

The Rent Service Race, Disability and Gender Equality Schemes 2008 – 2011

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Foreword



The introduction of housing benefit reforms, including the new Local Housing Allowance in April 2008, is part of the Government's wider Welfare Reform agenda, culminating in the Welfare Reform Bill, which received Royal Assent in May 2007.

This has meant that fundamental changes have taken place in the operational activities of The Rent Service since the publication of our last equality scheme in December 2006.

The new housing benefit system will no longer require a separate stand alone body to support it and Ministers have announced that the remaining functions of The Rent Service will transfer to the Valuation Office Agency in April 2009. Structural change to the business is set to continue as part of our Transform Programme, until the merger date.

In the meantime we have continued with a programme of diversity awareness for our staff in order that they can continue to provide high levels of customer service and reflect the communities they serve.

Our diversity and equality strategy is overseen by the Equality Board, whose members come from the most senior levels of the Agency and reflects our commitment to diversity at the highest level. The Equality Board will ensure that all elements of diversity will remain an important part of our agenda while our Transform Programme continues.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patrick Boyle". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Patrick Boyle

**Chief Executive
The Rent Service**

Introduction

Our equality scheme and action plans are designed to include the principles of equality and fairness in all that we do and are aimed to be inclusive of all of our staff and customers. As a result the Agency treats all areas of diversity equally and we are working towards having one scheme which covers race, disability and gender as well as other areas of diversity. Action plans for the individual diversity strands are contained as annexes to the scheme.

The Rent Service is an executive Agency of the Department for Work and Pensions, and does not have its own public service agreement objectives and targets. As a front line service delivery organisation The Agency contributes to the Department's overall public service agreement objectives and targets.

In our equality schemes annual progress reports published in November 2007, we explained that we had decided to review all our equality schemes in 2008 for the following reasons:

- race legislation requires race equality schemes to be reviewed by May 2008;
- to take on board comments on our first disability and gender equality schemes;
- to move towards our objective of mainstreaming and aligning with the usual April-March planning cycle used across government, and to align our cycle with the Spending Review cycle; and
- to move towards a single equality scheme.

This will help to embed diversity and equality into the way we do business. As this review is significantly earlier than required for disability and gender, we discussed this decision with the Disability Rights Commission and the Equal Opportunities Commission before they became part of the Commission for Equality and Human Rights in October 2007. They supported the proposal to carry out the third year review early with a 'light touch' review of our disability and gender equality schemes at the same time as we review our race equality schemes.

Overview of Progress

The Rent Service has been working towards having a single equality scheme in place since December 2006 that covers race, gender and disability as well as other diversity and equality issues.

The race equality scheme has been in place since May 2002 and was reviewed in May 2005. We have issued progress reports since the introduction of the combined equality scheme, the last being issued in November 2007 and these are available on our public internet site at www.therentservice.gov.uk

Since that time The Rent Service have moved our actions forward including:

- Following the successful roll out of diversity awareness training for all staff, we continue to raise diversity awareness amongst staff through updating our diversity intranet site as well as rolling out a training workshop on disability confidence to all staff which was completed by the end of April 2008.
- Carrying out impact assessments of policy and procedures issued to all staff as well as major publications to customers.
- Meetings of the Equality Board to review strategy and monitor progress in our action plans including offering The Rent Service staff the option of joining Valuation Office Agency diversity consultative groups from September 2008 in advance of the merger of the organisations.
- Monitoring our staffing statistics for gender race and disability and publishing the results in our Annual Report.
- Working with the Valuation Office Agency to review both organisations' diversity and equality policies procedures and practices with a view to recommending the best practices to be adopted in time for the merger in April 2009.

Consultation and Involvement

As part of our continued commitment to a high quality standard of service, we work in close partnership with our staff, customers and stakeholders, including our trade unions, to ensure that users of services are not adversely affected by the organisational changes that are taking place. In order to do this we undertake a range of measures to ensure these groups are consulted and involved and their views incorporated in the preparation of our equality scheme and action plans.

- We consult with our customers through customer satisfaction surveys which ask diversity questions to ascertain whether customers feel the service they receive has been affected due to their background. Customers are given the chance to feed back on the standard of service they receive and comments are analysed.
- Staff are also consulted via an annual staff survey which includes a diversity section. They are also able to feed back on diversity issues they may have via the Head of Diversity Health and Safety who will take forward any concerns raised. If staff have any unresolved issues dispute resolution through mediation is available via our Welfare Unit or as a last resort a formal grievance procedure.

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- We monitor complaints from our customers as and when they arise and taking appropriate corrective action if required. Complaints from customers on diversity issues are referred to the Head of Diversity Health and Safety to ensure that customers are satisfied with our responses.
- We also consult with customer representatives through our Departmental customer workshops and actions arising are fed into action plans as necessary.
- As landlord and tenants are important customers of the organisation, we attend local fora locally to our offices to give advice on our services and giving members of the public a chance to comment and give feedback on our service.
- We will work with the Valuation Office Agency to compare our ranges of stakeholder consultation and involvement and consider the opportunity for our staff to join diversity consultative groups as part of a larger organisation.
- We undertake an annual review and report of the progress of our schemes and action plans and publish these updates externally giving customers an opportunity to comment.

Impact assessment

As a public service provider, our activities could have adverse effects on our customers and partners. In order to identify these effects and minimise any potential adverse impact we conduct impact assessments.

As the Agency is not responsible for drafting legislative policy, and the main functions of The Rent Service are set out in statute, the legislation and Government policy we work to is drafted by main Government departments and will be impact assessed via their processes.

Our duties bring us into contact with a number of customers and stakeholders who we wish to treat with respect and fairness. Therefore we have a process for use by staff to impact assess our internal policies and guidance, for race, disability, gender and other diversity areas as well as our published documentation, which has been in place since 2006. We completed the impact assessment of our existing guidance during 2006/07 and now impact assess all new and revised guidance.

