

## Equal Opportunities Policy

### 1. Equality Act 2010

Leathermarket JMB wholeheartedly supports the principle of equal opportunities in all aspects of its operation, service delivery and employment, and opposes all forms of unlawful or unfair discrimination on the grounds of protected characteristics, as specified in the Equalities Act 2010:

- Race, nationality, ethnic or national origin,
- Religious belief,
- Age,
- Gender,
- Gender reassignment
- Sexual orientation,
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Disability, health status, physical and mental
- Pregnancy and maternity.

Leathermarket JMB believes that it is in the best interests of the organisation that all individuals are treated fairly and equally and that no individual suffers direct or indirect discrimination:

- **Direct discrimination** is to treat someone less favourably due to one of the characteristics above
- **Indirect discrimination** is the application of criteria that has the effect of discriminating against people who have one or more of the above characteristics.

### 2. JMB Values

#### **The difference the JMB can make**

The JMB is aware that we can only have a limited impact on deep societal issues that generate injustice, however this policy sets out the interventions that we can make which make a difference to the lives of JMB residents.

## **Community**

The JMB is very proud of the way that people of diverse heritage and very different life experiences live together and support each other. We want to continue to do everything we can to support a cohesive community.

The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) suggests that integrated and cohesive neighbourhoods are based on three principles:

- People from different backgrounds having similar life opportunities
- People knowing their rights and responsibilities
- People trusting one another and trusting local institutions to act fairly.

These three principles enable communities to build:

- A shared future vision and a sense of belonging
- A focus on what new and existing communities have in common, alongside recognition of the value of diversity
- A strong and positive relationship between people from different backgrounds.

## **Representing a diverse community**

The JMB is subject to democratic control, in terms of our residents being asked to vote in a continuation ballot every five years. Our ability to win the ballot comprehensively is dependent on our ability to represent and respond to the needs of our diverse community.

## **Voice and Agency**

The JMB recognises that low income is a significant reason why people are excluded from mainstream society, firstly in terms of being unable to afford what most people take for granted, such as being able to meet their nutritional requirement and taking an annual holiday.

People on low incomes are more likely to feel powerless and unable to influence the decision-making that affects their lives. The JMB believes that Voice is the critical component of the pursuit of social justice. For the JMB, Voice means giving those most at risk of being excluded an effective say in the way our services are delivered. We also want to give these same people Agency: the chance to play an active role in bringing about positive change.

We will do all that we reasonably can to ensure that all of our residents have the opportunity to participate in our decision-making processes, regardless of other challenges they face in life

### **Service standards**

The JMB believes that high quality service delivery and a positive equalities culture are inextricably linked.

The JMB wants to deliver services in a fair way. We recognise that to achieve this we may need to deliver our services in different ways to different people to achieve a fair outcome. For instance we should not require residents with limited mobility to attend interviews at our office.

### **Intersectional injustice**

The JMB is aware that statistically black people, women and disabled people are likely to receive a lower income. Thereby suffering the joint disadvantage of low income and injustice. Alternatively, someone may suffer dual injustice as a black and disabled person. This has become known as intersectionality, which has become an important concept and is defined as:

The interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, class and gender, which creates overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination and disadvantage<sup>1</sup>.

### **Racial injustice**

The JMB recognises the importance of and wants to respond positively to the Black Lives Matter movement and acknowledges the existence of structural racism in our society.

Organisations have to guard against institutional racism. The McPherson Report into the death of Stephen Lawrence defined institutional racism as:

*The collective failure of an organisation to provide appropriate and professional support to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness, and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people.*

### **Stereotyping**

The JMB is very aware of the negative stereotyping of council tenants and strives to provide a positive example of what council tenants can achieve when they are given control over the important decisions that impact on their lives.

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<sup>1</sup> Why I'm no longer talking to white people about race – Reni Eddo Lodge

## **Employment**

A positive approach to equality enables the JMB to recruit and retain the best staff and directors, to help us achieve our objectives. A diverse board and staff team is more likely to have the skills, experience and insight to meet residents' expectations.

The JMB's employment statement is:

*'Our aim is that our workforce will be truly representative of the community we serve and each employee feels respected and is able to give their best. We will provide equality and fairness in employment and we oppose all forms of discrimination.'*

### **3. Southwark together**

The JMB works in partnership with Southwark Council. As a response to the Black Lives Matter Movement, the Council has committed itself to a number of pledges that the JMB fully endorses:

We pledge to promote an open and transparent culture where employees who experience/see racism are able to raise it and expect the issue to be dealt with swiftly and fairly.

