committed to ensuring equal treatment for all our employees and members of the public who may be lesbians, gay men or bisexual. We seek to ensure that all our policies, procedures and practices on employment and service delivery are not based on the assumption that all employees and recipients of our services are heterosexual.

We respect the right of any individual to choose whether or not they are open about their sexuality. We support the right of any employee to do this without fear of discrimination, harassment or bullying and for them to be confident that they will receive fair and equal treatment. We also acknowledge that same sex relationships, gay men and bisexual members of the community may experience prejudice, discrimination and disadvantage.

To achieve this we will:

- Tackle through our policies and procedures unfair treatment and harassment of, lesbian, gay men or bisexual members of the community
- Ensure that our conditions of service for our staff offer the same benefits to people regardless of their sexual orientation and specifically that those in same sex relationships receive the same benefits as are available to all other employees
- Acknowledge Civil Partnerships in all appropriate documentation
- Provide services relevant to people's needs, which respect their sexual and social identities.
- Ensure our services meet the Provision of Goods and Services under the Equality Act
- Use information and feedback from our LGBT customers to improve our services.
- Uses various involvement methods to ensure the views of the lesbian, gay men or bisexual community are adequately heard.
- Consult and work with LGBT agencies and community organisations on the services we provide and where appropriate, develop services to meet the needs of lesbian, gay men or bisexual community
- Work with our contractors and partners to ensure their services meet the Provision of Goods and Services under the Equality Act are being met
- Recognise our duties under the Employment Equality Regulations – Sexual Orientation and ensure that there is no unfair treatment or harassment of staff members who are lesbians, gay men or bisexuals.
- Support LGB residents who are subject to harassment and abuse within the community and we will encourage homophobic or heterosexism crime to be reported.
- Recognise our duties under the Civil Partnership Act and ensure that staff terms and conditions or any housing policies and procedures do not unfairly discriminate against same-sex couples.
- Develop a working environment and culture where gay people feel supported and safe.
- Ensure that people feel able to 'come out' at work without the fear of negative reactions from work colleagues or the fear that it could have a detrimental effect on their career prospects.

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Other Equality Issues

We recognise that people can face discrimination and be victims of hate crime for many reasons including simply being different to others where there may be no statutory protection.

We recognise that people can face multiple discrimination, i.e. discrimination on more than one ground, and that this may require special effort in meeting those needs when accessing services or employment opportunities.

This can include

- Social mobility/class which can lead to a lack of educational opportunities which in turn can lead to a lack of employment opportunities
- Living at an address which is perceived as being in the 'wrong part of town', which can affect employment opportunities
- Poor literacy skills, which can limit employment opportunities or lead people to hide other disabilities
- Living in rural areas where there can be limited facilities and transport

To achieve this we will:

- Recognise the importance of promoting and investing in community cohesion in order to create and maintain sustainable communities.
- Regularly review our Equality and Diversity Policy, strategy and related procedures to ensure that they continue to reflect the diverse needs of the communities we operate in.
- Value the contribution that each group or individual makes to the cohesion and sustainability of all communities.
- Invest time and resources in community development initiatives, which specifically promote community cohesion, promote equality and recognise diversity.
- Ensure that our component communities are consulted on the decisions that we make which directly affect them. This will ensure that they have the opportunity to shape that decision making process.
- Recognise that we may have to deal with discrimination against other groups not specifically mentioned in this policy such as ex-offenders, asylum seekers and refugees.
- Regularly review our policies and procedures to ensure that we do not inadvertently prejudice or disadvantage such community groups.

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Who is responsible for the Single Equality Scheme?

- The Board has corporate responsibility for ensuring that this Scheme is delivered and that it underpins all aspects of the Association's work
- The Equality and Diversity Group has overall delegated responsibility for development, overseeing the implementation and monitoring of the Scheme.
- The Chief Executive and senior staff are responsible for ensuring that the Scheme is put into action across their Service Directorates.
- All Staff and our colleagues in partner agencies all have a role to play in helping us to meet our duty to promote equality for disadvantaged people.

Information and Communication

We will publish accessibility guidelines, which will provide advice and guidance for staff to make their information and communication easier to understand for all customers.

Equality in our Employment

Muir Group is committed to the concept and practice of equality of opportunity and combating discrimination, direct or indirect, through our employment policies, procedures and practices.

We are committed to maintaining an organisational spirit, ethos and culture which values people from all sections of the community and the contribution each individual can make to our work and in delivering services which meet individual needs.

To do this we aim to employ a diverse workforce, which has the skills, knowledge and competencies to achieve our business goals, provide them with the opportunities to maximise their potential and to provide a quality service which is responsive to the diverse individual and community needs.

Involvement

Muir Group is committed to involving all people and giving every person the opportunity to comment on how services and employment practices are provided and developed. Muir Group also recognises that it is important all people are represented in all the ways and levels in which we consult. For example we will make sure that the mechanisms are in place to ensure people are involved within Muir Group reflects the diversity of our residents and communities where we operate.

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Consultation Standards

Muir Group has developed an Involving People Strategy which guides our overall approach to consulting and involving the public and residents who use our services. Muir Group is committed to ensuring “that consultation is accessible to all people who wish to take part”.

Accessible Meetings Guidance

Guidance has been produced to make sure our meetings and events are accessible to all. To be fully inclusive it is a requirement that all meetings, events and activities whether provided to our employees or to customers who use our services are fully accessible.

Learning and Development

We will train our staff (and others, where appropriate) so they are more aware of and have skills to take positive action in removing barriers placed in the way of people by society.

A specific Equality and Diversity Training Plan has been produced. The purpose of the plan is to provide managers and staff with the skills and knowledge they need to ensure that equalities becomes part of our day to day activities. The plan will also help to create a culture of diversity.

The training is supported with visible and strong leadership from the top and every manager has individual responsibility and objectives, as with anything else they deliver.

The approach includes:

- Deciding the content of the equality/diversity elements to be included in training initiatives from service delivery and employment perspectives.
- Finding out what the different training needs for staff and others are.
- Using voluntary organisations as much as possible to enhance our learning and their capacity and development

We will evaluate the overall equality and diversity training programme on a yearly basis. If there is evidence to show that the training needs to be changed, we will take action to ensure that this happens.

Comments and Complaints

Members of the public who feel that they have experienced discrimination (either directly or indirectly) in the way that Muir Group has treated them may make a complaint through our Complaints procedure.

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We have grievance and disciplinary procedures in place and a policy on dealing with complaints of harassment relating to employees.

We also have a 'whistle blowing' procedure, which extends the protection for employees who want to report bad practice without fear of being victimised as a result.

We take all complaints seriously and will not tolerate any form of discriminatory behaviour.

Monitoring complaints is also another way of gathering information to see whether we are meeting our equality duties.

Monitoring

Muir Group is committed to monitoring the people who access services, apply for jobs and the experience they have of Muir Group in general. We have a system which assists in monitoring applicants for jobs. We also monitor whether employees have fair access to training and promotion, and the extent to which they are subject to grievance and disciplinary procedures.

There are some services that have yet to introduce equality monitoring systems. Where relevant, services will establish systems as part of their commitment to meet the needs of everyone.

We will involve people further both internally and externally and provide information on our single equality action plan and activities.

Publishing Results of Assessment, Involvement & Monitoring

There are many ways in which results are published. Some will be published within reports provided to relevant internal Board/Regional Committees. Other results may be published in more informal reports to meetings such as Muir Group's Equality and Diversity Group.

Within a yearly report for Equality and Diversity, this Scheme will be included and will show an update on the Action Plan.