All our senior managers who are responsible for developing internal guidance and policy are trained in impact assessment using an assessment tool with additional guidance to support these processes. The assessment process is overseen by the HR Directorate and places responsibility on senior managers, who are required to consider the extent to which policies meet the general duty and do not inadvertently lead to unlawful discrimination.

By continuing to work with our partners, including following our parent Department's processes, other Government Departments and our trade unions, customers and suppliers, we will improve our assessment systems following any feedback received. These measures embed the principles of diversity and equality in our interaction with all of our customer groups.

We will continue to screen our guidance to staff to ensure that they treat our customers and stakeholders with equality and fairness. We will also work with the Valuation Office Agency to ensure the best standards of impact assessment is continued following the merger of the organisations.

As a result of impact assessments we do amend our ways of working to account for customers' varying needs. This has included printing our service information leaflets in size 14 font and making our Internet site more accessible. We have reviewed our HR guidance to staff and produced a cultural guide to help staff to give them greater understanding of cultural and ethnic differences. We are undertaking a review of our main guidance to operational staff who undertake visits and the impact assessment process is under way to highlight any remedial action required. As part of the impact assessment process we carried out a review of under represented groups in The Rent Service the results of this review during 2006/2007 have been fed into our action plans.

In assessing our impact we:

- Assess our new and existing procedures and guidance to identify any potential adverse impact on minority groups and to work to reduce or eliminate adverse impacts where practicable.
- Identify any adverse impacts and feed these into the action plans. Progress will be monitored by the Equality Board.
- Advise the relevant authority where an adverse impact is identified in the course of our duties in an area in which The Rent Service is not the policy maker;
- Publish the outcomes of the assessment process and identify areas of improvement on our internet site and in hard copy upon request.
- During 2007-08 we have carried out 9 impact assessments on internal guidance and published documents with no decisions needing to be changed as a result of these assessments.

Monitoring and Evaluation

We monitor, analyse and evaluate a range of information on our staff to meet the specific requirements of the Race Relations Act, the Disability Discrimination Act and the Equality Act. This helps us to ensure that our staff from under-represented groups receive equal outcomes and are able to fulfil their potential. Our employment data is reported in the Department for Work and Pensions equality schemes in the chapter on Corporate Human Resources.

The Agency has monitored its staff by ethnicity, gender, disability and age since 2003 and also publishes this data in the Annual Report and Accounts since 2006. The purpose of monitoring is to help decide whether our policies are working, by maintaining statistical data on the number of employees and applicants for jobs and identify if there are any barriers to recruitment, career development and retention. Monitoring of staff data also helps to comply with requests for information by The Cabinet Office as well as complying with legislative requirements.

We have also introduced exit interviews and questionnaires for staff leaving the organisation to ensure that they are not leaving because of discrimination harassment or bullying. So far results from exit interviews show no one leaving the agency on the grounds outlined above.

Extent to which policies, functions and services meet the needs of disabled people

We carry out a series of consultations with disabled people in our day-to-day activities. Owing to the size of The Rent Service these consultations are in line with our resources. In the course of our functions we carry out inspections of property and come into contact with tenants and landlords from a wide variety of backgrounds. Our staff are trained to treat everyone with equality, fairness and respect.

Where we are advised of individual needs in advance, we will do everything within our control to adapt our service to meet people's various needs.

The following are examples of how we adapt to the differing needs of disabled people.

- We make adjustments to our estate to make our premises accessible to all, including disabled people. These include the provision of ramps to aid wheelchair access and induction loop systems in reception areas of our offices.
- We make reasonable adjustments to the working conditions of our disabled staff, including the provision of specialist equipment and furniture and reporting the outcomes of these adjustments.

- We provide a range of our service leaflets and publications in different formats, including large print, Braille and audio tape, as well as in a range of different languages.
- We train our staff in diversity issues so they do not inadvertently discriminate on grounds of disability and are currently rolling out a programme of disability confidence training.
- We carry out regular customer and staff satisfaction surveys and analyse the results according to gender, ethnicity and disability, where this information is provided. Outcomes are fed into our action plans as necessary.

Procurement

In developing relationships with our suppliers we have regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment and promote equality of opportunity. We ensure that our business procurement processes are explicit, including in our invitation to tender specifications. They outline responsibilities in relation to legislation and we expect contractors to provide evidence of their equality policies. All contracts let are made in accordance with good practice and available guidance from the Office of Government Commerce, the Cabinet Office and the Department for Work and Pensions, including Office of Government Commerce guidance on social issues in purchasing to ensure that our contractors and suppliers follow equality principles.

Equal pay

We aim to ensure equal pay for staff doing work of equal value by operating a pay system that is transparent and is based on objective criteria.

To achieve this we:

- use a systematic job evaluation scheme that incorporates the principles of equal pay;
- will undertake equal pay audits, including the monitoring of bonuses and allowances;
- provide guidance to managers involved in decisions about pay and benefits;
- consult regularly with our joint trade unions on these matters; and
- will review and improve this approach as appropriate.

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In so doing it is our objective to reward fairly the skills, experience and potential of all our staff, to avoid unfair discrimination, and as a result to continuously improve efficiency, productivity and operational effectiveness.

Progress reporting and reviewing

As part of our commitment to diversity we publish our equality scheme and action plans via the Internet and hard copies are available upon request. We also publish the results of our diversity achievements via the annual report and progress reports which will be available in similar formats. Our aims and goals for the business are published annually in the business plan. Once reviews have taken place, updated versions of the action plans will be posted on the website.

The equality schemes are reviewed every three years in order to set a new agenda and to meet legislative requirements. The review of schemes will be carried out in consultation with staff, customers and stakeholders so that the schemes are tailored to meet their requirements.

Annex 1 – Assessment of functions and policies

As required by legislation we have completed a review of our functions. As the Agency's main functions are laid out in legislation our functions do not change often. No major change has occurred to our functions since the last review in 2006 and as a result the possible adverse impact of our functions remains low. We do not draft government policy or legislation but apply the legislation we work to. Any potential adverse impact carried by the policy governing our work is normally owned by the Department for Work and Pensions and other government departments or agencies. However, if a potential adverse impact is identified we will raise this with our stakeholders and pass it on for further consideration.

