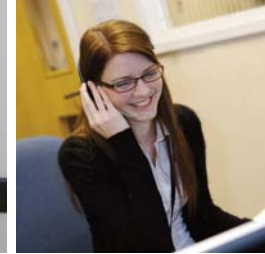


Acis Group
CORPORATE EQUALITY SCHEME
(CES)





Foreword by Chief Executive

Welcome to the Acis Group Limited Corporate Equality Scheme. This document sets out our commitment to ensure that we operate in a way that is free from discrimination and that we promote open access and equality of opportunity both as an employer and as a housing provider.

We are committed to embracing Diversity and will ensure that our service delivery, policies and procedures are developed to be inclusive. Whilst we have made great progress in improving our equalities performance we recognise that there is significant improvement that we need to achieve before we can consider ourselves to be delivering an excellent service in the area of diversity. We commissioned an independent consultant to carry out a reality check on our delivery of the diversity agenda and acknowledge the findings and recommendations in the report. We have identified the areas for improvement and have incorporated them into an action plan that will enable us to make significant progress on our current position.



This Corporate Equality Scheme is a focus for action that will facilitate achieving our corporate objectives to:

- Deliver excellent, flexible, customer-focussed service
- Provide affordable, sustainable homes
- Attract, develop and retain the best people

We are pleased to give our full support to this scheme and we will publish reviews of our progress annually. We recognise that we serve a diverse community and need to ensure that the services we provide meet the needs of all sections of that community. We are determined to ensure that we deliver our promises and will provide the support and resources to ensure this Corporate Equality Scheme is a success.

Valerie Waby



Background

From December 2006 the Housing Corporation, along with other public bodies, has a statutory public duty to promote equality. As our regulator, the Housing Corporation requires Acis Group Limited to develop and publish a Disability Equality Scheme by December 2007 and Gender Equality Scheme by February 2008, setting out how we intend to eliminate discrimination, promote equality and ensure that people are treated fairly in accordance with the Disability Discrimination Act (2005) and Equality Act (2006); the general and specific duties towards disability and gender equality are provided at Annex A.

While Acis Group recognises this requirement, we are equally committed to the promotion of equality and elimination of discrimination on any other grounds which, although covered by legislation, we are not subject to the same requirement to produce a specific Scheme.

In light of this, we have developed this Corporate Equality Scheme which incorporates a six strand approach to equality and diversity, being:

- Disability
- Gender
- Race
- Age
- Sexual orientation
- Religious or other beliefs

To facilitate Acis Group in achieving our mission of becoming the **“housing provider of choice, delivering excellence in all we do”** we recognise the importance of embracing diversity.

Through our core values, corporate objectives and strategies we intend to go beyond just complying with legislation and ensure that the services and employment opportunities that we provide are delivered in a way that is inclusive of everyone, are fair and that we will seek to achieve continuous improvement and best practice.



Implementation and Development of the Corporate Equality Scheme

All Board members and employees of Acis Group Limited are responsible for the implementation of the Corporate Equality Scheme.

A Diversity Service Improvement Group has been established consisting of Board Members, Employees from all departments within Acis Group and residents.

Their remit is to champion the Company's approach to diversity and to provide a focus for the effective delivery of this scheme. Additionally, a Service Improvement Group to oversee our Aids and Adaptations service is being established shortly to enhance our service to our disabled customers and deliver against our Diversity Action Plan.

The formulation and delivery of this Corporate Equality Scheme and Diversity Action Plan have, and will continue to be achieved by:



Involvement - The continued involvement of employees, tenants and residents in the formulation of this CES and Diversity Action Plan is paramount to its success.

The involvement will help to identify issues that are being faced by people accessing the services and homes that are provided by Acis Group and, as an employer, any issues that arise regarding employment with the Company.



Gathering Information – It is essential for Acis Group to continue to gather information through surveys, employee and resident involvement, not only on the issues and barriers that are faced by its customers and employees, but also to provide evidence on how the Scheme and Action Plan is performing and how it can be improved.



