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| Title of policy: | Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy |
| Purpose: | To set out North Stars approach to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion |
| Updated: | December 2022 (Board approved March 2022) |
| Next review: | December 2024 |
| By: | Director of People |

1 Policy Statement

Different Together - At North Star, Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion are part of our DNA. Together, we continue to build a culture that encourages, supports, and celebrates difference. It fuels our innovation and connects us even closer to customers and communities.

2 Definitions

While the terms Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) often go hand in hand, they are not one and the same. We are adopting the definitions used by the Housing Diversity Network.

Equality is the fair and unbiased treatment of others, taking into account, systemic and structural inequalities. This ensures equal opportunity and access for all groups which are protected by legislation.

Diversity refers to the presence of people who, as a group, have a wide range of characteristics, seen and unseen, which they were born with or have acquired. These differences can go beyond the protected groups set out in legislation.

Inclusion goes further and is where people's differences are valued and used to enable everyone to thrive at work. An inclusive working environment is one in which everyone feels that they belong without having to conform, that their contribution matters and that they can perform to their full potential, no matter their background, identity, or circumstances. An inclusive workplace has fair policies and practices in place and enables a diverse range of people to work together effectively.

These terms are interdependent and go hand in hand in promoting a culture that is actively equal, diverse, and inclusive.

3 Legal and Regulatory Duties

North Star is committed to meeting its obligations and duties under the Equality Act 2010 and to promoting equal opportunities both in the provision of services and in our employment practices. The Equality Act 2010 protects people with 'protected characteristics' from unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation (as defined in the Equality Act 2010). The protected characteristics are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion/belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

North Star is committed to meeting its obligations and duties under the Public Sector Equality Duty (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) and The Human Rights Act 1988 so far as they apply to our organisation as a Registered Provider of Social Housing.

Under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 we will:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010.
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Under the Human Rights Act 1998 we will:

- Treat everyone equally, with fairness, dignity, and respect

In addition, North Star complies with the regulatory requirements of The Regulator of Social Housing, it is a regulatory requirement that all Boards adopt an acceptable code of Governance. The Board of North Star has adopted the National Housing Federations model code 2020. The code requires Boards to take an active lead in committing to equality of opportunity, diversity, and inclusion in all the Organisation's activities as well as in its own composition. North Stars Board complies with the model code, and, on an annual basis carries out a self-assessment against the code.

4 The Board

North Star aims to have a Board and committee(s) that broadly reflects the diversity of the communities we serve and includes people with diverse backgrounds and attributes. Our Board Recruitment and Succession Planning policies also reflect our commitment to achieving a diverse and inclusive Board. The Board is responsible for:

- Demonstrating a clear and active commitment to achieving EDI in all North Stars activities, as well as in its own composition.

- Ensuring that it has policies and statements which meaningfully demonstrate this commitment and sets priorities and objectives.
- Providing leadership on this policy and, working with the Senior Management Team, ensure that it is implemented.
- Seeking regular assurance about how these commitments and objectives are being delivered in practice and tracking progress against the priorities it has set.
- Ensuring that North Star annually publishes information about its work to deliver these (EDI) commitments and objectives, and the progress it has made.
- Ensuring that people with direct lived experience of (or insight into) the communities we serve are meaningfully engaged in governance.
- Overseeing North Stars compliance with all legal and regulatory requirements.
- Reviewing the continuing relevance and appropriateness of the commitments set by the Organisation.

5 Our Commitments

The following are North Stars commitments to EDI

Customers

We will:

- Ensure all customers are treated with fairness and respect.
- Deliver relevant, accessible, and responsive services which take into account the sensitivities and needs of different groups including, but not limited to social, cultural, and religious needs, and any customer with additional support needs.
- Work in partnership to tackle direct or indirect discrimination faced by any local communities or groups.
- Consider the needs of a diverse range of communities when designing and developing new homes.
- Ensure that the new homes that we build are suitable for people with disabilities.
- Monitor the allocation of housing to ensure direct or indirect discrimination is not occurring.
- Work with Local Authorities to highlight direct or indirect discrimination in any common allocations policies, ensuring that systems for housing or rehousing customers reflect our equality principles.
- Consult with customers and obtain their views, particularly in relation to our EDI commitments.
- Ensure that any involvement activity promotes involvement from all groups of people.
- Adopt a zero-tolerance approach to tackle all forms of harassment.
- Ensure all forms of information and communication are accessible to customers.

