



# Equality and Diversity Annual Report 2013/14

South  
Tyneside *Homes*

South Tyneside Council's  
Housing Company

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## Foreword



Welcome to our Equality and Diversity Annual Report. The report outlines our achievements over the last 12 months and some of our priorities for the future

During 2013/4 we have completed twenty three actions outlined in our Single Equality Scheme action plan. We have talked to employees, customers and other stakeholders about their priorities for our New Equality Scheme covering the period April 2014 to March 2018 and developed a new document and action plan.

Our employees continue to drive forward improvements to our services. We continue to safeguard vulnerable people, have rolled out learning disability training to front line staff and reviewed some access arrangements to ensure that people with specific needs are able to access our services.

We continue to develop partnerships with other organisations across the borough and region and have developed a range of projects and initiatives that have benefited tenants, employees and the wider region.

We continue to use the Stonewall Diversity Champions scheme to improve our services and employment practices for lesbian, gay and bisexual employees and customers. We broke into the top 100 employers for the first time in 2014 and were ranked 72nd in the UK. In addition, we continue to use the Social Housing Equality Framework to guide our future work around equality.

We look forward to an exciting and challenging year ahead, building on our partnership working and developing new and existing projects with our partners.

**Paul Mains**  
**Managing Director**  
**South Tyneside Homes**

# Highlights for 2013/14

- Ranked 72nd by Stonewall in their top 100 employers list for our commitment to be a LGBT friendly workplace and employer. We use Stonewall's Workplace Equality Index as our improvement and measuring framework
- Further developed our partnership with the NHS and Keelman's Way School and provided fifteen six week work placements for young people with learning disabilities
- Increased awareness of the company as an LGBT employer and housing provider by part sponsoring Newcastle Pride and attending Sunderland Pride
- Improved our partnership working with a range of schools, raising awareness of ourselves as an employer, exploring site safety and other issues
- Developed a partnership with South Tyneside College and delivered a range of youth impact activities and projects aimed at getting young people involved in improving their local estates and communities.
- Improved tenants in Housing Plus (Sheltered Accommodation) understanding of LGBT issues and the behaviours we expect of tenants through a training and awareness campaign
- Continued to encourage young women to access our apprenticeship scheme by promoting opportunities in schools to Year 11 girls. We currently have 31 apprentices working for the company across the trades and in our offices
- Worked in partnership with Apna Ghar a local charity supporting the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Community to develop specific drop in sessions, improve access to services and continue to build our relationship with the BAME community
- Delivered an Energy Campaign that has trained employees and tenants on energy efficiency and how to get advice. Tenants and employees are now much more aware of energy efficiency and able to read meters, understand bills and change suppliers themselves, and help others to do the same
- Modernised 3,207 homes throughout the last year to ensure they meet the Government Decent Homes Standard. This standard focuses on internal and external repairs and energy efficiency
- Protected 144 children and 100 adults through our safeguarding arrangements ensuring vulnerable children and adults are protected
- Delivered a range of better health initiatives to ensure our employees are encouraged to maintain healthy and balanced lifestyles
- Undertook £1.1 million of aids and adaptations work to 327 tenants' properties
- Introduced new support response called "Condition Matters" which assists tenants to cope in their homes and helps with hoarding and other health related issues
- Over the last three years we have installed over 400 renewable energy measures, including solar PV, solar thermal, and both air and ground-source heat pumps and continue to fit insulation to all of our homes, this action reduces tenants energy bills significantly
- Worked with Gentoo, HMRC and Tyne and Wear Fire Service to organise and hold the first regional LGBT awards event recognising the achievements of organisations and individuals in the region.

# Equality Act

We continue to monitor our policies and services to ensure that we promote equality and diversity in everything we do. We protect customers and employees from all discrimination and take action to address any issues.

## Public Sector Equality Duty

Our Equality Scheme and action plan provides an overview of our main objectives and ensures we comply with our duties. Progress reports are provided to our Board every six months and are available to the public. In addition we produce an annual report highlighting our progress and commitment.

