



Oaklee Housing Association

HOUSING MANAGEMENT

Equality Impact Assessment

Consultation Document

July 2007

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Executive Summary

- 1.1 Oaklee Housing Association is committed to fulfilling its responsibilities under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. In its Equality Scheme, the Association gave an undertaking to carry out an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) on each policy, or group of related policies, where screening had indicated significant issues in relation to one or more of the nine equality dimensions.
- 1.2 The Association screened all of its policies during 2004 - 05. The results of this exercise, including the proposed EQIA programme, were subject to a 12 week period of public consultation between July and September 2005.
- 1.3 The aim of Housing Management policy is to provide within available resources a high quality, efficient, effective and equitable housing management service in the interests of the Association, its tenants, applicants and other customers and the wider community.

This report provides the following information:

- Background information on the equality duties and Oaklee Housing Association
- A description of the Association's current Housing Management policy and information on the scope of this review.
- The sources of quantitative and qualitative data considered during the review
- Assessment of the impact of the policy on the 9 equality dimensions. This includes potential differential impacts based on disability and race
- Proposed mitigating measures
- Details on consultation process
- The next stages of the EQIA

2. INTRODUCTION

Statutory Equality Duties

2.1 Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act requires Oaklee Housing Association, in carrying out its functions, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between:

- Persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
- Men and women generally;
- Persons with a disability and persons without;
- Persons with dependants and persons without.

2.2 The Association must also, in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland, have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

2.3 In line with its equality scheme obligations, the Association screened all of its existing policies to assess whether they impacted on the promotion of equality of opportunity or the duty to promote good relations. The following questions were asked during the screening exercise:

- Is there any evidence of higher or lower participation or uptake by different groups?
- Is there evidence that different groups have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to the particular policy issue?
- Is there an opportunity to promote equality of opportunity between the relevant different groups, either by altering the policy, or by working with others in government or in the larger community, in the context of the policy?
- Have consultations with relevant groups, organisations or individuals indicated that policies of that type create problems specific to any relevant groups.

A report describing the results of the screening process is available from Mr Maurice Mackey, Personnel & Training Manager (see contact details on page 2).

2.4 Following this screening process and the associated consultation, the Association developed a 5-year Equality Impact Assessment programme. The Housing Management policy was scheduled for assessment in year two of this programme.

2.5 This impact assessment has been carried out in accordance with the procedure outlined in the Equality guidance. The eight separate stages of the Equality Impact Assessment are:

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1. Determining the aims of the policy
 2. Collecting available data
 3. Assessing the impact of the policy
 4. Consideration of measures to mitigate any adverse impacts and/or alternative policies that might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity
 5. Formal Consultation
 6. Analysis of responses and decision by Association
 7. Publication of results of the Equality Impact Assessment
 8. Ongoing monitoring of adverse impact.

2.6 The purpose of conducting the Equality Impact Assessment is as follows:

- To identify adverse impacts and to consider mitigating factors which will eliminate adverse impact;
- To consider alternative policies which would better promote equality of opportunity

2.7 This document is a draft for consultation and contains details of the first four elements of the Equality Impact Assessment. The remaining stages will be implemented following consideration of consultation responses.

About Oaklee Housing Association

Oaklee Housing Association is a voluntary non-profit organisation and a Registered Housing Association with the Department of Social Development, with over 30 years experience in social housing. The Association provides and manages quality social housing, care and support services to meet a wide range of needs including sheltered housing for older people, general family housing, single people and people with special needs.

We have over 4,000 units of accommodation province-wide. Oaklee Housing is also the largest partnering organisation within the housing sector with over twenty-seven joint management partners who provide a wide range of care and support services to our tenants. Our aim is to provide a quality and caring service to all our tenants at an affordable rent.

The Association's Board of Management reflects a wide range of interests and experience, and represents the interests of tenants, other service users and the community at large.

3.0 The Policy

Description of Policy

3.1 Housing Management policy includes a range of policies which define how we manage our housing:

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1. Allocations, transfers and voids
 2. Rent collection and arrears recovery
 3. Nuisance and anti-social behaviour
 4. Tenant Participation
 5. Tenancy Management
 6. Estate Management

Policy Aim

3.2 Oaklee Housing is committed to providing a comprehensive Housing Management service. The aim of Housing Management policy is to provide within available resources and in accordance with legislation, regulations and best practice, an efficient, effective and equitable Housing Management service.

