

# **POOLE HOUSING PARTNERSHIP**

## **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY POLICY**

### **APPENDIX 1**

#### **1.0 OVERVIEW**

##### **Background**

Poole Housing Partnership implemented its Equality Scheme in 2004, when the ALMO was established.

This new policy sets out how we are building on this Equality Scheme to ensure that equality issues remain at the heart of all we do, and that PHP fully complies with:

- all legislation and regulatory requirements (see Appendix 2 for full details),
- the Equality Standard
- and the Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR) Code of Practice on Racial Equality in Housing

It also sets out the framework for monitoring and reporting progress towards the achievements of our objectives.

PHP's 2004 Equality Scheme identified the need to ensure no one is discriminated against, and specifically highlighted the requirement to consider the needs of the range of people in our community including those from ethnic minorities, disabled people, the young and old, and gay and lesbian people when preparing policies and delivering services to ensure no one was ever disadvantaged or discriminated against. The policy is now widened further to expressly include transgender and bisexual people and recognise faith/religion as an area potentially vulnerable to discrimination, in recognition of developments in best practice and to comply with new legislation.

The legislative framework for equality and diversity issues is illustrated in full on the attached document, marked Appendix 2. In the event of any changes to legislation, this appendix will be updated and circulated to staff and Board members along with an executive summary on any implications.

##### **Training**

In the last four years PHP has placed significant emphasis on training for staff, board members and involved residents and it is clear that PHP is now in a position of strength; evidence from away days and staff surveys shows us we have the hearts and minds of a committed team to support this work.

##### **Why is it so important for PHP?**

We want to deliver excellent services - the best services that we can. Equality and diversity is key to our objectives and values. We also know that to

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achieve this we need to recruit and retain the most talented people, contractors and consultants to be an exemplar social landlord.

We have strategic company objectives that support this policy including:

- Make services available and easily accessible to all the community, including “hard to reach” groups
- Support a healthy and diverse community
- Develop social and financial inclusion

We are committed to ensuring that all our policies, procedures and practices provide appropriate treatment in the provision of services and employment of staff and service providers.

### **What is PHP’s approach?**

- not to tolerate any form of unfair discrimination, bullying or harassment
- make sure we respect and are sensitive to every individual service users’ needs, so that every individual can easily access services and be involved in shaping those services in a way that works for them
- make sure we attract the best people from all strands, reflecting the community we serve to work with us, respecting and welcoming those differences which will positively help us to improve what we do and how we do it
- encourage our contractors and consultants to positively share our commitment and drive through our thorough selection and monitoring processes
- make sure every policy and procedure supports this ethos and regularly report our performance against targets to the Board and residents
- Know who our customers and staff are, and the wider community we work with, by gathering data on age, ethnicity, disability, gender and, only when residents are comfortable in disclosing it, sexual orientation and faith and, in addition, develop strong links with local voluntary and faith groups/contacts
- Carefully monitor the impact of our work on all strands of the community, all customers and all staff to ensure that no individuals are detrimentally affected by our policies or processes, and specific support and action is provided to customers and staff around recruitment, harassment anti-social behaviour and domestic violence
- Support recognised tenants and leaseholders groups and individuals, to share our values and work together, to meet our objectives
- Work with partners in the Borough, community groups and other stakeholders to improve our understanding and involve them when reshaping services and policies

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PHP is committed to ensuring its culture, its decision-making processes and its policies and processes, particularly including recruitment of staff and Board members, actively challenge discrimination, and encourage respect and inclusiveness. This is achieved through the completion of **Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs)** across the organisation – each service, each policy is tested. The purpose of this process is to ensure we address all the different needs that customers have, through:

- Collecting evidence,
- Measuring it against legal or regulatory requirements,
- Setting good practice standards,
- Meeting local needs,
- Designing an achievable action plan to address any identified shortcomings in performance,
- Monitoring the action plan

Managers will complete **Predictive Equality Impact Assessments** for new policies or proposals to change procedures: to consider how the proposal(s) could impact on service users.

