



Single Equality Statement 2020/23

Introduction

We live in an increasingly diverse society made up of people with different personal characteristics who represent a wide range of ages, religions and beliefs, races, sexes, sexual orientations, physical and mental abilities, genders and lifestyle choices.

Grand Union Housing Group as both a landlord and employer, strives to recognise and embrace all such differences to ensure that equality and diversity remain at the core of our business.

We will ensure our targets deliver services that are both responsive to the needs of communities and individuals and promote social inclusion. We are committed to taking positive steps to ensure that equality of opportunity and effective management of diversity are reflected in all our activities.

We are also committed to developing an organisational culture that respects and values all sections of the community and acknowledges the contribution each individual can make to our work.

Our single equality statement demonstrates how equality and diversity is integrated in who we are and all that we do and how it underpins our approach to protecting equality and diversity for the future.

The purpose of this statement is to promote equality of opportunity for minority groups and eliminate discrimination. Any action taken to overcome discrimination will help to improve the performance of the organisation and provide greater customer satisfaction, from all sectors of the community.

Definition of equality, diversity and community cohesion

Equality means treating people fairly and giving them fair and equal chances regardless of particular characteristics such as their age, disability, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation; whether they are married or in a civil partnership, are pregnant or taking maternity leave or have undergone a gender reassignment.

Diversity means understanding that everyone is unique and valuing the differences of individuals and groups.

Community cohesion means recognising, supporting and celebrating diversity. It is about building and maintaining strong and positive relationships amongst individuals and groups living in our neighbourhoods, creating an environment where there is mutual respect.

Values and vision

Grand Union aims to promote an understanding and appreciation of equality and diversity, both within our organisational culture and the communities we serve.

Our core values are:

- **Driven** – driven to do more. We empower staff to achieve more and help us evolve into a more efficient, flexible and ambitious organisation that has a positive impact on our customers and communities.
- **Together** – we are in it together. Our can-do attitude and collaborative approach help us achieve our goals and provide what our customers, colleagues and partners need from us.
- **Deliver** – we deliver on our promises. We are committed to making a difference to people's lives and by acting with integrity, being open-minded and taking ownership, we can be trusted to do what we say we will.

Grand Union has made a commitment to employees within its core values to strive to provide equality of opportunity for all, treat everyone with respect and understanding and to recognise the importance and value of employees and their welfare. We recognise that we will be better equipped to provide the quality services to our customers with a workforce that is valued and well resourced. Our people are our main resource and we aim to make the best use of the diverse range of skills we possess and support staff to work together for the benefit of our customers.

Our vision is "More Homes, Stronger Communities, Better Lives". For this vision to be realised it is essential that everyone can fulfil their potential and participate in the community in the ways in which they choose.

We will champion local needs and will promote our neighbourhoods as places for everyone, recognising and providing positive support for diversity of people and places.

Legal Requirements

The Equality Act 2010 replaced previous equality legislation in England, Scotland and Wales with a single act and introduced the term 'protected characteristics' and two new duties - a public sector general equality duty and specific duties.

Protected characteristics

The duty covers the protected characteristics:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- race, ethnic or national origin
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation.
- marriage and civil partnerships*
- pregnancy and maternity.

The general equality duty

The general equality duty is set out in the Equality Act 2010. In summary, Grand Union, in the exercise of its functions, have **due regard** to the following three aims:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
- **advance equality** of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- **foster good relations** between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

*only the first of the three aims apply to marriage and civil partnerships.

Due regard

The three aims listed above must be considered and reflected upon during:

- decision making
- designing policies (including internal policies)
- delivery of services.

The duty to have due regard is NOT a duty to achieve a particular result.

Advance equality

- remove or minimise any disadvantage suffered by people who share a relevant protected characteristic
- meet the needs of people who share a relevant protected characteristic where these are different from those who do not share it
- encourage people who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life and activities where they are disproportionately under- represented.

Foster good relations

Defined as the need to:

- deal with prejudice
- promote understanding.

The general duty applies to all public authorities listed in Schedule 19 of the Equality Act 2010 and to other organisations when carrying out public functions. We are not a public authority, however, we do carry out certain public functions, which include, allocation of housing, mutual exchanges, rent setting, setting tenancy terms and termination of tenancy. This means that we are required to comply with the general duty but only in relation to public functions that we carry out.

The public sector specific duty

There is a specific duty to:

- publish information to demonstrate compliance with the general duty
- prepare and publish one or more specific and measurable equality objectives in an accessible format.

As we are not listed under Schedule 19 of the Equality Act 2010, we are not listed for the specific duties (under Schedule 1 of the Specific Duties Regulations).

Grand Union, therefore, intends to meet both the spirit and the letter of its legal duties under the Equality Act 2010 as an employer and a provider of services to make sure that all our services, programmes and actions have a positive impact upon equality and diversity.