We do issue internal guidance to staff as well as information to customers and clients.

The main functions of The Rent Service are to provide rental valuation services for the private rented housing sector for housing benefit purposes and the new local housing allowance that became operational in April 2008. The Rent Service also carry out fair rent determinations, non-statutory advice to customers and stakeholders within the public, private and charity sectors and provide advice to local authorities on the effects on rental valuations for housing renovation grant applications made by landlords.

The introduction of the local housing allowance is a new function to the Agency and applies this from April 2008. The local housing allowance is part of the Government's wider welfare reform agenda which is designed to provide housing benefit claimants with greater fairness, choice and personal responsibility, and creates a simpler and more transparent system for them to access housing benefit support. This policy will have been assessed by our parent department and is designed to lessen any adverse impact the current housing benefit system has. Much work has been done to prepare for the introduction of the local housing allowance. We have completed a comprehensive review of localities across England, including extensive consultation with our local authority customers.

Our residual role and functions will transfer to the Valuation Office Agency in April 2009 who will take over responsibility for these at that time.

Annex 2 – Race Equality Action Plan

The Rent Service treats all areas of diversity equally and is working towards one scheme which covers race, disability, gender as well as other areas of diversity. The race equality scheme action plan follows in this section.

We have had a race equality scheme and action plan in place since 2002 and have taken many actions since that time to promote race equality together with an environment where our staff and customers feel comfortable and free from discrimination and harassment.

Since launching the race equality scheme, the Agency has introduced many practices to promote equality some of which include:

- Our Race Equality Steering group which was succeeded by the Equality Board whose membership is made up of senior managers in the organisation to give a lead on race and diversity issues at the highest level.
- A review of under represented groups in the organisation to establish whether there any real or perceived barriers to career progression. Outcome from this have been fed into our action plans.
- Impact assessments on policy and guidance to reduce possible adverse impact for customers and staff if identified.
- Consultation with our staff and customers through surveys and acting upon feedback when provided.
- Producing a cultural guide for staff to improve interaction with clients having diverse cultural and religious backgrounds.
- Publication and monitoring of ethnicity statistics for staff via our annual report.
- Rollout of diversity awareness training for all staff during 2007.
- Commencing work with The Valuation Office Agency to compare and contrast our policies and procedures and adopt best practice in the run in to the merger of the two organisations in April 2009.

A full list of the actions we intend to continue with are contained in the following race equality action plan.

Objectives	Activities required	Timescales	Outcomes	Responsible officer	Progress
R1 (D1 G1) Ensure implementation and governance of 2008-2011 Race Equality Scheme	Ensure structures already in place provide strategic steer	June 2008 – May 2011	That all objectives are taken forward and actioned	HR Director	Equality Scheme reviewed and published
	Reporting arrangements in place via Equality Board	Equality Board meetings	Reports to Agency Management Board and staff	Head of Diversity, Health and Safety	Equality Board continues to oversee progress
	Revised scheme to be published	June 2011	Planned actions are achieved and continuance of good practice	Chief Executive	Actions progress monitored to ensure completion
	All elements of Action Plan reviewed at Equality Board half yearly, monitor and report progress	June 2008- May 2011 half yearly	Ensure actions are ongoing and completed to timescales	Chief Executive	Reviewed at Equality Board half yearly and reported. Work commenced to incorporate into Valuation Office Agency Schemes by April 2009

Objectives	Activities required	Timescales	Outcomes	Responsible officer	Progress
R2 (D2 G2) Assessment of role, functions and policies	Embed race equality strategy into all our functions and processes	June 2008 – May 2011	The Rent Service Action Plan reflects Department's equality schemes	Head of Diversity, Health and Safety	Functions are statutory and have been re-assessed for impact
		Annually	Progress reports completed annually and published	Head of Diversity, Health and Safety	Statistical information currently published in Annual Report
	Regular review of procedures, functions and guidance	June 2008 – May 2011	That all procedures, functions and policy adhere to the requirements of legislation	Chief Executive via Equality Board	Continue with regular reviews of The Rent Service guidance, functions and policy embedded updates on progress to Equality Board
R3 (D3 G3) Assessment of new functions and existing procedures	Impact assessment of all new policies and procedures	June 2008 – May 2011	Assessment of policies and procedures to be carried out by trained senior managers	All Equality Board members	Senior managers trained

Objectives	Activities required	Timescales	Outcomes	Responsible officer	Progress
R3 (D3 G3) Assessment of new functions and existing procedures <i>(continued)</i>	Where potential adverse impact found relevant policy making body is advised	June 2008 – May 2011	Relevant body advised	Head of Diversity, Health and Safety	Advised as required
R4 (D4 G4) Ensure arrangements to monitor functions and procedures for potential adverse impact on customers	Review of feedback from customers via customer satisfaction survey	June 2008 – May 2011	All procedures are in place and carried out correctly	Head of Communications	Customer Satisfaction Survey results reviewed by Agency Management Board and published annually
	Review complaints handling procedure maintain log and publish result	June 2008 – May 2011	Complaints regarding race to be handled appropriately and learning points are fed back into processes	Head of Communications	Continue with complaints log to ensure customer feedback is acted upon
	Implement recommendations from Audit and impact assessment reports	June 2008 – May 2011	Ensure procedures do not impact adversely on our customers and stakeholders	Finance Director/HR Director	Recommendations form part of action plan. New Actions to be added as required

Objectives	Activities required	Timescales	Outcomes	Responsible officer	Progress
R5 (D5 G5) Ensure arrangements for publishing the results of assessments, consultations and monitoring	Progress and information including surveys to be reported via Annual Reports and scheme progress reports	June 2008 – May 2011	Improved reporting arrangements	Head of Financial Services/Head of Diversity, Health and Safety	All details published in Annual Reports and equality scheme updates
	Publication of Equality Scheme and Action Plan	June 2008 – May 2011	Processes and decisions are transparent and accessible to the communities we serve and to our own people	Head of Communications	Equality Scheme published internally and externally
R6 (D6 G6) Ensure customers are consulted and have access to information and services	Service leaflets available in other languages than English	June 2008 – May 2011	Ensure no customer groups are disadvantaged in gaining access to services	Head of Communications	In place. Ongoing review
	Local liaison with ethnic minority groups	June 2008 – May 2011	All of customer base have information and accesses to The Rent Service services	Service Delivery Director	Local liaison with tenant and landlord groups ongoing