Underpinning Objectives

- Provision of equal access to services
- Responsive to a diverse range of needs
- Promoting and developing tenant involvement
- Providing satisfaction to stakeholders
- Value for money
- Continuous improvement of service

Scope of Review

3.3 The main stakeholders in relation to the policy include tenants in receipt of Housing Management services and anyone seeking Oaklee accommodation and services or information in relation to accommodation and services

External

- Tenants
- Residents of agency managed supported housing schemes
- Leaseholders
- Applicants for housing
- Job applicants
- General public
- Elected representatives
- Community representatives
- Joint Management Partners
- Other Associations
- Department for Social Development
- NIHE
- Other statutory agencies
- Ombudsman
- Inspection and assessment bodies

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- S75 representative groups

Internal

- Board members
- Management
- Staff

Former

- Past tenants

This list is not exhaustive

Department for Social Development

Housing Associations are subject to a high degree of regulation by the Department for Social Development (DSD) which has specific responsibility for monitoring Housing Association activity and performance. Oaklee Housing is required to complete an Annual Regulatory Return which is one of the methods used by DSD to gather information on and monitor the Association's housing management activity and performance.

Inspection & Assessment Bodies

There are also other organisations including the Northern Ireland Housing Executive which monitor performance relating to Housing Management policy.

- 3.4 Housing Management policy is intrinsically linked to all of the Association's key policies and processes. This includes:

Access and Communications
Complaints
Maintenance
Development
Finance
Human resources
House Sales
Care & Support

- 3.5 We anticipate that Housing Management issues may potentially interlink with other equality impact assessments. Whilst considered to be important by the Association, the following areas do not come under the scope of this equality impact assessment.

- (a) Housing Associations are required to allocate properties including internal transfers in accordance with the rules of the common Housing Selection Scheme. This is the statutory scheme approved by the DSD for the allocation of all social housing in Northern Ireland from the Common

Waiting List. The Housing Selection Scheme is managed and administered by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to ensure consistency in its application and is operated by all social landlords in NI. The NIHE have conducted an EQIA on the Housing Selection Scheme and Housing Associations have participated in this EQIA consultation. A final report is due to be published in July 2007.

- (b) Repossession of property and evictions for breach of tenancy conditions can only be carried out in accordance with primary legislation set out in the Housing (NI) Order 1983 (Schedule 3). A possession order can only be granted by a court and if the judge considers it reasonable to end the tenancy and the process has been judged to be fair and in accordance with tenancy conditions and the law. An eviction is enforced through due process by the Enforcement of Judgments office. This is therefore not included within the impact assessment.
- (c) The rent setting policy is applied through Oaklee's annual budget setting process defined by the Finance Directorate. Service charges will be addressed under charging policies and therefore do not form part of this assessment. This will be covered in a separate EQIA scheduled for year 4 in the Association's Equality Scheme
- (d) The Housing (NI) Order 2003 introduced measures to assist Housing Associations' to deal with antisocial behaviour. In order to ensure consistency for all social housing tenants and compliance with the legislation the Department for Social Development has introduced a model policy and procedure for all Housing Associations for dealing with nuisance and anti social behaviour.
- (e) This EQIA assessment covers only those publications produced by Oaklee Housing Association. It excludes all other documents produced by other organisations which are made available to the Association's customers.

Legislative and Regulatory Requirements

3.9 The Association is required to comply with the following relevant legislative and regulatory requirements.

- DSD Regulatory Framework 2004
- Data Protection Act 1998
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- Housing (NI) Order 1983 (rights of secure tenants)
- Housing (NI) Order 1992 (introduced the Tenants Guarantee)
- Housing Order NI 2003 (brought Housing Associations within the remit of the Commissioner for Complaints and introduced introductory tenancies, use of injunctions and extended grounds for possession)
- Housing Benefit Regulations for Northern Ireland 2006
- Judgment Enforcement Rules (NI) 1981

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- Social Security Claims & Payments Regulations (NI) 1987
 - Social Security Administration (NI) 1992

3.10 Oaklee Housing Association must also meet certain obligations under its Equality Scheme to ensure that current and future customers have ready access to its Housing Management services and information about the services. Specific consideration needs to be given to some groups who do not have the same access to information as others. These include:

- People with physical, sensory, or learning disabilities who may have difficulties with information in print
- People with physical, sensory or learning disabilities who may require housing and support services to suit their specific needs
- Members of ethnic minority groups whose first language is not English and who may have difficulties with information provided only in English.

