

Accent on Equality & Diversity

*Accent Group's Equality & Diversity Strategy
and Action Plan*

Version 3 (revised October 2009)

2009 – 2011



Investors in Diversity

www.iiduk.com

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About Accent Group

Accent's vision is to make a difference by improving homes, communities and lives, to help achieve this we will support communities by providing homes, keeping them in good condition and helping people into employment through education and training.

Accent operates in 75 Local Authority areas serving nearly 20,000 households (around 50,000 people).

The group is made up of three Registered Providers, these are known as Accent Foundation, Accent Nene, and Accent Peerless. We also provide management services to leaseholders on properties we have developed, and those developed by other contractors via Accent Property Solutions and Accent Nene. Accent Group has substantial involvement in community regeneration activities including supporting business start ups, providing training and education opportunities and apprenticeships linked to our developments and planned maintenance programmes. This work is carried out by Accent Regeneration and Community Partnerships

This in its self brings many challenges no more so than understanding our customers and ensuring that we are providing tailored services to meet the needs of our customers. Our most recent profiling data shows us that across the group 59% of our customers are over 60, 46.9% have a disability, 4.2% of households are from a BME background and 59% have a female head of household.

In our most recent customer status survey (April 2009) we found that across the group 78% of our customers were satisfied with our service, if we break that down into selected diversity strands it shows that 87% of over 60's were satisfied, 75% of customers from a minority background were satisfied and 79% of our tenants with a disability were satisfied with the service they have received. We are reviewing the status survey to ensure that areas for improvement are identified and incorporated into the service improvement plans

We conducted a staff satisfaction survey in 2008 and found that 72% of staff feel that we recognise and value peoples difference, 80% of staff feel that they are treated with respect and fairness at work but only 79% feel that the work environment is free from bullying and harassment. We will be looking to increase these scores in our 2009 survey which will be carried out in the autumn.

Our Commitment

Accent Group operates in widely varied, diverse and multi-ethnic neighbourhoods and communities. We have long recognised the need to embrace this diversity and to ensure that our homes, facilities and services meet the different needs and aspirations that it creates.

Our vision is “*making a difference... improving homes, communities and lives*”.

Equality and Diversity is a cross-cutting consideration to our key objectives which are set out in the Accent Group Strategic Plan:

- Deliver excellent services
- Provide great places to live
- Give residents and their communities more choice and opportunity
- Be a well run and viable company

Accent Group holds to three key values in the way it conducts its business – respect, creativity and dependability. All of our people are expected to show respect for one another and for those with whom they come into contact. We aim to be approachable and easy to work with and to deal with our customers, suppliers and one another with honesty, integrity and a genuine desire to deliver services that fully satisfy the needs of our neighbourhoods and communities.

- Accent Group believes that everyone has the right to be treated fairly regardless of race, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, religion, beliefs, ethnic origin, nationality, language, carer responsibilities, marital or family status.
- We are committed to promoting equality, diversity and social inclusion in all our activities and we work to ensure that everyone associated with those activities – board members; staff and managers; contractors and suppliers; – demonstrates this commitment at all times.
- Our commitment to Equality and Diversity is enshrined in the Group’s Strategic Plan and in its associated strategies, business plans, policies and procedures.
- Accessible and fair to everyone, our services and employment practices work to overcome discrimination and disadvantage, and to enable people and communities to achieve their full potential.

Gordon Perry
Group Chief Executive

Carolyn Hirst
Board Champion
Equality & Diversity

1.0 Milestones and Key Performance Indicators

This is our 3rd version of the group wide strategy. We have already produced a detailed Disability and Gender Equality Schemes and Race Equality Action Plan. Our short to medium term strategic aims and objectives are based around the embedding of Equalities & Diversity across Accent Group, ensuring that all staff and Board Members have a clear understanding of the principles of Equality and Diversity and their role in delivering the objectives of this strategy.

Achieving our objectives will be an ongoing process and we recognise that we have much to do. It is therefore essential that we approach this area of our business in a structured way that takes a realistic account of our current performance, staff workload and available resources.

