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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of the equality, community cohesion and service improvement agenda we are required to annually update the Aire Valley Homes Leeds (AVHL) Board and Strategic Landlord with our progress. This is the report for 2009/10.

Following the development this year of AVHL's Single Equality and Cohesion Strategy (Appendix 1) and Single Equality Action Plan (Appendix 2), we have made progress towards achieving our newly established equality outcomes. These outcomes link closely with the council's corporate and employment equality outcomes.

The report describes progress made in the following areas:

- **Customer and neighbourhood profiling;**
- **Leadership and organisational commitment;**
- **Partnership working;**
- **Employment, training and development;**
- **Customer involvement and consultation;**
- **Equality Impact Assessments;**
- **Access and communication;**
- **Community cohesion.**

As well as progress made to date, the report seeks to highlight priorities for 2010/11.

2.0 BACKGROUND

As part of the Single Equality and Cohesion Strategy 2009-12 we are required to produce an annual report to update the Board on the progress made within the Equality and Cohesion Agenda. Strategic Landlord also requires a similar update.

2009/10 has seen the revision of Aire Valley Homes Leeds' (AVHL) existing Equality and Cohesion Strategy. To ensure that we continue to meet the requirements of our public duties, we have also incorporated a Single Equality Scheme into the revised strategy, resulting in the Single Equality and Cohesion Strategy and Action Plan being developed.

This report focuses on the achievements made under the new Strategy and Action Plan and highlights our priorities for 2010/11.

3.0 CONTENT OF REPORT

The Strategy is made up of our Equality Mission Statement, which underlines AVHL's commitment to reduce inequalities within service provision and employment practices. It also identifies 10 equality outcomes around different

areas of service delivery and employment. Actions to enable AVHL to achieve each outcome are listed in the Single Equality Action Plan.

Our outcomes reflect the council's corporate and employment outcomes and priorities in the following areas:

- Employment, learning and development;
- Safer communities;
- Service delivery;
- Stronger communities;
- Promotion of equality and diversity.

Detail of the outcomes and progress made towards achieving them will be reviewed one outcome at a time.

3.1 Outcome 1- We have detailed knowledge of our customer profiles and we are able to reliably use this knowledge to gain understanding of our customers, both at an overview and a detailed level. This understanding is used to shape existing, planned and future policies and services, ensuring that they are equitable and fair, meeting the needs of our diverse customers.

3.1.1 Customer Profiling

The customer profiling data we now hold has increased significantly. We have 65% overall and, although our target is 80%, we are working towards achieving 100% in 2010/11. As an organisation we are committed to the profiling agenda as it is fundamental in understanding who our customers are. Only then are we able to fully recognise who is and who is not accessing our services, and the impact our services are having on our diverse customer base.

We now know:

- The gender of 100% of our tenants;
- The age of 94% of our tenants;
- The ethnicity of 74% of our tenants;
- The religion of 45% of our tenants;
- The sexual orientation of 38% of our tenants;
- 39% of data has been captured around disability.

Since 2009/10, the percentage of data capture has increased by over 10%.

Some of the key initiatives that have been introduced to increase the data capture are:

- We ensure 100% data capture at the sign up of new tenants;
- We have introduced A5 desk pads to be used to record equality data during ad hoc telephone calls;
- Tenancy Management Officers are routinely collecting equality data as part of the Annual Tenancy Visit (ATV) procedure. This means that we

are getting to know our customers in order to identify any vulnerabilities or specific requirements;

- We are working to establish most vulnerable strands first. We have captured significant age data through our Sheltered and Supported Housing service and disability data through our Adaptations team.

3.2 Outcome 2- All our employees are committed to our equality agenda and understand the barriers that vulnerable people face. There are adequate resources allocated and structures in place to ensure that support, guidance and encouragement is available to them.