Reasons for Equality Impact Assessment

3.11 The screening report gave the following reasons for carrying out an impact assessment on the policy:

- (a) Housing Management policies (this includes tenant participation, rent collection and arrears, management of nuisance and antisocial behaviour etc) may have an adverse impact on any of the 9 socially defined groups
- (b) In a preconsultation exercise these policies were ranked in the following order of importance as affecting certain equality groups
 - Tenant participation 70%
 - Tenancy and Estate management 65%
 - Neighbour nuisance and ASB 61%
 - Rent 43%
 - Voids and relet management 39%
- (c) Whilst specific initiatives are in place as part of Oaklee's commitment to deliver an excellent customer service, the Equality Impact Assessment presented an opportunity to improve existing policy.
- (d) The Association believes that easy access to Housing Management services and information about them is of high importance to the Section 75 socially defined groups.
- (e) The Association also believes particular groups are likely to have greater difficulty than others in accessing its Housing Management services or information about them and access needs are likely to vary among the socially defined groups.
- (f) Pre-consultation feedback identified a range of issues in relation to how groups could be affected as follows:

Category	Groups Affected
Understanding of rights and responsibilities	Women, ethnic minority groups, all marginalised groups, sex offenders, elderly, blind, disabled, young people
Communication difficulties	Disabled people, including blind and those with learning difficulties, ethnic minority groups
Understanding of enforcement processes	Disabled people, young people, women, ethnic minority groups,
Barriers to Involvement	Women, elderly, ethnic minority groups
Procedures / lack of support	All groups

- (g) The Association provides services to a diverse range of customers including many client groups with special needs.
- (h) Due to the absence of available data at the time of screening the policy, the decision was taken to assess actual adverse impacts during the conduct of the equality impact assessment.

Implementation of the policy

3.12 The Housing Management policies have been defined by the Association's Management Team in consultation with the Tenants Forum, are approved by the Board of Management, and are implemented by Housing Management staff. The key aspects of current policy are presented below.

3.13 Oaklee Housing Association provides accommodation for people with a variety of housing needs in areas where housing need has been identified by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and new homes are built to lifetime homes standard. The statutory housing authority (NIHE) is responsible for collecting data and identifying housing need and supporting the Association in the delivery of the social housing programme.

Rent Collection and Arrears Recovery

3.14 Rent collection includes rent, rates, service charges, support and heating charges.

3.15 The Association offers tenants a range of convenient payment methods which include payment cards, direct debit, standing order, debit/credit card, cash, direct payment of Housing Benefit, direct payment by other agencies .

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- 3.16 Staff provide advice and information to tenants on tenants obligations, methods of rent payment, prevention of arrears, the consequences of non-payment and recovery action. This is provided through:
- Tenants Handbook
 - Tenancy Agreement
 - Tenancy sign up for new tenants
 - Tenants meetings and surgeries
 - Home visits / office visits and telephone contact
 - Letters to tenants
- 3.15 Housing management staff provide outline advice on benefits available to help meet rental charges, assist tenants to obtain detailed advice from relevant agencies e.g. Housing Benefit department, and with completion of Housing Benefit applications.
- 3.16 Regular rent statements are issued to tenants and tenants are contacted promptly when arrears occur.
- 3.17 Particular care is taken to ensure that vulnerable tenants and where appropriate their representatives (e.g. family, support worker, advocate) are fully aware of their obligations in relation to payment of weekly charges. Individual circumstances and support needs are taken into account when considering appropriate recovery action.
- 3.18 Tenants are encouraged to seek advice and debt counselling when in arrears either through the Association or through independent advice agencies such as Citizens Advice Bureaux.
- 3.19 Personal contact is made to establish all relevant individual circumstances before commencement of legal action for recovery. Legal action to recover debt and /or possession of property is taken as a last resort if a tenant is unwilling to reach or maintain an acceptable voluntary agreement for repayment of arrears.