Every manager who is responsible for either producing policies or processes or for the delivery of a service is part of the Equality and Diversity Working Group. This group meets regularly to exchange experiences and develop skills.

A flow chart is attached as Appendix 3 to illustrate the process of determining the need for a full Equality Review, and what elements of the policy, function or service should be considered.

### 2.0 FRAMEWORKS

The Board of Directors ensures that Equality and Diversity objectives are set and monitored, that lessons are learnt and changes made to improve performance using a suitable framework.

PHP's Business Plan and Action/Performance Plans provide the strategic framework, and these are monitored through the year. In addition, regular reports on improvements identified to either eliminate discrimination or improve access are captured and fed back to the Board, provided by PHP's Lead Officer and Board Champion. These strategic objectives cascade down into team plans and from 2008/9 will also be included in personal objectives for all staff.

The Audit Commission expects excellent organisations to carry out EIAs and involve staff and stakeholders throughout, demonstrating actions taken as a result of these processes.

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The Audit Commission's diversity KLOE examines the effectiveness of PHP under:

- Corporate culture and Governance
- Access and customer care
- Service user involvement
- Partnerships
- Harassment and domestic violence
- Legislation

PHP will ensure strategic objectives for equality and diversity follow these headings and will be included in the Business Plan each year.

### **The Equality Standard**

Level 3 or above of the Equality Standard (which was introduced in 2007 by the IDeA, "Improvement and Development Agency" for local government to specifically assist local authorities to meet their equality and diversity obligations) is considered to demonstrate the necessary commitment and compliance of an excellent organisation.

90% of local authorities use the IDeA's Equality Standard to manage their compliance with legislation and best practice in equality and diversity. The Standard has levels 1-5. Only a very small number of metropolitan authorities achieve level 5. PHP has been working in partnership with the Borough of Poole on this Standard and is committed to achieving Level 3 with the Borough by March 2009. However, in addition to this commitment, PHP is separately committed in the Business Plan to achieving Level 5 by 2010/11.

### **Equality and Diversity Framework for Review and Action**

We have looked at alternative frameworks for achieving the Equality Standard to find a more user-friendly, relevant and effective framework for landlord services. This was because staff were finding the Equality Standard's processes burdensome and less relevant to PHP's business.

Discussions with the National Federation of ALMOs, and consideration of Housing Quality Network (*Equality Impact Assessments September 2007*) led to the decision to use the National Housing Federation's framework, "A framework for review and action" from 2008/9 onwards, as this has been built specifically to meet the needs of housing providers. It provides 17 modules, with 17 sets of pertinent questions to probe each service area from maintenance to handling anti-social behaviour, lettings to income collection.

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Training will commence in the summer of 2008 for all middle and senior managers. They will be provided with the modules for their specific service areas to enable them to evaluate and improve their Equality Impact Assessments undertaken in March 2008. In addition, report formats have been reviewed to specifically require the outcomes of predictive EIAs to be included, and so over time all policy documents and procedures will display this information.

### **3.0 COMMUNICATION**

The Board appoints an Equality and Diversity Champion for the Board of Directors, and the Chief Executive also appoints a Lead Officer for Equality and Diversity for Staff.

These two individuals communicate regularly and ensure that Equality and Diversity receives the necessary mainstream profile in the organisation, ensuring it is included at every Board Meeting, and every staff Meeting, overseeing the feeding back of progress with action plans through the year.

To ensure that our stakeholders know of our work and plans, communication will include:

- A dedicated area on 'Your PHP' website to display the policy, Board reports, Action Plan and Equality Impact Assessment outcomes and schedule of Working Group meetings
- Regular features in 'At Home' newsletter
- A revised Equality and Diversity Action Plan will be presented to the Board in the Autumn, which will identify service areas requiring full EIAs and timetables for these
- Staff will routinely be consulted on equality and diversity (for example through away days, and surveys), as will all resident forums, service review groups and contractor monitoring groups
- Bespoke training, particularly in relation to gypsy/travellers, (Poole's most significant ethnic minority) will be regularly commissioned, including approved contractors and other local housing providers
- The Lead Officer and Board Champion will present an annual position statement on Equality and Diversity

### **4.0 REVIEW**

To measure the benefits of our Equality and Diversity policy we have and are continuing to develop robust monitoring processes. We will develop our current key performance indicators, establish targets and analyse performance against these targets. These will be included in the annual position statement reported to the Board.

