

# Equality and Diversity Strategy 2011-13

January 2011/Service Improvement Team

<b>Signed off</b>	<i>Residents' Forum – January 2011 Board – December 2011 Executive Team – November 2011</i>
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## Version Control

Item	Reason for Change	Version	Author	Date
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## **Equality and Diversity Strategy 2011-2013**

This Strategy is Origin's second Equality and Diversity Strategy. It sets out the key objectives that Origin wants to achieve in the area of equality and diversity, over a three year period.

### **Introduction**

Origin Housing is a diverse organisation with services that include the management of over 5,500 properties of various tenures comprising general needs, retirement housing, supported housing, key worker accommodation, leasehold, shared ownership, intermediate rent, commercial and market rent. As well as managing nearly 380 retirement housing and more than 160 supported housing tenancies, Origin operates a home improvement agency called "Care and Repair" and provides various support services to nearly 2000 non-resident clients who live in its communities.

Origin's workforce of over 250 people are from a wide range of backgrounds and cultures, reflecting the diversity of the customers and communities it serves in the London and North Hertfordshire regions. The diverse nature of its work, customers and employees, coupled with its recognition of the close links between the provision of quality housing and other social and economic opportunities, mean that valuing diversity and promoting equality are key principles of Origin Housing.

The legal and regulatory framework within which the 2007 Strategy was developed has now changed. The last Strategy delivered important advances in Origin's approach to equality and diversity, with the most significant outcome being the greatly improved knowledge of who Origin's customers are and what needs they have. The achievements of the last Strategy will act as a platform on which to devise new strategic objectives which will further embed Origin's commitment to equality. Central to this will be the need to develop means of tailoring services to customer needs, both on an individual and strategic basis, and valuing and respecting the diversity of employees.

### **The Framework**

#### **1. Scope**

This Strategy addresses the equality and diversity needs of Origin's customers and employees. Customers include residents of all tenure types and those that use our Care and Support services.

As well as existing intelligence that has highlighted equality issues for Origin, the Strategy will consider the requirements of new equality legislation.

#### **2. Overall aims**

The Strategy is guided by our values to:

- Promote equality and diversity and respect all individuals
- Seek and act on the views of communities
- Do what we say with integrity and openness

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- Foster partnerships.

It will support our 2011/2012 business priorities to:

- Tailor services to individuals and specific customer groups, e.g. a strategy for older people
- Develop further the effectiveness of our customer involvement
- Develop better career development opportunities
- Improve induction and support for staff.

The overall aims of the Strategy are:

- To have customers who know about, can easily access and are happy with their experience of services provided by Origin
- To provide services and communications that are tailored to individual needs and preferences
- To have staff who consider equality and diversity issues as part of everyday life
- To be a fair and supportive employer that recognises and respects individual differences.

### **3. Where are we now**

#### Equality Strategy 2007

Since the last Equality Strategy, Origin has made significant progress in a number of areas:

- The Customer Profiling project has vastly improved our knowledge of who residents are and the needs and preferences that they have.
- The Aids and Adaptations Service has been enhanced. The service experience has been improved for customers and access to the service is monitored so that underrepresented customer groups can be identified and appropriate action taken.
- Equality and Diversity training has been introduced for all staff. New staff receive the training within six months of joining Origin and are re-trained at least once every three years. The training has increased staff awareness of equality and diversity issues and has received positive reviews from attendants.
- Key staff have received training in how to conduct Equality Impact Assessment (EIAs) and EIAs on some of our main services have been progressed, with action plans developed to address their findings. The EIA process is helping ensure that services are well promoted, easy to access and delivered fairly.
- The Assessment and Support Service has been extended so that the support needs of all new tenants are reviewed before they move into their homes. This service helps tenants sustain their tenancies.
- A range of HR policies and procedures have been implemented which support equality and diversity.
- An accessible homes audit has been completed and required improvements are on track to be delivered during 2010/2011 and 2011/2012.

Some of the issues identified in the 2007 Strategy have either not been addressed or have not been addressed as comprehensively as intended. These include: developing and promoting a corporate commitment to diversity; developing equality and diversity targets for all service areas; ensuring that underrepresented groups are able to get involved; and understanding the cultural issues of some significant minority groups.

