



improving housing through partnership

# HFI's Equality and Diversity Strategy and Action Plan

2009 – 2012

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### **Message from the Board Equality Champion and Chief Executive of HFI**

HFI's first equality and diversity strategy ran from 2005-2008. The strategy document set out not only how HFI would meet its legal requirements under the different laws governing equality but also demonstrated its commitment to promote equality amongst all its residents and staff and increase the diversity of its services and workforce to meet the many varied needs of the diverse community it was set up to serve.

With the help of the previous strategy and action plan HFI made many advances in the quality of the services it delivers to all its residents and workforce including on equality issues. Key examples include:

- HFI now knows far more about the make up of its customers and is continually seeking ways to meet their needs more effectively.
- HFI developed and supported an active panel of residents representing the needs and requirements of disabled customers.
- HFI successfully set up a register of residents who would like to be involved and developed a suite of alternative options for involvement which has increase levels of resident participation while complementing traditional methods of resident involvement.
- HFI actively helped BME and female employees develop the skills and confidence to move into more senior positions within the organisation.
- Through a process of equality impact assessments HFI ensures equality and diversity issues are a key consideration in any significant change to services.

The Audit Commission has recognised this continued improvement by stating in its 2008 inspection report that “strengths significantly outweighed weakness” in HFI's approach to equality and diversity. This ranks HFI as one of the top ten performing housing organisations in relation to equality.

Although we are immensely proud of this achievement we recognise that there is still more that we can do. This strategy document and the related action plan sets out the developments that have taken place in the field of equalities and diversity over the previous three years and what action HFI plans to take to meet these new challenges. HFI is committed to continually reviewing and when necessary updating these documents to reflect any changes in legislation, best practice and customer and staffing requirements.



Claudia Webbe  
HFI Board Director  
Equalities Champion



Eamon McGoldrick  
HFI Chief Executive

## **1 The context of HFI's work on Equality & Diversity**

### **1.1 The borough of Islington**

- 1.1.1 Islington has a resident population of approximately 185,500 people. The people and communities living in the borough are very diverse. Over 40% of Islington residents are from backgrounds other than White British. 25% of residents are from Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds, including some who have only recently come to the UK, many as a result of fleeing oppression or war in their own country. There are 118 languages spoken by children attending Islington's schools and 64% of primary and 71% of secondary school pupils are from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. 16% of residents describe themselves as having an impairment or a disability. Islington is estimated to have the third highest percentage of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) residents of all London boroughs.
- 1.1.2 Islington is also the eighth most deprived out of 354 local authorities in England but it is a borough of contrast with very wealthy residents living next to residents with very low levels of income. The average gross annual income of Islington owner-occupiers (with a mortgage) is approximately £50,000 whereas the average gross annual income of Islington Council tenants is on average around £6,000. Approximately one fifth of the borough's working age residents are claiming some form of benefit, considerably higher than the average for London and nationally (14.6%). The majority of claimants (9.1%) are on incapacity benefits in comparison to a rate of 6.2% in London and 7.2% in Great Britain. 48% of children and 33% of older people living in the borough are affected by poverty. 43% of Islington school pupils are eligible for free school meals. Islington residents, irrespective of which ward they live in, are 34% more likely to die at a far younger age than the average for London and England.
- 1.1.3 There are 82,426 households in Islington, with social housing in the borough accounting for 49.2% of them. This is contrast to the London average of 26%. (Source: LBI website 2009)

1.1.4 As we can see from this information Islington's population is very diverse. It is also the case that a significant number of Islington residents, many of whom live in social housing in the borough, experience social exclusion and disadvantage for reasons linked to poverty. As HFI manages the majority of Islington Council's social housing and on behalf of the council it also oversees the work of other organisations that manage the remainder of Islington Council housing properties it is imperative that HFI has a strong Equality and Diversity Strategy with a focus on breaking down barriers its residents experience which limit their opportunities and impact on their quality of life.

## **1.2 HFI residents**

1.2.1 One of the main tasks within the previous HFI Equality and Diversity strategy was to set up a system to routinely collect diversity information from its residents and use this information to find out more about the diversity of its customers. A system for collecting information was launched during 2007.

1.2.2 In 2007 HFI undertook an exercise to use the information it had collected to that point from its tenants and members of their household to profile its customers using the six diversity strands of age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation.

1.2.3 Using the information provided by its residents during this profiling exercise together with information it had collected from residents previously HFI was able to learn more about the makeup of the people living in the properties it manages. As summary of this information is:

- The age profile of residents is older than that of Islington as a whole with 45.2% of HFI residents being aged 18 to 44, 16.9% aged between 45 and 59, and 17.5% being aged 60 years and over.
- Over half of residents do not have a disability or impairment but 45.3% of residents do regard themselves as having some form of disability or impairment. This is significantly higher level than is reported by residents across the borough (16%).

- There are more female (53.7%) than male (45.6%) residents in HFI managed properties and the difference is more significant than in the rest of Islington. HFI also has a small number of transgender residents.
- 40% of residents are White-British, 12.1% are from another white background and 47.9% of residents are from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) background. This is a significantly higher proportion of HFI residents from a BAME background compared to Islington as a whole.
- The largest faith groups amongst residents are Christian (63.9%) and Muslim (11.3%). Other faith groups account for around 1% each. Those with no religion or belief account for 13.1%.
- In relation to sexual orientation 75.8% of residents state they are heterosexual with roughly 6% of residents bisexual, gay or lesbian. Those preferring not to say stood at 18%.