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This policy will be reviewed every three years to ensure it remains fit for purpose and reflects PHP's culture and complies with all legal and regulatory requirements. Supporting procedures will be produced by the Working party to assist staff in compliance.

### 5.0 COMPLAINTS

Anyone who has a concern about PHP's performance in relation to Equality and Diversity should contact the Equality and Diversity Lead (Head of Housing Management) on (01202) 264410 or the Chief Executive's Personal Assistant on (01202) 263402.

In addition, PHP recognises complainants may wish to use an advocacy service, such as the Citizen's Advice Bureau, or relevant support group or Council, such as Dorset Race Equality. PHP would encourage the involvement of an advocate.

#### Key websites for reference:

<http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk>  
<http://www.cih.org.uk>  
<http://wwwcohesionactionnet.org.uk>  
<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com>  
<http://www.idea.gov.uk>  
<http://wwwraceactionnet.org.uk>

#### Key Document References:

1. Audit Commission KLOE on Diversity:  
<http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/housing/housingkloe/kloe31.asp?CategoryID=english^1628>
2. 'Equality Impact assessments' (2007), J Jeffery & R Seager Housing Quality Network
3. 'Equality Standard for Local Government' (2007)  
<http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/aio/6531086>
4. 'Equality and diversity: a framework for review and action' (2006) J. Jeffery & R Seager, National Housing Federation

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### **APPENDIX 2**

#### **THE LEGAL AND REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS**

A reason for carrying out an equality review is to provide evidence to meet the legal and regulatory requirements, which affect local authorities. The key requirements are summarised here.

Some of these requirements are set out in Acts of Parliament and statutory codes of practice. The Audit Commission, which inspects social housing providers, also sets and inspects standards of service delivery.

Further requirements and commitments may be set as conditions by outside bodies, such as local authorities.

The main regulatory and inspection framework for local authorities is:

- The Audit Commission's Key Lines of Enquiry

In addition, local authorities will need to consider:

- The requirements of local, regional and national stakeholders that relate to the areas in which they operate; and
- The local authorities own equality and diversity commitments.

Current relevant legislation:

- Equal Pay Act 1970
- Sex Discrimination Act 1975
- Race Relations Act 1976
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- Race Relations 1976 (Amendment ) Regulations 2003
- The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003
- The Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003
- Civil Partnership Act 2004
- Disability Discrimination Act 2005
- Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006
- The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006
- Equality Act 2006

The Government announced on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2008 that due to the complexity and significant volume of legislation in this area, a new single Equality Bill is proposed: "a new fairness Act aimed at allowing everyone, whatever their background to fulfil their ambitions".

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### The Audit Commission's Key Lines of Enquiry

The Audit Commission's Housing Inspectorate has developed Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE) to be used as the basis of its inspections of housing organisations. Most of the KLOEs cover a specific topic, e.g. repairs.

Diversity is a strand in all the topic-based KLOEs and is also one of three generic key lines of enquiry. The Audit Commission notes that these generic KLOEs 'will not be used independently for inspection purposes' as they have been 'embedded within each of the service specific KLOEs' (e.g., resident involvement).

The diversity strand in all the topic-based KLOEs pose the same question, namely:

- How does the organisation respond to the diversity of its community to ensure that all users, or potential users, have fair and equal access to [the relevant service area, e.g., tenancy and estate management]?

### The Diversity KLOE

The Diversity KLOE has been developed to:

*Ensure that services address the different needs that customers have.*

This KLOE covers five main areas of activity:

- corporate culture and governance;
- access to customer services;
- service user involvement;
- partnerships; and
- harassment and domestic violence.