In producing this scheme, three broad areas of our business were identified that we need to address which are Customer Services, Asset Management and Employment and Governance:

Objective	Strategies	Area	Covering e.g.
<p>To deliver excellent, flexible customer-focussed services</p>	<p>(A4) Develop and deliver fair and equitable, high quality services that meet the needs of our diverse communities.</p> <p>(A6) Demonstrate effective engagement with minority and hard to reach groups.</p>	<p>Customer Services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information/recording of customer needs, including communication preferences. • Accessibility of services, adjustments to offices. • Customer satisfaction • Communications (leaflets, website, audio etc) • Monitoring of complaints/Anti-Social Behaviour. • Staff knowledge on adjustments
<p>To provide affordable sustainable homes</p>	<p>(B3) Ensure all our homes meet the diverse needs of our customers</p>	<p>Asset Management</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing inclusive environments. • Major repairs/refurbishment projects accessibility standards. • Adaptations service.
<p>To attract, develop and retain the best people</p>	<p>(E1) Create and sustain an environment where people are recognised, rewarded and supported in realising their full potential.</p> <p>(E4) Ensure the organisation, Board and resident groups reflect the communities that we serve</p>	<p>Employment & Governance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reasonable adjustment policies • Training on Diversity Issues • Policies & Procedures • Accessibility of Corporate Events/Meetings • Profiling of employees and applicants for employment.



Impact Assessment

Acis Group will ensure that any new policies or services we develop are consistent with our intention of promoting equality and diversity throughout the organisation. Additionally, we will check thoroughly the impact of these new policies, or services, before they are agreed.

The process for checking policies and services, whether current or intended, will be through an Equality Impact Assessment.

A Diversity Toolkit and template are being produced and will be used to assess whether a policy or service discriminates, or has the potential to discriminate. The toolkit and template will help managers to consider the impact of their work on different communities and individuals by addressing a wide range of diversity issues, thus reflecting our commitment to ensuring all aspects of equality and diversity are considered fairly and equitably.

Measuring our Effectiveness

This Corporate Equality Scheme is a focus for action. The effectiveness of the scheme will be measured through the achievement of our deliverable targets and progress will be monitored through measurement against Performance Indicators and feedback from our employees and customers.

Externally we will be monitored through the Audit Commission Inspection process on our approach to equality and diversity which is covered by the Diversity Key Line of Enquiry 31 (KLOE). The KLOE represents a set of questions and statements around the service we provide, and use consistent criteria for assessing and measuring the effectiveness of our services. The KLOE outlines what it expects of an organisation delivering excellent services, and these are the standards that Acis Group aim to achieve and improve upon. The specific requirements of KLOE 31 and details of our current position on diversity, as assessed by an independent consultant in July 2007, are included at Annex B. Additionally our Diversity Action Plan is included at Annex C which addresses the areas for further improvement that were identified following an internal "health-check" made against KLOE 31.



The Profile of Acis Group Areas of Operation

To ensure that Acis Group can provide excellent services, equality of opportunity and inclusion it is important that we remain aware of the demographics of the areas that we operate in. The Acis Group area of operation predominantly covers the areas of West Lindsey and the City of Sheffield.

West Lindsey

The District of West Lindsey covers the area immediately north of Lincoln and forms the North West gateway to Lincolnshire. It is 115,773 hectares (1,158 square kilometres, 447 square miles) in area, is mainly rural and provides an attractive setting for its three market towns of Caistor, Gainsborough and Market Rasen.

- The area currently has a population of 86,500 (ONS 2006 Mid Year estimates) with 38,837 households (Valuation Office Mar 2007).
- The District is the 17th most sparsely populated area in England with a population density of 74 persons per square kilometre (ONS 2006 mid year estimates). This makes it the most sparsely populated Council within Lincolnshire and the East Midlands Region.
- Two thirds of the population live in rural villages and settlements whilst 34% live in the towns of Gainsborough, market Rasen and Caistor. Gainsborough with a population of 16,869 (Census 2001 figure) is the administrative headquarters for West Lindsey and is situated on the far West of the District. Market Rasen and Caistor have populations of 3,230 and 2,601 respectively.
- The District experienced negative population growth from 1981 to 1996 but it is projected that by 2011 the population will have increased by 15.3%. Evidence of growth is already apparent, as the population of the district has risen by 3.9% between 1991 and 2001. 18.24% of the population is aged 65 or over and there are 51% females to 49% males.
- Unemployment at 21% is higher than the County average of 1.9% (Nomis Average Annual Unemployment 2005). At February 2006 the highest levels of unemployment were found in the wards of Gainsborough (Gainsborough East 6.6%, Gainsborough South West 6.4% and Gainsborough North 3.9%) followed by Market Rasen 2.7%, Hemswell 2.5% and Wold View 2.5%. There is a problem with long term unemployment at 10.25% of those unemployed (Nomis)