3.2.1 Equality and Service Improvement Workshop

Following the launch of the Single Equality and Cohesion Strategy 2009-12, Managers attended a training workshop which aimed to introduce them to the new strategy and the concepts behind it. Some outcomes include:

- Managers appreciate the relationship between equality and service improvement;
- Managers are able to understand that equality and service improvement work is not an 'add on' to their job role, but they are working towards the delivery of tailored services;
- Managers understand the purpose of customer profiling and can appreciate that it is fundamental in AVHL being successful in providing appropriate services to individuals;
- Managers are aware of the Equality Framework and the Equality Framework Evidence and Collection Tool (EFECT), and can appreciate the benefits of having all equality legislation, duties and best practice guidance held in one central location. They understand that it is equally beneficial to evidence all our work in this area in one place, in preparation for any short notice inspection;
- Managers are aware that it is their responsibility to cascade this approach to equality back to their teams, and encourage individuals to represent their team on the 'E' Project Team.

3.2.2 The 'E' Project Team

The 'E' Project Team has been established. This is a working group made up of representatives from each team in AVHL, which acts as a communication channel and consultation forum. Team members are responsible for leading their teams in equality and service improvement work, embedding this work into day to day working practices.

As part of the establishment of this group, members are due to receive updated equality, cohesion and service improvement training, to ensure that they are adequately supported in their functions as 'E' Project team members in 2010/11.

This team will also be responsible for leading on the Equality Framework for Local Government within their teams, and will receive the appropriate training and support to enable them to do this.

3.2.3 Induction

A review of AVH's Induction programme is currently being undertaken. As part of this review, the introduction to Equality and Diversity is being updated to reflect the new Single Equality and Cohesion Strategy. Some of the key changes include:

- An emphasis on the relationship between equality and service improvement;
- The responsibility of all AVHL employees in delivering fair, flexible and appropriate services according to individual need;
- The role of the Service Improvement Officer;

As part of the Induction, new employees will also be provided with a supporting 'Induction Pack.' This will include an overview of the Single Equality and Cohesion Strategy and Action Plan and the Equality Framework.

3.2.4 Performance Management Framework

Equality and service improvement work at organisational level is now embedded and monitored within the Performance Management Framework. Managers are now obliged to report improvements identified and outcomes achieved as a result of Equality Impact Assessments and Lessons Learnt exercises.

3.3 Outcome 3- We have in place an effective procurement strategy allowing us to work closely with our contractors to ensure that our customers receive an efficient service that is appropriate to their individual needs.

3.3.1 Procurement

As part of Procurement 2011, a project seeking to outsource the provision of capital refurbishment, gas servicing work, and responsive repairs and maintenance work, companies tendering will be required to demonstrate previous equality and service improvement achievements as well as how they will embed equality and service improvement into the contract, should they be successful.

As part of the Invitation to Participate in Competitive Dialogue, bidders are required to demonstrate how they will deliver in key equality and service improvement areas as well as provide specific examples of works undertaken which are relevant to some of the following areas:

- Their strategic approach to achieving customer satisfaction, satisfying varying needs of the customer, continuous improvement, communication and access, in particular with regards to vulnerable customers;

- Their plans for provision of local employment and training opportunities throughout the contract;
- Their approach to stakeholder engagement and community participation;
- Describe how they will work with us to adapt the service to meet the changing needs of the community;
- Demonstrate how they will assist the Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) in customer profiling.

3.4 Outcome 4- We work closely with partner organisations to continue to share best practice and learn about, support and communicate with our diverse communities. This includes any specific communication needs or cultural requirements.

3.4.1 Partnership Working

This year AVHL has worked closely with Leeds Involving People (LIP), formally known as the Leeds Involvement Project. Working with this group has allowed us, and will continue to allow us, to involve hard-to-reach groups in the planning, development and evaluation of services.

This year we have successfully undertaken consultation work around the Single Equality and Cohesion Strategy with the LIP Disabled Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People's Group and the Disability Reference Group. These consultation exercises led to a better informed Single Equality Action Plan, as well as some changes being made to the strategy's equality outcomes.