A series of questions is posed for each of these five areas. Together they indicate where the Audit Commission's Housing Inspectorate will focus when assessing performance in responding to the diversity of the community that it serves.

The diversity KLOE also sets out the main indicators the Inspectorate will use to determine whether a housing provider is delivering an excellent (three star) or fair (one star) service in terms of diversity. Housing providers should also take account of the Access and Customer Care KLOE. This is closely linked to the Diversity KLOE, for example over the provision information.

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### **Revised KLOE 1. Prospects for Improvement**

The revised KLOE, issued on 29 June 2005 and applied to inspections from August 2005 onwards, emphasises that service improvements should be aimed specifically at the most vulnerable and most disadvantaged members of the community.

There is no overall definition of vulnerability; each area will have its own needs and circumstances. However, organisations are expected to prioritise and integrate social inclusion, community safety and the needs of young people within their service plans.

### **Legislation**

Each of key pieces of legislation is now examined in more detail sorted under the six equality strands:

- 1. Gender**
- 2. Race and Ethnicity**
- 3. Disability**
- 4. Sexual orientation**
- 5. Faith and religion**
- 6. Age**

#### **1.0 GENDER**

##### **Equal Pay Act 1970**

This Act prohibits discrimination in pay and conditions of work between men and women.

##### **Sex Discrimination Act, 1975**

This Act prohibits sex discrimination, gender reassignment and married persons from discrimination and victimisation in relation to employment, education, housing and the provision of goods services and facilities.

##### **Equality Act 2006**

This Act introduces an amendment to the Sex discrimination Act 1975 to ensure that all public authorities will have a gender duty to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination; and
- promote equality of opportunity between men and women.

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A detailed code of practice will provide direction and guidance on the gender duty, and is likely to follow the race duty and devolved responsibilities from both the Housing Corporation and Audit Commission, see Race and ethnicity below.

### **2.0 RACE AND ETHNICITY**

#### **Race Relations Act 1976**

This Act prohibits discrimination in relation to employment, education, housing, and the provision of good services and facilities. This covers direct and indirect discrimination as an employer and as a provider of housing and other services. The Act also allows organisations to take certain steps in pursuit of positive action, but does not allow positive discrimination.

The Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR) oversees the Code of Practice on Racial Equality in Housing updated in October 2006. This code sets out how to prevent unlawful racial discrimination and harassment in all areas of housing activity in England.

#### **Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000**

This Act placed a new duty on all listed public authorities to 'promote racial equality'. Both the Audit commission and Housing Corporation are listed as public bodies under this Act. This means that they are required to promote racial equality actively through:

- working towards the elimination of unlawful discrimination;
- promoting equality of opportunity;
- promoting good relations between persons of different racial groups

As inspectors and regulators of local authorities, the Audit Commission requires these.

As part of the steps it has taken to meet its equality duty, the Audit Commission has included these in its Key Lines of Enquiry, again discussed in more detail below.

Local authorities are bound by this Act. Local and district councils are also working to achieve the Equality Standard for Local Government, this seeks corporate progress on a broad range of equality areas including race, gender and disability. As a result, housing providers may be asked to contribute to a local or district authority's work to meet its Equality Standard, especially if it is responsible for managing on behalf of the council.

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### **3.0 DISABILITY**

#### **Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA)**

This Act covers employment, the provision of services, and housing matters. Discrimination occurs when a disabled person is treated less favourably than other people because of their disability, unless there is a justifiable reason. The main justifiable reason is on health and safety grounds.

Unlike the legislation on gender, race and ethnicity, this Act is not neutral. Someone who is not disabled cannot use the DDA if they believe they received less favourable treatment than a disabled person.

Employers and service providers have a duty to make reasonable adjustments so that a disabled person can take up a job, carry on working or make use of a service. The failure to make a reasonable adjustment will be regarded as less favourable treatment on the grounds of disability. Examples of reasonable adjustments include providing special equipment, changing working practices and procedures and adapting premises.

