



Equalities Scheme 2023-2028

Valuing Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

1. Introduction and Background

This Equalities Scheme sets out Southway Housing Trust's commitment to promoting and valuing Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI), in our role as a community-based housing provider and as an employer.

The Scheme defines our vision, aims and objectives regarding equality, diversity and inclusion and explains the steps we will take to achieve these.

Manchester is recognised as one of Europe's most culturally diverse cities. Southway's long-term vision is to create '**Thriving Communities**' across South Manchester embracing its rich diversity.

This vision is underpinned by our values of being **Caring, Committed** and **Successful Together**.

A key objective for us is to 'use our skills and resources to address inequality, reduce poverty and improve lives in our diverse communities. We support, advise, and enable people to achieve their potential and live well.'

We are proud of our role as a key strategic partner and are committed to treating everyone with respect, equity, and fairness across our services.

2. Equalities Scheme – Our Approach

2.1 Our Equalities Scheme underpins our vision and is central to how we work with our customers to ensure we are both inclusive and accessible.

As an employer, being fair and inclusive is equally important and we believe that colleagues who are treated fairly and with respect are more likely to feel engaged with Southway and its vision and values and have increased job satisfaction and engagement.

2.2 Our **Vision** for the Equalities Scheme is that **equality, diversity and inclusion** are central to everything we do.

In our communities and workplace, the Employers' Network for Equality, and Inclusion (ENEI) defines these terms as follows:

Equality is the foundation, where everyone – whether they live in a Southway home or they are employed by or seeking employment with Southway - has equality of opportunity.

Diversity is valuing diverse backgrounds, views, and approaches, whether that is in our communities or attracting and retaining diverse talent to our team of staff.

Inclusion is the active involvement of customers and staff in the activities and decisions that shape our organisation.

We also recognise that individual experiences are shaped by the combination of their personal characteristics (see section 3.1), known as intersectionality. We acknowledge that everyone has their own unique experiences of discrimination and oppression and that we must consider everything and anything that can marginalise people.

2.3 Our **Aims** are:

- To understand the diverse needs of our customers and communities and provide fully accessible and inclusive services.
- To foster a diverse workforce with a wide range of experiences and skills where difference is respected and valued.
- For our Governance structures to fully reflect the diversity of the communities we serve.
- To promote equality, diversity and inclusion and take a zero-tolerance stance against active discrimination, we will speak up and listen.

3. **Legislation, Regulation and Best Practice**

3.1 The Equality Act 2010 makes it unlawful to discriminate, victimise or harass anyone based on the following protected characteristics:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender re-assignment
- Marriage and Civil Partnerships
- Pregnancy and Maternity
- Race
- Religion or Belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

Southway has also adopted four additional protected characteristics:

- Armed Forces Veterans
- Carers
- Socio-economic status
- Care Leavers

3.2 The Act places a general duty on all organisations carrying out a public function to seek to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination.
- Advance equality of opportunity

- Foster good relations, tackle prejudice and promote understanding.

3.3 We have adopted socio-economic status as a protected characteristic. Given the levels of poverty, health inequality, and disadvantage in our communities Southway holds, this as a key area of focus.

We will therefore work to address financial and health inequalities, reduce poverty, and empower people to achieve their full potential and live well.

We will also consider intersectionality and the fact that disadvantage is increased where people hold more than one protected characteristic and will reflect this in our work with our customers and our staff.

3.4 The Regulator of Social Housing requires Southway, as a provider of social and affordable housing, to comply with its Consumer Standards; this includes:

1. Taking action to deliver fair access to, and equitable outcomes of, housing and landlord services for all tenants.
2. Demonstrate that they understand the different needs of their tenants, including in relation to the equality strands and tenants with additional support needs.

4. Priorities and Actions

Our Equalities priorities and the action plan that we use to monitor these have been set using the following themes from our Futures Strategy:

Our Customers, Our Homes, Our Neighbourhoods, A Social Business and Financially Strong, and Our Colleagues

The main commitments and activities that we will carry out in support of these themes are:

4.1 For our customers – We Will:

- Regularly collect necessary customer data, advise our customers as to why we do this, keep accurate records, and then use it responsibly to inform the way we shape our services and policies so that they are responsive to diverse needs.
- Deliver services using age-friendly principles to enable people to age well, reducing isolation and loneliness.
- Be open and transparent when explaining why services are designed in the way that they are, including ensuring that our policies are readily available to customers visiting our website.
- Provide advice and support to tenants to maximise their incomes and support people to move into work.

