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1 Introduction

1.1 The case for Equal Opportunities

Pentland Housing Association (PHA) believes that providing equality of opportunity for its staff, board members, tenants and other stakeholders is fundamental to the ethos of the association and that the moral case for equality is as, or even more, important than any legal and regulatory expectations. This belief is a key driver behind this policy and its supporting Equality Action Plan.

PHA is committed to promoting an environment of respect, understanding, where diversity is encouraged and discrimination avoided. This commitment covers all areas of PHA work both as an employer of staff and a landlord / provider of services.

PHA has one subsidiary organisations Pentland Community Enterprises (PCE) and

Together with PHA, these three organisations make up the Pentland Housing Group.

PHA opposes all forms of discrimination in relation to employment and the provision of its services. This includes; discrimination by and towards members of the public, governing body members, contractors and staff from other agencies, and where discrimination occurs, PHA will investigate and action appropriately.

Accordingly there will be a consistent approach to promoting equality and diversity as an employer of staff throughout the entire employment relationship from the recruitment process to termination and references. Whilst as a landlord / provider of services, PHA will strive to ensure it is fully accessible to everyone using their services i.e. prospective tenants, tenants, home owners, etc., and that equality of opportunity is provided for all.

1.2 Who this policy applies to

All these groups have a responsibility to be alert to discriminatory behaviours and practices should they occur. Any unacceptable behaviour and practices will be dealt with sufficiently. Breaches of the equality policy will be regarded as misconduct and lead to disciplinary action which may include dismissal.

Compliance with the policy is expected from all employees, board members, tenants and others working with the Pentland Housing Group (e.g. contractors, consultants, suppliers, etc.).

PHA will seek to ensure that all external suppliers of goods or services comply with equality legislation and have adequate policies and procedures in this area. Accordingly, information will be issued with all tender documents stipulating PHA's expectations in respect of equal opportunities, and tendering

organisations will be required to submit details of their own equal opportunities policies as part any tendering process.

PHA understands that smaller contractors / service providers may not have written a policy, but will whilst working with or on behalf of PHA they must accept, adopt and implement the principles of this policy.

1.3 Who is responsible for Policy Implementation?

The board of directors, has overall responsibility to the development, monitoring and implementation of this policy, but delegate's authority to PHA's Chief Executive to ensure the policy's day to day implementation.

1.4 Developing the policy

This policy was informed by consultation with PHA's board of management, staff and feedback from PHA's customers via a tenant participation consultation meeting and comments invited via the Pentland Press (PHA's newsletter).

The policy takes account of various pieces of legislation, regulatory and good practice guidance including:

- The Equality Act 2010
- The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Scottish Housing Regulator's "Equality in Practice Document 2002" and 2006 follow up study
- The Scottish Housing Regulator's "Regulatory Standards of Governance and Financial Management"
- The Scottish Federation of Housing Associations "Getting the Balance Right" good practice guidance
- Employers in Voluntary Housing model "Equal Opportunities Policy"

1970 with the Equal Pay act • followed shortly by the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 • Sex Discrimination Act 1975 • Race Relations Act 1976. • This was then followed 20 years later by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and then followed subsequent pieces of Equality Legislation introduced between 1995 and 2006. • And in October 2010, the Equality Act 2010 was implemented.

The policy also takes account of relevant PHA policies.

2 Legal and Regulatory Requirements

2.1 Background

Tackling inequality is not something new UK and Scottish governments have been addressing equality and diversity issues for many years and although

progress has been made inequalities still exist within Scotland and the UK. This has led to both Westminster and Holyrood governments continuing to develop legislation designed to tackle discrimination, promote equality, and address inequalities. This has included the development of the Equality Act 2010 by the UK Government, and the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 by the Scottish Government, and this policy takes account of both of these acts.

The objective of this policy is to ensure PHA not only actively promotes equality of opportunity as an employer and provider of services, but is compliant with various legislative and regulatory requirements including:

- The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010
- The Scottish Social Housing Charter
- The Equality Act 2010

Human Rights Act 1998

2.2 The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 & Scottish Social Housing Charter

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 states:

“Social Landlords, when performing housing services, must act in a manner which encourages equal opportunities and in particular the observance of the law for the time being relating to equal opportunities.”

This means PHA is legally obliged to comply with the Equality Act 2010.

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 also established the Scottish Social Housing Charter, which set out the Scottish Government’s and Scottish Housing Regulator’s (SHR) expectations for Scotland’s Registered Social Landlords (RSLs).