AVHL contributes to the quarterly Cross ALMO Equality and Diversity Group. However, the focus for 2010/11 is to steer the group in a new direction to ensure that we, and ultimately our customers, are benefiting from the group as much as possible. The aim is to promote joint working between the ALMOs, particularly with regards to the Equality Framework and the progress towards achieving Excellence.

3.5 Outcome 5- We promote and oversee accessible and up to date methods of customer consultation and our service users believe that they have a voice. Our customers are satisfied that they have influenced our equality priorities, including groups that are vulnerable or at greater risk of disadvantage.

3.5.1 Using Consultation to inform Equality Impact Assessments

We continue to involve and engage with our customers in a variety of ways. Findings from these exercises, such as focus group discussions, are then fed into the investigation stage of our Equality Impact Assessments (EIA). This means that our customers are influencing how our policies and services are developed and decisions are made based upon these findings.

An example where this has been used in 2009/10 is as part of the review of AVH's Service Standards. Across the different services, consultation was

undertaken with various focus groups. The discussions coming out of these consultation exercises then went on to inform the revision of the individual standards.

A focus for 10/11 will be to further embed this practice into EIAs, ensuring that they are as accurately informed and relevant as possible.

3.5.2 Talking Point

As well as involving groups such as LIP to gain an insight into the barriers that vulnerable groups face, this year we have signed up to the council's Talking Point community engagement portal. This database allows services within the city to share information about consultations with their partners. This means that we are now in a position to be able to access reports of consultations that have been carried out across Leeds to help inform our on policies and strategies, as well as publish our own consultation results for our partners to use.

3.5.3 Equality Focus Group

Although we promote a variety of channels to enable customers to consult with us and we communicate regularly with a number of our tenants, we were conscious that consultation exercises were not always representative of the whole community and there was a risk that the decisions we make do not necessarily benefit everyone. We have now established an Equality Focus Group, which comprises of disabled tenants, tenants from Black and Minority Ethnic communities, older and younger tenants, and tenants with different beliefs.

Although this focus group is in its infancy, the aim is to try to understand the impact our services have on a diverse group of people. In this way we can make more informed decisions about our service provision, based on representative consultations.

For 2010/11 we envisage that the key projects the group with which the group will help AVHL will be:

- Continue to review priorities for AVH and to scrutinise service delivery;
- Reviewing the accessibility of our website;
- Formulating an organisational strap line which emphasises AVH's services being unique and tailored made;
- Participation in EIAs.

3.5.4 Providing profile information to Tenants and Residents Groups

We are keen to engage with a more diverse and representative group of people through our Tenants and Residents Groups. One initiative for 2010/11, is to provide registered groups with profiling data, and access and communication information according to the tenants that make up that particular area. The aim is that this will allow groups to understand who their

communications should be aimed at, and in which particular formats or through which particular channels they should be produced.

3.5.5 Consultation Feedback

We value all customer engagement and involvement and aim to use customer feedback as a method of continually improving our services. Once our customers have informed our services and improvements have been, or are planning to be implemented, we then consider it imperative to feedback details of these changes to our customers. In this way we are demonstrating to our customers that they have a voice in the way services are delivered to them and they are encouraged, and understand the benefits, of engaging with us.

This feedback occurs on a regular basis. A good example of this was when we consulted with Leeds Involving People regarding the Single Equality and Cohesion Strategy. As a result of the various consultation exercises, one of AVHL's Equality Outcomes was revised, and some actions were added to the Single Equality Action Plan. Details of these amendments, as well as other projects and initiatives that we are working on, were fed back to the LIP groups in a "You said...we did" style document (Appendix 4), to show how we are, or plan to, address their concerns. Dialogue in this area is still ongoing.

This year we have also incorporated a "You said...we did" section into our tenants newsletter. This again allows us to demonstrate what changes we have made on the back of engaging with them. In the coming year we will also be dedicating a page on the website to a similar exercise.

3.6 Outcome 6- All our customers are satisfied that Aire Valley Homes Leeds engage with them and they can fully access our services, including those that are provided by a third party.

