



Single Equality Scheme  
2014-2017

Opening Doors, Building Communities

Bernicia believes that equality and diversity is not just about meeting legal and regulatory requirements, it is **fundamental** to the way we deliver our services and perform as an employer.

## Our Vision, Mission and Values

**Vision:** Helping to create places where people want to live.

**Mission:** Our business supports this Vision by investing in neighbourhoods and communities and offering a wide range of homes and services that meet the requirements of our residents and customers.



Customer Service



Quality



Teamwork



Leadership



Integrity

## What is our Single Equality Scheme?

Bernicia's Single Equality Scheme, Opening Doors, Building Communities, sets out how we will tackle discrimination and promote equality. We developed our first Equality Scheme in 2011 in consultation with customers, staff, local interest groups, the Housing Diversity Network and Equality North East. Through the scheme we have made many strides forward but we know we cannot rest on our laurels and in this, our second Single Equality Scheme, while we have set out some of our main achievements, we want to concentrate on the future, setting out a number of new objectives for the next 3 years.

## Background

The Equality Act (2010) brings together all the legal requirements on equality that we must meet and ensures a consistent approach to addressing discrimination against the nine protected characteristics.

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



## Equality Statement

Bernicia provides social housing and services to a wide range of customers from different age groups, backgrounds and cultures.

All our tenants are equally important, but we recognise they have different needs that require specialist services and management. We acknowledge our role in helping to tackle deprivation and discrimination through providing better services which are more inclusive and accessible, and introducing measures to combat discrimination in day-to-day operational services. We believe a socially inclusive society is more likely to prosper and thrive than one where exclusion and inequalities are left unchecked.

### We are committed to:

- Ensuring there are no discriminatory practices in any aspect of our work and we will be proactive in challenging prejudice, complacency and apathy.
- Ensuring that equality of opportunity remains an integral feature of everything we do.
- Achieving a diverse board and workforce, recognising the value that access to a wide range of talent and abilities brings to the Group and whole community.
- Making a contribution to the overall prosperity and well-being of individuals and communities by addressing factors that leave people and communities socially isolated and excluded.





“We recognise the need to understand the region we work in”

## Local Overview

Bernicia is based in the North East of England with properties in seven local authorities. We recognise the need to understand the region we work in and to have a picture of inequality in the region across the protected characteristics.

The English Indices of Deprivation 2010 identifies small areas of England which are experiencing multiple aspects of deprivation. There are **32,482 such areas in England** referred to as Lower Super Output Areas (LSOA's) each with a population of **approximately 1500**.

By using the IMD 2010 local authority summary we can identify seven north east local authorities that fall within the **30% most deprived in England**. Around 6,000 of our properties are in south east Northumberland where **47 lower super output areas** are ranked as being amongst the 30% most deprived in England.

Research carried out by Northumbria University and published in “Equality in the North East: a statistical profile” in 2008, gives an insight into trends in equality and diversity across the region while the Census of 2011 gives us more up-to-date information on the ethnic diversity of the region, which, while it has increased greatly since the previous Census, still remains one of the least diverse in the country.

This information has informed our single equality scheme.

# 6,000

of our properties fall within the **30% threshold** of the most deprived areas in England.

## Progress since our 2011 Equality Scheme:

A small selection of what we have achieved:

- Equality Standard “Gold” Award.
- Commitment to equality and diversity (E&D) demonstrated via:
  - Equality Statement developed and included in various published documents.
  - Improvements to website accessibility and E&D and recruitment pages.
  - A pledge to represent Bernicia as an inclusive and welcoming to all groups in society through positive images in our literature and general publicity.
- Board recruitment pack developed with the aim of improving the diversity of our boards and committees.
- E&D Panel made up of Board, Tenant and Director E&D Champions and staff representing all aspects of the organisation established, sitting quarterly and reporting to the Corporate Development Committee.
- Collection and regular review of information used to monitor how well our board, staff and tenants reflect the area we serve to help determine positive action required.
- Volunteer work for a person with learning disabilities, offering meaningful and interesting work, creating positive attitudes towards diversity and improving communication skills amongst staff.
- Competencies, including equality and diversity competency, introduced.
- Sponsoring of LGBT virtual network giving LGBT staff a forum to discuss employment issues and information on LGBT events and issues in the area.
- Improvements to HR policies such as Dignity at Work and Pay and Benefits and extension of rights to flexible working and reasonable adjustments.
- Systems overhauled and streamlined to ensure that our services can be customised to meet individual needs of our tenants.
- Residents over 60 surveyed to help us identify demand for future care requirements with choices for residents promoted.

# So what's next?

## What we plan to do:

A small selection of objectives from our Action Plan for the next three years.

- Review options for improving the diversity of our boards and committees.
- Improve E&D awareness of board members via training and board reports.
- Improve information held on the area in which we operate to help determine positive action to make our services more accessible and staff, board and tenant composition reflective of the area.
- Develop pay and reward processes further.
- Carry out equal pay audits by gender, age and ethnicity.
- E&D training for all staff and board members.
- Review options for improving recruitment processes, including use of competencies, advertising and positive action to be taken.
- Review the collection, monitoring and use of profiling information on tenants.
- Research ways in which tenant panels can scrutinise, monitor and review our services for E&D.
- Review services for making communications more accessible.





“We continue to improve our knowledge and understanding of our customers.”

## Our commitment

This is our second single equality scheme and it will help us to ensure that:

- We have effective leadership and governance arrangements in place to scrutinise performance in E&D.
- Our services are non-discriminatory by assessing the impact of our policies, procedures, strategies and core services.
- We provide excellent customer service that responds to the individual needs of our customers.
- We continue to improve our knowledge and understanding of our customers ensuring that services are shaped and reviewed using that knowledge and understanding.
- Our workforce will understand and promote our commitment to E&D.
- Our board and workforce will broadly reflect the communities we work in.

## For more information

If you have any questions or would like to know more about our single equality scheme, please contact Sue Harding-Smith on **0191 238 3806** or email [sue.harding-smith@bernicia.com](mailto:sue.harding-smith@bernicia.com)

All our publications can be made available on request in large print, braille, or audio and in other languages.

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