We pledge to listen to and amplify our diverse voices within our organisations on how we create an inclusive workplace at all levels

We pledge to work to address structural racial inequalities within our organisation, the organisations we partner with and within the service we deliver.

We pledge to champion organisations that address racial injustices and organisations that promote diversity.

We pledge to ensure that people of all backgrounds can rise to the top of the organisation.

## **4. Turning our values into a reality**

### **1) Business Plan**

Promoting equality is identified as critical building block for what we are trying to achieve within our Business Plan. A detailed plan to achieve these objectives is contained in our Three-year Workplan.

Support for residents facing the greatest challenges is a critical objective within our Business Plan.

### **2) Review**

The JMB board will formally review our approach to equality on an annual basis.

### **3) Commitment To Equality**

We will be high-profile in proclaiming the commitment to equality set out in this paper to our residents and staff, and invite challenge if people believe that we are not living up to them.

### **4) Governance**

Residents from diverse backgrounds should believe that they are effectively represented.

### **5) Training**

It is essential that our directors can effectively represent our diverse community, therefore equality training will be mandatory for our directors.

Similarly, it is essential that our staff have the right attitude, skills and knowledge to deliver services to our diverse community and that our managers have the knowledge to provide support to our diverse workforce.

### **6) Service Standards**

We strive to ensure that all residents can access good quality JMB services, regardless of what other challenges they face in life.

We have equality information for over 90% of our secure tenants. This gives us a strong basis to assess how our services are experienced by residents facing injustice.

We are aware that people experiencing the effects of injustice are likely to have lower expectations of our service and are less likely to make effective use of our 'not-right-first-time' process. Therefore we will offer the extra support to our residents confronting the greatest challenges.

### **7) Voice and agency**

We want to give power to those who have historically been excluded. This means identifying the barriers to participation such as lack of confidence and time or not physically being able to get to meetings and develop strategies to address these barriers.

The JMB is committed to giving residents extensive options to participate. We currently support fifteen resident's groups who play a role in contributing to and scrutinizing of JMB activities.

### **8) Inclusive activities**

We are aware that voluntary groups are vulnerable to developing into self-perpetuating cliques and that most people participate in new activities because they are encouraged to do so by their family and friends. Therefore it is really important that we make our participatory processes and social events as inclusive as possible.

Decision-making responsibility within the JMB ultimately rests with the JMB board. The stepping stones to becoming a director is involvement in tenants' and resident associations and sub-groups. It is therefore important that these groups are welcoming to new members, especially if their life-experience brings a different perspective that the existing group may be lacking.

### **9) Support for those experiencing intimidation**

The JMB strives to ensure that residents who face discrimination as a consequence of having a protected characteristic know that the JMB is here to support them. We want people who experience racism, homophobia and domestic violence to receive top quality support.

### **10) Income maximisation & practical support**

Due to the intersectionality of low income and other forms of injustice noted earlier, supporting residents who have a low income with financial advice and practical support is a critical part of our equalities strategy.

## **11) Housing allocations**

In line with the national trend<sup>2</sup>, black tenants living within the JMB are more likely to be overcrowded and live in older, smaller properties that are more vulnerable to condensation.

With regard to disability, unsuitable housing will reduce the quality of life for residents with certain health conditions. For instance we are concerned about the number of older residents who live on the top storey of walk-up blocks.

The JMB supports the work of Leathermarket CBS who are building new council homes. The new homes mean that either residents can move out of unsuitable homes to new homes or move into homes vacated by other JMB residents benefitting from the new build programme.

## **12. Employment**

Applying the 1995 Equal Opportunities Commission booklet “Benefits of Equality and Cost of Inequality” to the JMB, the business benefits are:

- The best person is recruited for the job
- The best use is made of human resources
- The workforce is representative and has a better understanding of the local community
- A positive image with residents
- A positive image with the council and other potential funders
- Managers can integrate equality into organisational objectives
- New ideas are generated by a diverse workforce

The JMB has a whistle-blowers policy that staff can use if they believe standards that the JMB has set for itself are not being upheld.

The JMB values its entire staff team. The JMB is a ‘flat-organisation’, with a relatively low wage differential between its highest and lowest staff member. The JMB believes that the historical status differential between office and estate based staff is demotivating to estate staff and would undermine the delivery of the JMB’s critical cleaning and repair services.

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<sup>2</sup> Race and council Housing in Hackney 1984

## **Equalities Action Plan October 2020-2021**

### **1. Business Plan & Workplan**

We will use our Business and Workplan process to structure our positive response to equality.