## Corporate Commitment

## Corporate Equality Group

Regular meetings of our Corporate Equality Group manage, direct and scrutinise our work on equality. The group includes a range of employees from all levels in the organisation to ensure that a good mix of skills, experience and knowledge influence the decisions we make.



# Single Equality Scheme

From April 2013 to the end of March 2014 we made significant progress towards delivering the aims and objectives outlined in the scheme completing twenty three actions.

Our Single Equality Scheme came to an end in March 2014. A new equality scheme covering the period April 2014 to March 2018 was developed with customers, employees and stakeholders reflecting their priorities and the areas we need to focus on over the coming years.

Our equality objectives for 2014 - 2018 are to:

1. Have a corporate commitment to equality and lead by example
2. Knows who our customers are and provides responsive flexible services
3. Have effective arrangements in place for community involvement and partnership working
4. Provide excellent levels of customer care and access
5. Have an effective approach to hate crime, harassment and anti social behavior
6. Have a modern and diverse workforce and whose recruitment, selection and training processes are positive about equality

## Social Housing Equality Framework (SHEF)

SHEF is a national continuous improvement framework for housing organisations and managed by the Local Government Association (LGA). The framework helps us to structure our work around equality and improve our approach, systems and outcomes for customers and employees.

We will undertake a further assessment against this framework in Autumn 2014.



## 2013/14 Equality Performance Framework

Indicator	All Count	Under 25yrs	25yrs -50yrs	Over 50yrs	Gender Male	Gender Female	BME	WI+ WO	White British	Disabled	Non Disabled	LGB	Hetero-sexual	Christian	No Faith	Other Faith
	Number	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
STH employees	630	10.2	54.8	35.1	69.4	30.6	2.2	0.6	96.2	5.4	87.8	0.8	90.2	64.4	28.6	2.9
% of top 5% of earners (Band 12 +)	26	0	65.4	34.6	76.9	23.1	0	0	0	3.9	88.5	0	100	73.1	23.1	N/A
% of top 10% of earners (Band 10 +)	58	0	63.8	36.2	63.8	36.2	1.7	0	96.5	3.5	91.4	0	96.6	77.6	19	N/A
% of new employees	21	61.9	19.1	19.1	76.2	23.8	0	0	100	9.5	90.5	4.8	90.5	66.7	33.3	N/A
% of employees ending their employment	49	10.2	44.9	44.9	65.3	34.7	0	0	100	10.2	83.7	0	89.8	61.2	32.7	N/A
% of employees subjected to formal disciplinary action	30	20	46.7	33.3	76.7	23.3	3.3	3.3	93.3	3.3	80	0	93.3	56.7	26.7	N/A
% of employees involved in formal grievances	5	0	0	0	40	60	0	0	100	0	80	0	80	40	20	N/A
% of employees involved in formal harassment and bullying	1	0	100	0	0	100	0	0	100	0	100	0	100	0	100	N/A
% of employees involved in capability	1	0	100	0	100	0	0	0	100	0	100	0	100	100	0	N/A
% of employees involved in sickness	1	0	100	0	100	0	0	0	100	0	100	0	100	100	0	N/A
% of external applications received	417	72.4	21.5	6.1	72.9	27.1	1	0.2	98.1	3.1	90.9	0.7	92.8	54.5	39.7	N/A
Success rates of job applicants	19	63.2	10.5	21.1	79	21.1	0	0	100	5.3	94.7	5.3	94.7	83.3	22.2	N/A
Applicants for flexible working	14	7.1	78.6	14.3	42.9	57.1	0	0	100	7.1	92.9	7.1	90	64.3	35.7	N/A
Flexible Working request approvals	10	20	60	20	40	70	0	0	100	10	90	10	100	40	60	N/A
Return to work rates after maternity leave	7	14.3	85.7	0	0	100	0	0	100	42.9	42.9	0	85.7	57.1	42.9	N/A