Objectives	Activities required	Timescales	Outcomes	Responsible officer	Progress
R6 (D6 G6) Ensure customers are consulted and have access to information and services <i>(continued)</i>	Review of annual customer satisfaction survey and staff surveys	June 2008 – May 2011	Ensure feedback from customers in all ethnicity groups is fed into planning process and guidance reviews	Head of Communications	In place annual review following results of customer satisfaction survey and staff survey
	Consider using Internet site user surveys to increase customer feedback on site content and format	June 2008 – May 2011	Increase knowledge of customer demographics and views	Head of Communications	Will be considered as part of regular website reviews
R7 (D7 G7) Ensure all staff have access to diversity awareness raising opportunities	Diversity module as part of the Induction course	June 2008 – May 2011	New employees aware of good practice and responsibilities	Head of HR Operations and Learning	Diversity module in place and reviewed regularly
	Diversity training for staff to include legislation changes	June 2008 – May 2011	To raise staff awareness on diversity issues including race	Head of HR Operations and Learning	Initial training complete. Ongoing specific training

Objectives	Activities required	Timescales	Outcomes	Responsible officer	Progress
R7 (D7 G7) Ensure all staff have access to diversity awareness raising opportunities (<i>continued</i>)	Raise awareness of race diversity issues via review of guidance and relevant publicity on intranet and publications	June 2008 – Mar 2011	Staff kept up to date on progress of diversity issues including race	Head of Diversity, Health and Safety	Update of guidance and publicity ongoing
	Update and review of Diversity and Equality Policies including Different but Equal Policy	June 2008 – Mar 2011	All strands of diversity are included in guidance and compliant, and staff fully informed	Head of Diversity, Health and Safety	Commenced complete review with view to merger with Valuation Office Agency 2009
	Consult staff on demand for and commitment to a Staff Diversity Network	June 2008 – June 2009	Possible staff diversity network to act as additional two way communication channel with Senior Management	Head of Diversity, Health and Safety	In preparation of Agency transfer to Valuation Office Agency offer staff opportunity to join their consultative groups

Objectives	Activities required	Timescales	Outcomes	Responsible officer	Progress
R7 (D7 G7) Ensure all staff have access to diversity awareness raising opportunities <i>(continued)</i>	Obtain customer feedback and consultation in regard to race equality issues	June 2008 – May 2011	Identify areas where service delivery to customers from under represented groups can be improved	Head of Diversity, Health and Safety	Attend and action feedback from Parent Department Customer Forums
	Incorporate Holy Days of obligation into corporate calendar	Dec 2008	Increase staff cultural sensitivity	Head of Communications	
R8 (D8 G8) Ensure robust arrangements for monitoring recruitment including applicants for employment, training and promotion	Regular analysis of data from recruitment training and promotion processes	June 2008 – May 2011	To ensure that processes are open and equal for all applicants	Head of HR Operations and Learning	Annual review
	Monitor ethnicity of staff against national population statistics	June 2008 – May 2011	The Rent Service staff are more representative of the communities they serve	Head of Diversity, Health and Safety/ Head of HR Information	Benchmarking against similar organisations in place

Objectives	Activities required	Timescales	Outcomes	Responsible officer	Progress
R8 (D8 G8) Ensure robust arrangements for monitoring recruitment including applicants for employment, training and promotion <i>(continued)</i>	Increase our understanding of the impact of race equality issues on staff turnover	June 2008 – May 2011	Analysis of data from exit interviews and other sources may lead to actions for incorporation in action plan	Head of HR Operations and Learning	Exit interviews in place
	Investigate and adopt relevant best practice in improving representation via recruitment and selection	June 2008 – May 2011	The Rent Service staff are more representative of the communities they serve	Head of HR Operations and Learning	Review commenced with view to merger with Valuation Office Agency and adopting best practice
R9 (D9 G9) Continue to monitor diversity statistics on employees involved in formal disciplinary, capability or grievance action	Regular analysis of disciplinary, capability and grievance records	June 2008 – May 2011	To ensure action taken is fair and consistent	Head of HR Operations and Learning	Regular review
	Publication of all relevant data in Annual Report and scheme progress reports	June 2008 – May 2011	To ensure openness and transparency in The Rent Service commitment to diversity	Head of Financial Services/Head of Diversity, Health and Safety	Published annually

Objectives	Activities required	Timescales	Outcomes	Responsible officer	Progress
R10 (D10 G10) Seek to ensure our workforce reflects the diverse makeup of the communities we serve at all levels in the organisation	Consider adopting targets for staff ethnicity representation by grade	June 2008 – May 2011	Incorporate relevant actions into planning processes	Head of Diversity, Health and Safety/ Equality Board Members	Work with Valuation Office Agency commenced to incorporate procedures
	Consider positive action initiatives to increase staff ethnicity representation at all grades	June 2009 – May 2011	Job applicants from any ethnic background gain improved opportunity for recruitment and promotion	Head of HR Operations and Learning	Review of mentoring policy underway and assessment of Valuation Office Agency Schemes
R11 (D11 G11) Maintain and build visible leadership commitment to race equality	Continue with senior management representation on Equality Board	June 2008 – May 2011	Improved leadership on race and other diversity issues	Equality Board Members	Senior management represented on Equality Board
	Review core values to ensure equality and fairness to all	June 2008 – May 2011	Equality and fairness forms a key business priority for The Rent Service	Head of Financial Services	Core values reviewed annually
R12 (D12 G12) Encourage suppliers to address equality issues	Ensure procurement processes follow available guidelines concerning suppliers' equality policies	June 2008 – May 2011	More contracts let to organisations with best practice equality policies	Finance Director	Contracts let in line with Office of Government Commerce guidance

Objectives	Activities required	Timescales	Outcomes	Responsible officer	Progress
R13 (D13 G13) Ensure diversity and equality is featured in all policies/guidance	Review HR policies/guidance	June 2008 – May 2011	HR policies/guidance more inclusive and helpful to staff	Head of HR Operations and Learning	Review of policies/guidance commenced

Annex 3 – Disability Equality Action Plan

The Rent Service treats all areas of diversity equally and is working towards one scheme which covers race, disability, gender as well as other areas of diversity. The disability equality scheme action plan follows in this section.

