

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Statement

Our commitment

At Onward we want to create an inclusive and diverse organisation that meets the needs of both our customers and colleagues.

We are committed to promoting equality of opportunity, as well as creating communities and working environments that are inclusive and free from discrimination or harassment.

We value diversity and recognise the benefits of employing a diverse workforce. As an employer and through our work in providing homes and services, we will help ensure fair treatment for all members of the community regardless of race, ethnic origin, nationality, gender, disability, religion, marital status, maternity, sexual orientation, or age.

This is our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion in employment and service delivery, and here we set out how we will meet and exceed the legal requirements outlined in the Equality Act of 2010 and Human Rights Act of 1998.

Our duties

As a social housing provider, we have not only a responsibility but a desire to promote equality of opportunity. The 2010 Equality Act makes discrimination unlawful in relation to the nine 'protected characteristics', age, marriage and civil partnership, religion and belief, disability, pregnancy and maternity, sex, gender re-assignment, race, and sexual orientation.

We want to make sure that our services are accessible to everyone, and will seek to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, and victimisation
- Advance equality of opportunity
- Foster good relations (tackling prejudice and promoting understanding through allyship).

The Social Housing Regulator sets out the regulatory standards which require registered housing providers to respond to the needs of diverse residents. Providers are required to treat all residents with fairness and respect including those with protected characteristics and those with additional support needs. This is in keeping with our core value of RESPECT.

Our principles

Onward aims to be open, inclusive, and diverse. Our values mean we believe everyone has a right to be treated with dignity, fairness, and respect. These principles guide our work to ensure we:

- Create a diverse workforce and inclusive workplace.
- Understand the diverse needs of our customers and promote equality, diversity and inclusion with our customers, partners, stakeholders, and supply chain.
- Promote equality of opportunity in employment and services and deliver appropriate, flexible and accessible services.
- Challenge prejudice discrimination and harassment

Our approach

Employment Provisions

All equality characteristics are monitored to ensure our workforce represent our communities, together with our attraction and recruitment information to support progression against protected characteristics.

We ask for colleagues to voluntarily provide us with 'equalities monitoring information'. This information will allow us to:

- Understand the make-up of our colleagues
- Identify any under-represented groups enabling us to address the gaps
- Ensure that our recruitment processes are fair and effective
- Fulfil any support needs that our colleagues may have

We recognise that overcoming barriers to equality of opportunity can require positive action. We will consider measures where we believe we can address such barriers, which include:

- Supporting recruitment of people with disabilities, as a recognised 'positive about disability' employer.
- The use of apprenticeships and other learning and development opportunities to encourage applications and career progression from underrepresented groups.
- Making 'reasonable adjustments' for potential candidates during the recruitment process as well as enabling colleagues to be their authentic self at work.

We have a range of HR policies to support and enable our colleagues to balance their work life responsibilities with their personal life. These include:

- Modern ways of working to deliver services and meet the needs of our customers.
- Flexible working arrangements including, but not limited to, home working, condensed working, part-time and job share opportunities.
- A focus on family friendly policies including maternity, paternity and parental leave and health and wellbeing, including mental health support with dedicated Mental Health First Aiders and our accessible Employee Assistance Programme.
- Effective HR policies to deal with any matters relating to discrimination.

In addition the colleague Equity Forum, and our supporting network groups, are committed to helping Onward to ensure we continue to have an inclusive working environment. We meet so that we can listen and respond to the experiences of colleagues with a diverse range of backgrounds and interests to identify and address barriers that prevent inclusivity.

Harassment anti-social behaviour and domestic violence

We are committed to dealing promptly and effectively with harassment (racial and other), anti-social behaviour and domestic violence affecting customers and colleagues. Our Safer Neighbourhood Team deal with serious cases and support colleagues in tackling issues affecting customers and communities where we work.

We have effective policies and procedures on bullying and harassment and whistleblowing for our colleagues.

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Training

We will ensure that all employees, the Onward Board, and our Customer Scrutiny Board understand the importance of equality, diversity and inclusion. We will provide a mandatory and regular programme of equality training that underpins our values.

In addition we will play an active role in initiatives which provide opportunity and development to underrepresented groups to progress without barrier or restriction.

Procurement

We are committed to achieving best value in procurement while upholding our equality and diversity principles. We ensure this policy is reflected in all suppliers or contractors working on our behalf and our principles are maintained in their dealings with customers and colleagues. Where appropriate, we will use opportunities that arise through procurement to achieve social value and inclusive outcomes.

Data protection

Onward needs to collect, process and store personal information about tenants, employees, suppliers, and other business contacts to carry out its business and provide its services. The use of personal information will be treated with full regard to data protection legislation. We will ensure data is processed lawfully, accurate, secure, relevant, and retained for the appropriate period.

Service Provisions

Understanding our customers

We are committed to delivering excellent customer services. To ensure that our services are accessible and meet customer's needs, we will collect customer profile information on a voluntary basis. We will capture information on age, gender, religion, ethnicity, disability, and main language.

Tailoring services for customers

We will use customer information to tailor our services according to their individual needs. For example, we will:

- Work towards ensuring communications are sent to customers in their preferred format
- Provide relevant customer information to our contractors to ensure works carried out are done so with customer needs are understood
- Provide additional support where it is required e.g., via our Adaptation service
- Ensure our offices are accessible

Listening to our customers

We believe that developing meaningful relationships with our customers is critical to the long-term success of Onward. Our customers have the best insight into how good our homes and services really are. We value every opportunity to engage with and listen to our customers.

Our Customer Engagement Community is currently made up of over 2700 customers. We regularly monitor and report on the profile of our engaged customers and put measures in place to encourage greater involvement from any under-represented groups.

Whilst some of our customers may prefer a more active role others may choose to engage using reactive services such as calling us to report a repair. We understand that not all customers want to engage with us directly and that different methods (online surveys, social media for example) will provide greater opportunities for customers to get involved.

Our engagement activities include:

- Customer Scrutiny Board where customers can formally review our performance and check service provision
- A clear and personal complaints resolution process
- Surveys seeking views and opinions on specific service areas
- Activities to shape and influence services
- Influencing local and national policy
- Social media, including comments and feedback
- Social investment and wellbeing activities
- Local initiatives (community days, coffee mornings)

Other forms of engagement:

- Publications and information such as our newsletter
- Maintaining our website with relevant and up to date community news and information
- Tenancy and customer support provided by our colleagues and contractors on the phone or in person
- Digital and self-service solutions
- We will work with partners organisations to share best practice and deliver local projects that support our customer groups and diverse communities

Feedback from our engagement activities is used to continuously improve our service delivery.

Throughout our engagement activities, we encourage positive and appropriate behaviours by developing terms of reference and codes of conduct where appropriate. We will deliver and commission training on equality, diversity, and inclusion issues to members of our Customer Engagement Community.

Our Customer Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Forum will work with us to ensure that our services remain accessible and meet the needs of all Onward.