Our approach

To be proactive and change or adapt our services to address equality and diversity issues. Our achievements to date for example:

Race

We continue to work with our partners and local community groups to gain a better understanding of the service needs in the localities in which we work. Although we cover a largely rural area of the country with a low percentage of customers from black and minority ethnic groups, we remain vigilant and aware of issues with regard to discrimination, education, communication and employment. Help and assistance is offered to those who do not speak or have difficulty with English for example through interpreter and translation services. In addition, our database is updated to inform us of our customers' communication needs. We have robust anti-social behaviour and harassment policies and work in partnership with the police to ensure that issues are highlighted and dealt with swiftly. We promote reporting of hate crime through external specialist organisations.

Disability

We have an ongoing commitment to be a “two ticks”, positive about disability, employer. We continue to ensure that our various methods of communication take account of the needs of our customers, who we consult with regarding our publications, and work with to find the most appropriate methods. Our website facilities have been upgraded to include Browsealoud. Partnership working with local authorities allows us to maintain aids and adaptations budgets for minor works and we employ dedicated officers. We maintain records of adapted properties to inform allocations decisions and promote the best use of resources. We provide an assisted gardening scheme for elderly and disabled customers. Our employees receive training and development in areas of mental health awareness. Where we have concerns or are aware that a customer has a mental health need, we will signpost them to appropriate agencies to support them to successfully sustain their tenancy as well as support from dedicated tenancy support officers. Our independent living service provides homes for people with learning disabilities and its forum encourages customers to discuss and make decisions about the services. Contractors are using profiling information to tailor services to individual needs e.g. communication or mobility needs on repair job tickets.

Age

Staff training ensures we use inclusive language and positive images about age and avoid perpetuating stereotypes. We have an established record for recruiting apprentices with many securing permanent opportunities and run Project Mackenzie, a scheme helping young people into work. We employ a dedicated youth officer and have a youth panel.

We provide a Community Alarm and Support Service and a wellbeing project officer within our retirement schemes.

Gender

We have policies and procedures in place in order that we can effectively respond to customers who report incidents of domestic abuse and gender-based violence. Regardless of gender, we are committed to improving good practice in work-life balance, including flexible working, agile working, childcare vouchers and an employee assistance/counselling service. As an employer with over 250 staff we are legally required to publish our gender pay gap on an annual basis. Our latest report published in 2019 confirms that on average, female employees are paid 8.45% less than their male colleagues, which shows an improvement on the previous year (9.15%). Despite paying the same salaries to both men and women who carry out the same job role, traditionally men tend to apply for, and occupy, job roles that attract higher salaries than those that traditionally attract more women, particularly in part time roles. Although we seek a gender balance in our staff, Board and governance structures that reflects our customer base as far as is practicable, ultimately, we will appoint people based on merit. However, with changes to our HR Strategy, agile working and the appointment of apprentices, we are hoping to improve in this area and close the gap further.

Sexual orientation

We recognise that people from the LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender and Queer/Questioning) community may experience discrimination, bullying and harassment, and that significant numbers find themselves homeless. All our customer facing policies and procedures are equality impact assessed to ensure that no group, protected or otherwise, is excluded from receiving our services, either directly or indirectly. Through our work we support and assist people both within the organisation and with the help of external agencies. For our staff, it is important that we have a workplace that does not discriminate in employment or tolerate homophobic behaviour. Our aim is to have a workplace that enables people to be themselves.

Gender reassignment

We will not tolerate any harassment or victimisation of those who choose to undergo gender reassignment. We will continue to work with organisations to assist both staff and customers and will ensure that all our services are accessible, that support and information are available, and that harassment and discrimination do not arise. In October 2018, we launched our Transgender procedure which sets out our position in some detail regarding the recruitment and employment of staff who have either undergone gender reassignment or who are in the process of transitioning.

Marriage & civil partnership

We aim to ensure that none of our policies discriminate against people on the grounds of their relationship status. We offer tenancies to married, civil partnership and cohabiting couples. Staff benefits such as pensions and health plans are inclusive of marriage, civil partnerships and co-habitation.

Pregnancy & maternity

We have family friendly policies including Maternity, Paternity, Adoption and Shared Parental leave schemes which aim to support staff in the way that best suits their needs. Support is given to any member of staff who advises that they are pregnant, and we undertake a risk assessment to ensure that any risks at work are addressed during the pregnancy. Our policy supports 'Keep in Touch' Days (KIT) and staff can request flexible arrangements under our Flexible Working policy.

Religion/belief

We support understanding and mutual respect between religious groups. We aim to better our understanding of the service needs in the localities in which we work and raise awareness for staff and customers of different cultural and religious events. We recognise that some people have experienced hate crime directed at them because of their religious beliefs and we have policies and procedures in place to support staff and customers who may have experienced such incidents.