(Source: HFI diversity profile report 2007)

1.2.4 This profile of our customers reaffirms the diversity of HFI residents and highlights the differing needs of our customers and their expectations of the services they receive from HFI and its partners. The challenge for HFI is to adequately meet these differing and constantly changing individual needs and expectations. This strategy document and the related action plan will help HFI focus on delivering effective and flexible services to satisfy all our customers.

### **1.3 Governance arrangements within HFI for equality and diversity**

1.3.1 HFI has a Board of Directors, consisting of seven resident (tenant and leaseholder) representatives, five council representatives and five independent directors. The Board's role is to guide and steer the rest of the organisation and ensure that it meets its goals in the most effective and efficient manner.

1.3.2 At the time of publication of this document, the diversity breakdown of the Board is as follows:

- 11 female and 6 male board directors.
- 1 director between 25-40 years old, 12 directors between 41-55 years old, 3 directors between 56-70 years old and 1 director over 71 years old.
- 1 director declared disabled and 16 directors not disabled.

- 12 directors are White-British, 3 directors are Black-Caribbean, 1 director is White-Irish and 1 director is from an Asian background.
- At the time of publication there was no current information about board director's religion or belief or sexual orientation.

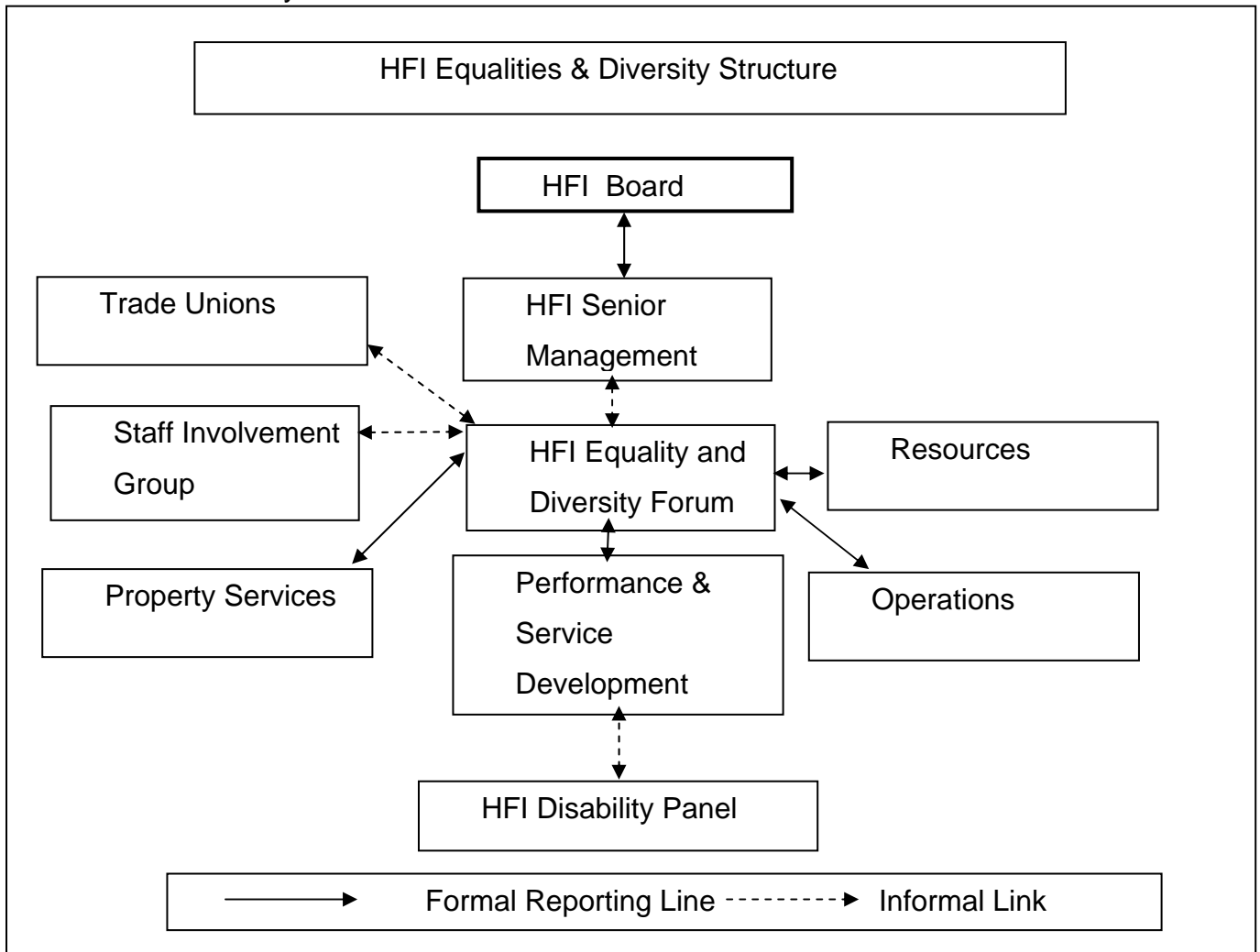
1.3.3 The role of the Board of HFI in relation to equality and diversity is that it sets the objectives and agrees this Equality and Diversity Strategy and related Action Plan. The Board has assigned the position of equality and diversity Champion to Board Member, Claudia Webbe.

1.3.4 As Board Champion for Equality and Diversity, Claudia provides a key link between the Board and the Chief Executive and other directors of HFI's senior management team on the issue of equality and diversity. Claudia also has a role on behalf of the Board monitoring the progress of equality and diversity related work within the organisation and representing the views of the Board in relation to equality and diversity both within and outside of the organisation.

1.3.5 The Board have delegated the responsibility of implementing this Strategy and Action Plan to the Chief Executive, Eamon McGoldrick.