We aim to go back to basics and lay a solid foundation for moving forward. Our priorities are therefore:

- Further develop our understanding of the profile and needs of our customers and identify the actions needed to meet their needs
- To ensure key policies and procedures relating to equality and diversity are in place, up to date and actively publicised and are embedded into the organisation
- To ensure our services and offices are accessible to all, ensuring all physical barriers to access are removed.
- Further develop our Equality Impact Assessment Framework to ensure our services are tested by residents to ensure there are no adverse barriers to service.
- Develop and implement a balanced scorecard for E&D and build an effective monitoring and review systems this will allow us to track trend information and identify hotspots.
- To promote ownership of this strategy and engage the whole organisation in working towards achieving our objectives.

Achieving all the above priorities will enable the organisation to succeed in the Investors in Diversity Award

Overarching Milestones 2009/2010	Date
Establishment of an E&D Steering Group – ensuring all core business areas are engaged.	June 2009 (Completed)
Identify the strategic and policy “gap” in the light of KLOE Self-Assessment and Peerless Audit Commission Inspection, include in action plans	November 2009 (Completed)
Complete Investors in Diversity self-assessment	December 2009 (Completed)
Complete action plans (see Appendices)	October 2010
Amalgamate the three equality schemes into one overarching equality scheme taking into account the new Equality Bill	October 2010

3.0 Purpose of this strategy

This strategy has 3 main functions:

- 1 To clearly define what Equality and Diversity means to Accent Group;
- 2 To set our objectives – being clear about what we want to achieve;
- 3 To provide a clear plan and process for getting there.

It will be used internally as a tool to guide our progress and externally as a statement of our commitment and to demonstrate our approach to addressing the issue.

There are 2 main reasons why we have developed this strategy:

- Good performance on equality and diversity is central to our values as an organisation. We therefore need a framework to make sure that the importance we attach to it is reflected in the way we work.
- It makes good business sense. Ensuring that we are responsive to the needs and preferences of individuals will mean that our services are in demand, contributing to our success as a business. Similarly, we want to attract and retain staff and board members with a diversity of skills and experiences because we know that this results in creativity, new ideas and an ability to meet the needs of our customers more effectively.

4.0 Responsibilities

The Group Board and individual subsidiary boards have responsibility for nominated champions for diversity and ensuring that this strategy underpins all aspects of our work.

The Chief Executive has responsibility for ensuring that the strategy, including the work plan, is efficiently implemented.

The Group Directors, Managing Directors and Senior Managers in all areas of the group have responsibility for ensuring that the strategy is communicated to their teams. Also for ensuring that actions from the work plan are incorporated into the business plans and passed down into individual Performance targets.

The Diversity Champions across the group will be responsible for promoting E&D within their business areas and providing support to staff at a local level. They will also underpin the work and challenges issued by the E&D strategy group.

All staff members are responsible for ensuring that they familiarise themselves with the strategy and complete any tasks allocated to them in the work plan. They must also ensure that they follow the principles it sets out and bring to the attention of their line manager or a director, any instances of discrimination or other issues that could undermine our ability to achieve the objectives we have set out.

The purpose of this strategy is to provide a framework for ensuring that we address equality and diversity issues as a core part of our business.

There are many communities, groups and individuals who may face disadvantage or discrimination, who may be unable or unwilling to access services or who receive services that fail to meet their needs and preferences.

It may also include other groups or individuals. It is intended that all fall within the scope of this strategy, it is impossible for us to plan in advance how we will meet every individual need or circumstance we encounter. What we hope to achieve through this strategy is:

- To work on addressing areas where we have identified scope for improvement
- To undertake activities that will allow us to identify and respond to needs that we may not currently be aware of
- To create a culture within Accent Group where promoting diversity and avoiding discrimination is embedded in all practices and policies.

5.0 Aims and Objectives

Below are our main aims and objectives for the coming three years to help ensure that the Group Strategic Plan and its four objectives are met. We work on a 'golden thread' approach within the group and these aims and objectives will be embedded into all RP's business plans.

Deliver excellent Services

Ensure that our offices are accessible to everyone

Ensure that our services are accessible and meet the diverse needs of our customer base.

Provide Great Places to Live

Ensure that our homes are accessible and enable independent living

Have neighbourhoods that are safe and secure to live in

Give residents and their communities more choice and opportunity

Have involvement and consultation process that are not discriminatory.

Ensure that vulnerable and hard to reach groups are integral to our involvement process.

Be a well run and viable company

Have recruitment and selection processes for staff and board members that are non discriminatory.

Provide an open and positive working environment, which is free from bullying and harassment

To help Accent achieve its strategic objectives we are working towards The Investors in Diversity Standard. This is an initiative which provides a framework to support and enable organisations to adopt, develop and benchmark behaviours and practices, which promote inclusion, equality, diversity and achievement.

