



Equality and Diversity Policy

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1. Purpose of the Policy

- 1.1 The Policy sets out how Ardenglen Housing Association is committed to supporting and promoting Equality and Human Rights.
- 1.2 This commitment is embraced by our Board of Management and colleagues and informs all of our activities and their impact on our customers, colleagues and other stakeholders.
- 1.3 The Policy addresses our legal and regulatory obligations and demonstrates cohesion with our Vision, Purpose and Values to the benefit of our customers, communities and colleagues.

2. Policy Objectives

- 2.1 To prevent discrimination and eliminate prejudice within the organisation and our community.
- 2.2 To advance equality of opportunity for all of our customers, colleagues and stakeholders.
- 2.3 To treat all of our customers and employees fairly, and with dignity and respect.
- 2.4 To promote inclusion and celebrate diversity
- 2.5 To show zero tolerance for harassment and hate crime
- 2.6 To promote, support and recognise tolerance and cohesion within our community
- 2.7 To ensure that our contractors and suppliers support and align with our policy aims and challenge those who don't
- 2.8 To comply with our legal and regulatory obligations and seek to demonstrate best practice standards

3. Definitions

- 3.1 **Equality** is about ensuring that every individual has an equal opportunity to make the most of their lives and talents, and believing that no one should have poorer life chances because of where, when or whom they were born, or because of other characteristics.
- 3.2 **Promoting equality** is about behaving in a way that tackles inequalities, aiming to ensure that all staff and customers are treated fairly, and do not experience discrimination.

- 3.3 **Promoting diversity** is about recognising that everyone is different and creating a working environment that values each customer and employee ensuring that services are delivered that suit all sections of the community
- 3.4 **Inclusion** is about positively striving to meet the needs of different people and taking deliberate action to create environments where everyone feels respected and able to achieve their full potential.
- 3.5 **Protected characteristics** there are 9 defined characteristics within the Equality Act 2010 and they are noted below.

4. Legal and Regulatory Requirements

4.1 Ardenglen will meet all of its legal obligations as set out in the following legislation:

- The Equality Act 2010
- The Human Rights Act 1998 and associated European Union directives
- The Scotland Act 1998
- The Housing (Scotland) Acts 2001 and 2010

4.2 The Equality Act 2010

4.2.1 The Equality Act 2010 sets a UK-wide legal framework for protecting the rights of individuals and for advancing equality of opportunity for all. There are nine “protected characteristics” listed in the Act:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sexual orientation

4.2.2 It is unlawful to discriminate against, harass or victimise a person because they have one or more of the protected characteristics. When carrying out “public functions” – this term covers just about all of the services that Ardenglen provides – Ardenglen must also comply with the general equality duty set out in section 149 of the Equality Act. The duty means that we must:

4.2.3 Eliminate unlawful discrimination (including direct and indirect discrimination and discrimination arising from disability), as well as harassment and victimisation.

4.2.4 Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

4.2.5 Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

4.3 Human Rights Act 1998

4.3.1 The Human Rights Act 1998 specifies that every individual has the right to own and enjoy the ownership of property; the right to respect for private life; the right to respect for family life; and the right to respect for their home. The Act provides protection against discrimination with regard to any of these rights and could affect many of the housing and other services that Ardenglen provides.

4.3.2 The European Convention on Human Rights contains articles setting out the rights that are protected, while alleged breaches of the articles are heard by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). It is likely that the status of the Act and the jurisdiction of the ECHR will change now that the UK has left the European Union.

4.4 Scotland Act 1998 and Housing (Scotland) Act 2001

4.4.1 While equal opportunities is a matter reserved to the UK Parliament, the Scottish Parliament also has powers under the Scotland Act 1998 to “encourage and promote” equal opportunities. Equal opportunities requirements are written in to section 106 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 which states that when providing housing and related services, registered social landlords (RSLs) must:

“ ... act in a manner which encourages equal opportunities and in particular the observance of the equal opportunity requirements” set out in the Scotland Act.”

4.5 Housing (Scotland) Act 2010: Scottish Social Housing Charter

4.5.1 The Scottish Social Housing Charter, as approved by the Scottish Parliament, sets standards and outcomes that all social landlords should achieve when performing their housing activities. The refreshed Charter (April 2017) sets a number of equalities obligations to be met by social landlords:

- Performing all aspects of their housing services so 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.
- Complying with equalities legislation.

- Understanding the needs of different customers and delivering services that recognise and meet these needs.