We have decided to review the whole scheme and action plans now, to coincide with the review of the original race equality scheme. We have issued progress reports since the introduction of the combined equality scheme, the last being issued in November 2007 and these are available on our public internet site at www.therentservice.gov.uk

Since that time The Rent Service have continued to implement actions contained within our action plans and some of these actions relating to the promotion of disability awareness have been as follows:

- Following the successful roll out of diversity awareness training for all staff, we continue to raise diversity awareness amongst staff through updating our diversity intranet site as well as rolling out a training workshop on disability confidence to all staff which will be completed during 2008.
- Carrying out impact assessments of policy and procedures issued to all staff as well as major publications to customers including making our service leaflets available in a range of products such as audio tape and Braille, and producing all our service leaflets in minimum size 14 font.
- Meetings of the Equality Board to review strategy and monitor progress in our action plans including offering The Rent Service staff the option of joining Valuation Office Agency diversity consultative groups from September 2008 in advance of the merger of the organisations.
- Monitoring our staffing statistics for disability and publishing the results in our Annual Report.
- Working with the Valuation Office Agency to review both organisations diversity and equality policies procedures and practices with a view to recommending the best practices to be adopted in time for the merger in April 2009.

A full list of the actions we intend to continue with are contained in the following disability equality action plan.

Objectives	Activities required	Timescales	Outcomes	Responsible officer	Progress
D1 (G1 R1) Ensure implementation and governance of 2008-2011 Equality Scheme	Ensure structures already in place provide strategic steer	June 2008 – May 2011	That all objectives are taken forward and actioned	HR Director	Equality Scheme reviewed and published
	Reporting arrangements in place via Equality Board	Equality Board meetings	Reports to Agency Management Board and staff	Head of Diversity, Health and Safety	Equality Board continues to oversee progress
	Revised scheme to be published	June 2011	Planned actions are achieved and continuance of good practice	Chief Executive	Actions progress monitored to ensure completion
	All elements of Action Plan reviewed at Equality Board half yearly, monitor and report progress	June 2008 – May 2011 half yearly	Ensure actions are ongoing and completed to timescales	Chief Executive	Reviewed at Equality Board half yearly and reported. Work commenced to incorporate into Valuation Office Agency schemes by April 2009
D2 (G2 R2) Assessment of role, functions and policies	Embed disability equality strategy into all our functions and processes	June 2008 – May 2011	The Rent Service Action Plan reflects Department's equality schemes	Head of Diversity, Health and Safety	Functions are statutory and have been re-assessed for impact

Objectives	Activities required	Timescales	Outcomes	Responsible officer	Progress
D2 (G2 R2) Assessment of role, functions and policies (<i>continued</i>)		Annually	Progress reports completed annually and published in Business Plan/ Annual Report	Head of Diversity, Health and Safety	Statistical information currently published in Annual Report
	Regular review of procedures, functions and guidance	June 2008 – May 2011	That all procedures, functions and policy adhere to the requirements of legislation	Chief Executive via Equality Board	Continue with regular reviews of The Rent Service guidance, functions and policy embedded updates on progress to Equality Board
D3 (G3 R3) Assessment of new functions and existing procedures	Impact assessment of all new policies and procedures	June 2008 – May 2011	Assessment of policies and procedures to be carried out by trained senior managers	All Equality Board members	Senior managers trained
	Where potential adverse impact found relevant policy making body is advised	June 2008 – May 2011	Relevant body advised	Head of Diversity, Health and Safety	Advised as required

Objectives	Activities required	Timescales	Outcomes	Responsible officer	Progress
D4 (G4 R4) Ensure arrangements to monitor functions and procedures for potential adverse impact on customers	Review of feedback from customers via customer satisfaction survey	June 2008 – May 2011	All procedures are in place and carried out correctly	Head of Communications	Customer satisfaction survey results reviewed by Agency Management Board and published annually
	Review complaints handling procedure maintain log and publish result	June 2008 – May 2011	Complaints regarding disability to be handled appropriately and learning points are fed back into processes	Head of Communications	Continue with complaints log to ensure customer feedback is acted upon
	Implement recommendations from Audit and impact assessment reports	June 2008 – May 2011	Ensure procedures do not impact adversely on our customers and stakeholders	Finance Director/HR Director	Recommendations form part of action plan. New Actions to be added as required

Objectives	Activities required	Timescales	Outcomes	Responsible officer	Progress
D5 (G5 R5) Ensure we publish the results of assessments, consultations and monitoring	Progress and information including surveys to be reported via Annual Reports and scheme progress reports	June 2008 – May 2011	Improved reporting arrangements	Head of Financial Services/Head of Diversity, Health and Safety	All details published in Annual Reports and equality scheme updates
	Publication of Equality Scheme and Action Plan	June 2008 – May 2011	Processes and decisions are transparent and accessible to the communities we serve and to our own people	Head of Communications	Equality Scheme published internally and externally
D6 (G6 R6) Ensure customers are consulted and have access to information and services	Service leaflets available in other formats such as Braille and audio tape	June 2008 – May 2011	Ensure no customer groups are disadvantaged in gaining access to services	Head of Communications	In place. Ongoing review
	Local liaison with all customer groups	June 2008 – May 2011	All of customer base have information and accesses to The Rent Service services	Service Delivery Director	Local liaison with tenant and landlord groups ongoing

