

# Metropolitan Housing

We are a unique network of locally focused member organisations working together to provide housing, regeneration and care and support services. We manage 35,500 homes and provide a diverse range of services to over 80,000 customers (including 12,000 care and support service users and 2,500 refugees and asylum seekers).

Our user base includes asylum seekers, ex offenders, individuals fleeing domestic violence, individuals with learning disabilities or mental health needs, older persons, individuals with physical disabilities, refugees, registered care users, those suffering from substance misuse, teenage parents, women and young people.

We do not consider equality to be a fair-weather option and see it as a business imperative and social necessity, particularly in the current economic environment. As the most vulnerable members of society face the toughest of times, we have made a renewed commitment to addressing exclusion, poverty and inequality, refusing to shy away from the most challenging issues that arise in the housing and social care sector.

## **Issue to be resolved**

With women being head of the household in 60% of our homes and over 60% of our workforce being female, providing a equal service and being a fair employer is more of a business necessity than a social enterprise.

Where a significant underrepresentation of women is identified, we take action to rectify it (for e.g. after a recent analysis of our staff profile we took action to address underrepresentation at senior levels). Our annual employee satisfaction survey specifically breaks down results by gender and we undertake equal pay audits to ensure fair pay.

## **Action taken**

As an employer and service provider, we work with our staff and community regeneration groups to address any barriers in the recruitment, development and promotion of female members of staff and to create an environment which is inclusive, accessible and barrier free.

One of our most successful projects recently has been the starting up of a women's football team in Chalkhill, London. Almost exclusively from Somali and Algeria, with a Muslim background, over 70 per cent of the girls are asylum seekers and have to overcome significant cultural and religious barriers in order to engage. They say these sessions have helped them adapt and become a part of the local community.

Our development team also works with the club, providing opportunities in education, training and employment to 14-19 year olds.

In the last year, the sports team generated £139,000 in external support funding 42 sports activities at no extra cost to our service users.

Anissa Nahill, Chair of the Al-Bahdja Community Group, of which the team is a part of, says, "Teenage girls can be very self-conscious and this can prevent them from taking part in physical activity, also in the Muslim community girls face religious or cultural restrictions when they do wish to participate. However, this girls-only activity is popular and helps to build confidence and self esteem."

We are also contracted to work with 60 Refugees and 40 EU Migrants in Sheffield and Rotherham and over the course of the last two years have worked with a total of 131 women with 22 moving into employment.

In addition to this there is a women's staff group the Women's Forum, which participates in the annual CEO appraisal and runs its own surveys around flexible working, childcare, work/life balance, equal pay and satisfaction in the workplace. Formed in 2009, the group runs its own mentoring system and aims to change perceptions, champion the need for gender equality, demonstrate to the Board and senior management why gender equality is important and reiterate the business case for change.

We offer extensive mentoring and coaching opportunities across the organisation, through our corporate learning and development program as well as our women's group initiatives.

Our management development programme has a high take up by female staff reflecting the proportion of female managers, the encouragement they receive from their line managers and to redress for some any lack previous opportunity to gain formal qualifications with our coaching and mentoring programme being rolled out to managers across the organisation and many women acting as coaches and being coached.

The organisation also actively encourages flexible work patterns and has a number options, eg job share, staggered hours, part time work. For example we have 201(11%) female and 41 (2.5%) male part time staff and of these 14% are at senior management level.

We regularly examine our Human Resources database to look for significant differences in pay between genders and segment our organisation by business, location and management level each year to determine the gender pay gap in each of these areas. We then place these findings into the context of the overall UK population by reference to the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) produced by the Office of National Statistics.

Any major variations are investigated and a commentary produced to explain why these variances have arisen. When necessary we also examine related activities such as recruitment and selection to assess their impact.

In addition we analyse all significant exercises involving changes in pay and conditions, e.g. annual pay review, reorganisations and restructures; to ensure no gender bias has crept into our decision making processes

## **Result**

It is important to us that we have an encouraging culture that supports all our employees to be high performers and achieve their aspirations. For women this is about realising they are central to how the organisation develops and embeds its culture and defines the way we work. This is translated in our employment policies around flexible and family friendly working and total reward; the proportion of management posts held by women – 50% executive; 40% senior management; 52% functional heads; the advancement through open recruitment of internal female candidates; and over 50% of woman participants on the management development and the coaching and mentoring programmes with representation in senior management rising from 20% to 50% in the last 3 years.

With 8 of the 15 board places already filled by women, and with women in the positions of Chair and Deputy Chair of the Board, the organisation is leading by example in having women at its most strategic level. Recent recruitment initiatives have resulted in the number of women on the board increasing, with the two most board recent appointments being women. Women also chair the boards of three of the main 5 subsidiary businesses and 4 of the 6 group wide Committees.

Of our 2,500 employees, more than 60% are women. And, at the top 2 tiers of our management structure, the gender split is completely equal with the majority of women returning to work from maternity leave full or part time in their same posts.

### **Next Steps**

In 2011, we launched our Single Equality Scheme *All Together Different*. It is our public commitment to equality and a statement of our intent to ensure diversity is embedded in everything we do. Informed by the desire to 'level up' and meet the highest standard set across all the 'protected characteristics', the scheme covers age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

The Board has corporate responsibility for ensuring that the scheme underpins all aspects of our work while the CEO has responsibility for ensuring it is implemented effectively. The CEO is also a Diversity Champion, member of the Diversity Network which brings together staff from across the business, the Board, our national residents' group and our staff groups. It holds the CEO and the Executive Management Team to account on reaching equality and diversity targets and provides feedback on the CEO's personal appraisal – a unique opportunity for staff to directly feedback on our organisational performance.

We also recognize that the nature of our business attracts female staff, ie care and support; housing and community development and within care and support, certain services are 24/7 therefore we offer the opportunity for shift work with the same reward benefits, ie statutory holidays and sickness; purchase of child care vouchers, defined contribution pension scheme, as all other employees.

### **Contact**

Mark Harrison