Tenant Participation

- 3.20 Oaklee Housing Association is committed to tenant involvement in the operation of its business and provides tenants with the opportunity to shape and influence Housing Management policies and services.
- 3.21 This is set out in the Tenant Participation Compact and is reflected in tenant representation on the Association's Board of Management and sub-committees and in the employment of a dedicated Tenant Participation Officer.
- 3.22 Tenant participation is facilitated primarily through a Central Tenants Forum of elected tenant representatives and 4 Regional Forums. Each regional forum has two representatives from each sheltered housing scheme in the region, four representatives from supported housing, and four other representatives.

3.23 The Tenants Forum works in partnership with Association staff to consider and review policy and service issues which affect tenants, and also to inform and consult with the Association's tenant body.

3.24 Tenant involvement is also facilitated through:

- Tenants Associations/Committees at local scheme level
- Tenant meetings and focus groups
- Participation in Service Review Steering Group and various continuous improvement teams
- Tenants Handbook working group;
- Tenants editorial group for Oakleaves (Oaklee's Tenants newsletter)
- Development of tenant information leaflets
- Tenant Forum website

3.25 To achieve effective participation the Association provides induction and ongoing training for Tenant Forum members

3.26 To encourage greater participation Oaklee Housing offers a flexible approach to tenant involvement, assistance with expenses, travel costs, and convenient times for meetings in easily accessible venues and locations.

Tenancy Management and Estate Management

3.27 Oaklee Housing Association is committed to providing an excellent tenancy and estate management service to all tenants. We recognise the importance of working in partnership with other voluntary, statutory and community organisations to assist in the delivery of an effective and efficient Housing Management service.

3.28 As part of a current structural review the Association has combined the operational Housing Management and Maintenance functions to improve performance and service delivery to tenants through service delivery teams comprising of Housing Officers, Maintenance Officers and local scheme based staff.

Specialist Teams

3.29 The Association's Board of Management has decided to implement specialist teams for delivery of Housing Management services which will include estate management, allocations and void management, and income recovery.

3.30 The new specialist teams are expected to improve the Association's performance and service delivery to over 3000 tenants by improving methods of contact, speed of response and quality of information provided. We do not consider there will be any adverse impact for any of the 9 socially defined groups in relation to tenants or staff.

Contact methods

3.31 Tenants, housing applicants and other customers can contact the Association in a variety of ways:

- The Associations office at Leslie Morrell House, 37/41 May Street, Belfast
Open Monday – Friday 9.00am – 5.00pm
- Telephone via the Oaklee Services Centre (Lo-call 0845 073 0005)
- E-mail (services centre@ oaklee.org.uk)
- Website www.oaklee.org.uk
- Written correspondence
- Tenants Forum
- Local scheme based staff
- Home visits/meetings with Housing Management staff

Oaklee Services Centre

3.32 The Oaklee Services centre provides a responsive and accessible Housing Management and Repairs service to tenants, applicants and other customers

3.33 An average of 2,500 housing management and maintenance calls are taken each month from a range of customers embracing the nine socially defined groups by specially trained customer advisors using the most advanced technology. Calls typically dealt with include stock enquiries, queries on housing application process, position on waiting list, transfer requests, repair requests, rent account queries.

3.34 Almost 80% of incoming calls are resolved at the first point of contact and all calls are tracked from start to completion to ensure we are delivering a consistent and high quality service.

Personal Contact

3.35 This results in improved service to tenants through more efficient and effective use of Housing Officers' time allowing them to dedicate more time to tenancy and estate management through personal contact with tenants. Personal contact with a Housing Officer contact is regularly requested by tenants via the OSC.

3.36 Calls which require more specialist attention are allocated to the local Housing Officer for response and resolution within an agreed target period.

Translators, Advocates & Signers

3.37 The Association is currently working on a collaborative initiative to implement Language Line service to provide greater accessibility and responsiveness to

customers through Oaklee Services Centre as the main contact point for housing management and tenancy queries.

