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Policy reference PO-A-283-PP

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# EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION POLICY

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Approved	14 April 2021
Published	29 April 2021
Effective	14 April 2021
Review	Triennial

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## Summary

The vision at Longhurst Group is clear; everything we do is about ‘improving lives’. From the great homes, care, and support services we provide, to projects that make a positive difference to our communities and to people’s lives. Fundamental to this is our commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion, which underpins everything we do.

Longhurst Group is committed to promoting equality and eliminating unfair discrimination in all aspects of our work. This policy sets out our approach to equal opportunities and the avoidance of discrimination at work and in the services we provide.

The policy framework will underpin the development of our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, which will set out our ambitions, aims and objectives in relation to this work.

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# PART TWO

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## Policy

### Intent

Longhurst Group is committed to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion, and a culture that actively values difference. We want to build teams that are as diverse as the customers and communities we serve and create an environment where all our people can thrive. We believe that diverse perspectives and different ways of thinking, help us to anticipate and better understand the needs of our customers. We are committed to ensuring we have policies, strategies, processes, and behaviours in place that promote equality and contribute to an inclusive organisational culture.

When we talk about diversity, we mean ensuring that we employ colleagues with different backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences. When we talk about inclusion, we mean creating a working environment where everyone has a 'voice' and everyone's opinions and views are heard and respected. Diversity and inclusion go hand in hand. Diverse and inspired thinking is the reward for an inclusive workplace culture. The Group is committed to being an inclusive employer and creating working environments free of harassment and bullying, where everyone is valued and treated with dignity and respect.

Working in the housing and care sectors puts the Group in a position of trust. Therefore, our colleagues have a responsibility to make professional judgements and to maintain professional standards in line with our corporate values, policies, and ethical practices. We recognise that we have the power to reduce discrimination and the disadvantages that people experience by making our services more accessible and responsive to the needs of the communities with whom we work.

This policy also reflects the Group's responsibility for meeting its equality and diversity obligations to its customers and takes account of the Equality Act 2010 and other relevant legislation. All Group policies consider Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion implications as part of the development and review process. Issues such as modern-day slavery, safeguarding, fair access to services, etc are covered under separate policies. The tenancy agreement also contains obligations which tenants must comply with regarding nuisance, anti-social behaviour and threats to staff, visitors, and contractors.

### Principles

Longhurst Group aims to tackle discrimination or disadvantage proactively and ensure that no individual or group is directly or indirectly discriminated against for any reason due to employment or accessing services.

The aim of the policy is to improve access to employment and services by:

- Promoting equality of opportunity and ensuring discrimination is not tolerated;
- Supporting our aim to be an inclusive employer;
- Reducing discrimination and the disadvantages that people may experience; and
- Ensuring that the Group is compliant with its legal obligations.

Through our leadership, strategies, policies, and processes, we will ensure that the legal framework, as set out in the Equality Act 2010 and other relevant legislation, is embraced.

In carrying out our activities, the Group will have due regard to:

- Eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010.
- Advancing equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Fostering of good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

It is essential that this policy is embedded across the Group and that colleagues consider its contents and implications in everything that they do.

## Scope

This policy applies to customers, colleagues, agency staff, job applicants, Board and Committee members. It also applies to residents and volunteers who represent the Group or its customers. Any external contractors, third parties or sub-contractors providing services on behalf of the Group are responsible for adhering to this policy.

This policy applies to all conduct within the workplace, as well as outside of the workplace where related to work, such as meetings, social events, and social interactions with colleagues. It also covers conduct that may impact the Group's reputation, such as expressions of views on social media, communication with a member of the media and communication with customers.

## Policy Details

### Discrimination

The Group is committed to ensuring that everybody is treated with dignity, fairness, and respect in an environment, which is free from any form of discrimination with regard to the nine protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010, which are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marital or civil partner status
- pregnancy or maternity
- race (includes colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin)
- religion and or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

The Group is also committed to ensuring that discrimination does not occur in relation to other individual characteristics that may unfairly affect a person's opportunities in life. This could include caring responsibilities or working part-time.