3.6.1 Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs)

This year progress has been made with EIAs. For 2010/11 a schedule has been developed to ensure that all service areas are addressed and the impact of all policies and procedures can be accurately assessed.

We now have a good structure in place to be able to deliver against this schedule. The 'E' Project Team members will undertake detailed training to ensure that they are in a strong position to be able to lead their teams in this area. Furthermore, with the incorporation EIAs in the Performance Management Framework, we are in a better position than ever to ensure that the results of the assessments are sufficiently monitored and reviewed.

Now that we are continuing to make progress in customer profiling, our EIAs are becoming more and more informed. This results in higher quality EIAs which means that changes we make to policies and services will benefit more people.

3.6.2 British Sign Language Training Course

Having previously identified a barrier in communication which meant that a high proportion of our deaf tenants were not able to communicate effectively with employees that visit them at their properties, training in British Sign Language (BSL) is now being rolled out. It is being delivered to members of the Adaptations Team, as well as several Sheltered Housing Officers and Tenancy Management Officers where it has been identified that there is interaction with deaf people most frequently.

Although it is difficult to measure the impact of this initiative at such an early stage, positive feedback from staff has led to plans to roll out the training to additional customer-facing staff, as well as tenants who would benefit from learning this communication skill. The outcomes will be measured in following months through methods such as staff and customer satisfaction surveys.

3.6.3 Annual Tenancy Visits

This year we have undertaken Annual Tenancy Visits with customers who have had little or no contact with us over the past two years. Within this criteria we have also ensured that our vulnerable customers, such as elderly tenants, are visited as a priority.

The outcomes of these visits are now monitored closely which is allowing us to clearly identify particular vulnerabilities, access barriers and specific communication requirements of our tenants. Our staff are now in a better position to be able to make any necessary referrals.

Since the monitoring began in November 09, some of the issues discussed/raised can be quantified as follows:

- 78 Adaptations
- 64 ASB / Nuisance neighbour
- 4 Domestic Violence
- 1 Hate Crime
- 5 Sheltered / Supported Housing

3.6.4 Service Standards

Previously our Service Standards incorporated a caption promoting the availability of the documentation in alternative formats. However, it was identified that as this caption was always in English, we were creating a barrier for anybody that could not read English.

This was closely reviewed in 2009/10 and each of the standards now has a standardised page dedicated to the promotion of the availability of the document in alternative formats. This page includes the same caption printed in the six most common community languages spoken in the Aire Valley Homes Leeds area.

In addition, the title of the service standard, i.e. the service area, is now also translated into the six most common community languages, as well as including a pictorial symbol, which assists in reducing communication barriers surrounding disability.

3.6.5 Customer Facing Literature

With regards to all our customer facing literature, we are continuing to work with our Tenants Communications Panel to ensure that all documentation is accessible. However, in an attempt to go beyond this and demonstrate to our customers that we want to avoid any exclusion regarding accessing information, we have recently introduced the Tenant Approval mark. This will now feature on customer facing literature that has been assessed and approved by the Communications Panel as being clear and accessible.

To ensure that the tenants that sit on this panel are adequately supported to scrutinise the literature they receive and make appropriate recommendations, they have been enrolled on a Plain English training course which is due to be delivered to them in early 2010/11.

On the back of some customer engagement it was highlighted to us that the 'Contact Us' section of the tenants newsletter was complicated and difficult to read. As a result of this feedback, this page has been redesigned, and uses pictorial symbols to promote the variety of options available to communicate with us.

As well as through the Tenant Communications Panel, we continually engage and involve customers in the review of other documentation. This is often a crucial part of the initial stages of the Equality Impact Assessment, which then allows us to amend the document as required.

3.6.6 Website

In terms of our online accessibility, we have recently had our website audited to allow us to identify barriers to access and make any necessary adjustments. The results highlighted that our website has many examples of good accessibility practice. Some recommendations were made, particularly in regards to making it easier for blind users which are now scheduled into an ongoing improvement programme. Some improvements will include:

- Use of video clips, including British Sign Language translations where possible;
- Use of alternative text tags

3.7 Outcome 7- We are representative of the communities we serve and our working environment and human resource policies are free from discrimination. Our staff are encouraged to reach their full potential through effective training and development.