All organisations are required to ensure that services open to the public should be fully accessible to disabled people. This refers to any premises, which are open to the public, rather than tenants, and includes meeting facilities with board members.

This Act also covers the presentation of information about an organisation's services, and whether the formats used are accessible to disabled people. For example, if an applicant or tenant requests information in large print, in Braille or an audio-tape the association must be able to meet this request within a reasonable time period.

#### **Disability Discrimination Act 2005**

This Act came into force in December 2006. It places a duty on all public authorities to:

- eliminate disability discrimination;
- eliminate disability harassment;
- promote equality of opportunity between disabled and able bodied people;
- take account of a disabled person's disabilities, even when that involves treating disabled people more favourably than other people.

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Government departments, local and district authorities, inspection and audit agencies such as the Audit Commission and Housing Corporation are considered public authorities for the purposes of the duty to promote disability equality.

The general duty does not tell public authorities how to do their work. Instead, it requires them to give due weight to the need to promote disability equality in relation to all policy and practice including planning, policy making, service delivery, regulation, inspection, enforcement and employment. Housing providers should take particular care to ensure that they do not make judgements on impairment of staff, applicants or tenants but ask questions about needs and requirements and how these can be met.

The Act also extends the definition of disability to include people with HIV, cancer and multiple sclerosis.

The Act now makes it unlawful for landlords and managers of premises to discriminate against a disabled or prospective tenant by failing, without justification, to comply with the duty to provide reasonable adjustments for that disabled person.

The tenant (or someone on his or her behalf) will be required to ask for an adjustment before this duty applies. Once a request has been made the landlord must make reasonable adjustments to its policies, practices, procedures or auxiliary aids and services where it is otherwise impossible or unreasonably difficult for a disabled person to enjoy the premises.

Landlords are not legally required to remove or alter physical features, eg, widening doorways for wheelchair users. However, if a tenant or a member of the tenant's household makes a request for alterations to the premises, the landlord should not unreasonably withhold consent.

Landlords and management agents will be required to take reasonable steps to provide an auxiliary aid or service which would help or facilitate a disabled person's enjoyment of the use of premises (this applies also to a tenant's disabled partner or disabled child), regardless of whether or not they are the main tenant, these may include:

- permitting a blind person to have a guide dog on the premises despite a term of a lease/ tenancy forbidding the keeping of pets;
- using a typewalk service when communicating with a profoundly deaf person where he or she would usually telephone other tenants;
- reading a tenancy agreement/information to a visually impaired person or providing it in Braille or large print; or

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- allowing a disabled person to leave rubbish in another place if he or she cannot access the designated place to leave rubbish.

Reasonable adjustments are dependent on various factors, the most important being the particular needs of a disabled person. This moves away from the 'one size fits all' approach.

The Disability Rights Commission plans to produce specific guidance on housing in 2006.

### **4.0 SEXUAL ORIENTATION**

#### **The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003**

European Union (EU) Directives were designed to tackle discrimination and harassment in employment and vocational training faced by people because of their sexual orientation.

The regulation covers direct and indirect discrimination as well as harassment in the workplace because of a person's sexual orientation.

The regulations also recognise that in certain, very specific, circumstances to be of a specific sexual orientation may be a genuine occupational requirement. An example might be where the prime purpose of a job is to campaign to promote equal rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered people.

The regulations do not require employers to monitor job applicants' sexual orientation although some employers already do this.

#### **Civil Partnership Act 2004**

This Act gives same-sex couples the right to register a civil partnership and have their relationship legally recognised. They will have the same rights as a married couple in areas like tax, social security, inheritance and workplace benefits.

### **5.0 FAITH AND RELIGION**

#### **The Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003**

EU Employment Directives were designed to tackle discrimination and harassment in employment and vocational training at the workplace, faced by people because of their religion or belief.