Staff/contractors

We maintain appropriate records in respect of recruitment, training and employment, including disciplinary and grievance procedures, and report on and use this information as a means of identifying areas of inequality. We have established mandatory and refresher equality and diversity training for staff, Board members, Committee members and contractors. All staff are assisted to realise their full potential through the annual appraisal and regular 121s. Staff skills information is kept to record language and signing skills. Staff have undergone disability awareness and dementia awareness training. We work to ensure that the health of our employees is effectively monitored and supported, via a free counselling service, and that absence from the workplace is minimised.

Poor mental health affects one in four of us in any given year and this is why we are working hard to promote mental wellness and support those with mental health issues. A list of what we currently offer is in place on our internal intranet (GUS). Moving forward we will be appointing mental health first aiders and committing to new mental health at work standards that will help us positively manage mental health and therefore better support the needs of our staff.

Modern slavery and human trafficking statement

We have a Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement. The organisation is absolutely committed to preventing slavery and human trafficking in its corporate activities, and to ensuring that its supply chains are free from slavery and human trafficking. This statement sets out our actions to understand all potential modern slavery risks related to its business and to put in place steps that are aimed at ensuring that there is no slavery or human trafficking in its own business and its supply chains.

Our commitments

Knowing our customers

We are continuing to collect, and update, information from our customers that will help us to ensure that we are not unlawfully discriminating against anyone in the protected groups and that **all** our customers are able to access and receive the same level of service. We refer to the collection of data as 'profiling'. We are constantly looking for new ways of using the information that we hold. Using the data to better understand our customers' needs, expectations and behaviours, is what we call 'insight'. While we still collect the traditional equality and diversity information to ensure that our services and processes are inclusive, how we interpret and present the information has changed. By classifying groups of people with similar demographics, behaviours and attitudes, this not only allows us to enable more effective targeting and tailoring of our services, it will also enable us to become more flexible with our communications, predict which group/s will place the greatest demand on our services and plan what resources will be needed. Although using generational categories brings together people from a wider age range, they all share the same behaviours, attitudes and common experiences. We refer to this way of grouping customers as 'segmentation'.

Customers are not obliged to provide personal information to us, but the law requires us to gather this information if we can. We hold good quality information but will always seek to gather more, especially email addresses and contact details to allow us to communicate effectively.

Knowing our staff

Clear leadership is key to establishing a strong vision for equality and improving equality outcomes. Board members and our Executive team play important roles in ensuring a strong vision and commitment to equality.

We also request equality and diversity information from staff, Board and Committee members with the aim of reflecting the relevant local

populations and the communities with which we work. However, no one is obliged to provide this information.

Community investment

Grand Union strives to ensure that customers are at the core of its business. We are committed to engage, empower and develop individuals and communities to create opportunities for employment and skills to tackle the current economic climate as well as our on-going commitment to putting customers at the heart of all that we do.

Our strategy focuses on individual empowerment, employment and life skills, worklessness, educational opportunities and opportunities for our customers to engage with us to challenge performance, contribute to future direction and work in partnership with us to deliver the best services we can with the resources available.

The following table summarises some of the key findings from our segmentation exercise (March 19) and six-monthly update (September 19)

Customer Insight/Segmentation

Group %	Traditionalists born before 1946 Age 74+	Baby boomers born 1946 – 1964 Age 55 – 73	Generation X born 1965 – 1980 Age 39 - 54	Millennials born 1981 – 1997 Age 22 – 38	Generation Z born 1998 – TBC Age 18 - 21
March 2019	16.7% (1877)	30.3% (3410)	27.9% (3135)	23.6% (2660)	0.6% (69)
September 2019	15.1%	30.4%	28.2%	24.7%	0.7%

Averages by generational group	Traditionalists	Baby boomers	Generation X	Millennials	Generation Z	Overall average
Length of tenancy (years)	18.6	13.9	9.5	4.1	0.9	11.1
Physical/mental impairment	21.3%	17.3%	10.8%	9.3%	19.6%	12% (adults)
Main contact is female	54.9%	53.9%	68.0%	76.0%	76.8%	63.2%
Email addresses held for main contact	22.6%	57.6%	81.2%	90.9%	94.2%	68.1%
Mobile phone number held for main contact	47.4%	85.2%	95.7%	98.1%	100.0%	85.7%
Responsive repair job requests in previous year	3.73	3.64	3.96	4.3	3.54	3.95
Registered for MyGuhg portal	8.2%	23.8%	38.7%	42.1%	21.7%	29.5%

The most common method of contact in the six months to September 2019 across **all** groups is by telephone (65.2%) followed by email (18.8%).

Equality impact assessments

We have implemented an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) process by which we can look for any direct or indirect adverse outcomes that might result from our policies or procedures, for anyone with a protected characteristic. By undertaking a system of EIA, we ensure that everyone has fair and equal access to all our services.

Monitoring and review

This statement links closely to our Equality, Diversity and Customer Care policy, both of which will be reviewed in accordance with our policy review programme.

Reviewed by: Head of Governance

Supported by: Governance Officer

Date of review: February 2020

Date of next review: February 2023