### Customer Profile Project

Significant progress has been made over the last eighteen months in terms of capturing diversity information for both residents and staff. As of November 2010, we have information regarding five diversity characteristics or more for 71.2% of tenants and 70% of our staff (excluding agency staff). The diversity of tenants and staff for whom information has been captured is detailed in the table below:

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Residents</b>	<b>Employees</b>
<b>Age</b>	39.9% are between 35 and 54 and 34% are 60 or over, including 20% of general needs tenants	31.0% are under 35 and 13% over 56
<b>Disability</b>	51.7% of tenant household members have one disability, including 52.0% of general needs. 39.7% of tenant household members have more than one disability, including 39.9% of general needs	4% have a disability
<b>Ethnic origin</b>	45.1% are Black Minority Ethnic (BME)	47.0% are BME
<b>Gender</b>	61.4% are female	63.3% are female
<b>Religion /belief</b>	51.6% are Christian, 10.6% Muslim, 20.3% have no religion and 10% prefer not to say	55.4% are Christian, 3.3% Muslim, 21.7% have no religion and 10.9% prefer not to say
<b>Sexual orientation</b>	3.5% have a sexual orientation other than heterosexual/ straight (bisexual, lesbian/ gay woman, gay man or other), 17.5% prefer not to say	7.1% have a sexual orientation other than heterosexual/ straight, 11.4% prefer not to say
<b>Language</b>	26.7% have a language other than English as their first language, 7.2% prefer to have communication from Origin in a language other than English	

The table above highlights that:

- a considerable proportion of Origin's residents are aged 60 or over
- over half of residents have at least one disability and a significant number have more than one disability
- more than a quarter of residents have a language other than English as their first language
- Origin staff are broadly representative of residents except in respect of age.

The profile of Origin's customers must be reflected in the way that services are planned, resourced and delivered.

### Diversity Key Line of Enquiry (KLOE) and Service Reviews

The Diversity KLOE sets out a series of questions and statements which help organisations assess whether they have an excellent or fair approach to equality and diversity. A recent gap analysis review of Origin's services revealed that since the last Strategy was developed we:

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- have strengthened our equality and diversity performance in the area of Access and customer care but
- need to improve our performance further in the areas of: Corporate culture and governance; Service user involvement and Partnerships in the community.

Over the past eighteen months comprehensive service reviews have been completed on the following services: Allocations and lettings; Gas servicing; Responsive repairs; Tenancy and estate management, including anti-social behaviour; Leasehold services. The service reviews made several suggestions about how Origin's approach to equality and diversity can be enhanced. Some of the recommendations are being addressed through improvement plans for individual services. Others will be addressed at an organisational level, including the suggestion that we:

- consistently collect diversity information of survey respondents so that customer satisfaction can be analysed by the different diversity characteristics
- comprehensively assess and address the potential equality impact on the services reviewed
- make some aspects of our services more accessible e.g. gas contractors could carry language translation cards and the website could be made more accessible.

#### Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs)

EIAs are helping Origin improve the way that it develops policies and delivers services for customers and staff. By reviewing monitoring information and carrying out consultation with stakeholders, the EIA process helps ensure that services are not discriminatory and are meeting the needs of customers, employees and communities. The potential equality impact of several services e.g. gas servicing, anti-social behaviour and complaints, has been reviewed and highlighted corporate equality issues that are being addressed, as well as those specific to each service. Examples of improvements made to policies and procedures that have been reviewed include:

- The development of a pictorial postcard to improve access for gas servicing
- The introduction of a 24 hour voicemail service for reporting complaints
- Domestic Abuse information cards developed for all front-line staff.

#### Diversity monitoring – performance

A suite of equality and diversity indicators are monitored by the Board on an annual basis and the Diversity Leadership Group every six months. Having collected more information about who Origin's customers are in the last twelve months, more effective diversity monitoring will be carried out in future.

Diversity monitoring information for 2008-2010 is included in appendix one. The appendix shows that whilst targets have been met in numerous areas, improvement is required in the areas of governance and resident involvement. This reinforces the results of the KLOE gap analysis. It is good practice to have staff, senior management and Board diversity profiles that broadly reflect the communities where a housing provider works. Whilst Origin's staff and senior management team profiles are diverse, the make-up of its Board does not currently reflect the communities that we serve, particularly in terms of gender and ethnic origin. It is important that the customers Origin engages with reflect the diversity profile of all customers. In both 2009 and 2010 the diversity of residents involved has not been monitored and appropriate targets for this area have not been developed. This Strategy plans to address this area of weakness.

### Customer and staff satisfaction

Origin wants all customers to know about, easily access and be equally satisfied with services, regardless of their diversity characteristics. Similarly, we want all staff to be equally satisfied with their experience of working for Origin.