Objectives	Activities required	Timescales	Outcomes	Responsible officer	Progress
D6 (G6 R6) Ensure customers are consulted and have access to information and services (<i>continued</i>)	Review of annual Customer Satisfaction Survey and staff surveys	June 2008 – May 2011	Ensure feedback from disabled customers is fed into planning process and guidance reviews	Head of Communications	In place. Annual review following results of customer satisfaction survey and staff survey
	Consider using Internet site user surveys to increase customer feedback on site content and format	June 2008 – May 2011	Increase knowledge of customer demographics and views	Head of Communications	Will be considered as part of regular website reviews
D7 (G7 R7) Ensure all staff have access to diversity awareness raising opportunities	Diversity module as part of the Induction course	June 2008 – May 2011	New employees aware of good practice and responsibilities	Head of HR Operations and Learning	Diversity module in place and reviewed regularly
	Diversity training for staff to include legislation changes	June 2008 – May 2011	To raise staff awareness on diversity and disability issues	Head of HR Operations and Learning	Disability awareness training due to complete April 2008

Objectives	Activities required	Timescales	Outcomes	Responsible officer	Progress
D7 (G7 R7) Ensure all staff have access to diversity awareness raising opportunities (<i>continued</i>)	Raise awareness of disability diversity issues via review of guidance and relevant publicity on intranet and publications	June 2008 – May 2011	Staff kept up to date on progress of diversity issues including disability	Head of Diversity, Health and Safety	Update of guidance and publicity ongoing
	Update and review of Diversity and Equality Policies including Different but Equal Policy	June 2008 – Mar 2011	All strands of diversity are included in guidance and compliant, and staff fully informed	Head of Diversity, Health and Safety	Commenced complete review with view to merger with Valuation Office Agency
	Consult staff on demand for and commitment to a staff diversity network	June 2008 – June 2009	Possible staff diversity network to act as additional two way communication channel with senior management	Head of Diversity, Health and Safety	In preparation of Agency transfer to Valuation Office Agency offer staff opportunity to join their diversity consultative groups

Objectives	Activities required	Timescales	Outcomes	Responsible officer	Progress
D7 (G7 R7) Ensure all staff have access to diversity awareness raising opportunities (<i>continued</i>)	Obtain customer feedback and consultation in regard to disability equality issues	June 2008 – May 2011	Identify areas where service delivery to customers from under represented groups can be improved	Head of Diversity, Health and Safety	Attend and action feedback from Parent Department Customer Forums
D8 (G8 R8) Ensure robust arrangements for monitoring recruitment including applicants for employment, training and promotion	Regular analysis of data from recruitment training and promotion processes	June 2008 – May 2011	To ensure that processes are open and equal for all applicants	Head of HR Operations and Learning	Annual review
	Monitor staff disability data against national population statistics	June 2008 – May 2011	The Rent Service staff are more representative of the communities they serve	Head of Diversity, Health and Safety/Head of HR Information	Benchmarking against similar organisations in place
	Increase our understanding of the impact of disability equality issues on staff turnover	June 2008 – May 2001	Analysis of data from exit interviews and other sources may lead to actions for incorporation in action plan	Head of HR Operations and Learning	Exit interviews in place

Objectives	Activities required	Timescales	Outcomes	Responsible officer	Progress
D8 (G8 R8) Ensure robust arrangements for monitoring recruitment including applicants for employment, training and promotion <i>(continued)</i>	Investigate and adopt relevant best practice in improving representation via recruitment and selection	June 2008 – May 2011	The Rent Service staff are more representative of the communities they serve	Head of HR Operations and Learning	Review commenced with view to merger with Valuation Office Agency and adopting best practice
D9 (G9 R9) Continue to monitor diversity statistics on employees involved in formal disciplinary, capability or grievance action	Regular analysis of disciplinary, capability and grievance records	June 2008 – May 2011	To ensure action taken is fair and consistent	Head of HR Operations and Learning	Regular review
	Publication of all relevant data in Annual Report and scheme progress reports	June 2008 – May 2011	To ensure openness and transparency in The Rent Service commitment to diversity	Head of Financial Services/Head of Diversity, Health and Safety	Published annually

Objectives	Activities required	Timescales	Outcomes	Responsible officer	Progress
D10 (G10 R10) Seek to ensure our workforce reflects the diverse makeup of the communities we serve at all levels in the organisation	Consider adopting targets for staff disability representation by grade	June 2008 – May 2011	Incorporate relevant actions into planning processes	Head of Diversity, Health and Safety/ Equality Board Members	Work with Valuation Office Agency commenced to incorporate procedures
	Consider positive action initiatives to increase disabled staff representation at all grades	June 2009 – May 2011	Job applicants with disabilities gain improved opportunity for recruitment and promotion	Head of HR Operations and Learning	Review of mentoring policy underway and assessment of Valuation Office Agency schemes
D11 (G11 R11) Maintain and build visible leadership commitment to disability equality	Continue with senior management representation on Equality Board	June 2008 – May 2011	Improved leadership on race and other diversity issues	Equality Board Members	Senior management representation at Equality Board
	Review core values to ensure equality and fairness to all	June 2008 – May 2011	Equality and fairness forms a key business priority for The Rent Service	Head of Financial Services	Core values reviewed annually
D12 (G12 R12) Encourage suppliers to address disability equality issues	Ensure procurement processes follow available guidelines concerning suppliers' equality policies	June 2008 – May 2011	More contracts let to organisations with best practice equality policies	Finance Director	Contracts let in line with OGC guidance

Objectives	Activities required	Timescales	Outcomes	Responsible officer	Progress
D13 (G13 R13) Ensure diversity and equality is featured in all policies/guidance	Review HR policies/guidance	June 2008 – May 2011	HR policies/guidance more inclusive and helpful to staff	Head of HR Operations and Learning	Review of policies Ongoing with view to Valuation Office Agency merger

Annex 4 – Gender Equality Action Plan

The Rent Service treats all areas of diversity equally and is working towards one scheme which covers race, disability, gender as well as other areas of diversity. The gender equality scheme action plan follows in this section.