- 3.38 Translators, signers and advocates are arranged as necessary to meet the specific requirements of tenants and other customers in communicating with the Association on housing management and tenancy issues.

Written Correspondence

- 3.39 The Association will make all tenancy information available in alternative formats on request.

Voids Management

- 3.40 When a property becomes vacant following termination of tenancy it is inspected by Housing Management staff to identify any repairs or other work necessary before it is re-allocated. This work is carried out by the Association's Maintenance Assistants or an external contractor.
- 3.41 The Association has a target time of 4 weeks for reletting general needs properties.
- 3.42 For properties which are long term void and for which there is low demand the Association implements a void strategy which includes local promotion and advertising; liaison with relevant agencies to identify possible applicants; analysis of factors contributing to low demand and implementation where possible of measures to counteract these e.g. remodelling; consideration of alternative client groups or alternative use of the accommodation.
- 3.43 The processes in relation to void management focus on the physical features of the accommodation.

4. Consideration of available data and research

Sources of information

- 4.1 The following were used in considering available data relevant to the impact of Housing Management policy.
- (a) Internal management information in relation to profile of tenants and service users
 - (b) Office for National Statistics
 - (c) Northern Ireland Research and Statistics Agency
 - (d) NICORE – statistics of all lettings made by the Association
 - (e) Qualitative Feedback from staff

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- (f) Tenant Satisfaction Survey (MORI) 2006
 - (g) Complaints register
 - (h) Northern Ireland Life & Times Survey 2006
 - (i) DDA audits
 - (j) Equality Commission Codes of Practice
 - (k) NIFHA Pre-Consultation Feedback on Equality Impact of Housing Management & Maintenance Policies May 2007

4.2 The key issues highlighted by analysis of the above data sources are presented in this section.

Profile of Service Users

- 4.3 Oaklee Housing Association has over 4000 units of accommodation located throughout Northern Ireland.
62% Sheltered housing for older people; 23% general family housing; 15% supported housing for tenants with special needs
- 4.4 The principal sources of equality information about tenants are tenant surveys and NICORE lettings statistics.
- 4.5 Information on lettings by age, gender, marital status, ethnic group, religious belief, applicants with a disability, and applicants with responsibility for a dependent are included at Appendix B.
- 4.6 At present, Oaklee Housing Association does not collect data on political opinion or sexual orientation. The 2006 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey indicates that 0% of respondents described themselves as gay or lesbian while 2% chose not to respond and 98% indicated they were heterosexual. A research report by Youthnet argues that analysis of the Census 2001 indicates that between 2% - 10% of the population may be lesbian, gay or bisexual.
- 4.7 According to the 2006 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey 36% considered themselves to be unionist, 23% stated that they were nationalists whilst 40% stated that they were neither.

Complaints

- 4.8 The Association received 31 complaints in 2006/07, excluding neighbour disputes. Of these 17 were in relation to Housing Management - 6 regarding rent arrears, 2 regarding housing application, 3 regarding staff and the remainder a combination of housing related concerns. Complaints response is carried out in accordance with the complaints policy and reported bi-monthly to the Board of Management.

Tenant Satisfaction Surveys

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- 4.9 Oaklee Housing commissioned Ipsos MORI to undertake a tenants survey in November 2006 as the Association wished to obtain accurate, unbiased and statistically robust information from Oaklee tenants to inform and guide future strategic and operational decision-making.
- 4.10 As the response rate in previous postal surveys was generally low the Ipsos MORI survey took the form of face-to-face interviews with 351 tenants across all accommodation types - sheltered, general needs and supported housing, and embracing all of the nine socially defined groups.
- 4.11 A pilot survey of 10 interviews was conducted with respondents from each housing type to check the flow, sense and logic of the questionnaire following which any issues around wording, order or understanding of questions or any other concerns were identified and amended prior to commencement of the main survey.
- 4.12 Interviews were carried out by trained interviewers during weekdays and weekends between the hours of 9am and 9pm
- 4.13 The survey gathered information on a wide range of Housing Management issues including:
- Satisfaction with services received
 - Future intention (to remain with Oaklee or move elsewhere)
 - Attitudes to charges
 - Contact with and communication from Oaklee
 - Complaints procedure
 - Suggested improvements to the Association's service
- 4.14 Overall 85% of tenants are satisfied with the service provided by Oaklee, ranging from 73% of tenants in general needs housing to 90% of tenants in sheltered and 91% of tenants in supported housing.
- 4.15 Over three-quarters (77%) of tenants consider their rent is good value for money and 76% of those who received a rent statement found it very or fairly helpful.
- 4.16 In terms of contact with Oaklee the areas rated highest by tenants are speed of answering calls (90% rated very good or good), the fact that calls are answered by a person (86%) and politeness/ friendliness of staff (86%)
- 4.17 The main reasons for dissatisfaction related to the repairs and maintenance service and to the time taken to resolve queries (rated poor or very poor by 31%). Satisfaction levels were generally lower among general needs tenants.
- 4.18 Almost half (49%) of tenants are currently involved with or know how to get involved in tenant participation in Oaklee.