1.3.6 One of the main ways the Chief Executive directs work linked to this Strategy and Action Plan within the organisation and monitors progress on agreed actions is through the Equality and Diversity Forum, which he chairs personally. The Equality and Diversity Forum meets on a bi-monthly basis and is a group of managers and staff which represent each of the four divisions within HFI (Operations, Performance and Service Development, Property Services) and Resources divisions). Representatives of the staff involvement group and trade Unions also sit on the forum.

1.3.7 The diagram below shows the formal structure within HFI for managing our equality and diversity work:



**1.4 Home for Islington employees diversity profile**

1.4.1 In August 2009, HFI employed 775 staff. The diversity breakdown of our staff was:

	Employment Grades				Grand total
	PO4 & below	PO5-6	PO7-8	PO9 & above	
	703	39	15	18	775
Age band					
<20	2	0	0	0	2
20>25	23	0	0	0	23

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26>30	78	1	0	0	79
31>35	78	5	0	1	84
36>40	66	3	2	0	71
41>45	125	7	2	5	139
46>50	124	11	4	7	146
51>54	93	5	1	3	102
55>59	71	5	5	1	82
60>65	38	2	1	1	42
Over 65	5	0	0	0	5
Gender					
Male	403	25	12	14	454
Female	300	14	3	4	321
Ethnicity					
Asian Bangladeshi	6	0	0	0	6
Asian Indian	17	1	1	0	19
Asian Pakistani	3	0	1	0	4
Other Asian background	12	0	0	0	12
Black African	54	1	0	0	55
Black African	26	0	0	0	26
Black Caribbean	118	3	0	1	122
Black/ Black British	19	0	0	0	19
Mixed	15	2	0	1	18
Other	8	0	0	1	9
Other African background	4	0	0	0	4
White	65	3	3	4	75
White British	270	25	8	11	314
White Greek Cypriot	8	0	0	0	8
White Irish	43	4	1	0	48
White Turkish Cypriot	3	0	1	0	4
White Kurdish	1	0	0	0	1

Unspecified	25	0	0	0	25
Not Declared	6	0	0	0	6
Disability					
No	130	4	7	4	145
Yes	69	8	0	1	78
No data	504	27	8	13	552
Sexual Orientation					
Bisexual	5	0	0	0	5
Gay	8	3	0	0	11
Heterosexual	299	16	9	14	338
Lesbian	3	0	0	0	3
Not Stated	94	9	1	1	105
No data	294	11	5	3	313
Religion					
Buddhist	3	1	1	0	5
Christian	227	10	5	7	238
Hindu	9	1	0	0	10
Jewish	1	0	0	2	3
Muslim	24	1	1	0	26
No Religion	62	9	1	4	76
Other Religion	22	0	1	1	24
Pagan	2	0	0	0	2
Sikh	2	0	1	0	3
No Data	271	10	4	3	288
Not Known	5	1	0	0	6
Not Stated	75	6	1	1	83

## 1.5 Background to our Equality and Diversity strategy

1.5.1 In December 2004 HFI set up an Equalities Working Group, chaired by Claudia Webbe, to oversee the setting up of its first Equality & Diversity Strategy. The Strategy which resulted ran from 2005-2008.

1.5.2 HFI was inspected by the Audit Commission in September 2008 and was awarded three stars with excellent prospects for improvement, the highest award that can be given by the Audit Commission. In its report the Audit Commission found strengths significantly outweighed weaknesses in relation to diversity and subsequently put HFI within the top 10 performing housing authorities in the country in its approach to equality and diversity. Some of the achievements recognised by the Audit Commission were:

- Strong leadership has led to clear and effective plans with a well monitored understanding of different resident needs.
- HFI complies with the CRE Code of Practice for Rented Housing.
- HFI monitors itself against the Local Government Equality Standard and the London Borough of Islington assessed HFI as reaching level four against the standard.
- Information collected about residents allows services to be tailored to needs and disadvantages faced by residents are overcome allowing them a more equal access to services.
- HFI has an effective, well structured and tailored approach to meeting the communication needs of residents in a cost effective way.
- HFI has a comprehensive approach to training staff on diversity.
- HFI is ensuring that contractors engage appropriately with the equalities and diversity agenda and that work is available to women and black and minority ethnic companies and workers.

1.5.3 This equality and diversity strategy 2009-2012 and related action plan build on the success of the previous strategy. It sets out what HFI still wants to achieve in relation to equality and diversity and how it will drive further improvements over the lifetime of the strategy to deliver on the commitments set out within this document. This includes:

- The areas still requiring attention as highlighted by the Audit Commission in its 2008 inspection report.
- [http://www.homesforislington.org.uk/About%20us/Audit%20Commission/HFI%20Inspection%20Report%20\(Final\).pdf](http://www.homesforislington.org.uk/About%20us/Audit%20Commission/HFI%20Inspection%20Report%20(Final).pdf)

- Our objectives documented in the overarching LBI corporate equality scheme which HFI is signed up to and our specific actions within the high level action plan which support this document.
- [http://www.islington.gov.uk/Community/equalitydiversity/corporate\\_equality\\_scheme/](http://www.islington.gov.uk/Community/equalitydiversity/corporate_equality_scheme/)
- Our action points set out in the current LBI equality schemes covering disability, gender, race and sexual orientation and also actions which will be agreed for new equality schemes covering age and religion and belief.
- <http://www.islington.gov.uk/community/equalitydiversity/keydocuments.asp>
- Meeting the requirements set out in the Equality Framework for Local Government.
- <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=9491107>
- Meeting the requirements of relevant Codes of Practice published by the former equality commissions and now managed by the Equality and Human Rights Commission
- <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/advice-and-guidance/information-for-advisers/codes-of-practice/>
- Changes to the national direction of equality and diversity which will result from the introduction of the new Equality Act during 2009/10
- [http://www.equalities.gov.uk/equality\\_bill.aspx](http://www.equalities.gov.uk/equality_bill.aspx)

## **2 Equality and Diversity Policy Statement**

### **2.1 HFI's commitment to equality & diversity**

- 2.1.1 HFI is committed to promoting equality and diversity among our customers and staff. This equality & diversity policy statement links directly into our Equality & Diversity Strategy and Action Plan, which sets out our priorities for action to improve the living and working environment for all our residents and staff.
- 2.1.2 What equality means to HFI is ensuring that all our services meet the needs and aspirations of all our customers, that we provide our services in a fair and equitable way and that they are accessible to all. To do this, we will ensure that our policies and practices are not discriminatory and actively encourage people to access our services or take up and remain in employment with us.