4.6 Regulatory Standards on Equality

4.6.1 The Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) sets equivalent standards for the governance and financial management of RSLs in Scotland. The SHR’s standards and guidance state that:

“The RSL pays due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality and foster good relations across the range of protected characteristics in all areas of its work, including its governance arrangements.”

4.6.2 The Care Inspectorate set National Care Standards for Housing Support and these include:

Equality and diversity

Your right to:

- live an independent life, rich in purpose, meaning and personal fulfilment;
- be valued for your ethnic background, language, culture, and faith;
- be treated equally and to live in an environment which is free from bullying, harassment and discrimination; and
- be able to complain effectively without fear of victimisation.

5. Our Commitments

5.1 Our vision is “transforming Communities by providing aspirational homes and services, to enhance the quality of life for our customers.

5.2 This vision is supported by 4 corporate values and this policy is aligned with those values to ensure that we embed a culture of equality throughout our organisation and with everything that we do.

Value 1: Customer and Community Focused

- Encourage people from all sections of the community to become involved in membership of our Board, Customer panels and engagement models in a meaningful way that supports influence on our policy and practice.
- Address equality issues in our policies and procedures for individual service areas (e.g. housing allocations, repairs, property adaptations, tenancy agreements, harassment).
- Provide services that are accessible to all of our customers, including housing applicants.

- Tailor our approach to service delivery, where needed, to take account of customers' individual needs.
- Ensure that Ardenglen's office premises are fully accessible to our customers, employees and visitors.

Value 2: Accountable

- Promote a culture that respects and promotes equality, diversity and inclusion.
- Ensure that Ardenglen's Board of Management provides leadership and commitment, and makes resources available to achieve our equality objectives.
- Provide all Board members with training on equality and diversity, along with periodic refresher training.
- Comply with the Scottish Social Housing Charter
- Ensure that all of our colleagues have awareness of the issues that different customers may experience, and know how to respond to these issues in a person-centred and flexible way.
- Take prompt action to address all instances of discrimination, bullying, harassment or victimisation.
- Ensure that our contractors and suppliers have an acceptable approach to embracing equality and diversity and challenge those who do not adhere to our values.
- Promote a culture where are colleagues are treated fairly and with respect
- Adopt a zero tolerance to harassment, bullying and disrespect within the workplace and ensure a safe environment to challenge unacceptable behaviour.

Value 3: Making a difference

- Develop our customer profiling data and introduce robust analysis methods to ensure that are services are equally received throughout our community and take remedial action when this is not the case.
- Listen to understand the needs of our diverse community, and develop services, investment programmes and policies that respond to those needs
- Progress toward a workforce that broadly reflects the characteristics within our community, by promoting and encouraging application from underrepresented groups.
- Introduce mandatory training on all equality based issues to ensure that our approach is embedded and visible throughout the organisation

Value 4: Innovative

- Identify characteristic groups that are underrepresented within the community and develop appropriate and effective means for engagement and influence, suitable to those characteristics

- Utilise all methods of communication to ensure that barriers to information and influence are eradicated.
- Develop partnerships with organisations who represent our community characteristics to ensure that we continue to introduce innovative initiatives that build community cohesion and resilience.

6. Gathering and Using information about our customers and colleagues

- 6.1 Ardenglen will collect, review and measure data on a regular basis to inform us on our performance measured against equality issues relating to governance, recruitment, staffing, lettings, repairs, complaints and satisfaction.
- 6.2 We will carry out equality impact assessments on all of our policies and significant change programmes to ensure they align with our equality objectives and ethos. We will address any aspect of our policy or service delivery that has a detrimental impact on any protected characteristic group or individual.
- 6.3 We will provide a full explanation of why information is collected and what it is used for, ensuring that every individual is aware of their right to opt out of providing such information.
- 6.4 We will store information securely and sensitively and only use it for the purpose of promoting and ensuring equality and fairness and improving outcomes.

7. Policy Implementation and Management

- 7.1 We will introduce a strategic approach to equality and diversity that supports this policy and seeks continuous improvement in our approach.
- 7.2 We will ensure that all Board members and colleagues will be suitably trained not only in the policy objectives but the operational tools needed to embed and respond to equality issues.

8. Performance Management

- 8.1 We will enhance our performance management framework to ensure that we maintain visibility of issues affected by equality and diversity
- 8.2 We will review the performance of our customer facing services and ensure that targets met, customer satisfaction levels and incidents of complaint are not inappropriately disproportionate by any of the protected characteristics, as we develop our data source.

8.3 Outcomes relating to this Policy will be reported to the Board of Management and the Senior Leadership Team of Ardenglen.