Colleagues must not unlawfully discriminate against or harass other people, including current and former employees, job applicants, clients, customers, suppliers, and visitors. This applies in the workplace, outside the workplace (when dealing with customers, suppliers, or other work-related contacts), and on work-related trips or events, including social events.

The following forms of discrimination are prohibited under this policy and are unlawful:

- **Direct discrimination:** treating someone less favourably because of a protected characteristic. For example, rejecting a job applicant because of their religious views.

- **Indirect discrimination:** a provision, criterion or practice that applies to everyone but adversely affects people with a protected characteristic more than others and is not justified. For example, requiring a job to be done full-time rather than part-time would adversely affect women because they generally have greater childcare commitments than men. Such a requirement would be discriminatory unless it can be justified.
- **Harassment:** this includes sexual harassment and other unwanted conduct related to a protected characteristic, which has the purpose or effect of violating someone's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them.
- **Victimisation:** retaliation against someone who has complained or has supported someone else's complaint about discrimination or harassment.
- **Disability discrimination:** this includes direct and indirect discrimination, any unjustified less favourable treatment because of the effects of a disability, and failure to make reasonable adjustments to alleviate disadvantages caused by a disability.

## Recruitment and Selection

Equality is an important part of our recruitment and selection policies and processes, and we require all those undertaking selection decisions to have appropriate and up-to-date training in support of this.

Recruitment, promotion, and other selection exercises, such as redundancy selection, will be conducted based on merit, against objective criteria that avoids discrimination.

Job applicants shall not be asked questions which might suggest an intention to discriminate on the grounds of a protected characteristic. For example, applicants should not be asked whether they are pregnant or planning to have children.

There are limited exceptions which should only be used with the approval of the People Services team. For example:

- Questions necessary to establish if an applicant can perform an intrinsic part of the job (subject to any reasonable adjustments).
- Questions to establish if an applicant is fit to attend an assessment or any reasonable adjustments that may be needed at interview or assessment.
- Equal opportunities monitoring (which will not form part of the selection or decision-making process).

The Group is required by law to ensure that all employees are entitled to work in the UK. Assumptions about immigration status should not be made based on appearance or apparent nationality.

To ensure that this policy is operating effectively, and to identify groups that may be under-represented or disadvantaged in our organisation, we monitor applicants' ethnic groups, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion, and age as part of the recruitment policy.

Provision of this information is voluntary, and it will not adversely affect an individual's chances of recruitment, or any other decision related to their employment. The information is removed from applications before shortlisting and kept in an anonymised format. Analysing this data helps us take appropriate steps to avoid discrimination and improve equality and diversity.

## Positive Action

As a Group we recognise that overcoming barriers to equality of opportunity can require positive action. We will consider measures where we believe we can address such barriers, for example:

- Ensuring fair representation of minority ethnic groups within the workforce.
- Setting targets for recruitment of underrepresented groups following reviews of our workforce profile.
- As a Disability confident employer, supporting the recruitment of people with disabilities
- Using apprenticeships and other training opportunities to encourage applications from underrepresented groups.

## Training, Promotion and Conditions of Service

Colleagues will be given appropriate access to training to enable them to progress within the organisation. This commitment includes training managers and all other employees about their rights and responsibilities under the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy.

The People Services team shall work in partnership with line managers on an annual basis (for each colleague) to identify their learning and development requirements.

Our conditions of service, benefits and facilities are reviewed regularly to ensure that they are available to all colleagues who should have access to them and that there are no unlawful obstacles to accessing them.

## Termination of Employment

We will ensure that redundancy criteria and procedures are fair and objective and are not directly or indirectly discriminatory.

We will also ensure that disciplinary policies and penalties are applied without discrimination, whether they result in disciplinary warnings, dismissal, or other disciplinary action.