- 2.1.3 What diversity means to HFI is recognition and appreciation of the different life experiences, skills and perspectives that all individuals bring to our communities and workplace. We believe that diversity benefits and adds real value to our organisation and the work that we do. HFI will promote and celebrate the diversity of our community and staff. This means that we will actively consult and work with all our customers to recognise their different service needs and preferences and we will always aim to make our services fit with these needs and expectations. As an employer, we will actively empower all our staff to develop their potential and take pride in their abilities and resources.
- 2.1.4 We are committed to ensuring equality of opportunity and valuing the diversity within our community and workforce. It is our policy that everyone should be treated fairly and without discrimination regardless of disability, gender including transgender, race, ethnicity, colour, national origin, age, sexuality, language, HIV status, religious or other belief, class or social background, family status, responsibilities for dependents and unrelated criminal convictions.
- 2.1.5 HFI recognises that discrimination can take a number of forms including direct and indirect discrimination. HFI also accepts the definition of institutionalised racism as defined by the MacPherson Report following the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry and will extend it to apply beyond racism to discrimination against disabled people and all forms of discrimination. We will meet, alongside our partners in Islington, our community cohesion duty under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000.
- 2.1.6 HFI welcomes and is committed to fulfilling its legal duties under the following Acts and Statutory Guidance to combat discrimination and promote equality: Equal Pay Act 1970, Sex Discrimination Act 1975, Race Relations Act 1976, the Human Rights Act 1998, Disability Discrimination Act 1995, Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003, Gender Recognition Act 2004, Disability Discrimination Act 2005, Employment Equality (Sex Discrimination) Regulations 2005, Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006, Equality Act 2006, Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007 and all other current and impending equalities legislation.

2.1.7 In April 2009 the Government published a new Equalities Bill. One of the main aims of the Bill is to simplify and modernise equalities legislation by bringing together all preceding equalities legislation, as listed above, under one Act of Parliament. The Government expect the Bill to receive Royal assent during the spring 2010 with most of the elements of the Bill coming into force in autumn 2010. Many of the changes introduced within this revised strategy are the result of the expected changes likely to be introduced by this new Act of Parliament. HFI will continue to review this strategy and the linked action plan as and when changes are made during the progress of the Bill and when Royal assent is given.

## **2.2 Responsibilities**

2.2.1 Every member of our staff has the responsibility of complying with and actively promoting our Equality & Diversity Strategy and we will ensure awareness of equality issues is a key component of the induction process for all new staff and is considered in the annual performance development reviews of all existing staff.

2.2.2 HFI expect its partners, contractors, residents panel directors, tenant management organisations and tenant and residents associations to comply with and promote our strategy in their delivery of services to our residents.

2.2.3 All employees must not discriminate, harass, bully or abuse anyone and neither persuade or pressure others to discriminate or condone any such behaviour. If any employee does not follow these requirements they will be investigated under the Disciplinary Procedures.

### **3 Aims of our Equality & Diversity Strategy**

3.1.1 The aim of this strategy is to provide a clear framework for what HFI is trying to achieve, how this will be done, and what mechanisms will be used to measure its success. It will help HFI learn to identify any barriers that cause discrimination and through active and ongoing consultation with all our stakeholders enable us to introduce new and more effective ways of providing our services.

3.1.2 We want to improve the quality of life for all our customers and staff by providing excellent services and being a first class employer. We want to make sure that our services are accessible, that they meet the needs of all our residents and that people feel confident in using them. We aim to become an organisation that is inclusive and draws strength from its differences.

#### **3.2 In partnership with our community**

3.2.1 As part of the review of this strategy during 2009 HFI consulted widely with local community groups and individual residents to find out what problems people experienced with our organisation and to seek ideas and suggestions about how we could make things better. The comments and feedback we have received has helped in the formation of this Strategy and Action Plan.

3.2.2 HFI has and will continue to develop and implement the Equality & Diversity Strategy and Action Plan in partnership with our residents, tenants and residents associations, representatives and advocacy groups within the community, staff and contractors.

3.2.3 The Equality and Diversity Strategy is a public document and as such HFI will be answerable to the public and residents in particular for delivering the programme and agenda set out in the strategy.

3.2.4 HFI will:

- Consult widely with our residents, staff and partners on each review of this strategy.

- Be pro-active in reaching out to all the groups in our community to seek their input and advice on the continued development and implementation of this strategy and related action plan.
- Use a variety of inclusive consultation techniques including community events, surveys, written documents, focus groups as well as face-to-face meetings to consult and involve our residents and their representatives, staff and contractors.
- Communicate this strategy widely to our community and workforce.
- Ensure the strategy is available on request in our main community languages and in accessible formats and that it is accessible to disabled people from a wide range of impairment groups.
- With the help of feedback from our residents and staff we will monitor, review and evaluate the effectiveness of our service delivery and employment practices, and if there are any areas of weakness we will take action to address this.