3.7.1 Human Resource Policies

As part of an ongoing schedule, we have been working alongside the Trade Unions in revising a number of Human Resource policies. This is to make sure that they are fit for purpose and are in line with any recent changes in legislation. As part of this review process, Equality Impact Assessments will be undertaken before each one is signed off, to ensure that any changes made to the policies will benefit all employees.

3.7.2 Representation within Job, Training and Promotion Applications

This year we signed up to a Management Administration System, Networks. This is a best practice tool used in the housing sector. This system allows AVHL to electronically track all job online job applications according to the 6 equality strands. The same equality data is requested from those that apply using a hard copy format, and a function is available for us to manually add this data to the system.

This allows us to receive regular reports indicating representation at different stages of our recruitment and selection process. We can monitor number of applicants, number of applicants short listed and number of successful applicants by equality group.

As a result of these regular electronic reports we will be in a stronger position for 2010/11 to identify areas of under representation, and as a result, we can focus our advertising accordingly. Bringing under represented groups onto the Board, and into staff and management groups is a priority for the beginning of 2010/11 and steps to achieve success in this area will be incorporated into the Recruitment and Selection policy which is due to be revised in the near future.

In terms of applications for training, the revision of the Performance Appraisal and Development Scheme (PADS) this year has led to all employees having an equal opportunity to express interest in areas of training. Successful applicants can then be monitored according to equality strand.

3.7.3 Jobs for Young Workers

The Future Jobs Funding initiative has meant that AVHL was in a position this year to employ young people from within the local labour market. So far we have created and filled 4 roles, predominantly in environmental caretaking and administration, but we are optimistic in increasing the number of roles available for 2010/11.

For 2010/11 the Human Resources (HR) department have been tasked with promoting across all wider management areas, the benefits of apprenticeships.

3.7.4 Accessibility of Training

The development of a learning questionnaire for staff is planned for 10/11. This will enable the Training Officer to adapt future training sessions to ensure that they are appropriate for the individual. This means that employees will be in a better position to get the most out of training sessions they attend. Employees are requested to evaluate any training sessions they have undertaken in order that we can monitor them in terms of accessibility, flexibility and relevance. These evaluation forms, along with the learning questionnaire, ask for equality data for monitoring purposes.

3.7.5 Positive About Disability 'Two Ticks' Accreditation

Work has progressed in this area and AVHL are aiming to gain the accreditation in June 2010. As a result of ongoing work this year, such as dialogue with Job Centre Plus who is a disability employment advisor, our portfolio is strong in a number of areas. There is still work to be done in the first few months of 2010/11, but a commitment from Board and the Senior Management Team means that resources are available to continue making progress.

3.8 Outcome 8- We have structures in place to be able to deal effectively with any reports of Anti Social Behaviour, Hate Crime or Domestic Violence.

3.8.1 Training

Over the course of 2009/10, customer facing employees have continued to attend hate incident reporting training to ensure that AVHL is equipped to effectively manage reports of hate crime coming into any of its offices.

Hate incident reporting training and hate crime awareness training is also incorporated into the corporate Training Plan for early 2010/11. This will ensure that employees continue to have the most relevant and up to date knowledge and awareness in this area.

3.8.2 Communication

A priority for 2010/11 will be to work closely with partner agencies in developing a strategy and action plan in line with the new Cross-Government Action Plan for Hate Crime. This will incorporate initiatives in the following areas:

- Encouraging reporting of hate crimes;
- Increase victim and community confidence in reporting hate crimes to us;
- Prevention of hate crimes occurring or escalating.

In an effort to begin tackling some of these initiatives we have already drafted a hate crime awareness article for our tenants' newsletter during 2010.