The Scottish Social Housing Charter’s Equalities Outcome sets out the Scottish Government’s expectation that

“every tenant and other customer has their individual needs recognised, is treated fairly and with respect, and receives fair access to housing and housing services.”

Whilst, the Charter’s Performance Indicator 3 requires PHA to measure and monitor the

“Ethnic origins and disability details of service users, staff and for RSLs only, governing body members.”

PHA has systems in place to measure their performance against this indicator and report on this annually to their board of management, tenants (and other customers) and the SHR via their Annual Return on the Charter (ARC).

2.3 The Equality Act 2010

Introduction

The Equality Act challenges organisations to be as **diverse** as possible, and to have the principle of **equality** at their heart. PHA is fully committed to meeting these challenges and to that end has defined Diversity and Equality as follows:

Diversity - Is about valuing individual differences. Pentland Housing Group is committed to valuing and managing people's differences to enable all employees and customers to contribute and realise their full potential. PHG further recognises that people with different backgrounds, skills, attitudes and experiences can bring fresh ideas and perceptions that will benefit the association and the services it provides.

Equality - Is about making sure people are treated fairly and given fair chances and applies both to PHA's employees and those PHA provides services for. **Equality is not about treating everyone in the same way, but recognises that their needs are met in different ways.** .

The Act – an overview

The Act, which applies to both PHA's staff and its customers centres on two key elements, which are:

- The identification of nine "protected characteristics" who require additional protection
- The identification of "unlawful behaviour" not allowed under the act

Protected Characteristics

The act identified the following protected characteristics:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender Reassignment
- Marriage, and Civil Partnership
- Pregnancy & Maternity
- Race
- Religion or Belief
- Sex (Gender) and
- Sexual Orientation

Unlawful behaviour

The key elements of unlawful behaviour, which should be avoided as both an employer and a provider of services, as set out within the act are defined below:

Direct Discrimination - Is treating someone less favourably than others based on a protected characteristic *e.g. refusing to give housing advice to someone because of their sexual orientation.*

Associated Discrimination - Discrimination against a person, because they have an association with someone with a particular protected characteristic *e.g. someone is not given a job, despite being the best candidate, because they have a disabled partner.*

Perceptive Discrimination - Discrimination against a person, because the discriminator thinks the person possesses that characteristic *e.g. someone is discriminated against by their work colleague, because they think they are gay, or a middle aged employee is overlooked for promotion simply because they look younger and therefore not considered to have sufficient maturity to take up a senior role.*

Indirect Discrimination - A policy, practice, procedure, provision or criteria that applies to everyone, but might disadvantage a particular protected group, and cannot be objectively justified in relation to the job *e.g. e.g. not letting properties to people under a certain age, because it is believed as a group they generally act in an anti-social way.*

Harassment - Conduct that violates a person's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive working environment. The intention of the perpetrator is irrelevant; it is the impact on the individual which determines if harassment has taken place.

Victimisation - Treating someone less favourably and discriminating against them because they have pursued or intend to pursue their rights relating to alleged discrimination, complained about the behaviour of someone harassing them or given evidence in someone else's discrimination complaint.

Compliance with the Equality Act 2010

PHA considers any form of discrimination on the grounds of age, disability, religion or belief, gender, sexual orientation, etc. to be unacceptable, and will strive to avoid any form of unlawful behaviour when carrying out its activities as an employer or a provider of services.

Awareness of the Equality Act 2010

PHA will strive to ensure its board members, employees, customers and contractors employed on their behalf are aware of the expectations the act places on them. This will be achieved through the delivery of periodic equalities training for board and staff members, and various actions outlined within PHA's Equality Action Plan to raise equality awareness within customers.

PHA will also strive to ensure their policies, procedures, practices, etc. do not result in discrimination or contravene the act. Central to achieving this will be the development of an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) tool which will help ensure the impact of any new policies, policy revisions, proposals, on anyone belonging to a "protected characteristic" are fully understood and taken into account.

Positive Action

The Equality Act 2010 allows employers to address imbalances in its workforce, by encouraging members of under-represented groups to apply for jobs. No quotas will be set by PHA, but equality targets may be set to encourage people from a particular group(s) to apply for any vacancies in PHA where there is an under representation.