- Shape and deliver services that recognise individuals' specific needs and adjustments to help sustain their tenancies.
- Ensure there is equity in accessing all our services by taking action to redress any imbalances identified and updating relevant Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs).
- Find out where we have gaps in our service offer and seek to make reasonable adjustments to enable people with both visible and invisible disabilities or long-term health conditions to gain access to services.
- Learn from services already designed around the principles of equity - acknowledgement that there are historically underserved and underrepresented populations - and individual needs and identify how this can be replicated.
- Identify intersectionality and reflect in our work that, for some individuals, multiple personal characteristics intersect with one another and overlap, putting them at a higher risk of unconscious bias, discrimination, or other negative outcomes.
- Ensure that the tenant voice runs through the services we provide, and we will facilitate and include customer input when shaping our services.
- Promote digital inclusion and provide opportunities for more people to get online.
- Ensure that our website is accessible and easy to navigate.

4.2 **For our Homes – We Will:**

- Recognise specific customer needs when prioritising works, and adapt services based on these where it is practicable.
- Allocate our homes to people using a fair and clear lettings policy based on housing need.
- Carry out adaptations and other adjustments to homes to enable people to live independently and have a better quality of life.
- Commit to building homes that meet the needs of people throughout their lives, including supplying accessible homes as part of our development strategy.
- Design developments of new builds with accessibility in mind, including sufficient provision of parking for both Blue Badge holders and those without to limit pavement parking, which may make streets impassable for wheelchair users.
- Provide homes that are well maintained to allow customers to live to a good standard, regardless of their situation.
- Take action to ensure that boundary treatments on Southway properties are properly maintained to prevent obstruction of pavements and ensure safety and accessibility for wheelchairs, scooters, prams, and other mobility aids.
- Make homes affordable by having a range of different types of tenures including social rent.
- Reduce the cost of running homes by providing energy-efficient measures and energy advice.
- Provide our customers with the best start when beginning a tenancy by setting out clear expectations, ensuring that they are aware of available

support and introduced to services that will help them make their house a home.

4.3 For our Neighbourhoods – We Will:

- Have a strong presence in our communities to support people to live well and safely, working in partnership with local community groups and support agencies.
- Act as a Third-Party Reporting Centre for hate crime and deal quickly and effectively with anti-social behaviour and hate crime incidents.
- Comply with best practice when dealing with cases of domestic abuse.
- Deliver community investment activities that support people to move into work, improve their financial resilience and reduce poverty.
- Support those in our communities most impacted by socio-economic circumstances.
- Make reasonable adjustments to enable people with visible or invisible disabilities or long-term health conditions to gain access to services.
- Be a key strategic partner and work with key stakeholders across the communities that we serve to promote best practice in equality and inclusion.

4.4 To be a Social Business and Financially Strong – We Will:

- Assess our performance against the Employers Network for Equality & Inclusion's (ENEI) Tidemark standard.
- Benchmark our equality and diversity outcomes against Greater Manchester and Manchester City Council data, and work towards the gold standard of ENEI Tidemark benchmarking during the Equalities Scheme lifecycle.
- Deliver the Mind Wellness Action Plan
- Highlight equality and diversity impacts identified in EIAs, case studies, complaints, and feedback in all Board reports, to ensure the Board can take these into account when making decisions.
- Report to the Board annually on the delivery of this Scheme
- Produce our policies and other documents in Plain English and where relevant provide short, easy-to-read summaries.
- Have clear policies on leave and time off, and flexible and home working, responding to needs arising through pregnancy, maternity, adoption and parenting, caring responsibilities, and needs arising due to disability and ill-health.
- Provide all managers with training and guidance on how to support staff and respond to requests for flexible working within individual needs.
- Have clear policies on conduct, bullying and harassment, and grievance, and deal with any issues promptly and consistently with oversight of performance on issue handling under a panel of vetted managers and staff training in equality and diversity, and conflict resolution.

- Achieve gold status as part of the Armed Forces Covenant by introducing measures outlined in the UK Government Defence Employer Recognition Scheme.
- Have an accessible website that enables translation, modification of text size and audio content, and includes easy-to-find information about our services and policies.
- Require all contractors/suppliers/consultants to commit to working within our EDI standards.
- Conduct Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) on all relevant policies, strategies, and services to reduce the risk of these disadvantaging any protected group.