N/A – Not available, new category introduced

## 2013/14 Equality Performance Framework

Indicator	All Count	Under 25 yrs	25yrs -59yrs	Over 60yrs	Gender Male	Gender Female	BME	WI+ WO	White British	Dis-abled	Non Dis-abled	LGB	Het-erosex-ual	Chris-tian	No Faith	Other Faith
	Number	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
% of tenancies	17,755	4.6	54.1	41.3	41.3	58.7	1.7	0.8	97.5	32.9	67.1	1.1	98.9	63.7	33.6	2.7
% of people register with Home Finder	5430	14.7	59	26.3	40.9	59.1	2.8	1.4	95.8	33	67	1.8	98.2	54.2	40.3	5.5
% of bidders for properties (Home Finder)	39,591	20.8	64.5	14.7	39.6	60.4	3.3	2.4	94.3	24.8	75.2	2.3	97.7	47.1	47.1	5.8
% of offers (Home Finder)	2665	17.8	57.2	25	37.2	62.8	7.9	1.6	90.5	33.5	66.5	1.3	98.7	49.8	43	7.2
% of lettings (Home Finder)	2088	19.1	57.7	23.2	37.5	62.5	3.7	1.7	94.6	33	67.1	1.3	98.7	49.3	44.2	6.5
% of 'x' with rent arrears	5144	8.2	81.2	10.6	32.7	67.3	2.1	0.9	97	30	70	1.3	98.7	50.9	46.2	2.9
% of housing plus tenants	1208	n/a	5.5	94.5	48.4	51.6	0.2	1	98.9	65.5	34.5	0.5	99.5	81.7	16.4	1.9
% of all complaints	938	7.4	71.5	21.1	39.2	60.8	1.7	1	97.3	30.6	69.4	1.6	98.4	55.6	40.7	3.7
Face to face interpreters	*															
Language Line Usage	25															
British Sign Language interpreters	15															

\* no information due to a change in service provision



## Equality Performance Framework

We monitor our performance on a wide-range of equality and diversity related themes. This provides important measures on our performance and the analysis of this data feeds into our action-planning to ensure continuous and well-informed improvement on our approach to equality and diversity.

Notable trends in the performance data over the last 12 months include:

### Employment

- Lesbian, gay and bisexual - increase in new employees and employees overall but a 3% decline in applications for jobs
- Under 25 years - significant increase in new employees. 71.2% of all applications received from this age group and 20% of all disciplinary issues involved a person under 25 years old
- Disability - 2% increase in the number of employees in the top 10% of earners declaring a disability, a significant increase in new employees (9.5%), a 3.2% increase in successful applicants and a slight increase in applications for jobs
- Men - over represented in formal disciplinary action compared to profile of men in the workforce, 76.7%
- Women - Slight reduction in women in the top 5% of earners and 70% of flexible working requests from women
- Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic – slight increase in employees, a 1% decrease in applications for jobs and no successful applicants.

### Services

- Over 60s - the profile of customers in this age group has dropped for the first time in several years by 0.2% to 41.3%. Activity for the last 12 months has improved bidding activity for this age group and offers reflect the number of people registered
- Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Community – the number of people registered for Home Finder has decreased by 0.5%, the tenant profile has also decreased by 0.2% but offers and letting have increased
- Disabled people – the number of people registered for Home Finder has increased by 3.4%
- Lesbian, gay and bisexual – an increase of 0.6% in the number of people registered on Home Finder
- Two out of every three people living in a Housing Plus scheme are disabled.
- A significantly larger proportion of young people, BAME and non disabled people bidding for properties and an under representation of disabled people and people over 60 years old.

The full 2013/14 performance information is included in the previous section.

Knowing who our customers are and providing services that are responsive to their needs

### Understanding our customers

We continue to collect data on our customers' profiles via our regular Tenancy Support visits and ask customers to inform us of changes in circumstances so our records are accurate and up to date. Understanding the needs of our customers is vital to delivering accessible, effective services that meet their needs.