Human Rights Act 1998

Although the Human Rights Act 1998 applies to public bodies and **not** directly to housing associations, recent legal cases mean actions could be brought against associations carrying out duties deemed to be a function of a public body (e.g. allocations, evictions, etc.).

PHA will therefore ensure that when they are providing services, developing policies, etc., which could be considered as a public function it will take account of advice from the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) as outlined in their “Human Rights at Home” publication.

Policies which should take account of the Human Rights Act 1998 are outlined within PHA’s action plan. It is important to stress that PHA will take account of the Human Rights Act as a matter of good practice and **not legal requirement**.

3 Ensuring Equality of Opportunity as an employer

3.1 PHA will strive to ensure that all employees are treated with fairness and respect, not discriminated against on any grounds, or disadvantaged by any conditions or requirements which cannot be shown to be relevant to their performance. To deliver this PHA will seek to ensure all employees are provided with equality of opportunity in all stages of their employment starting from recruitment.

3.2 To achieve this PHA aims to:

- Ensure integration of equality and diversity good practice into all it does, and ensure employees are treated with fairness and respect from each other and from members of the public, board members, and contractors.
- Implement fair and just employment practices to ensure that no job applicant receives less favourable treatment on any grounds.
- Ensure people are recruited and promoted solely on merit, experience, ability and potential. This applies throughout the entire duration of employment as all decisions will be based only on merit.
- Provide an environment appropriate to the needs of those from all walks of life, and offer a culture that respects and values each others’ differences and promotes dignity, equality and diversity.

In addition, PHA will seek to:

- Ensure all employees, board members, tenants, contractors and other stakeholders of PHA are aware of, and abide by, this policy
- Set clear expectations for all employees, contractors and others acting on PHA’s behalf to treat people respectfully, politely and in a way that maintains their dignity
- Comply with anti-discrimination legislation and regulatory expectations

- Ensure PHA's employment practices are non-discriminatory and support employees with specific / particular needs, as far as reasonably practicable
- Provide support to any employees, or board members, who may experience discrimination or unfair treatment
- Foster working environments where people are free from discrimination, intimidation, harassment or bullying, and where any employees or board members displaying such behaviours will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal, or when dealing with breaches of the code of conduct procedure, as appropriate
- Provide fair access to learning and development opportunities, and support staff and board members to fulfil their potential
- Provide appropriate equal opportunities training for all employees, and board members (including induction training)
- Ensure that all potential employees are treated fairly and equally, and any decisions on recruitment and selection are based solely on essential and desirable job criteria
- Monitor employee profiles and remove barriers to employment, training or promotion

The policy will now outline how PHA will ensure equality of opportunity in various key elements of its role as an employer.

3.3 Recruitment & Selection

PHA is committed to ensuring all recruitment decisions will be based completely on the merits and abilities of candidates and no other criteria. In order, to achieve this, equality and diversity practices will be integrated into every stage of the recruitment and selection process.

A fair recruitment process will strive to remove barriers to the employment of people of different backgrounds. This will enable PHA to recruit from the widest pool of talent, potentially raising the standard of their intake and increasing the opportunity of a more diverse workforce to more fully reflect the community it serves. A more diverse workforce will improve the organisation's service delivery, as it will include staff with more diverse knowledge and experiences and better equipped to meet the needs and aspirations of customers / potential customers.

To highlight PHA's commitment to promoting equality and diversity from the beginning of the employment relationship, all vacancies will be aimed at as wide a group as possible and any advertisement for a vacancy. Any job adverts will state that an equality policy is in place and also display any signs of equality bodies PHA is affiliated with (i.e. Happy to translate).

The information contained in adverts and all vacancy literature will be clear and accurate to attract the most appropriate candidates from all groups across society. PHA will strive to ensure that all applications have clear instructions for completion and application forms are free from personal questions not relevant to the vacancy and could lead to discrimination.

PHA will ensure all staff and / or board members involved at any stage in the recruitment and selection process will receive equality and diversity awareness training. This will ensure that those involved in the recruitment process will not discriminate by asking any potentially discriminatory questions.

3.4 Terms and Conditions of Employment

As part of the employment relationship covered under this policy, all contracts of employment will be issued in accordance with the job role and not the job holder. Employee's terms and conditions will be standard across all employees regardless of any of the protected characteristics. Employees will not receive less favourable terms and conditions for any reason other than relating specifically to their job.

All new employees will receive a copy of the Employers in Voluntary Housing "**Statement of terms and conditions of employment**", which PHA has adopted and thus forms part of all employees' terms and conditions.

