

Solon Housing Disability Equality Scheme



Foreword

Disability affects nearly everyone – most of us lose mobility, sight or hearing as we age. Mental ill health can disable people as well as learning and physical difficulties. We know that at least one in three of our resident households include someone with a disability or long- term illness.

We must work hard to make sure everyone is included and provide access to all our services. Disability can prevent people getting around their home or neighbourhood. It can mean people can't join in social or consultation events. It might mean they have difficulties in communication, hearing or reading what they need to know. Therefore we have committed to do everything we can reasonably do to remove barriers to equality and support everyone in gaining choice and control in their life.

This vision is not easy to realise; disabled people still face many barriers. Not just physical barriers but also attitudes.

The publication of this Disability Equality Scheme is an important step towards achieving this vision.

Solon Housing Disability Equality Scheme

This is Solon's first Disability Equality Scheme (DES). It is a document that we expect to develop further. We will review it annually taking into account evidence of progress and experience. We will continue to involve disabled people in its evolution and implementation. We will report the progress to the Resident Involvement and Equal Opportunities Working Group and Residents where possible.

The scheme focuses on improving outcomes in three areas:

- Asset management – the construction and improvement of our homes
- Customer services - making our own services more inclusive to disabled people; and
- Employment and governance

Within these areas, residents have identified their priorities for Solon as:

- Aids and adaptations
- Training for staff
- Understanding residents' needs
- Communicating in the right way

- Listening to residents' views

Background to the scheme

Solon is committed to diversity and equality for all people, and constantly works to ensure that it treats people with respect and delivers services appropriate to individual needs. In considering disability we use the definition of disability set out under the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and 2005.

The meaning of disability

The Disability Discrimination Act defines a disabled person as someone who has a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

What does 'impairment' cover?

It covers physical or mental impairments – this includes sensory impairments, such as those affecting sight or hearing. The term 'mental impairment' is intended to cover a wide range of impairments relating to mental functioning, including what are often known as learning disabilities.

What is a 'substantial' adverse effect?

A substantial adverse effect is something which is more than a minor or trivial effect. The requirement that an effect must be substantial reflects the general understanding of disability as a limitation going beyond the normal differences in ability which might exist among people.

What is a 'long-term' effect?

A long-term effect of impairment is one:

- Which has lasted at least 12 months;
- Where the total period for which it lasts is likely to be at least 12 months; or
- Which is likely to last for the rest of the life of the person affected.

Effects which are not long-term would therefore include loss of mobility due to a broken limb which is likely to heal within 12 months and the effects of temporary infections, from which a person would be likely to recover within 12 months.

Our regulatory duty

As well as Solon's long term commitment to equality and diversity, as a housing association there is a regulatory requirement for us to promote disability equality.

This scheme sets out how we will fulfill this duty under the Disability Discrimination Act 2005.

This duty requires us to:

- Eliminate discrimination unlawful under the Act;
- Eliminate the harassment of disabled people related to their disabilities;
- Promote positive attitudes towards disabled people;
- Encourage participation by disabled people in public life; and
- Take steps to take account of disabled people's disabilities, even where that involves treating disabled people more favourably than other people.

Our Disability Equality Scheme is required to set out:

- The way in which we have involved disabled people in its development;
- Our methods for assessing the impact of policies and practices on equality for disabled people;
- Our arrangements for gathering information about our performance in relation to disability equality and how we will put the information gathered to use; and
- The actions we will take to meet the duty.

Statistical Information

Historically, the way in which houses have been built, and housing services have been run, has failed to consider the needs of disabled people as part of the wider community.

The following statistics will illustrate the need to address the issue of disability equality:

- There are currently around 8 million disabled adults in the UK
- Disabled people are less likely to be employed and more likely to be economically inactive than non-disabled people – nearly half of all disabled people of working age are economically inactive compared with 15 per cent of non-disabled people.
- The income of disabled people is, on average, less than half that of non-disabled people and disabled people are more likely to live in poverty.
- Disabled people are more likely to be victims of hate crime and harassment – one in four disabled people has experienced hate crime or harassment. (Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, 2005).
- There is a huge shortfall in accessible homes. The English Housing survey 2005/2006 showed that 1.5 million people were in need of accessible accommodation, with 375,000 living in completely unsuitable housing.
- According to our latest survey (Status Survey 2005) 41% of
- Solon tenant households have someone with a disability or long-term illness.