### **3.3 Provide high-quality services accessible to all**

3.3.1 HFI received a three-star rating with excellent prospects for improvement from the Audit Commission following its most recent inspection of the organisation in October 2008. We are very proud of this achievement but want to continue to develop and improve our services to ensure they remain of high-quality, are accessible to all our residents and of real benefit to the wider community.

3.3.2 We recognise that poor quality housing and living in overcrowded conditions has significant impacts on health, educational attainment and wellbeing and that black and minority ethnic communities are often disproportionately affected by these circumstances. We want to deliver improvements to our residents' homes that will substantially improve the quality of their environment and help to make the area they live in safe and secure for many years to come.

- 3.3.3 To address the debilitating effects of poor housing, HFI aims to achieve the Decent Homes target for all the accommodation it manages by March 2011. The Decent Homes Standard does not however cover a number of things such as security, lift repair and renewal, environmental or estate works and facilities for the disabled. Those will be covered by the HFI Standard. Our objective is to deliver improvement to residents' homes that will not just meet the government's Decent Homes Standard by 2010 but will deliver a much higher level of improvements that we know are needed to our stock from our Asset Management Information and what our residents have told us needs to be improved.
- 3.3.4 HFI is also currently developing a programme of much need newly built family sized social rented housing within Islington and also implementing a program of works to deconvert small dwellings into larger units to help alleviate the overcrowding experienced by many families in Islington.
- 3.3.5 HFI accepts the findings of the Hills Report 2007 that social landlords should have a greater involvement in taking steps to tackle poverty as this is an essential factor in promoting the equality for those living in social housing. HFI is an active director of the Islington Strategic Partnership as we believe we are well placed to work in partnership with others to tackle social exclusion within the community by helping our customers have access to all life opportunities.
- 3.3.6 As we have said Islington is a very diverse and vibrant area but this can at times create tensions and divisions within the community. HFI is committed to supporting and building community cohesion and equality for all. We will work with partners to help build links within the community particularly with younger people to help breakdown barriers between different groups and increase life opportunities. We will also work towards eradicating all types of harassment on our estates and will support people facing harassment by taking the strongest action against perpetrators of hate crime.

3.3.7 We will actively seek to engage all our customers, including those who have been marginalised or previously considered “hard to reach” and involve them by providing accessible and convenient consultation opportunities. We will involve people throughout our community in the way we deliver our services to them. We will ensure that the information we provide to our customers is available in the main community languages and is accessible to all. We will actively encourage and welcome feedback from our customers on the way we provide services and build that feedback into improving our services.

3.3.8 HFI remains committed to providing high-quality services that meet the needs of all our diverse community. We will act to:

- Ensure all our customers are treated with dignity and respect.
- Remove any barriers preventing our customers from accessing our services or participating in our decision-making structures.
- Provide information on our services which is accessible and available in appropriate formats and advertise the availability of our translation & interpreting services.
- Carry out a program of equality impact assessments on current and on all proposed policies & functions to identify any adverse impact on any particular group and to take action to address or alleviate this.
- We will use the diversity information we have collected about from our customers to analyse the provision of our core services to check if they have any unfair adverse affects on any particular group and take appropriate action to alleviate this.
- Consult and involve our customers in the development of our services.
- We will act promptly to investigate any complaints we receive about the way we provide services.
- Work with others to promote a community in which all our residents can live free from prejudice and discrimination and in ways which promote vibrant and cohesive neighbourhoods.

### **3.4 Combat discrimination & value diversity in our workforce**

3.4.1 HFI aims to have a workforce that reflects our community. We will continue to develop, promote and seek ways to improve our employment related policies and procedures to ensure they continue to give equal access to employment and development opportunities to all our potential and existing staff directors. We will make sure that our employment practices are accessible to everyone and we will put into place in our equality & diversity action plan a range of initiatives to:

- Have a workforce which is representative of our community at all levels and grades throughout our organisation.
- Continue to develop our policies to give all our staff equal access to employment and career development opportunities.
- Make sure all our staff know of their right to be protected from discrimination, harassment and bullying.
- Seek innovative ways to help staff from under represented groups develop their careers and progress within the organisation.
- Train all our staff and Board directors on their responsibilities to implement this strategy.
- Set ambitious performance targets so that we can measure our progress.

### **3.5 Working with our residents and partners**

3.5.1 Home for Islington has a number of ways in which it seeks the views of its customers on its standards of service delivery and to identify improvements. It also has a number of formal structures by which residents can become more involved in the monitoring of HFI's performance and direction including tenant and residents associations, consultative panels and Board membership.

3.5.2 HFI also works in partnership with other key stakeholders within the borough including the council, the local police authority and primary care trust and others to ensure that we seek better ways of working together to meet the needs and aspirations of the whole community we all serve.

3.5.3 HFI is also a significant purchaser of services within the local area. We will use our influence and purchasing power to promote this strategy amongst our contractors and partners. HFI will:

- Continue to seek creative methods for reaching our different resident and community groups to ensure that information about HFI and how to become involved is presented in ways which are as relevant to all residents, as widely distributed and as easily understood as possible.
- Actively go out into the community and make contact with bodies that represent minority groups within HFI's wider customer profile and work with them to identify the needs of the groups they represent and find ways to breakdown barriers they may face to accessing our services.
- Promote our Resident Involvement Register as a method of consulting more widely with residents and ensure its membership reflects the wider population.
- Support the development of new tenant and resident associations and ensure they are accessible and representative of the community they represent.
- Our resident consultation panels reflect the make up of the communities they represent.
- Ensure that our communication is accessible to all through our Communications Strategy and Interpretation and Translation Policy. We will ensure that our communications and literature meets the requirements set out in these documents and that there is the widest possible access for people who do not speak and/or read much English and for disabled and D/deaf or deafened residents and staff.
- Aim to make the Board truly representative of our local community and will encourage people from under-represented groups to seek Board membership.
- Work with contractors and partners and those we buy services from to ensure they do not operate discriminatory practices in employment or service delivery.
- Promote adherence to good equalities practice amongst our contractors and partners in the employment of their staff and in the delivery of their services, in respect to disability, gender, ethnicity, colour, nationality, language, age, religion, belief and sexuality.

