



# equality and diversity strategy 2019-2021

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## Introduction

The aim of this strategy is to provide a planned approach to equality and diversity at Irwell Valley Homes. The strategy sets out how we will ensure equality and diversity continues to remain integral to our way of working with our colleagues and our customers. It also sets out what we will do to advance and promote equality.

Our focus on equality, diversity and inclusion recognises and values the differences in our colleagues and customers and ensures fairness. It is not limited to the protected characteristics covered by legislation.

Everybody who uses our services and facilities will be treated in line with this strategy. This includes existing and potential customers, members of the public, partners and stakeholders, contractors and colleagues.

In addition, we will adhere to the Public Sector Equality Duty which requires us to consider all individuals when carrying out our day to day work. This means we will have due regard to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't
- foster or encourage good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't.

Irwell Valley Homes is currently regulated by the Regulator of Social Housing. Their Regulatory Framework stipulates all housing associations must:

- treat their residents with fairness and respect
- show they understand the different needs of their residents in relation to the nine protected characteristics, including in relation to the equality strands and residents with additional support needs.

## Our commitment to and need for equality and diversity

We have set ourselves an overall equality objective which is 'to promote and encourage equality and diversity in all areas of our work'. This links to the overall corporate objective to attract, retain and reward colleagues.

### In setting this objective our aim is to make sure we:

- understand our customers to enable us to represent them better
- will increase our understanding of our differences and learn from each other's cultures
- attract the best talent who will remain loyal and committed, reducing turnover and being recognised as an employer of choice
- services are tailored to meet the diverse needs of our customers and colleagues
- provide a continuous cycle of training and awareness events

We have an equality and diversity action plan which focuses on the key actions that we will take to achieve our objective.





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The action plan has been developed following consultation with our colleagues via our colleague survey and with members of the colleague forum. Customers have also been consulted, along with research to identify those areas where we want to focus our improvements over the coming years. The action plan is linked to the Chartered Institute of Housing's Equality and Diversity Charter core commitments.

Actions are framed under these broad themes:

## Leadership, culture and governance

We will provide the level of support and leadership necessary to ensure the continued visibility and success of our equality and diversity work.

We aim to promote a culture where discrimination is eliminated and provide an environment of equal opportunities where everyone recognises the positive contribution that a diverse workforce can make.

This will be achieved by providing appropriate equality and diversity training to colleagues and Board members that equips them to make sound decisions on policy, service development and recruitment, ensuring we are an employer of choice.

We will ensure that equality and diversity good practice is considered and applied so that colleagues working for Irwell Valley Homes are free from harassment and discrimination because of their differences and that their diversity is recognised and acknowledged.

## Understanding our customers

We aim to regularly update systems and procedures to ensure that all available data on customers and services is accurate and used both strategically and operationally. This data will be used to identify opportunities where improvements can be made and services can be shaped to meet the needs of our customers.

## Delivering and improving services

Providing an excellent service that is responsive, non-discriminatory and seeks to deliver continuous improvement.

To achieve this we will:

- undertake diversity monitoring to ensure the services we provide are accessible and do not discriminate.
- continue to collect customer profiling information so that we can deliver services in a way that meets different needs.
- undertake equality analysis to make sure we understand how our services impact on different people.
- create opportunities for customers to influence and improve what we do through customer engagement activities including specialist advisory groups.
- look at customer feedback and responses from surveys to measure satisfaction including looking at satisfaction among different groups of residents.
- take proactive and reasonable steps to eliminate all forms of harassment, hate crime and discrimination.





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## Procurement and partnerships

We aim to ensure that all major procurement partners operate appropriate policies aligned to the Equality Act 2010. We will achieve this through the procurement process and will set and monitor appropriate targets to ensure equality and diversity objectives are met.

We will publish the aims and objectives of this strategy to colleagues, customers, partner and other stakeholders to demonstrate our commitment to equality and diversity and also to meet the Public Sector Equality Duty.

## Inclusive workplace

Ensuring that equality and diversity principles are fully reflected in our approach to recruitment, colleague development and training, ensuring colleagues feel valued and supported and achieving a positive and fair working environment where diversity is led at all levels.