We are in the process of carrying a full tenancy audit of all our residents so will have a much clearer picture of their needs.

Involvement

Solon has directly involved disabled people in developing our scheme and action plan this far.

Members of the Residents' Forum attended an equalities training day organized by the Bristol Housing Partnership in 2008. This highlighted the changing equality standards and what residents can expect from Housing Associations regarding disability equality.

The HR Co-ordinator presented information about the duty and Action Plan regularly to the quarterly RP&EOWG in 2006 – 2008 for consultation. The Sub Committee included disabled residents and we are actively trying to encourage more residents to join.

A consultation event was held in November 2009 which was attended by 15 people (mostly residents, however staff and representatives from disability charities were also in attendance). Of the attendees, a number of disabilities were represented, including:

- Wheelchair user
- Deaf or hard of hearing
- Blind or partially sighted
- Long term medical condition or illness
- Dyslexia / dyspraxia
- Learning difficulties
- Mental health condition
- Physical impairment

This session looked into the services that Solon offers and helped to identify barriers that disabled people may experience in accessing them. This formed the basis of the action plan for this scheme and the supporting action plan.

We will review the effectiveness of all these approaches and continue to involve disabled people in the implementation of our scheme through a variety of means.

Evidence

We will continue to gather information through surveys (including Status Survey 2008 and 2011) and research (Tenancy Audit 2009 - 10), and analyse the evidence to give us a clear picture of how we are performing on disability equality and delivering the outcomes in this scheme.

Future measures of how successfully we at Solon are delivering disability equality will include:

As a service provider:

- the percentage of new homes which meet “Wheelchair Standard” and
- “Lifetime Standard” homes
- the percentage satisfaction with the adaptation service
- the percentage of minor adaptations completed within 28 days
- the percentage of disabled people engaged in Solon
- the percentage of staff to have received disability training
- the satisfaction rates of disabled residents, or households containing disabled persons, in comparison with non-disabled residents including, but not limited to, repairs, complaints survey and Anti Social Behaviour

As an employer:

- the percentage of new staff recruited

We will monitor outcomes by regularly reviewing the information we have gathered, and incorporate appropriate changes through our normal policy cycle.

Impact

We will assess the impact of our policies and practices on disabled people, through Equality Impact Assessments. We are planning a programme of Assessments on all our mainstream policies and procedures, and have already conducted these on a few policies. To do this properly requires some time, and we are drawing up an ongoing programme for this as part of mainstream policy reviews. In the meantime we are looking at ad hoc issues as they arise.

The Homes we provide to our residents

We are reviewing our design brief to ensure both that our developments take account of a whole range of accessibility issues, as identified by our residents, and that they are fully compliant with legal and planning guidelines. We are reviewing our Aids and Adaptations policy to facilitate ‘reasonable adjustment’ of our homes to disabled residents’ requirements.

The Services we provide to our residents and prospective residents

We have looked at how we communicate with our residents. We have decided that all communications with our customers should be in more accessible, larger print than previously. Ultimately all letters and brochures will be produced in a larger font size unless there is an overriding reason not to do so. To minimize costs we will be applying the new larger print standard to brochures only when we require new documents, such as when re-stocking or when the information in them is out of date. Through the Tenancy Audit we will be identifying the specific communication needs of particular residents, and put in place procedures to ensure these are met. The Universal housing database is being updated to incorporate any specialist requirements.

Recruitment, employment and training of our own staff

We have held the disability “Two Tick” status since 2001 and provide a range of services to prospective and current employees to ensure that those with a disability can both access and maintain employment. We are reviewing our recruitment processes with a view to increasing accessibility to employment at Solon for those with a disability. We will develop internal expertise around key areas such as mental health and hearing impairment, and work with external agencies, as appropriate, to promote opportunities at Solon. All staff have equal access to training and development opportunities as demonstrated by the positive results in our annual staff survey.

January 2010