We have made significant improvements in engaging with our local community groups. Our continued work with Northern Pride, Sunderland Pride, BLISS=Ability, The Deaf Club, Sight Service, Apna Ghar and other partners has provided us with feedback and insight that have been used to change our services.

New projects with TCV Training, Jarrow and Harton secondary schools and Marsden, St Oswalds and St Gregory's primary schools have resulted in some exciting work with young people and some significant changes to our estates and communities. We will continue to work with the local community to develop new partnerships and relationships and identify project and activities that improve the lives of people in the borough.

### Welfare Reform

It's been our priority over the last year to get information, advice and support to every Council household affected by the under-occupation charge and Benefit Cap. We have successfully contacted over 99% of tenants and are meeting new people throughout the year.

We always try to meet customer needs and have a flexible service with outreach sessions in local areas, a drop-in service at Home Finder and offer home visits. We have helped hundreds of customers to secure Discretionary Housing Payments from the local authority to support them with housing costs and helped people move to more affordable tenancies.

We have learned a lot over the past year about what is needed from this service. We hope to build on what we have learned over the last year and work with our partners at the Council across the borough to support South Tyneside in preparing for the introduction of Universal Credit in 2016.

Ensuring we have effective arrangements in place for community involvement and partnership working

Improving our partnership working has been a key aim over the last year, we have:

- Worked with Gentoo, Tyne and Wear Fire Service and HMRC to develop a regional LGBT Awards event to recognise the work taking place across all sectors in the region to improve services for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.
- Developed a closer working relationship with South Tyneside Council – ensuring we are able to respond to requests more effectively
- Supported customers through welfare reform changes through a partnership approach with South Tyneside Council, Citizens Advice Bureau, Bridges Community Bank, Department for Works and Pensions and other partners
- Worked with a number of schools, the NHS, training organisations and community groups on a range of projects exploring employability, access, budgeting and making physical improvements to local communities
- Continued our partnerships with CREST and BLISS=Ability working with the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic and disabled communities
- Continued our work with Northern Pride, Sunderland Pride and the LGBT North East website.

We continue to attend and organise a range of events with customers, groups and organisations in the borough and beyond. We have conducted a range of satisfaction surveys, mystery shopping and worked with project groups to ensure a diverse range of customers are able to influence and provide their feedback on the services we provide.

Some of the voluntary, statutory and community groups in the borough we have worked with over the last year include:

- Apna Ghar - women's groups for the BAME community
- Parentline – support for parents of LGBT young people
- South Tyneside Race Equality Forum
- BLISS=Ability
- CREST
- South Tyneside Deaf Club
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- South Tyneside Race Equality Forum
- Sikh Community
- Sight Service South Tyneside
- ARCH – Hate Crime reporting
- TCV Training
- Schools – Jarrow, Keelman's Way, St Oswalds, Hebburn, St Wilfrid's, Harton, Mortimer, St Gregories, Marsden, Hebburn
- South Tyneside Multi-Agency Domestic Violence Forum
- Bridges Community Bank
- Department for Works and Pensions
- Job Centre
- BT South Tyneside

Providing excellent levels of customer care and access to services

### **Customer Care and Access**

Our approach to customer service is working well, Connect 2, our Housing Service Centre delivers an effective one stop advice service to our

customers.

During 2013/14 we took 177,270 calls in the Connect2 service, which is a substantial increase compared to last year. Of those calls we resolved on average 78% at the first point of contact and our average call handling time was 307 seconds.

The Customer Service Team also dealt with 63,586 face to face enquiries in our area offices. Our customer service employees resolve almost 80% of all enquiries at the first point of contact. The knowledge and experience of the team enables them to work with customers to ensure they receive an excellent service.

We continue to provide a range of support services to help people get access to our services and provide training and awareness sessions to ensure employees provide consistent and quality customer care in a range of ways that are appropriate to peoples' individual needs.

### **Compliments and Complaints**

We received 938 complaints from April 2013 to March 2014.