6.0 How Accent operates**6.1 Good Governance we aim to**

- Ensure that our board members have an understanding of and are committed to equality and diversity issues in all areas of the business and are able to provide leadership and direction
- Have board members that broadly reflect, at all levels, the diversity of the communities we serve
- Have a board with a diverse range of backgrounds, skills and experience.
- Adopt good practice in all areas relating to equality and diversity and take a proactive approach

6.1 As an Employer we aim to

- Create an organisational culture that values diversity and recognises equality and diversity as a core business issue.
- Have a staff team that broadly reflects, at all levels, the diversity of the communities we serve
- Create a positive working environment where all staff feel empowered, valued and supported
- Ensure that all staff members have an understanding of equality and diversity, and contribute towards achievement of our objectives

6.2 As a Social Landlord we aim to

- Be equally accessible to all
- Ensure that our services recognise and respond to the needs of individuals
- Create balance and cohesive communities in which the diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and positively valued
- Attract and retain a diverse range of tenants, achieving a tenant profile that is broadly reflective of the communities we serve.

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- Offer customers the opportunity to be involved and consulted in a range of different ways that suit different needs and preferences.
 - Ensure that any groups and forums we establish are inclusive and broadly reflect the tenant community they represent.
 - Ensure that specific minority groups of customers are as satisfied with our services as the majority.
 - Have a development programme that takes account of diversity issues in the size, design and location of home.

6.3 Working with communities and others:

- Work with community groups in our priority neighbourhoods to improve community cohesion
- Work with other agencies to help ensure customers are signposted to received the right services they need.
- Actively promote equality and diversity in all our partnership agreements and strategic alliances.
- Actively promote equality and diversity in the way we procure goods and services

7.0 Action planning

Attached in the appendices are our objectives and key milestones for overarching service delivery areas and governance. Our objectives have been identified from the KLOE Self Assessments, Staff Satisfaction Scores, Status Surveys and Accent Peerless Audit Commission Inspection June 09.

These appendices set out our key target areas for improvement over the next two years. To ensure delivery of these improvements they will be carried across into service improvement and business plans for relevant departments and subsidiaries

8.0 Equality and Diversity Strategy Group

The Equalities and Diversity Strategy Group will consist of individuals who have enabling responsibilities throughout the organisation. They will meet quarterly to review the Equality and Diversity Strategy (including Action Plans). They will influence Group, Executive and Programme Boards to facilitate and resource Equality and Diversity actions, initiatives and tasks.

The Group will be made up of the Diversity Champions from the various boards across the group and operational Champions. The Operational Champions will help drive improvements at a local operation level. The Champions will meet twice a year to discuss progress against targets and looking at best practice from across the group and also from outside the group.

An Annual Report on Equality and Diversity will be produced, which will include annual milestones and progress against targets. The Annual Report will highlight each target with subsequent reports ensuring demonstrable improvements against targets, with the ultimate aim of continuous improvement and exceeding targets.

9.0 Terms of Reference

1.0. Constitution

- The Equality & Diversity Strategy Group will have a membership of staff and board members from across the group .
- The members will be Board and operational representative from Group, AF, AP, AN and ARCP
- Agenda and supporting papers will be issues at least 7 days before the meeting.
- The group will be chaired by Accent Group Board E&D Champion

2.0 Responsibilities

- To champion and promote Equality and Diversity principles across the group.
- To develop, monitor and regularly review the Group's Equality & Diversity Strategy
- Develop, implement and review a detailed action plan to deliver improvements in equality and diversity performance on a 3 year cycle as indicated in Accent's Equality and Diversity Strategy.
- To provide regular progress reports on Equality and Diversity to the Group Board including an annual report.
- To monitor Accent's performance on a quarterly basis in terms of Equality and Diversity.
- Subsidiary Board & Operational Champions will be responsible for reporting back on outcomes and progress through their relevant reporting structures.
- To drive improvements in Equality and Diversity performance throughout all aspects of Accent's business.
- To work in partnership with other specialist agencies to ensure that Accent's services demonstrate respect for all people.
- To agree annual objectives and milestones to assist Accent in meeting its legal requirements and to help the organisation comply with regulatory code.
- To provide a Forum where Accent's plans, policies and procedures relating to issues of equality and diversity can be examined and reviewed in detail.