- West Lindsey’s economy is largely dependent on declining industrial sectors, as a third of the workforce is engaged in agricultural and manufacturing industries. Most of the workforce is engaged in service related jobs, the majority being in public administration, education and health.
- Patterns of deprivation in West Lindsey show the extent of disparity between areas in the district. Using “Super Output Areas” this diversity is even more stark with parts of the Gainsborough South West Ward ranked 4,965th out of such areas nationally placing this area in the bottom 5% more deprived in the country. However wards in the Lincoln fringe villages are within the top 20% least deprived nationally. (Source: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Indices of Deprivation 2004 – Revised)
- Ethnic Minorities
- 7.4% of all economically active people have declared that they have a limiting long term illness and 34.3% of households have one or more persons with a long term illness (2001 Census)
- West Lindsey’s population is older than the national age structure with 18.2% over 65 years and there are comparatively fewer younger people in the key economically active categories between 20 and 30 years of age.
- The District contains one registered Travellers site and the Council is currently working to assess the full needs of this community and make appropriate provision.

Ethnic Group	Population %	Age Group 18 – 64 %
White: British	97.64	97.67
White: Other	1.38	1.47
Mixed	0.41	0.26
Asian or Asian British	0.26	0.27
Black or Black British	0.15	0.17
Chinese/Other Ethnic	0.16	0.16



Sheffield

Following a successful stock transfer of almost 1200 homes in March 2007, Acis Group expanded its area of operation into the city of Sheffield. The demographics vary markedly from that of West Lindsey which provides us with a new and exciting challenge for the future to meet the needs and aspirations of the more diverse communities and mix of cultures that exists within Sheffield.

The Sheffield Urban area has a population of 1.2 million and falls within the county of South Yorkshire. ONS statistics for the South Yorkshire region show that at the 1991 Census, children (people aged under 16) made up 19.7 per cent of the resident population.

The proportion was lowest in Sheffield (18.4 per cent). The proportion of young adults in households who were lone parents in 1991 was highest in Sheffield (2.9 per cent).

Sheffield had the highest proportion of people aged 16-24 resident in households who were full time students, 23.2 per cent, compared with 20.8 per cent for the county as a whole.

People of pensionable age (that is, 65 years and over for men and 60 years and over for women) made

up 19.1 per cent of the population of South Yorkshire in 1991, an increase of 1.5 percentage points since 1981. The proportion of men and women who were aged 75 years and over increased, respectively, by 0.5 percentage points and 1.0 percentage points between 1981 and 1991. The proportion who were aged 85 years and over increased by 0.5 percentage points in the inter-censal period.

The proportion of people of pensionable age in 1991 was highest in Sheffield (20.9 per cent). In 1991, the total number of households containing at least one pensioner in South Yorkshire was 173,967. Sheffield, with 36.4 per cent, was the district with the highest proportion of such households in 1991.

A question on long-term illness was asked in the 1991 Census for the first time. Sheffield had the lowest proportion of households containing at least one person with a long-term illness (29.5 per cent). These figures compare with 31.1 per cent for the county as a whole.

In South Yorkshire, 16.6 per cent of people had a long-term illness. This figure ranged from 18.5 per cent of persons in Barnsley, the district with the highest proportion, to 16.1 per cent in Rotherham and Sheffield, the districts with the lowest.