## Disabilities

If colleagues are disabled or become disabled, we encourage them to tell us about their condition so that we can support them as appropriate.

If a colleague experiences difficulty at work because of a disability, they may wish to contact their line manager to discuss any reasonable adjustments that would help overcome or minimise the difficulty. The line manager may wish to consult with the People Services team and their medical advisor about possible adjustments. We will consider the matter carefully and try to accommodate a colleague's needs within reason. If we consider a particular adjustment would not be reasonable, we will explain our reasons and try to find an alternative solution where possible.

We will monitor the physical features of our premises to consider whether they might place anyone with a disability at a substantial disadvantage. Where necessary, we will take reasonable steps to improve access, including enabling people to work from home.

## Part-time and Fixed-term Working

Part-time and fixed-term colleagues should be treated the same as comparable full-time or permanent colleagues and enjoy no less favourable terms and conditions (on a pro-rata basis where appropriate) unless differential treatment is justified (by law).

## Supporting our Customers

We will tailor services in a person-centred way to ensure we deliver equity in access, experience, and outcomes for all customers. All policies and strategies relating to the provision of homes and services will have due regard to equality issues and have equality impact assessments undertaken.

## Breaches of this Policy

The Group takes all claims of discrimination very seriously and will take appropriate action against those concerned. This covers all behaviours, including remarks and insinuation, verbal and non-verbal which causes offence. Colleague's breaching this policy will be dealt with in accordance with the Group's Disciplinary Policy. Serious cases of deliberate discrimination may amount to gross misconduct resulting in dismissal.

If a colleague believes that they have been discriminated against they should refer to our Grievance Policy.

Colleagues can be held personally liable, for any act of unlawful discrimination. Colleagues who commit serious acts of harassment may be guilty of a criminal offence. Sexual harassment may amount to both an employment rights matter and a criminal matter, such as in sexual assault allegations. In addition, harassment under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 relating to a protected characteristic is a criminal offence.

Colleagues have a right not to be victimised for making a complaint in good faith, even if the complaint is not upheld. However, making a false allegation deliberately and in bad faith will be treated as misconduct and dealt with under our Disciplinary Policy.

## Roles and Responsibilities

There are specific responsibilities within this policy, as follows:

### **The Board, Chief Executive and the Executive Team are responsible for:**

- Providing leadership on this policy and acting as overall champions to ensure that it is implemented;
- Communicating the policy internally and externally.

### **Managers at all levels are responsible for:**

- Implementing the policy as part of their day-to-day line management and applying employment policies and practices in a fair and equitable way.
- Ensuring all colleagues act in accordance with this policy, providing necessary support and direction, actively challenging behaviours inconsistent with this policy.
- Effectively managing and dealing promptly when investigating issues relating to potential discrimination, including complaints from customers and other stakeholders.
- Ensuring that all policy or service decisions that change provisions and practices are assessed as being compliant with this policy.
- Behaving in a manner consistent with this policy, leading by example and ensuring that those they manage adhere to the policy and promote our aims and objectives regarding equal opportunities.

Managers will be given appropriate training on equality, diversity and inclusion awareness and equal opportunities recruitment and selection best practice.

### **All colleagues are responsible for:**

- Implementing the policy in their day to day work and dealings with other colleagues, customers and third parties.
- Acting when equality and diversity is not adhered to, whether by colleagues, customers, suppliers or stakeholders.
- Reading and becoming familiar with this policy and ensuring that it is properly observed and fully complied with.
- Positively promoting the Group's approach to equality and diversity and reporting any instances of a breach to this policy, to their line manager.