This statement sets out the expectations of employees to avoid discrimination or harassment of other staff, board members, customers, etc. The statement also outlines that PHA will strive provide a supportive environment where staff are free from discrimination and harassment, and fully supported if they experience any form of discrimination during their work for PHA.

In addition, all members of PHA staff must sign a "*Staff Code of Conduct*" which states:

"You must not act in a way that unjustifiably favours or discriminates against particular individuals, groups or interests"

"You must treat others with respect at all times. This includes considering the views of others and being tolerant of differences." **and**

"You must not harass, bully or attempt to intimidate any person."

3.5 Salary and Benefits

PHA operates a pay and benefits structure that is fair, competitive, flexible, transparent, and objective with no disparities in salary due to belonging to any protected characteristics.

3.6 Redundancy Selection

Redundancy selection will be made according to the statutory requirements and in line with PHA's Redundancy Policy. Criteria will be discussed with the Trade Union and or nominated representatives. The criteria will be set out and will be objective, fair and consistent. This will ensure that employees selected for redundancy are selected according to the chosen selection criteria and not in any discriminatory way either indirectly or directly.

3.7 Workforce Monitoring

PHA will monitor equalities information about their current workforce and job applicants, and compare it against the most recent census information. PHA will also benchmark its performance against other members of the Scottish Housing Best Value Network to identify any issues / areas for improvement. The development of appropriate benchmarking procedures will form part of the PHA's Equality Action Plan.

Equalities monitoring information will be reported to the board of management quarterly, and form part of PHA's Annual Return on the Charter (ARC).

3.8 Reasonable Adjustments

PHA will, in accordance with the reasonable adjustments provisions of the Equality Act 2010, make any reasonable adjustments required to allow new and existing employees with disabilities to perform the requirements of their employment.

In accordance with the act, PHA will balance the need for change with the expense or effort involved. If an adjustment requires disproportionately high expenditure or disruption, it is not likely to be reasonable.

3.9 Bullying and Harassment

PHA is fully committed to promoting a harmonious working environment where employees are treated with respect and dignity, and no employee feels threatened or intimidated. PHA will therefore endeavour to ensure that no employee experiences harassment, bullying or discrimination from tenants, other employees or any PHA stakeholders.

3.10 Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures

A breach of this policy will be considered a disciplinary offence and PHA's disciplinary procedures will be followed to ensure matters are fully investigated. Procedures will be applied fairly, and disciplinary action will only be taken following a full investigation and after all other means of resolving the issue have failed, unless the breach is of such a nature that the individual concerned should be given a warning, suspended from duty or in extreme cases dismissed.

All employees have the right to take action under the grievance procedure. PHA will deal with causes of a grievance quickly and effectively through a clear, fair and structured process.

3.11 Investigating allegations of harassment / disciplinary issues or grievances

The Employers in Voluntary Housing (EVH) **"Statement of terms and**

conditions of employment” sets out in detail the grievance and disciplinary procedures, which will be followed to investigate any alleged instances of harassment, bullying and or any other grievances related to discrimination.

This statement sets out in detail the procedures which PHA will follow in order to ensure that anyone involved in any alleged instances, whether they are the accused or the alleged victim will be treated fairly and according to the procedures set out in sections A12 and A13 of the EVH statement. This statement is provided to each new member of PHA staff and will be made available on request.

3.12 Membership of PHA

PHA’s membership policy sets out the criteria relating to membership eligibility and seeks to ensure its membership reflects the communities it serves. PHA encourages membership applications from:

- Tenants and sharing owners of PHA;
- Other residents living within the PHA’s area of operation;
- Others who can contribute particular community, business or professional experience.

Membership is open to all sections of the community regardless of race, gender, age, etc. and applications will be encouraged from any under-represented groups.

3.13 Board of management composition

Although the decision to stand for election to the board is voluntary and open to any member of the association, PHA will seek to ensure the board’s composition is as representative of their community as possible by:

- ensuring all board and sub-committee meetings are held in accessible venues
- providing board papers in alternative formats (e.g. in large print) on request
- identifying, and where possible, addressing imbalances between the board’s profile and that of PHA’s community

The composition of PHA’s membership and board will be monitored, reviewed and reported to the board of management annually and form part of PHA’s Annual Return on the Charter.