Acis Group Customer Analysis

Ethnic Origin

Ethnic Group	%	No
White British	88.81	4,261
Not Recorded	8.40	403
White: Any Other White Background	0.63	30
White Irish	0.52	25
Black or Black British: Any Other Black	0.27	13
Mixed: White & Black Caribbean	0.25	12
Black or Black British: African	0.21	10
Black or Black British: Caribbean	0.17	8
Other Ethnic Origin: Other Groups	0.17	8
Refused	0.17	8
Mixed: Any Other Mixed Background	0.13	6
Asian or Asian British: Other Asian	0.08	4
Mixed: White & Asian	0.08	4
Other Ethnic Origin: Chinese	0.06	3
Asian or Asian British: Pakistani	0.04	2
Asian or Asian British: Indian	0.02	1

Marital Status

Category	%	No
Single	45.50	2,183
Not Known	20.78	997
Married	16.38	786
Widowed	6.96	334
Co-Habitee	3.71	178
Divorced	3.58	172
Separated	3.08	148

Gender

	%	No.
Female	58.23	2,794
Male	41.77	2,004

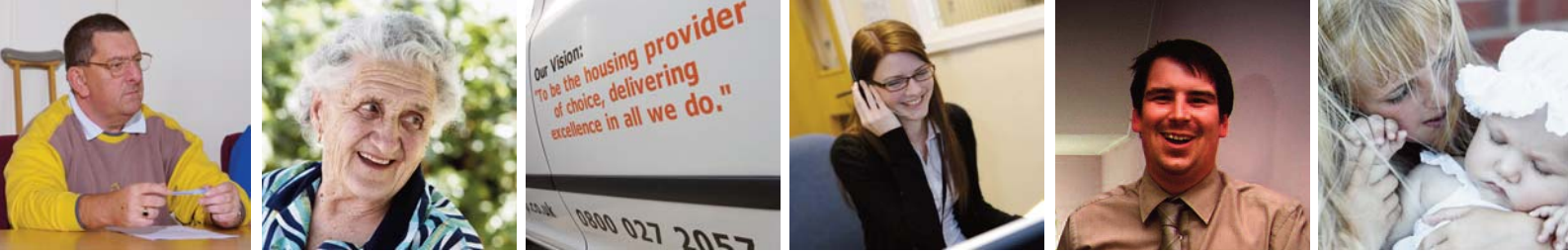


Language

	%	No.
English	77.24	3,706
German	0.10	5
Iranian	0.02	1
Italian	0.02	1
Kurdish – Sorani	0.02	1
Philippino	0.02	1
Polish	0.02	1
Ukranian	0.02	1
Unknown	22.53	1,081

Age

Age	Female	%	Male	%	Total
Not Known	34	51.52	32	48.48	66
Below 20	30	78.95	8	21.05	38
20 - 29	407	74.41	140	25.59	547
30 - 39	505	71.63	200	28.37	705
40 - 49	440	59.38	301	40.62	741
50 - 59	296	49.66	300	50.34	596
60 - 64	147	42.36	200	57.64	347
65 - 69	147	41.06	211	58.94	358
70 - 74	182	48.53	193	51.47	375
75 - 79	185	50.55	181	49.45	366
80 - 84	187	58.99	130	41.01	317
85 - 89	148	65.49	78	34.51	226
90 - 99	85	74.56	29	25.44	114
100+	1	50.00	1	50.00	2
	2794	58.23	2004	41.77	4,798



Disability

At the present time there is insufficient data on households with disabled occupants to give a complete customer profile analysis. We are currently undertaking a full customer profiling exercise which will identify all household occupants with disabilities and will be recorded into 13 categories.

This information will supplement the data gained from housing applications where our Continuous Recording of recent general needs lettings show that approximately 30% of households contain a person with a disability compared to 23.6% shown in the 2001 Census. This is consistent with the data we currently hold which shows that we have 1,737 (30%) householders with disabilities. These are categorised below:

Wheelchair User	31
*Mobility	1170
Deaf	18
*Visual	527
*Mental Health	720
Physical Disability	28
Epilepsy	25
Depression	84
Cancer	13
Diabetic	66
Breathing Difficulties	31
Renal Disease	8
Liver Disease	4
Major Surgery	3
*Other	553

Investor in Diversity

Acis Group has made a commitment to become an Investor in Diversity which is a new national standard that will help us adopt, develop and benchmark behaviour and practices to promote inclusion, equality and diversity that will assist us in achieving our corporate objective to deliver excellent, flexible customer-focussed services.

Summary

The Acis Group Board, Management and staff are collectively committed to ensuring that, wherever possible, everything we do and the services that we provide are inclusive of everyone and are considered to be fair and equitable.

J Jenkinson

Chair of Board

V Waby

Chief Executive

Acis Group Limited

December 2007

Annexes:

- Disability and Gender Equality Duties.
- KLOE 31 (Diversity) - Acis Group Current Status.
- Acis Group Diversity Action Plan.