### **3.6 Knowing our community**

- 3.6.1 We know that Islington has many diverse communities and there are often many differences within each community. In order for HFI to more effectively understand and meet the differing needs of all its customers and residents we are committed to collecting information about our customers which we will use to help us learn more about our customers, how our services affect them and help to identify ways we can make improvements to these services.
- 3.6.2 The collection and analysis of this information used in conjunction with information from other national and local sources is a requirement of the Equality Framework for Local Government to enable HFI and its partners to demonstrate the impact of their services of local communities and help identify any equality gaps in service provision. The results of this analysis will then be used to set local priorities and targets to improve services and bridge any identified equality gaps.
- 3.6.3 HFI has made significant progress increasing the amount of customer information it has collected from its tenants. This information has been used as part of equality impact assessments and also equality audits have been undertaken of key service areas including repairs and maintenance, rent collection and complaints.
- HFI will continue to collect information from customers and seek new and innovate ways to use this information to help identify areas of poor performance and identify service improvements.
  - We will continue to work closely with partners to ensure that information collected can be shared as appropriate to increase understanding of customers multiple needs and identify opportunities for more effective joint working.
  - We will develop better ways of using the information to help staff identify and react more effectively to individual customer needs

### **3.7 Learning from complaints**

- 3.7.1 One of the key activities we look at is our complaints handling process to ensure that we respond effectively to our customers and to determine whether there are any areas of discrimination we need to address.

3.7.2 Every six months HFI board receive a report giving an analysis of complaints received during the previous six months and comparing performance on complaints handling over the past five years. The process is used to spot trends in performance and identify areas in need of improvement.

- We will continue to use our complaints process to identify cases where the service provided has not met our customers' needs or expectations, including due to equality related issues.
- HFI will use this valuable feedback from our customers to tackle inequalities and to improve our services to meet diverse customer needs more effectively.

### **3.8 To be an employer of choice**

3.8.1 HFI wants to be an employer of choice and aims to attract and retain a talented and diverse workforce that reflects the community we serve.

3.8.2 We have been recognised for our success to date in achieving this objective by being awarded a "Two Ticks – Positive about Disabled People Employer" by Job Centre Plus. We have also been accredited by Stonewall as a positive employer for lesbian, gay and bisexual people and we are also recognised as being an age positive organisation.

3.8.3 HFI has also been accredited as an Investor in People and is committed to retaining this award and improving our level of accreditation.

3.8.4 HFI conducts a bi-annual staff attitude survey to which all employees have an opportunity to contribute. The results of this survey are used to monitor staffing issues and are analysed by diversity strand in order to identify any particular equality related concerns. The results of the 2008 survey showed that 66% of staff are satisfied in their jobs and 81% agreed that HFI has a clear commitment to equality and diversity however disabled employees report higher levels of dissatisfaction with their jobs. The results of the survey and actions planned to address areas of concern highlighted by it are reported to Board on a bi-annual basis and the results published on the intranet. Results from the survey are also fed back to staff at the staff conference.

3.8.5 In compliance with the general duties for Race, Disability and Gender, HFI collects information from its staff and prospective employees across all six diversity strands of age, gender, race, disability, sexuality and religion or belief in regard to:

- Applications for employment, training and promotion
- Staff in post
- Staff receiving training
- Staff appraisals
- Staff making complaints or grievances
- Staff facing complaints or disciplinary action
- Staff leaving the organisation.

3.8.6 HFI aims to have a workforce that is truly representative of the community it serves at all levels within the organisation. On an annual basis HFI analyses the diversity information it has collected from staff to monitor:

- Equalities breakdown of the workforce compared with the equalities composition of HFI residents.
- Equalities breakdown of our staff by grade.

3.8.7 The Equality Framework for Local Government expects an Excellent organisation to have a workforce that is increasingly representative of the community it serves, is actively working to increase the numbers of women and BAME officers within senior management posts and that promotes a culture in which all staff are treated with dignity and respect. HFI is committed to achieving these objectives and a number of programs and initiatives are planned or are in place to facilitate the achievement of these goals. These are recorded in the equality and diversity action plan.

3.8.8 HFI will also:

- Strive to make sure our workplace is free of discrimination and harassment and take robust action, where appropriate, to combat it.
- Ensure that everyone has equal access to training and promotion opportunities and that we operate work-life balance policies that maximise employment and career development opportunities for all.

- Provide a safe environment that is accessible to disabled people and seek to retain in employment any of our staff who are or become disabled.
- Conduct periodic equality impact assessments of all our major employment policies and procedures in order to ensure our employment practices are fair and to promote equality and diversity across the six diversity strands.
- Continue to seek new methods of employment to meet the work life balance needs of both our staff and the organisation.
- Continue to use the staff attitude survey as a way to measure the impact of our Equality & Diversity Strategy and Action Plan within the organisation and take appropriate action where necessary.