3.14 Board Operations

PHA’s chairperson is responsible for ensuring board meetings are conducted in a manner, which allows all board members the opportunity to participate and contribute.

The chairperson should strive to ensure that:

1. The board uphold and promote the principles of equality and diversity in the governance of PHA
2. Individual board members display no discriminatory behaviour in their dealings with fellow board members, employees, PHA customers or other PHA stakeholders

In addition, all PHA board members must sign a code of conduct which states:

“You must consider the views of others and be tolerant of differences.”

“You must uphold our equality, whistleblowing and acceptable use policies.”
and

“You must always treat your Governing Body colleagues, our staff and their opinions with respect.”

3.15 Learning & Development

PHA’s training policy states:

“Through our Equalities Policy we are committed to providing a supportive working environment that maintains and promotes the training and personal development of all our employees and board members.”

PHA will therefore strive to allocate training courses and / or further education solely on organisational / individual needs and ensure no one is treated, more or less favourably, on the grounds of age, gender, disability, etc. PHA also recognises that certain employees (e.g. those from minority backgrounds or with disabilities) may require specific additional support from PHA to access learning and development opportunities.

The identification of the training needs of staff members should form part of the PHA’s staff appraisal and supervision procedures, whilst board members’ needs should be identified through their annual assessment process.

Progress on meeting these commitments will be monitored and annually reported to the board of management in accordance with PHA’s training policy.

3.16 Specific Equality and Diversity Training

PHA will run equal opportunities training for employees and board members to enable them to understand their obligations, identify discrimination, and take appropriate action to challenge and address discrimination.

In addition, new employees and board members will receive induction training which should include an overview of current legal and regulatory equality obligations, their implications for PHA and an overview of PHA’s Equality Policy.

4 Ensuring Equality of Opportunity as a provider of Services

4.1 As a provider of services, PHA aims to comply with, and exceed, regulatory and legislative expectations by promoting social inclusion, providing equality of access and eliminating unlawful discrimination in the delivery of their services.

4.2 To achieve this PHA will seek to:

- Treat people respectfully, politely, and in a way that maintains their dignity
- Ensure no customer receives less favourable treatment or is disadvantaged by conditions or requirements, which cannot be shown to be justifiable
- Deal effectively with complaints of unfair treatment or discrimination in personal interactions with PHA and / or in the provision of their services
- Liaise with police / local authority partners to deal effectively with complaints of victimisation, harassment, discrimination or criminal activity against individuals or groups belonging to a protected characteristic
- Respect community diversity and ensure that all services and opportunities offered by PHA are promoted appropriately and accessible to all sectors of our community
- Ensure good communication with all sections of its community, including traditionally excluded groups, by providing full, clear, accurate and accessible information regarding PHA and its services
- Consult with different individuals and communities to ensure PHA's services are responsive and reflect the diversity of their community
- Monitor its services to ensure they do not discriminate, or exclude

4.3 Service Delivery

PHA aims to understand the needs / preferences of the diverse communities they serve **and** develop appropriate services in response. Furthermore, they will strive to ensure that their buildings, staff and services are accessible to all our customers, and potential customers.

To achieve these aims, PHA will seek to:

- Promote their services to as wide a cross-section of people as possible by using a range of accessible / alternative formats
- Develop a database of customers' communication preferences
- Gather information about the communities they serve to help plan their services
- Build links with local voluntary and community groups who work with, or represent, groups of people covered by this policy (i.e. protected characteristics)

Two key areas where equality of opportunity underpins PHA's work are providing "access to housing" and the "allocation of properties." Each will be discussed in turn.

4.4 Ensuring equality of opportunity in access to housing

To ensure equality of opportunity in this area, PHA will seek to:

- Ensure all members of the community are aware of PHA's services, including availability of housing
- Be accessible to all, and take appropriate actions to address barriers faced by customers e.g. access for disabled people, need for information in alternative formats, etc.
- Ensure its staff are sensitive to people with communication difficulties, and offer help with completing applications forms where necessary

4.5 Ensuring Equality of Opportunity in Allocation of Properties

PHA is part of the Highland Housing Register a common housing register allowing housing applicants to apply for properties from six landlords using a single application form.

The HHR partner landlords are:

- 1) The Highland Council
- 2) Albyn Housing Society Ltd.
- 3) Cairn Housing Association Ltd.
- 4) Lochaber Housing Association Ltd.
- 5) Lochalsh and Skye Housing Association Ltd.
- 6) Pentland Housing Association Ltd.