ANNEX A

DISABILITY EQUALITY SCHEME

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) made it unlawful for public authorities to discriminate against disabled people by treating them less favourably in employment and in the provision of services. The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 amends the 1995 Act, placing a new positive duty on public authorities to promote equality of opportunity for disabled people.

The duty has two elements – a general duty, and specific duties that are intended to assist authorities in meeting the general duty.

The general duty

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended by the Disability Discrimination Act 2005, places a general duty on public authorities to promote disability equality. The duty came into force on 4 December 2006 and requires public authorities to:

- promote equality of opportunity between disabled persons and other persons
- eliminate unlawful discrimination
- eliminate harassment of disabled persons that is related to their disabilities
- promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons
- encourage participation by disabled persons in public life
- take steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, even where that involves treating disabled people more favourably.



Specific duties

The specific duties relating to policy development and service delivery require public authorities to:

- produce and publish a disability equality scheme (DES) demonstrating how they intend to fulfil their general and specific duties
- involve disabled people in the development of the scheme
- produce an action plan setting out the key actions an authority will take to promote disability equality
- explain the methods they use for assessing the impact of their policies and practices, or the likely impact of their proposed policies and practices, on equality for disabled persons
- assess and consult on the likely impact of proposed policies on the promotion of disability equality
- monitor policies for any adverse impact on the promotion of disability equality
- publish the results of these assessments, consultation and monitoring
- report annually on the progress of the action plan
- review the scheme every three years.

The specific duty covering an authority's role as an employer is to monitor the effect of its policies and practices on disabled persons, and in particular the effect on the recruitment, development and retention of disabled employees.

The aim of this equality scheme is to facilitate removal of barriers for all disabled people. This includes people who might not automatically identify themselves as disabled, but who nevertheless face discrimination in their everyday life because of their impairment.



Social Model of Disability

In the formulation of this CES and action plan, Acis Group have adopted the Social Model of disability as defined by the disabled peoples movements as opposed to the medical definition being "a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse affect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities". Acis Group rejects the medical model and accepts:

- disability is a social phenomenon,
- that while many individuals have physical or sensory impairments or learning difficulties or are living with mental health needs, it is the way society responds to these which creates disability and not an individual's impairment,
- that disabilism is a form of oppression in the same way as for example racism, sexism and homophobia.

The social model of disability makes the important distinction between impairment and disability. It is the response of the disabled people's civil rights movement to the oppression of disabled people. "Barriers" or elements of social organisation which take little or no account of people who have impairments, cause disability. It follows that if disabled people are to be able to join in mainstream society, which is their human right, the way society is organised must be changed. Removing the barriers that exclude people who have impairments can bring about this change.

Barriers can be:

- prejudice and stereotypes
- inflexible organisational procedures and practices
- inaccessible information
- inaccessible buildings.



GENDER EQUALITY SCHEME

The Gender Equality Duty requires public authorities to promote gender equality and eliminate sex discrimination and harassment. Instead of depending on individuals making complaints about sex discrimination, the duty places legal responsibility on public authorities to demonstrate that they treat men and women fairly. The duty will affect policy making, services and employment practices such as recruitment and flexible working. The onus will be on organisations to promote equality, rather than on individuals to highlight discrimination.

The general duty

The Equality Act 2006 amends the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 to place a statutory duty on all public authorities, when carrying out their functions, to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment
- promote equality of opportunity between men and women

Specific duties

The specific duties relating to policy development and service delivery require public authorities to:

- produce and publish a gender equality scheme (GES) showing how they will meet the general and specific duties and setting out their gender equality objectives
- gather and use information on how their policies and practices affect gender equality
- assess the impact of their policies and practices, or the likely impact of their proposed policies and practices, on equality between women and men
- consult stakeholders in the development of the scheme



- assess functions and policies, or proposed policies, which are relevant to gender equality
- implement the actions set out in the scheme within three years
- report annually on the progress of the action plan
- review the scheme every three years.

The specific duties covering an authority's role as an employer are to:

- consider the need to have objectives that address the causes of any differences between the pay of men and women that are related to their sex
- gather and use information on how its policies and functions affect gender equality in the workforce.