### **2. Review**

The Board will review our Equality Policy, Equalities Plan and Equalities Impact Assessment in November 2020. Equalities will be a standard item for Performance sub.

Promoting equality is written into the workplan of all staff.

Our progress on promoting equality is reported upon in our Annual Report and to our Annual General Meeting.

### **3. Commitment to Equality**

The JMB will consult upon and publicise its commitment to equality:

- Discussion about new Equalities Policy with the Board, sub-groups, TRA and staff team. Jan 2021- April 2021
- A shorter more accessible version of our Equality Policy will be distributed to all residents and included within our new tenant's sign-up pack, from Jan 2021.

### **4. Governance**

All Directors will be required to attend Equality and Recognising unconscious bias training being organised for TMOs by Southwark council for the financial year 2021/22. Future Directors will be required to attend this training within 6 months of appointment.

### **5. Training**

All JMB staff will attend Equalities during the financial year 2021/22. New staff will attend this training as part of their induction process



## **6. Service standards**

The JMB will cross reference service satisfaction and ethnicity information. June 2021.

We will increase the percentage of secure tenants that we hold equalities information on from 91% to 95% (November 2021).

With regard to residents who are seldom seen and heard, we would like to re-start our structured programme of home visits, as soon as it is Covid-19 safe for us to do; so that we can pick up on service and support needs that we are not currently aware of.

The priority for major investment works is to replace services, such as communal heating systems and lifts that if they failed would cause huge difficulties for residents who have health problems.

## **7. Voice and agency**

Participation and Communication Sub will work with TRAs to agree recommendations on how TRAs can best involve and represent residents. September 2021.

## **8. Inclusive activities**

The JMB has organised a Black History Month zoom meeting to listen to residents about how we can best respond to the Black Lives Matter movement. October 2020.

## **9. Support for those experiencing intimidation**

We are aware of the disparity between the high percentage of women nationally who report in surveys the experience of domestic and sexual violence and the much lower percentage of JMB women tenants who request our support, During Covid-19 we have given a high profile to the support provided. We will continue to do this. On-going.

## **10. Income maximisation and practical support**

JMB staff will continue to offer income maximisation advice. On-going.

The JMB will sustain the food programme provided by our Community Support Network volunteers and food providers for as long as possible. On-going.

The JMB support a joint initiative between Leathermarket CBS and Southwark Council to offer employment opportunities to JMB residents.

### **11. Housing allocations**

The JMB will support the CBS to do early allocations to the new homes being built at Joseph Lancaster and on the Elim estate.

The JMB will continue to fund all aids and adaptation requests recommended by medical practitioners to improve living conditions for our residents with limited mobility. On-going.

### **12. Employment**

The JMB will undertake the following action:

- Report on ethnic composition of staff team to Staffing sub- May 2021
- We have a predominately male estates services team. We will undertake a review into our recruitment practices and staff facilities to better understand their impact on the gender balance within estate based staff and to assess if changes are required. December 2021

### **13. Covid-19**

Nationally Covid-19 disproportionately effects the elderly, those with under-lying health problems and people of Afro-Caribbean and South East Asian heritage. The JMB will continue to offer the highest level of support that we can.

## **Equalities Impact Assessment**

The JMB should review the impact of its actions and inaction, both positive and negative, on equalities over the past year.

### **Positive**

#### **Food programme, summer and autumn food and fun programmes and financial advice**

There is a strong interaction between poverty and other forms of injustice. Therefore poverty alleviation measures have a positive impact on inequality.

The JMB has organised food deliveries to those suffering food poverty for the ten months.

The JMB has accessed £10,000 hardship funding for the benefit of our residents. The JMB secured funding for a Summer Food and Fun programme delivered by Fast-58 and also arranged half term activities and food for October.

#### **New build programme**

The JMB is supporting the CBS new build programme that will benefit JMB tenants who live in the least suitable housing, of which black people are over-represented

#### **Aids and Adaptions**

The JMB has adapted homes to make them easier to live in by tenants with limited mobility.

#### **New heating systems and lifts**

The JMB has renewed vital systems, such as heating and lifts. If these services had failed, life would have been incredibly difficult for our most vulnerable residents.

### **Negative**

#### **Equality of service provision**

The JMB remains concerned about the impact that persistent complainers has on our service, as responding and managing assertive complainers diverts staff resources from supporting the residents facing the greatest challenges. Especially, as those facing the greatest challenges tend to have the lowest expectation of the services and are less likely to complain.

#### **Home visits**

Covid-19 has meant that we should not have a structured programme of visiting secure tenants in their homes, therefore we may be unaware of residents confronting extreme challenges,