PHA's board adopted the HHR allocations policy on the 15th December 2008, and this policy was reviewed by the PHA board on 25th March 2013.

HHR's allocations policy is based around the following principles:

“Consistency: This Allocations Policy will be delivered fairly and consistently across the partner landlords in all areas of the Highlands.

Equal opportunities: It is intended that no applicant is treated unfairly for any reason, either because of their race, colour, ethnic background, religion, class, sex, age, disability, mental health, sexuality or family circumstances. We will undertake and report ethnic monitoring and respond to any emerging issues. The Allocations Policy will be subject to an Equality Impact Assessment.

Access to Housing: We make sure that people have fair and open access to our housing list and assessment process. We work with others to maximise and simplify access routes into our housing.”

PHA is fully committed to these principles and will strive to ensure its allocations practices and procedures are non-discriminatory and based around each

applicant's housing need. In addition, PHA will ensure HHR's housing list is open to all by encouraging applications from all sections of its community.

PHA will ensure that any new procedures adopted as part of choice based lettings (CBL) will also meet these principles.

4.6 Publicising of the Allocations Policy

In accordance with the HHR Allocation policy a free copy of this full policy will be made available to anyone who asks for it. In addition, a summary version of the policy is available in appropriate formats, including on the website of HHR landlords. HHR will make the policy available in other languages and formats (such as in Braille, in larger font or on audio tape) if requested.

In addition, PHA will ensure copies of HHR's allocations' policy (and supporting information including the summary version) will be available:

- At PHA's office
- On PHA's website
- At the offices of other housing providers who are part of the HHR

This information will be available in alternative formats on request.

5 Policy Development

5.1 When reviewing or developing policies PHA will strive to avoid discriminating and identify any instances of potential imbalances in treatment or potential discrimination being encountered by disadvantaged groups.

5.2 The Equality Act 2010 expects public bodies to identify any adverse affects their policies might have on any protected characteristics. Although **not** a public body, PHA will, as a good practice measure, develop an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) tool to help identify any adverse affects any of their policies might have.

5.3 Equality Impact Assessments

A draft EIA tool is attached to this policy (Appendix 1) and the steps involved in developing this tool, including timescales, are outlined in PHA's Equality Action Plan. The finalised EIA tool will take account of advice, recommendations and good practice outlined by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and the SFHA's "Getting the Balance Right" good practice guidance.

5.4 Customer Engagement

The Scottish Social Housing Charter challenges housing associations to ensure their services meet and exceed their customers' needs and aspirations. PHA

will therefore strive to engage with all sections of its community (including traditionally excluded / hard to reach groups).

Excluded and hard to reach groups may include customers:

- With mobility difficulties
- With specific religious and cultural requirements
- With language and other communication differences
- With young children
- From minority ethnic backgrounds e.g. migrant workers
- Or with any other specific needs resulting from their belonging to a “protected characteristic”

When developing any engagement or consultation activities, PHA should ensure they have taken steps to maximise participation and minimise any barriers which might restrict customer participation.

Consideration of this was given within PHA’s Tenant Participation Strategy Policy which stated:

“PHA will:

- Arrange for meetings to be held in premises which are easily accessible
- Hold meetings at appropriate times
- Meet with existing community or support groups
- Actively encourage under-represented groups and individuals to get involved by offering support or working with other key agencies
- Provide specialist equipment such as a hearing loop, translations and interpretation services to assist if required
- Ensure our staff are trained in and aware of equalities issues and actively promote participation”

In addition, customer engagement and consultation activities should be regularly reviewed by senior staff and the board of management to ensure they were accessible to anyone wishing to participate, and identify potential improvements for future activities.

PHA’s Tenant Participation Strategy Policy also sets out a variety of ways tenants and other customers can contact PHA including:

- In person at our local offices
- By telephone
- By letter or email
- Via their website – www.pentlandhousing.co.uk
- Via regular surveys
- By coming along to an event e.g. our Annual General Meeting, participation / consultation event
- By requesting a home visit

6 Information and Publications

6.1 PHA will publicise its commitment to equal opportunities in a variety of ways, as set out in more detail within their **Equality Action Plan** including:

- Newsletter articles
- An equalities statement summarising their various commitments to equalities including their policy, action plan, etc.
- Displaying a range of relevant equalities information within PHA's office

6.2 Materials to publicise its equality commitment will be developed in consultation with tenants, other customers and local community groups. PHA will also seek to ensure that these materials, and others it produces, do not perpetuate stereotypes and discrimination, and are produced in concise plain language.