### **3.9 Equalities in Procurement**

3.9.1 Procurement is an important function, which HFI will use to actively promote our Equality & Diversity Policy and Strategy. Equality in procurement is about more than ensuring contractors are appointed fairly but also that contractors practice equality in service delivery and in employment. HFI's Procurement Strategy seeks to ensure that our contracts are set up and delivered in a way which is non-discriminatory and promotes equality of opportunity for all our residents, staff and local businesses. To this end HFI will:

- Ensure all contracts will be tendered in strict accordance with HFI's procurement policy and will comply fully with all relevant legislation within UK and EC law.
- Ensure it reacts to changes in procurement practices introduced by the Equalities Bill 2009.
- Ensure a common procurement practice for all contracts and provider agreements, whereby all contractors and service providers wishing to deliver services do so in accordance with our Equality and Diversity Strategy and action plan.
- When planning a service to go out to tender ensure, along with the business case, value for money and affordability requirements, equality issues are considered, as a minimum to ensure the contract meets our legal obligations relating to disability, gender and race and where appropriate through the completion of a full equality impact assessment.

- Take steps when planning a contract and measuring the success of a contractor to encourage active participation from customers and service users, including people from marginalised and disadvantaged communities.
- Encourage greater interest in our contracts opportunities from voluntary organisations, small businesses and local and black and minority ethnic businesses through our contract specifications and advertising of contracts.
- Make potential contractors aware of HFI's Equality and Diversity Policy and, where deemed appropriate, ensure that they take steps to implement it in full.
- In line with those used by London Borough of Islington, ensure clauses relating to equalities are include as appropriate within our specification documents, pre-qualification questionnaire and contract conditions.
- At pre-tender stage and where relevant and appropriate to the selection process, formally request from potential suppliers evidence of their equalities policies and training programs and evidence of effective implementation within their organisation; this information will be used to ensure they have the ability to meet the equalities requirements of the contract.
- Make sure our contractors and external service providers meet the Commission for Racial Equality's Code of Practice on Procurement.
- Expect suppliers to take all appropriate steps to ensure their employment practices are compliant with statutory equalities legislation and encourage them to promote equality of opportunity beyond the scope of the contract.
- Set up and use monitoring systems for contracts which measure contractor performance against equalities targets set out within the contract specification and conditions.
- Towards the end of a contract period and before re-tendering review the success of the equality objectives set as part of the contract and whether they were achieved.
- Provide training for all staff involved in procurement work so that they understand the provisions of equality legislation and their relevance to their area of work.
- Support efforts made by our contractors to develop their recruitment and employment practices in ways which help to promote diversity within their own workforce and amongst their sub-contractors.

#### **4 How we will deliver our commitment**

- 4.1.1 HFI has formally adopted the Equality Framework for Local Government, which is a systematic way for our organisation to measure its progress in achieving equality and celebrating diversity within our community and workforce. The action plan attached to this strategy details the actions we will take and is partly based on the targets set out in the Equality Framework.
- 4.1.2 The Audit Commission has published a guidance document Key Lines of Inquiry, which sets out the standards required of an excellent organisation. One of the key themes within this guidance is diversity and HFI will use this checklist to evaluate our progress towards becoming an excellent organisation in terms of equality and diversity.
- 4.1.3 HFI will also work in partnership with London Borough of Islington and other key organisations within the borough to ensure Islington achieves the requirements set out in the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) criteria relating to tackling inequality, disadvantage and discrimination and improving the lives of vulnerable people.
- 4.1.4 HFI will adhere to the Single Equality Scheme agreed by London Borough of Islington once this has been implemented.

#### **4.2 The Equality Framework for Local Government**

- 4.2.1 In 2009 the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) replaced the Equality Standard for Local Government with a new tool to measure local government compliance with the equality agenda called the Equality Framework for Local Government. The new framework builds on the improvements introduced by the Equality Standard and aims to be simpler, smarter and more proportional and relevant.
- 4.2.2 The Framework focuses on five key areas of performance: knowing your community and equality mapping; place shaping, leadership, partnership and organisational commitment; community engagement and satisfaction; responsive services and customer care and a modern and diverse workforce.

- 4.2.3 The framework recognises accomplishment in these areas using three levels of achievement: developing, achieving and excellent. There is also a transitional stage of moving towards excellence which IDeA expects to phase out by the end of 2011.
- 4.2.4 HFI, alongside London Borough of Islington, declared Level 4 of the Equality Standard in 2008. Under the new Equality Framework this means that we are currently moving towards excellence. Our goal is to achieve and excellent rating under the framework by March 31 2011.
- 4.2.5 HFI welcomes the new Equality Framework and is committed to using it to ensure we continue to strive to mainstream equality and diversity into every aspect of our service delivery and employment.

### **4.3 Equality Impact Assessments**

- 4.3.1 Under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 HFI has a duty to monitor and review existing and new policies and functions relevant to the duty to promote race equality and identify any adverse effect on any of our black and ethnic minority communities. As a social landlord we are also monitored on how well we perform in regard to the CRE's Code of Practice in Rented Housing and the Code of Practice for Tackling Racial Harassment. One of the key ways in which to determine whether any of our functions or policies is having an adverse impact on our community or staff is to undertake an impact assessment.
- 4.3.2 Complying with the requirements of the Equality Framework for Local Government also requires the completion of equality impact assessments in order for the organisation to achieve the excellent level of the framework.
- 4.3.3 To address multiple discrimination, HFI has adopted an impact assessment process which covers all six of the Equality Framework target groups and investigates any adverse effect of our policies or functions in regard to disability, race, gender, sexuality, age, religion or belief. HFI sets out in annual program how it will review current and all proposed policies and procedures to ensure as a minimum we comply with all equalities legislation.