Notable trends in the data include:

- 71.5% of complaints from 25 – 59 years, 17% higher than tenant profile, over 12% of 25-39 year old have raised a complaint compared to the tenant profile.
- 9% more women complained compared to our customer profile
- 1.6% of complainants were LGBT customers
- 30.6% of complainants were disabled, 2.3% lower than customer profile
- 3.7% of people with an 'other faith' complained, 1% higher than our customer profile
- 55.6% of Christians complained, 8% lower than our customer profile

During the last year the Customer Service Team has also reviewed and updated the Complaints and Compliments Policy and Procedure, to make it easier than ever for our customers to provide us with their feedback.

The Customer Forum, which is a group of involved tenants who provide feedback and suggestions have input into the new policy and their suggestions were incorporated into the new arrangements. In addition, we undertake monthly satisfaction surveys with tenants who raise a complaint in order to find out how easy they found the process to make a complaint. At the end of March 2014, cumulatively over 96% of tenants told us they were either satisfied or very satisfied with how easy it was to log a complaint.

### **Home Finder**

Our Home Finder Service and South Tyneside Council's Homeless Service have been reviewed and restructured over the last 12 months and a new service will be launched in 2014 under the responsibility of South Tyneside Homes.

We hope the service will be a quicker, more effective and responsive service where the entire process will be managed by one organisation with clear responsibilities for each manager and employee,

The service will continue to provide advice and guidance on housing options and homelessness advice and support people to submit applications, bid for properties and manage their way through the various housing options available to them

Officers from this service are able to provide home visits and out of office calls and support various customers who may have difficulty completing the application process, bidding for properties or getting access to a computer.

### **Fuel Poverty**

We have worked hard over the last year to improving the energy efficiency of our housing stock, and reducing fuel poverty to take the most vulnerable people out of fuel poverty. This work has helped make homes warmer and more efficient to heat, reducing energy costs and fuel bills.

To support these measures, we have successfully bid for £151,000 in funding and recruited a dedicated Energy Efficiency Officer who has worked closely with tenants and residents. The work of this person alone has saved residents hundreds of pounds from their annual fuel bills. We will continue this work during 2014/15 and explore new and emerging issues.

### **Working with Contractors and Partners**

Ensuring that our contactors and their sub-contractors demonstrate a good commitment to equality and diversity and align their approach with ours is very important to us.

They must be able to evidence the work they have done in this area and support us to comply with our equality duties. We continue to work closely with our partners through our Contractors Equality Group and ensure they provide accessible services and protect children and adults from safeguarding issues.

In addition, we assess compliance through the comments made to us via complaints and compliments. We monitor satisfaction with contractor services by various characteristics to identify any trends that may need further investigation.

As part of the Decent Homes process our partners' Customer Liaison Officers visit customers and carry out individual needs assessments for households. This allows us to provide extra support for customers to allow them to live in their home whilst we carry out the work or move tenants

to appropriate accommodation if the works will impact too heavily on their health or wellbeing. The assessments help us to identify individual support needs and to understand which specially adapted equipment is needed. The assessments include referrals to our Occupational Therapist Team which enables adaption work to be carried out at the same time of the decent homes work.

Over the last year we have worked with contractors to train and review their safeguarding arrangements and ensure they reflect our processes. All contractors have included safeguarding as part of each site induction and trained their employees and the sub contractors they use.

Having a modern and diverse workforce with recruitment and selection processes that are positive about equality

### **Positive about Disability**

Our continued commitment to the “Two Ticks” disability scheme is now in its 8th year. The “Positive about Disabled People” status is awarded by Jobcentre Plus to employers who have made commitments to employ, keep and develop the abilities of disabled employees.

### **Work Placements**

Our work placement scheme offers a structured programme that equips school leavers with the appropriate skills.

### **Project Choice**

We continue to develop our partnership with Keelman’s Way school and the NHS hand have expanded the work placement scheme for young people with learning disabilities (16 to 19 years old) over the last 12 months. We have increased the number of services that have been involved in the project, trained employees and mentors in working with people with learning disabilities and offered more placements.