Culture

We will:

- Treat everyone fairly, with dignity and respect, embracing difference and recognising the value it brings.
- Build an inclusive workplace in which our staff feel a sense of belonging.
- Hear and learn from the lived experience of people from diverse backgrounds.
- Proactively tackle and prevent any form of discrimination, harassment, or victimisation.
- Embed a culture of EDI, ensuring that this is considered in all our activities, policies, and procedures.
- Take seriously complaints of bullying, harassment, victimisation and unlawful discrimination by fellow employees, customers, suppliers, visitors, the public and any others during the organisation's work activities.
- Adopt a zero-tolerance approach to bullying, harassment, victimisation, and unlawful discrimination.
- Continue to support our staff led Inclusion Group. This group helps to drive inclusivity in the workplace and has an important role in helping North Star to achieve its objectives.

Recruitment and Retention

We will:

- Appoint staff and Board members objectively and on merit, based on aptitude and potential, and following our policy.
- Monitor all stages of the recruitment process to ensure that it is fair, accessible, transparent and presents no barriers.
- Identify any structural inequality, inherent in what we do and eliminate it.
- Aim to have a workforce and Board that broadly reflects the diversity of the communities we serve.
- Maintain fair and transparent recruitment, promotion, and reward processes
- Annually review employment policies and practices to ensure fairness, and update them to reflect changes in the law or best practice
- Train Board and Managers in effective recruitment practices, adopting unbiased approaches, and provide regular refresher training.
- Take positive action to address under-representation. This can include, but may not be limited to, encouraging applications from people from under-represented groups, making links with community groups and sharing vacancies with them, and using specialist recruitment platforms or agencies.
- Continue to be accredited as a 'Disability Confident' employer and interview every candidate who declares that they have a disability and meet the essential job criteria.

- Encourage ethnically diverse people to apply for jobs with us, and interview every ethnic-minority candidate who declares this, and who meets the essential job criteria.

Training and Development

We will:

- Ensure that all staff and Board receive suitable, and regular training on EDI so that they understand their rights, responsibilities, and North Star's approach.
- Support all staff to develop their full potential, so that their talents and resources can be fully utilised to maximise the efficiency of the Organisation.

Use data to drive actions

We will:

- Collate and analyse demographic data on Board, Customers and Candidates for employment.
- Use data to identify areas of under representation, inequality, issues, and to target action.
- Develop a set of metrics to enable us to track progress against our EDI commitments.

Procurement of services

We will:

- Adopt procurement practices that ensure contractors and suppliers demonstrate a genuine culture of inclusion and equality of opportunity.

Transparency

We will:

- Annually publish information about progress on our equality, diversity, and inclusion commitments. This will include:
 - Updates on initiatives.
 - Progress against key commitments.
 - Data and analysis

6 Policy Breaches

North Star will not tolerate unfair treatment and discrimination and expects everyone we work with to share our commitment to eliminating discrimination. We adopt a zero-tolerance approach and will take prompt and strong action to deal with unfair discrimination, bullying, harassment, or victimisation by any individual or organisation connected with us.

Staff who have any concern or feel that they have been subject to discrimination, bullying or harassment should speak to their Line Manager or a member of the People Services team. The following policies provide more guidance and includes advice on raising concerns or complaints:

- Bullying and Harassment
- Code of Conduct for Staff and Board
- Domestic Abuse
- Disciplinary
- Grievance
- Sexual Harassment
- Transitioning in the workplace
- Whistleblowing

If you have any questions about this policy, please contact the Director of People.