The feedback from both the recent customer and staff surveys revealed some discrepancies between satisfaction levels of different groups of respondents when they were analysed by age, ethnic origin, disability, gender, religion and sexual orientation<sup>1</sup>. For customers, those of a Black Minority Ethnic (BME) background, those with no religion or a religion that was different to the majority religion (Christian) and younger customers were less satisfied with key aspects of Origin's service. Similarly, staff of a Black Minority Ethnic (BME) background or those with no religion or a religion that was different to the majority religion (Christian) were less satisfied with Origin as an employee. With regards to age, older staff were more likely to be less satisfied.

Lower satisfaction amongst younger people and people from a BME background is a fairly common trend amongst housing providers. However, it is important that we frequently monitor accessibility and satisfaction information and probe further where necessary to identify the crucial variable and reasons associated with lower dissatisfaction.

## **4. What our customers want**

Origin's customers and staff recognise the importance of equality and diversity. Customers require that Origin provides easily accessible services which are delivered fairly by respectful and proficient staff. Some of the recent customer feedback that we have received demonstrates that, at times, we need to do this better. Staff want Origin to be an equal opportunities employer that respects individual differences, helps ensure that staff are treated fairly in respect of the job that they do and provides them with opportunities for learning and development.

Customers and staff expect Origin to do what it can to identify and address discrimination and harassment both in the home, neighbourhood and workplace.

The information collected about the diversity profile of our residents and employees can now be used further to shape our services to the varied needs and differences of both our residents and employees. The feedback from our customers on collecting this information has been positive and they want us to treat them as individuals and take account of their needs. We have also had positive feedback where resources have been targeted using this information, a prime example being older customers who have been proactively contacted about the possibility of using our Aids and Adaptations Service.

As demonstrated above, we have also been able to analyse feedback from customers and staff by different diversity characteristics. This analysis has started to inform various business strategies.

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<sup>1</sup> Data sources are Origin's STATUS survey 2009, ongoing service satisfaction surveys conducted by Pexel, staff survey 2010.

## 5. What the business needs

In order to achieve the overall aims of this Strategy, demonstrate its values and support the delivery of business priorities, it is important that Origin strives to:

- comply with equality legislation
- base all business decisions on customer intelligence
- further develop and embed its approach to equality and diversity.

### Equality legislation

The Equality Act received the royal assent in spring 2010 and some provisions of the Act came into force on Oct 1<sup>st</sup> 2010. The Act brings together previous equality legislation and extends equality law in some areas. Its requirements, which will be phased in over time, will impact on Origin's role as both an employer and service provider. The Act's implications and its phased implementation will be reflected in the supporting Action Plans as appropriate.

The full impact of the Equality Act on Origin as a service provider will become clearer over the next eighteen months as further specific duties are introduced. Requirements that can be addressed now include the need to consider equality issues for an extended group of protected characteristics.<sup>2</sup> Origin is already receiving and acting upon advice about the Act's impact on its role as an employer. Areas that are being changed include the recruitment process and Origin's role in identifying and tackling discrimination and harassment.

### Using customer intelligence

By analysing the diversity profile of its customers, Origin can better tailor service delivery and shape its business strategies so that resources are allocated more appropriately to customer need. It is vital that the good work of the Customer Profile collection project is maintained so that Origin's knowledge of its customers continues to increase.

Excellent organisations have used customer profile data to inform strategic decisions across their business. One example includes using profile data to help identify future housing need and shaping housing development and asset management strategies around this. Another example is the use of profile data to identify the location of vulnerable customers e.g. older people and those with a mobility disability to inform health and safety strategies and future works programmes.

### What does excellence look like?

In spite of the demise of the Audit Commission, the Diversity KLOE provides the most comprehensive guidance on what a social housing provider should be doing to help ensure that it is delivering an excellent approach to equality and diversity. The equality and diversity focus of the Tenant Services Authority's (TSA) regulatory framework is on understanding and being responsive to customer needs, particularly in relation to the seven diversity characteristics and tenants with additional support needs<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> The nine protected characteristics referred to in the Equality Act are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex, sexual orientation.

<sup>3</sup> The seven diversity characteristics in the TSA's framework are age, disability, ethnic origin, gender, gender reassignment, religion and belief, and sexual orientation.

Several organisations have been praised for their approach to equality and diversity. Recent work around customer profiling, has laid the foundations to enable Origin to start working towards developing a similar approach.

Key themes that are common in the approaches of these organisations include:

- The Board lead the organisation's approach to equality and diversity
- Board, staff and involved customer diversity profiles reflect those of the communities served and/or measures are in place to work toward this
- Known diversity profile information of customers and employees is high
- EIAs have been carried out on key services and action taken to address issues identified
- Staff have a strong awareness of the needs of people from diverse communities
- Tailored services based on specific needs of customers are provided
- Customer profile information informs strategies
- Services, premises and involvement opportunities are easily accessible for all
- Customers are able to easily access support services
- Equality and diversity is promoted through procurement and contract monitoring
- Customers and employees are confident that harassment will be dealt with effectively.