We have decided to review the whole scheme and action plans now, to coincide with the review of the original race equality scheme. We have issued progress reports since the introduction of the combined equality scheme, the last being issued in November 2007 and these are available on our public internet site at www.therentservice.gov.uk

Since that time The Rent Service have continued to implement actions contained within our action plans. Some of these actions relating to the promotion of gender issues have been as follows:

- Following the successful roll out of diversity awareness training for all staff, we continue to raise diversity awareness amongst staff through updating our diversity intranet site.
- Carrying out impact assessments of policy and procedures issued to all staff as well as major publications to customers.
- Meetings of the Equality Board to review strategy and monitor progress in our action plans including offering The Rent Service staff the option of joining Valuation Office Agency Diversity Consultative Groups from September 2008 in advance of the merger of the organisations.
- Monitoring our staffing statistics and publishing the results in our Annual Report.
- Working with the Valuation Office Agency to review both organisations diversity and equality policies procedures and practices with a view to recommending the best practices to be adopted in time for the merger in April 2009.
- Through the review of policies of both organisations, we will be in a position to offer additional mentoring and support for people from all genders for progression and career advancement.

A full list of the actions we intend to continue with are contained in the following gender equality action plan.

Objectives	Activities required	Timescales	Outcomes	Responsible officer	Progress
G1 (D1 R1) Ensure implementation and governance of 2008-2011 Equality Scheme	Ensure structures already in place provide strategic steer	June 2008 – May 2011	That all objectives are taken forward and actioned	HR Director	Equality Scheme reviewed and published
	Reporting arrangements in place via Equality Board	Equality Board meetings	Reports to Agency Management Board and staff	Head of Diversity, Health and Safety	Equality Board continues to oversee progress
	Revised scheme to be published	June 2011	Planned actions are achieved and continuance of good practice	Chief Executive	Actions progress monitored to ensure completion
	All elements of Action Plan reviewed at Equality Board half yearly, monitor and report progress	June 2008 – May 2011 half yearly	Ensure actions are ongoing and completed to timescales	Chief Executive	Reviewed at Equality Board half yearly and reported. Work commenced to incorporate into Valuation Office Agency schemes by April 2009

Objectives	Activities required	Timescales	Outcomes	Responsible officer	Progress
G2 (D2 R2) Assessment of role, functions and policies	Embed gender equality strategy into all our functions and processes	June 2008 – May 2011	The Rent Service Action Plan reflects Department's equality schemes	Head of Diversity, Health and Safety	Functions are statutory and have been re-assessed for impact
		Annually	Progress reports completed annually and published in Business Plan/ Annual Report	Head of Diversity, Health and Safety	Statistical information currently published in Annual Report
	Regular review of procedures, functions and guidance	June 2008 – May 2011	That all procedures, functions and policy adhere to the requirements of legislation	Chief Executive via Equality Board	Continue with regular reviews of The Rent Service guidance, functions and policy. Updates on progress to Equality Board

Objectives	Activities required	Timescales	Outcomes	Responsible officer	Progress
G3 (D3 R3) Assessment of new functions and existing procedures	Impact assessment of all new policies and procedures	June 2008 – May 2011	Assessment of policies and procedures to be carried out by trained senior managers	All Equality Board members	Senior managers trained
	Where potential adverse impact found relevant policy making body is advised	June 2008 – May 2011	Relevant body advised	Head of Diversity, Health and Safety	Advised as required
G4 (D4 R4) Ensure arrangements to monitor functions and procedures for potential adverse impact on customers	Review of feedback from customers via customer satisfaction survey	June 2008 – May 2011	All procedures are in place and carried out correctly	Head of Communications	Customer Satisfaction Survey results reviewed by Agency Management Board and published annually
	Review complaints handling procedure maintain log and publish result	June 2008 – May 2011	Complaints regarding gender to be handled appropriately and learning points are fed back into processes	Head of Communications	Continue with complaints log to ensure customer feedback is acted upon

Objectives	Activities required	Timescales	Outcomes	Responsible officer	Progress
G4 (D4 R4) Ensure arrangements to monitor functions and procedures for potential adverse impact on customers <i>(continued)</i>	Implement recommendations from Audit and impact assessment reports	June 2008 – May 2011	Ensure procedures do not impact adversely on our customers and stakeholders	Finance Director/HR Director	Recommendations form part of action plan. New Actions to be added as required
G5 (D5 R5) Ensure we publish the results of assessments, consultations and monitoring	Progress and information including surveys to be reported via Annual Reports and scheme progress reports	June 2008 – May 2011	Improved reporting arrangements	Head of Financial Services/Head of Diversity, Health and Safety	All details published in Annual Reports and equality scheme updates
	Publication of Equality Scheme & Action Plan	June 2008 – May 2011	Processes and decisions are transparent and accessible to the communities we serve and to our own people	Head of Communications	Equality Scheme published internally and externally

Objectives	Activities required	Timescales	Outcomes	Responsible officer	Progress
G6 (D6 R6) Ensure customers are consulted and have access to information and services	Ensure trained staff of both genders are available to advise and meet customers if requested	June 2008 – May 2011	Ensure no customer groups are disadvantaged in gaining access to services	Head of Communications	In place. Ongoing review
	Local liaison with all customer groups	June 2008 – May 2011	All of customer base have information and accesses to The Rent Service services	Service Delivery Director	Local liaison with tenant and landlord groups ongoing
	Review of annual Customers Satisfaction Survey and staff surveys	June 2008 – May 2011	Ensure feedback from customers of differing genders is fed into planning process and guidance reviews	Head of Communications	In place annual review following results of Customer Satisfaction Survey and staff survey
	Consider using Internet site user surveys to increase customer feedback on site content and format	June 2008 – May 2011	Increase knowledge of customer demographics and views	Head of Communications	Will be considered as part of regular website reviews