The explanatory notes to the UK regulations define a recognised religion as:

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*...beliefs...[that] attain a certain level of cogency, seriousness, cohesion and importance, provided the beliefs are worthy of respect in a democratic society and are not incompatible with human dignity.*

These regulations recognise very specific circumstances in which holding certain religious or other beliefs will be a genuine occupational requirement.

Some of the implications for employers include:

- providing prayer rooms;
- meeting the dietary requirements of certain religions or beliefs;
- being flexible to accommodate cultural and religious holidays;
- being flexible over uniforms to accommodate certain religions or beliefs.

The regulations do not require employers to monitor job applicants' religion, although some employers already do this.

### **Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006**

This Act makes it unlawful to stir up hatred against people because of their religious beliefs or lack of them. These can include criminal acts, antisocial behaviour, abuse or harassment or the display of written material that is threatening, abusive or insulting with the intention or likely effect of stirring hatred.

One of the key objectives of this Act is to close the loophole where race legislation protects mono-ethnic groups such as Jews and Sikhs but not multi-ethnic faith groups, such as Muslims.

Housing providers can now take action against political and religious extremism. Issues such as leafleting could be addressed, as well as individuals who may stir up religious hatred or action against others who do not share their religious beliefs.

This Act should not infringe freedom of speech. The following would not be seen as an offence:

- criticising the beliefs, teaching or practice of a religion or its follower;
- proselytising one's own religion or urging followers of a different religious to cease practising theirs;
- telling jokes about religions; or
- expressing antipathy towards or dislike of particular religions or their adherents.

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The distinction is based on the intention to stir up hatred; this includes threatening, abusive or insulting works, action or material intended to incite hatred of a particular group of people rather than an ideology. Thus, for example, ridicule, prejudice, dislike, contempt, would not be regarded as hatred.

### **The Equality Act 2006 (Part 2)**

Part 2 of this Act prohibits religious or faith discrimination and victimisation in relation to education, housing and the provision of goods services and facilities.

It therefore proposes to make it unlawful for a person providing a good, facility or service that they would normally provide the public or a section of the public to discriminate on the grounds of religion or belief.

### **6.0 AGE DISCRIMINATION**

#### **The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006**

These regulations implemented in October 2006, and amended in April 2008, outlaw unjustified discrimination on the grounds of age in all aspects of employment and vocational training.

There will be a national default retirement age of 65, to be reviewed in 2011, but employees will have a right to request to work past that age and employers must give serious consideration to such a request. An employer who wishes to set a lower retirement age must justify this and show that it is 'appropriate and necessary' to do so.

### **7.0 THE COMMISSION FOR EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

The Equality Act 2006 established a single equalities body called the Commission for Equality and Human Rights, operational from October 2007. The new Commission merged the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Commission for Racial Equality and the Disability Rights Commission into one umbrella body. It is responsible for promoting equality and combating unlawful discrimination covered by the existing equality commissions and the three new strands, namely sexual orientation, religion or belief and age, as well as the promotion of human rights.

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The new commission for Equality and Human Rights has a range of powers to promote equality and tackle discrimination. These include:

- to consult with stakeholders to ensure all groups have an opportunity to participate and engage in its work;
- to monitor progress on equality, human rights and good relations between communities, through publishing a regular 'state of the nation' report;
- to promote good relations between and within communities across all sections of society;
- an explicit role to combat prejudice and work to reduce crime affecting particular communities, including new powers to monitor hate crimes;
- a regional presence across the country, and in Scotland and Wales

### **8.0 ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR**

In dealing with harassment there are powers that housing providers can exercise under the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003.

The police have a wide range of legal powers that can be used to deal with harassment, including the Criminal Damage Act 1971; the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, which provides a definition of 'racially aggravated' which can be attached to certain offences and can add two years to the penalty for a crime; the Public Order Act 1986, which covers causing intentional harassment, alarm or distress, using words/behaviour to stir up racial hatred, distributing written material likely to stir up racial hatred and the possession of racially inflammatory material; and the Protection from Harassment Act 1997, which covers harassment and stalking, with or without violence.