### To achieve this, we will:

- provide equality of opportunity in all aspects of recruitment and selection.
- take positive action where appropriate to ensure a diverse workforce.
- make sure all colleagues are treated fairly and will be provided with a work environment where they are free from harassment or other barriers to performing their role.

- make reasonable adjustments to overcome barriers for colleagues with disabilities.
- support colleagues to reach their full potential through training, mentoring and colleague development programmes.
- undertake diversity monitoring and reporting.

The action plan sets out in more detail the specific actions that we will take to meet our commitments.

## Financial/value for money implications

Successfully embedding equality and diversity by creating an inclusive culture within the organisation where colleagues feel valued and engaged, will reduce costs associated with high colleague turnover and sickness levels or stress.

## Risk

- Recruitment and retention – failure to embed principles of equality and diversity throughout the organisation will prevent Irwell Valley Homes being considered as an employer of choice and this is essential in a competitive market to be able to recruit from a wide talent pool and attract and retain the best talent.
- Regulation – failure to adhere to the standards set out in the Regulatory Framework could lead to a regulatory judgement being made against the organisation.
- To mitigate these risks the equality and diversity group which is made up of managers and colleagues from across the business, along with customers and a board representative, will monitor performance and drive improvements forward in partnership with managers across the organisation.





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## Legislative and regulatory responsibilities

The key piece of the UK equalities legislation which applies to Irwell Valley Homes is the Equality Act 2010.

Under the Act Irwell Valley Homes is subject to the general public sector 'equality duty' because we carry out public functions. This means that we must, as a minimum, have due regard to the following when we are carrying out our functions:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The Act explains that having due regard for promoting equality involves:

- removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics
- taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people
- encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

### The relevant protected characteristics are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- Marriage and Civil Partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

As a provider of social housing, Irwell Valley Homes is regulated by the Regulator of Social Housing.

Our Regulator specifies the requirements on housing associations through its Standards framework. Under these standards, all housing associations must:

- treat their residents with fairness and respect
- demonstrate that they understand the different needs of their residents, including in relation to the nine protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010 and residents with additional support needs.

## Performance monitoring and review

Our success will be measured against the key milestones identified in the action plan for the next 2 years, by regularly reviewing our progress at the bi-monthly equality and diversity group meetings. Where possible these will be linked to the Chartered Institute of Housing's Equality and Diversity Charter core commitments, enabling us to benchmark and report consistently on:

- equality and diversity is driven from the top
- equality, diversity and inclusion informs our business planning
- equality, diversity and inclusion shapes our organisational culture
- equality, diversity and inclusion is supported through colleague training, development and engagement
- we know who our customers are
- we involve our customers in shaping and scrutinising services
- we represent the communities we serve
- we support the communities we serve

The Board has overall strategic responsibility for leadership in equality and diversity and has appointed a champion to promote equality and diversity and represent them on the equality and diversity group.



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Delivery of this strategy is the responsibility of the equality and diversity group, with the support of the Leadership Team.

## The main roles of the Equality and Diversity Group will be:

- to continue to make Irwell Valley Homes a diverse and inclusive workplace
- to raise awareness
- to keep up to date with external best practice
- to demonstrate and share good practice
- to identify and implement changes in legislation
- to monitor and report on our progress in achieving our actions set out in our action plan
- to consider whether the objectives need to be updated or expanded.

The equality and diversity group will meet quarterly and will provide updates to the Board and leadership team on a six monthly basis.

The strategy will operate within a two year time frame. Following the two year period, a review of the strategy will be undertaken.

Managers and other colleagues are responsible for actively championing and promoting equality and diversity in all areas of their work, and for delivering the action plan.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this equality and diversity strategy sets out Irwell Valley Homes' commitment to and need for, equality and diversity for colleagues and customers, embedding equality and diversity principles at all levels of the organisation. We expect all colleagues delivering services to adhere to the principles set out in this strategy to ensure everyone feels valued and is treated fairly and with respect.

## Associated policies and procedures

- Customer Involvement Policy and Strategy
- Access and Customer Care Policy and Strategy
- Worklessness Strategy
- Continuous Improvement Strategy
- Safeguarding Policy
- Neighbourhood Management Policy

## Further Information

If you want more details about how we will achieve our objectives, please get in touch with Liz Atkinson, Head of HR or Jane Hanson, Chair of the equality and diversity group.