3.9 Outcome 9- We have a deeper understanding of communities and neighbourhoods within the Aire Valley area and within the whole of Leeds.

3.9.1 Monitoring Neighbourhood Tensions

We continue to monitor neighbourhood tensions in AVHL areas on a weekly basis and hotspot areas are highlighted regularly through the Quarterly Performance Report. AVHL is then involved in partnership work with agencies including the police and the Anti Social Behaviour Unit (ASBU), to attempt to combat some of the issues occurring at a neighbourhood level.

Following a recent meeting with the Community Intelligence Officer for Safer Leeds, AVHL is soon to sign a Memorandum of Understanding. This will enable AVHL to receive regular reports detailing community tensions across the city. Initiatives to prevent and reduce tensions are then addressed in local neighbourhood tasking meetings, which AVHL housing management employees attend.

3.10 Outcome 10- Existing and new communities living in Aire Valley Homes area feel that they belong to their local community and that they make valuable contribution in shaping its future.

3.10.1 Strictly Come Business

In 2009/10 we were involved in Strictly Come Business, a project which promotes the start up of new businesses and enterprise among social housing tenants. We attended numerous community events around our area providing business advice and practical support to the local community. Last year the project helped over 40 social landlord tenants in Leeds to set up their own business.

We are pleased to be involved in the same project this year. We will again be attending local events, providing employment advice as well as support for those wishing to start up their own business.

3.10.2 The Big Lunch

Another event which we promoted last year, and will endeavour to promote this year, is The Big Lunch. This project aims to get as many people as possible sitting down to have lunch with their neighbours, encouraging communities to grow their own food and share resources between them.

3.10.3 Corporate Social Responsibility

This year we have been developing a formal Corporate Social Responsibility Strategy. The strategy is currently in draft format and is soon to be presented to Senior Management Team for sign off. The strategy will go out for consultation, both among employees and customers.

We have done a lot of work within the community this year. Some projects, which are carrying on into 2010/11 include AVHL employees attending a Beeston primary school helping children to read, and a mentoring scheme at a local school, providing support and career advice to young people. The latter scheme has had a positive impact on the students' performance.

In 2010/11 we are looking forward to employing young workers as part of the government's Future Jobs Funding initiative. Our aim is to employ young people from within the local labour market, predominantly in environmental caretaking and administrative roles.

Another forthcoming event in which we will be involved is World At Work day. A number of AVHL employees will be working with small groups at Hunslet Moor Primary School, helping them to understand the importance of work, how the lessons they are learning at school are needed in the workplace and to raise their aspirations. The pupils will carry out activities as well as listen to volunteers give practical examples of working.

4.0 EQUALITY FRAMEWORK

2009 saw the launch of the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) in Leeds. The framework, which replaces the Equality Standard, builds on the concept of mainstreaming equality work by embedding equality across the organisation and focusing on achieving equality outcomes for customers and staff.

Leeds City Council has already begun to make significant progress in this area. The ALMOs took the decision to work with the framework and populate the corresponding Equality Framework Evidence and Collection Tool (EFECT) independently.

This year AVHL has laid the foundations in this area to ensure that it is in a good position to be able to progress with the framework and ultimately, achieve excellence. The Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) are in the latter stages of finalising a similar framework that is for the use of social landlords. We are likely to start working with this framework, however the work we have already done in this area will transfer across relatively simply.

Following consultation with numerous LCC directorates, we then made a decision on the approach we would take. We have set up a project team which is lead by the Service Improvement Officer and consists of members of staff from each team, who are responsible for populating EFECT with evidence from their respective area. This representative is not solely in charge of sourcing the evidence, but they coordinate the rest of the team in terms of how they can contribute. However, only they will have user rights to EFECT, ensuring that there remains a certain amount of control.

The plan for the group for this year is as follows:

- June 2010- Training for project team members surrounding both the framework itself and the evidence collection tool;
- July- September 2010- Self assessment and gap analysis by each team, to be submitted as a report to Senior Management Team declaring when we will aim to achieve Excellence.