Objectives	Activities required	Timescales	Outcomes	Responsible officer	Progress
G7 (D7 R7) Ensure all staff have access to diversity awareness raising opportunities	Diversity module as part of the Induction course	June 2008 – May 2011	New employees aware of good practice and responsibilities	Head of HR Operations and Learning	Diversity module in place and reviewed regularly
	Diversity training for staff to include legislation changes	June 2008 – May 2011	To raise staff awareness on diversity and gender issues	Head of HR Operations and Learning	Diversity awareness training rolled out as require. Valuation Office Agency learning packages available to The Rent Service staff on transfer
	Raise awareness of gender diversity issues via review of guidance and relevant publicity on intranet	June 2008 – May 2011	Staff kept up to date on progress of diversity issues including gender	Head of Diversity, Health and Safety	Update of guidance and publicity ongoing
	Update and review of Diversity and Equality Policies including Different but Equal Policy	June 2008 – Mar 2011	All strands of diversity are included in guidance and compliant, and staff fully informed	Head of Diversity, Health and Safety	Commenced complete review with view to merger with Valuation Office Agency

Objectives	Activities required	Timescales	Outcomes	Responsible officer	Progress
G7 (D7 R7) Ensure all staff have access to diversity awareness raising opportunities <i>(continued)</i>	Consult staff on demand for and commitment to a staff diversity network	June 2008 – June 2009	Possible staff diversity network to act as additional two way communication channel with senior management	Head of Diversity, Health and Safety	Offer staff opportunity to join Valuation Office Agency diversity consultative groups in preparation for merger
	Obtain customer feedback and consultation in regard to gender equality issues	June 2008 – May 2011	Identify areas where service delivery to customers from gender groups can be improved	Head of Diversity, Health and Safety	Attend and action feedback from Parent Department Customer Forums
G8 (D8 R8) Ensure robust arrangements for monitoring recruitment including applicants for employment, training and promotion	Regular analysis of data from recruitment training and promotion processes	June 2008 – May 2011	To ensure that processes are open and equal for all applicants	Head of HR Operations and Learning	Annual review
	Monitor staff gender data against national population statistics	June 2008 – May 2011	The Rent Service staff are more representative of the communities they serve	Head of Diversity, Health and Safety/Head of HR Information	Benchmarking against similar organisations in place.

Objectives	Activities required	Timescales	Outcomes	Responsible officer	Progress
G8 (D8 R8) Ensure robust arrangements for monitoring recruitment including applicants for employment, training and promotion <i>(continued)</i>	Increase our understanding of the impact of gender equality issues on staff turnover	June 2008 – May 2011	Analysis of data from exit interviews and other sources may lead to actions for incorporation in action plan	Head of HR Operations and Learning	Exit interviews in place
	Investigate and adopt relevant best practice in improving representation via recruitment and selection	June 2008 – May 2011	The Rent Service staff are more representative of the communities they serve	Head of HR Operations and Learning	Review commenced with view to merger with Valuation Office Agency and adopting best practice
G9 (D9 R9) Continue to monitor diversity statistics on employees involved in formal disciplinary, capability or grievance action	Regular analysis of disciplinary, capability and grievance records	June 2008 – May 2011	To ensure action taken is fair and consistent	Head of HR Operations and Learning	Regular review
	Publication of all relevant data in Annual Report and scheme progress reports	June 2008 – May 2011	To ensure openness and transparency in The Rent Service commitment to diversity	Head of Financial Services/Head of Diversity, Health and Safety	Published annually

Objectives	Activities required	Timescales	Outcomes	Responsible officer	Progress
G10 (D10 R10) Seek to ensure our workforce reflects the diverse makeup of the communities we serve at all levels in the organisation	Consider adopting targets for under represented groups by grade	June 2008 – May 2011	Incorporate relevant actions into planning processes	Head of Diversity, Health and Safety/ Equality Board Members	Work with Valuation Office Agency commenced to incorporate procedures
	Consider positive action initiatives to increase female staff representation at all grades	June 2009 – May 2011	Female job applicants gain improved opportunity for recruitment and promotion	Head of HR Operations and Learning	Review of mentoring policy underway and assessment of Valuation Office Agency Schemes
G11 (D11 R11) Maintain and build visible leadership commitment to gender equality	Continue with senior management representation on Equality Board	June 2008 – May 2011	Improved leadership on race and other diversity issues	Equality Board Members	Senior management representation at Equality Board
	Review core values to ensure equality and fairness to all	June 2008 – May 2011	Equality and fairness forms a key business priority for The Rent Service	Head of Financial Services	Core values reviewed annually
G12 (D12 R12) Encourage suppliers to address gender equality issues	Ensure procurement processes follow available guidelines concerning suppliers' equality policies	June 2008 – May 2011	More contracts let to organisations with best practice equality policies	Finance Director	Contracts let in line with Office of Government Commerce guidance

Objectives	Activities required	Timescales	Outcomes	Responsible officer	Progress
G13 (D13 R13) Ensure diversity and equality is featured in all policies/guidance	Review HR policies/guidance	June 2008 – May 2011	HR policies/guidance more inclusive and helpful to staff	Head of HR Operations and Learning	Review of policies Ongoing with view to Valuation Office Agency merger

Annex 5 – Other Areas of Diversity

The Rent Service treats all areas of diversity equally and is working towards one scheme which covers race, disability, gender as well as other areas of diversity. We have no specific action plan for other areas of diversity but we have a combined single action plan for consideration at our Equality Board meetings which take into account all our actions, and applies them across all the diversity elements.

The principles outlined in the equality scheme apply equally to other diversity areas and in particular age, sexual orientation and religion and belief.

As a matter of course when we impact assess our policies and procedures, we screen them for all areas of diversity and if any potential adverse impact is found, then we try to mitigate them.

As part of our monitoring we publish staff statistics by age group and have begun to ask staff about their sexual orientation in the last full staff survey. The recent introduction of a staff exit questionnaire has allowed staff to feed back to the HR Directorate on issues such as leaving due to discrimination harassment or bullying in order to identify whether The Rent Service is a tolerant organisation and welcoming organisation to work for.

As we work towards our merger with the Valuation Office Agency we will screen both organisations policies and procedures to ensure the adoption of best practices from both Agencies. The larger organisation will offer greater resource and the opportunity for The Rent Service staff to join diversity consultation groups including those for age, religion and belief.