4.5 **For our Colleagues – We Will:**

- Increase the number of opportunities available and encourage and work with our local customers to apply for employment and apprenticeships within Southway.
- Induct and train all our staff so that they fully understand our commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, and the importance of this to their ways of working and behaviours.
- Support our EDI staff group and networks in having a platform to discuss EDI.
- Undertake awareness-raising and training activities, including disability confidence training, cultural awareness, and others.
- Record and monitor diversity data relating to job applicants, employees, and Board members.
- Take positive action to try to achieve a better balance where there is evidence of underrepresentation of a particular group in certain roles or at certain pay grades - for example, the BOOST programme.
- Guarantee interviews to any applicant who has a disability or long-term health condition and/or is an ex-member of the Armed Forces and meets the minimum requirements of the job.
- Conduct fair, competency-based selection processes based on skills and ability with transparent guidance available for managers and applicants.
- Manage and support staff to apply for promotion based on their skills, abilities, and performance.
- Regularly review our pay policy and pay gap monitoring to ensure equity.
- Conduct a staff satisfaction survey at least every two years and assess the results of this based on various diversity strands.
- Have clear transparent information available to staff on the type of data that we hold, and why we hold it.
- Remove any barriers to establishing an open and inclusive work culture through the work of our Equality & Inclusion Business Partner, Equality & Inclusion Steering Group, comprehensive training programme, and actions arising out of associated processes.

5. **Stakeholder Responsibilities**

- 5.1 Everyone working for and with Southway is responsible for promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion, with a clear understanding of Southway's approach and the importance of fairness, equality, and respect for differences.
- 5.2 Managers will lead by example demonstrating the behaviours expected of all staff.
- 5.3 All stakeholders will aim to act within the principles of equity across the business.
- 5.4 Specific Roles and Responsibilities

The Board provides strategic leadership to the organisation and has overall responsibility for this Equalities Scheme and ensuring that our actions and plans are effective and focused on the right things. The Board has adopted the National Federation of Housing's Code of Governance, taking an active lead in committing to equality of opportunity, diversity, and inclusion in all the organisation's activities as well as in their own composition. The Board is currently supported by an EDI Co-optee.

The Chief Executive is the executive lead on equality, diversity, and inclusion, and is responsible for providing assurance to the Board that this scheme is being effectively delivered.

The Equalities (E&D) Group – a small group of staff led by the Chief Executive that is responsible for setting the Equalities Scheme and Action Plan, and then leading on its delivery.

EDI Staff Group- a group of allies and advocates who will contribute innovative ideas to shape Southway's plans for EDI and further our commitment to inclusivity, diversity, and equity.

All staff and volunteers are expected to work within the ethos of the Equalities Scheme.

Data collection and management is a collective responsibility:

- Tenant - People and Places
- Colleague - Human Resources
- Property - Property & Development
- Governance - Corporate Services
- Reporting/Benchmarking - Business Intelligence

Suppliers, contractors, and consultants who work for Southway must share our commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion. Where suppliers provide services directly to our customers, they must comply with our policy and procedures.

6. Measuring our Success

An action plan has been developed for the Strategy and will be reported on and reviewed with the Southway Board and for customer facing services the People and Places Committee on an annual basis.

There are direct links to other strategies including Community Investment and Age Friendly and we will report on the achievements made on these through separate reporting.

7. Related Strategies:

- Futures Strategy
- Communication Strategy
- Community Investment Strategy
- Customer Voice Strategy
- Digital Access Strategy

8. Glossary

Equality is the foundation, where everyone has equality of opportunity.

Diversity is valuing diverse backgrounds, views, and approaches.

Inclusion is the active involvement of a diverse range of people in the activities and decisions that shape an organisation.

Equity ensures that all individual's needs are met through reasonable adjustments or other accommodations. If equality of opportunity for all is the goal, then equity is how we get there.

Intersectionality recognises that for some individuals, multiple personal characteristics intersect with one another and overlap, increasing the risk of unconscious bias, discrimination, and other negative outcomes; for example, the double discrimination of racism and sexism experienced by ethnically diverse women.

Protected Characteristics – nine characteristics outlined by the Equality Act 2010 making it unlawful to discriminate, victimise or harass anyone based on their age, disability, gender re-assignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.