### **Longhurst Group are responsible for:**

- Ensuring that equality, diversity and inclusion is an integral part of induction and training for all colleagues and Board members.
- Ensuring all our policies consider equality and diversity through completion of the Policy Development Plan as part of the policy framework before approval and circulation.
- Ensuring our internal and external customers, including suppliers, are aware of our commitment to equality and diversity by promoting through our range of multi-media channels and platforms.
- Taking equality and diversity into account when making changes to the business. We will consult, engage with, and learn from our stakeholders in the development and delivery of an equality action plan and on our work more broadly.
- Investigating and responding whenever anyone thinks we have not complied with our own policy and have failed to provide equality of opportunity.
- Through procurement services we will ensure that our suppliers and contractors demonstrate that they have appropriate policies and procedures in place to ensure their services to our customers and colleagues meet our diversity expectations as set out in our Procurement Policy.

In addition to the above, responsibility for ensuring the implementation of this Policy is held by the:

- Executive Director of People and Performance
- Director of People Services

Operational responsibility is held by the:

- Employee Relations Manager – responsible for ensuring the policy remains compliant as and when legislation is amended.

### Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

The Group undertakes monitoring to meet statutory requirements and achieve best practice. This is used to inform and improve our employment practices. If any discrimination is identified as a result, we will take corrective action to eliminate it.

The make-up of the Group's workforce and employment practices will be monitored by the Group's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion steering group to ensure compliance with legislation and best practice. This Group will also oversee the delivery of equality and diversity action plans and equality schemes.

An annual report will be provided to the People, Remuneration and Nomination's Committee (PREMCO) to report on progress against the People and Culture Strategy which will include reporting on progress and achievements against the strategic aim 'to create an inclusive organisation'. PREMCO will also receive reports on Gender and other Pay Gaps and actions to eliminate any disparities that exist.

Compliance with mandatory Equality, Diversity and Inclusion awareness training will be provided to the Group Board as part of the quarterly performance reporting.

We will monitor how this policy and any supporting action plans are working in practice and the policy will be updated where a change in the law or new guidance is issued. Otherwise the policy will be reviewed on an annual basis.

### Equality and Diversity

The Group is committed to E,D&I and such will make reasonable adjustments to the policy to recognise, accommodate and support individual needs, where needed.

This Policy adheres to the Group's approach to Equality and Diversity.



Group members will take a proactive approach to ensure that no individual or group is discriminated against or treated differently as a direct or indirect result of this Policy.

## PART THREE

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### Appendices

- A. Definition of the 9 Protected Characteristics
- B. Approval Control Document
- C. Policy Development Plan

## Appendix A: Definition of the 9 Protected Characteristics

Age – a person belonging to an age or age group. An age group includes people of the same age and people of a range of ages.

Disability – a person has a disability if the person has a physical or mental impairment, and the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Gender Reassignment – a person has this protected characteristic if they are proposing to undergo, are undergoing or have undergone a process (or part of a process) for the purposes of reassigning their sex, by changing physiological or other attributes of sex.

Marriage and Civil Partnership – people who have or share the common characteristics of being married or of being a civil partner can be described as in a marriage or civil partnership. A married man and a woman in a civil partnership both share the protected characteristic of marriage and civil partnership. People who are not married or civil partners do not have this characteristic.

Pregnancy and Maternity – relates to women that are pregnant or within their allocated maternity period. Women that are not pregnant nor within their maternity period do not share this characteristic.

Race – for the purpose of the Act, ‘race’ includes color, nationality and ethnic or national origins. People who have or share characteristics of color, nationality or ethnic or national origins can be described as belonging to a racial group. A racial group can be made up of two or more different racial groups.

Religion or belief – the protected characteristic of religion or religious or philosophical belief, is also stated to include a lack of religion or belief. It is a broad definition in line with the freedom of thought, conscience and religion guaranteed by Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Sex - people having the protected characteristic of sex refers to be a man or a woman, and that men share this characteristic with other men, and women with other women.

Sexual orientation – the protected characteristic of sexual orientation relates to a person’s sexual orientation towards people of the same sex as him or her (in other words the person is a gay man or a lesbian); people of the opposite sex from him or her (the person is heterosexual); people of both sexes (the person is bisexual).