6.3 Provision of Information

PHA recognises that indirect discrimination can occur through the provision of inaccessible information which creates inadvertent barriers thus limiting access to PHA's services *e.g. a visually-impaired resident may not be able to read a policy in standard print size or someone whose first language is not English may not be able to communicate effectively with staff.*

As a result various commitments are set out in PHA's Tenant Participation Strategy Policy to ensure information is as inclusive as possible, these include:

- Ensuring all letters are personalised, written in plain language, jargon free and easy to understand
- Making all information available in alternative formats and languages (PHA are members of Happy to Translate) on request, written in plain language and jargon free.
- Naming the member of staff responsible for dealing with particular issues in all communications.

Alternative information formats may include; large print, audio tapes or CDs, use of language or sign interpreters, Braille, etc.

As it would be impractical and cost prohibitive to have all possible formats available immediately, PHA will produce information in alternative formats within 10 working days of a request provided that request is reasonable.

All reasonable costs in relation to the provision of materials in alternative formats this will be borne by PHA.

Any requests for materials in alternative formats as part of its equalities' monitoring regime.

6.4 Complaints

PHA will respond promptly to any complaints and treat complaints involving discrimination, harassment or victimisation very seriously, and ensure such complaints are tackled in line with agreed targets.

Complaints will be monitored by frequency, type of complaint, outcome and reported to the board of management quarterly. In addition, PHA will ensure that board reports, separate general complaints from those related to equality issues.

6.5 Dealing with Harassment

PHA will take decisive action to deal with cases of harassment, and discrimination on any grounds. PHA will adopt specific policies and procedures for responding to harassment (racial, sexual or otherwise) which constitutes a breach of tenancy agreements.

Any tenant who feels that their complaint of harassment has not been dealt with satisfactorily will have a right to appeal. The appeal procedure will be clear, fair and accessible to all.

6.6 Dealing with Serious Incidents

The Offences (Aggravation by Prejudice) (Scotland) Act 2009, came into force on 24 March 2010 and recognises hate crime on grounds of sexual orientation, transgender identity and disability. PHA aims to ensure that all our tenants can live in their homes without fear of hate crime, harassment or abuse and that if incidents occur, they are dealt with efficiently and effectively and to the satisfaction of the victim.

To achieve these aims, PHA will seek to:

- Develop clear policies and procedures for dealing with reports of serious incidents
- Ensure all tenants sign an agreement stating they must not harass or act in an anti-social manner towards PHA tenants, employees, board members and anyone acting on behalf of PHA (i.e. contactors).
- Revise the section on Equalities within the Tenants' handbook to reflect the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010, and emphasise the expected levels of behaviour placed on all PHA tenants.

7 Performance Management

- 7.1 In accordance with the Scottish Social Housing Charter the board of management will monitor the implementation of this policy annually through the analysis of statistical reports regarding the ethnicity, gender, disability and age of all:

- Applicants for housing or employment
- Allocations and appointments made
- Employee, tenant and board profiles

7.2 In addition, the board of management will receive regular monitoring reports, which identify any emerging trends in:

- Access to housing - who has applied, who has been allocated a house, and by what process (e.g. direct applicant, nomination or referral)
- Housing allocations - where applicants were housed, and the types of housing allocated
- Access to employment - who has applied, and been appointed, to vacancies within the organisation

7.3 Where reports reveal particular issues (e.g. under representation) appropriate action will be agreed by the board of management.

7.4 Equality Action Plan

PHA have developed an Equality Action Plan (Appendix 2) following discussions with the board of management, employees and tenants. This action plan identifies a range of objectives to help ensure PHA provides equality of opportunity for all. The delivery of each objective of the action plan will be monitored by the board of management, and the action plan will be reviewed annually.

8 Implementing this Policy

- 8.1 The success of this policy relies on the commitment of all PHA employees and board members to ensure it is applied in practice, and to attend equalities training arranged by the association.
- 8.2 All employees and board members are expected to challenge discriminatory and offensive behaviour or poor practice, and draw them to the attention of PHA's senior staff.

9 Policy Review

- 9.1 This policy will be reviewed every three years unless an earlier review is required by legislative or regulatory changes, whilst the Equality Action Plan will be reviewed annually.