The placements have proven to be a great success in giving students not only knowledge and skills but also in challenging employees’ assumptions about people with learning disabilities.



### **Apprenticeships**

We have 31 apprentices being trained in painting, plastering, joinery, plumbing/gas fitting, electrical work, general maintenance, business administration and housing this year. A further 11 young people joining the programme in September 2014. Our apprentices work and study towards NVQ levels 2 and 3 in chosen fields.

### **Training and guidance**

We continue to roll out our award winning equality and diversity training course for managers, front line employees and Board members, providing a tailored training package that is specific to the roles and responsibilities of individuals.

Over the last 12 months we have rolled out refresher equality courses and trained more involved customers in equality and diversity through half day interactive workshops. This has helped to ensure that customers are aware of our commitment to this subject and they know what their responsibilities are when dealing with each other and undertaking activities.

We are in the process of reviewing our "Making South Tyneside Homes Accessible" course for frontline employees. Our intention is to roll this session into a more generic session about Customer Service that will be provided to all frontline employees. This will explore the different support services that we offer to customers who have additional needs.

### **Equal Pay**

Following a large exercise and negotiations and agreement in 2010 relating to red book and green book employees we are confident that all posts within the organisation are paid the correct rate of pay and there are no inequality issues.

### **Monitoring**

We continue to monitor and analyse our recruitment and selection processes to identify any areas that may require positive action and develop actions and projects to help to overcome any issues.

Having an effective approach to Hate Incidents, Harassment and Domestic Abuse

### **Safeguarding**

Our Concern Matters Procedure gives guidance to employees on the referral process we have in place. Our work with partners to improve our referral and monitoring process continues. Over the last twelve months we have:

- Monitored trends, safeguarding hotspots, types of concern and repeat referrals and produced a report on the findings
- Increased the number of adult referrals from employees
- Increased the number of referrals made to agencies such as adult and child duty team
- Protected 144 children and 100 adults
- Introduced new support response called "Condition Matters" which assists tenants to cope in their homes and helps with hoarding and other health related issues

## Hate Incidents

Our Hate Incident reporting centres continue to be effective. We have worked with the Police, South Tyneside Council and the Fire Service to take a coordinated approach against hate incidents in the borough since 2010/11 when we implemented a multi-agency hate incident reporting database called ARCH. The database allows us to share information about hate incidents, victims and perpetrators across each organisation. This has enabled us to identify areas where targeted work is needed.

We have promoted how to report hate incidents and the action we and partners have taken via various forums and reports are provided to the Board on hot spot areas and concerns.

## Domestic Abuse

Our Domestic Abuse Policy and Procedure guides employees on what to do when someone tells them they are experiencing or have witnessed domestic abuse. They were developed in consultation with front line employees and are used in training sessions on domestic abuse.

Employees have received training to ensure they know how to raise awareness of the issues and show them how to report a concern. Reports continue to be steady therefore we are confident that this has been effective.



## Challenges for 2013/14 and beyond

- Undertake an external assessment of compliance with the Social Housing Equality Framework
- Maintain our position as a Stonewall Workplace Equality Index top 100 employer
- Undertake Equality Analysis for all of our policies and services
- Support customers in receipt of benefits in the transition to Universal Credit
- Improve our ability to manage stress among employees and develop training and guidance for employees and managers
- Review our Financial Inclusion Strategy
- Work towards having a Board and workforce that is representative of the borough
- Ensure that our services do not directly or indirectly discriminate against any person who accesses them
- Develop integrated text, email and instant messaging into the telephone system to increase our communication methods.
- Review how we manage neighbourhoods and areas
- Undertake work to 200 properties to fit Solar PV panels, this will reduce the number of tenants that suffer from fuel poverty.

## Contacts

For further information or copies of any documents,  
please visit [www.southtynesidehomes.org.uk](http://www.southtynesidehomes.org.uk)

If you would like to discuss anything in this document or have an issue  
relating to our approach to equality and diversity, please contact:

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