## **6. The strategic objectives**

The following strategic objectives have been developed after consideration of Origin's values, 2011/2012 business priorities, a review of what customers and employees want, current performance, industry good practice and the needs of the business:

- i. To implement intelligent systems to use customer profile data to monitor access to and satisfaction with services.
- ii. To tailor service delivery and communications to customer needs and preferences.
- iii. To develop and sustain a culture of equality and diversity where Board members, staff and involved customers retain appropriate levels of training and understanding about relevant equality and diversity issues.
- iv. To develop mechanisms to ensure that Origin engages with and utilises feedback from customers that reflect the diversity of its communities.
- v. To develop a strategy for older people.
- vi. To identify and address equality and diversity issues that affect Origin's role as an employer.

## **7. Achieving the strategic objectives**

The key activities which will need to take place in order to achieve each objective are outlined below. Detailed tasks will be included in the supporting Action Plans.

### i. To implement intelligent systems to use customer profile data to monitor access to and satisfaction with services.

- Increase profile data collected and available for existing residents
- Implement IT systems that enable staff to easily use relevant profile data to tailor customer communications and service delivery, ensuring that data is held confidentially as appropriate

- Implement local systems for each service to enable staff to easily monitor accessibility
- Develop a monitoring, analysis and reporting framework for customer accessibility and satisfaction for all services, including localised equality and diversity performance indicators.

ii. To tailor service delivery and communications to customer needs and preferences.

- Review the Assessment and Support service
- Ensure that all services, particularly the new Neighbourhood Service, has tailoring services as a core part of delivery
- Develop definition of and guidance on serving vulnerable customers
- Update guidance and develop training on tailoring communications and service delivery
- Carry out a programme of EIAs on priority services
- Carry out consultation with customers from identified minority groups
- Complete DDA improvements in communal areas.

iii. To develop and sustain a culture of equality and diversity where Board members, staff and involved customers retain appropriate levels of training and understanding about relevant equality and diversity issues.

- Update the equality and diversity indicator suite and refresh targets
- Consult staff about how equality and diversity can be further embedded and research best practice
- Develop an Equality and Diversity Communications Strategy
- Implement appropriate equality and diversity training programmes for involved customers, different stratum of staff and Board members.

iv. To develop mechanisms to ensure that Origin engages with and utilises feedback from customers that reflect the diversity of its communities.

- Complete an EIA on Resident Involvement
- Identify involvement methods that customers want to use
- Develop and implement a mechanism to enable customers to scrutinise equality and diversity performance.

v. To develop a strategy for older people.

- Analyse diversity and locality profile of older customers
- Identify services where older people are underrepresented
- Carry out consultation with older customers in all tenures and research best practice
- Work in partnership with local and national agencies for older people.

vi. To identify and address equality and diversity issues that affect Origin's role as an employer.

- Adhere to the employee related requirements of the Equality Act
- Carry out consultation with staff from identified minority groups
- Carry out EIAs on key policies for staff.

## **8. Implementation, monitoring and review of the strategy**

### Implementation and monitoring of the Strategy and Action Plan

To ensure Origin achieves the objectives of the Strategy, an appropriate Equality and Diversity Action Plan will be developed on an annual basis. Senior managers will assist with the Action Plan's development to ensure that actions are specific, have clear and measurable outcomes and are adequately resourced in terms of time and staff. Each action will be owned by a manager and tasks will be included in the personal work plans of relevant staff members so that staff take responsibility for and are committed to delivering their actions.

### Equality and Diversity performance indicators

A suite of equality and diversity performance indicators will continue to be monitored, in order to measure our progress on equality and diversity and to ensure that our services and workplaces are accessible and fair.

### Progress monitoring

Progress against the delivery of the Action Plan and the performance indicators will be monitored by the Diversity Leadership Group (DLG) quarterly and by Board on an annual basis. The monitoring will include a review of whether intended outcomes have been achieved once these can be measured. Any issues of concern around the delivery of the Strategy and Action Plan and/or performance against the indicators may be raised for further attention by either the DLG Chair or Board, as and when necessary.

A suite of local equality and diversity indicators will be developed for each service area, accompanied by a mechanism for managers and teams to monitor these, as part of the first year Action Plan.

Customers will also be involved in the monitoring and scrutiny of our approach to equality and diversity. The role of customers in this will be developed as part of the first year Action Plan.

### Review of the Strategy

The progress of the Strategy will be reviewed quarterly by the DLG and annually by the Board.