- 4.3.4 We have built into our equality impact assessment process active consultation and engagement with our customers and staff through surveys and meetings and will continue to seek ways to improve this. We will continue to report back on our progress annually, providing a summary of the outcomes of completed equality impact assessments through our website and making the full reports available on request to our community and staff.
- 4.3.5 HFI will continue to carry out a formal equality impact assessment during the development of all strategies, policies, procedures and projects which are likely to have a significant impact on residents and/or staff, to assess whether there is any adverse impact on any particular equality group. This process will be an integral part of the planning and implementation of strategies, policies, procedures and projects. The assessment will be done before and during any consultation and will include a specific race equality impact assessment as required under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. HFI will also carry out a program of equality impact assessments to proposed revisions of relevant existing strategies, procedures and policies.
- 4.3.6 HFI will publish the learning from each equality impact assessment on its website and the program of equality impact assessments will be review on an annual basis.

#### **4.4 Training**

- 4.4.1 HFI completed an extensive program of online equality and diversity awareness training beginning in 2005, which was compulsory for all existing staff. It is also completed as part of the induction process for all new staff.
- 4.4.2 All staff have been trained on their responsibilities as set out in the Interpretation and Translation policy and procedure.
- 4.4.3 HFI conducted a programme of customer services training with a particular focus on the needs of disabled and ethnic minority customers for all front line staff and managers during 2007. HFI is committed to ensuring its entire staff receives regular disability equality training.

- 4.4.4 All managers involved in the recruitment and selection process and also in the implementation of performance management and staff grievance procedures receive related equality & diversity training.
- 4.4.5 All senior managers and key staff within the organisation have also been trained on the equality impact assessment process.
- 4.4.6 All directors of the HFI Board completed the same online diversity training course as staff during 2006/07 and 2008/09. Directors of the Board are encouraged to revise this training every two years.
- 4.4.7 Staff working for Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs) within the borough also have the opportunity to undertake the on-line equality and diversity course.
- 4.4.8 Contractors are expected to implement their own equality and diversity awareness training amongst their operatives and sub-contactors to a level required to meet the needs of their contractual obligations.
- 4.4.9 In order to successfully implement our Equality & Diversity Strategy, HFI recognises the importance of its board directors, staff and partners having access to sufficient levels of training to ensure they remain up to date with their responsibilities under the race, disability and gender equality duties and with current and future equalities legislation. How this will be achieved over the next three years is set out in the related equality and diversity action plan.
- 4.4.10 HFI will continue to monitor information collected as part of our learning and development function to identify and address any areas of concern in relation to the planning, accessibility and delivery of our training and development programmes. We will use this information to continually review the success of our training & development processes.

## **5 Equality & Diversity Action Plan**

- 5.1.1 The things we will do over the next three year to meet the aims of this strategy document are set out in the attached action plan. The action plan also clearly states any resource implications required to implement the actions and how they will be met.

- 5.1.2 The plan clearly identifies the actions we are taking to meet our responsibilities under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and under the Sex Discrimination Act and Disability Discrimination Act including the expected outcomes of these actions and times scales when we expect to have achieved these actions.
- 5.1.3 In partnership with the London Borough of Islington, HFI aims to achieve the excellent level of the Equality Framework for Local Government. To assist us in doing this, our action plan will also clearly show where we are addressing the requirements of the framework, which will enable us to achieve the excellent rating. As LBI is leading in our aim to achieve the Excellent rating actions which it expects HFI to achieve are replicated in our action plan.
- 5.1.4 The action plan itself will be revised each year to reflect any changes to the priorities of this three-year strategy document.
- 5.1.5 The Board will be presented on an annual basis with a report on showing the level of progress made within the organisation to achieving the objectives set out in this strategy and action plan.

## **5.2 How will we know our Equality & Diversity Strategy is successful?**

- 5.2.1 We will know we are making a difference with our new Equality & Diversity Strategy when:
- We, along with London Borough of Islington, achieve the excellent level on the Equality Framework for Local Government.
  - We get positive feedback in our Tenants' and Leaseholders' Surveys.
  - We get positive feedback from our staff in our Staff Attitude Survey.
  - There is increased representation from all sectors of our community in our resident consultation forums and other methods of consultation and involvement.
  - Our workforce at all grades and levels of the organisation is representative in terms of equalities profile of the community we serve.
  - Other ALMOs look to us as a leader on equality and diversity.

## **6 Monitoring this strategy and action plan**

- 6.1.1 As part of this, each of our service areas monitors what they do and report back each year on their performance against each of the action plans. We will make any necessary improvements to the strategy and action plan identified as a result of this review.
- 6.1.2 Monitoring and evaluation of our Equality & Diversity Strategy takes place on a number of levels:
- On an annual basis the board of HFI receives a report of progress towards meeting the strategy and action plan.
  - The HFI senior management team receives six monthly reports on progress against the strategy's equality & diversity action plan.
  - The bi-monthly Equality and Diversity Forum meeting monitors progress at an operational level across the organisation on tasks set out in the action plan.
  - The bi-monthly Staff Involvement Group considers equality and diversity issues affecting staff across the organisation.
  - We will continue to undertake extensive consultation with our residents on their experiences of our service and seek suggestions from them on how we can continue to improve our service to meet their needs and expectations. We will do this using a range of techniques such as resident focus groups, surveys and questionnaires, attending community events, learning from complaints and resident mystery shopping.
  - We will also use information gathered within the organisation for example performance data, sampling and spot checks and quality audits to test the quality and fairness of our services.
  - HFI will commit itself to an external challenge of its strategy. This is will be achieved in part through a peer review of the strategy as part of the assessment of organisation for the Equality Framework in 2011.
  - Use the outcomes of the programme of equality impact assessments we will undertake over the next three years to gauge the success of our strategy.

- Each year HFI will produce an end of year report assessing our performance against this strategy and action plan and we will publish this report on our internal and external website to make it available to all sections of our community and workforce.