4.19 Over half (53%) of tenants indicated there are no improvements they would like to see in services they receive from Oaklee (79% in supported housing). Of those who suggested improvements 10% want the organisation to provide more facilities and services.

Pre-consultation feedback

4.20 The Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations appointed a market research company earlier in 2007 to conduct a pre-consultation exercise to assist designated Housing Associations to assess the impact of their Housing Management and Maintenance policies on the Section 75 socially defined groups.

4.21 A total of 98 consultees were sent pre-consultation information prior to the completion of telephone surveys. 23 surveys were completed in total (18 by telephone and 5 returned by post)

4.22 The feedback indicated that the top three groups which are most affected by Housing Management and Maintenance policies are:

1. Disabled people
2. Ethnic minority groups
3. Older people

4.23 The main policy areas identified by consultees were in order of importance:

1. Repairs	6. Tenancy management
2. Antisocial behaviour	7. Rent collection and arrears
3. Adaptations	8. Void management
4. Estate management/ local services	9. Voids and relet repairs
5. Tenant participation	10. Cyclical /planned maintenance

4.24 The policies with which equality related issues were identified were:

- Anti-social behaviour
- Tenant participation and involvement
- Tenancy management
- Rents
- Estate management /local area services

4.25 Some concerns were expressed about the level of voids in some areas but these are not equality related.

5.0 Assessment of Impact

5.1 This section outlines our assessment of the impact of the Association's Housing Management policy on the nine Section 75 socially defined groups based on the evidence considered above.

Disability

People with physical or sensory disabilities are likely to have different needs or greater difficulty accessing services and/or information. This includes:

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- Wheelchair users
 - People with limited mobility
 - Hearing impaired
 - Visually impaired
 - Amputees
 - Those with a mental illness or learning disability
 - People with Dyslexia

Oaklee completed a full DDA audit of its properties in 2002 and reviewed this in 2006. A programme is now underway to implement work required including installation of automatic entrance doors to schemes. Home visits are available as necessary by staff.

Race

Ethnic minority groups are likely to be adversely affected as they are less likely to speak English as their first language and may be less able to read and interpret information in written form. There may also be cultural issues and issues around social inclusion for differing ethnic groups.

There is no evidence of adverse impact. The Association arranges a translation service where necessary in relation to tenancy and housing management issues and will provide tenancy documents and information in alternative formats as required.

Dependent s

People with dependents are more likely to be affected by office opening hours and more restricted in terms of availability for tenant involvement. Staff can arrange visits outside normal working hours, family friendly facilities are provided at the Association's main office and tenants are encouraged and supported to become involved.

Age

There may be some impact on the grounds of age as older people are more likely to have special requirements due to mobility, difficulty understanding information and sensory impairments. There is no evidence of any adverse impact as information is provided in large print, home visits are available and scheme staff provide provide support to tenants.

Gender

There is no evidence of adverse impact.

Marital Status

There is no evidence of adverse impact.

Religious Belief

There is no evidence of adverse impact.

Sexual Orientation

Oaklee Housing Association does not currently collect data in relation to this socially defined group and there is no evidence to suggest adverse impact.

Political Opinion

Oaklee does not currently collect data in relation to this socially defined group and there is no evidence to suggest adverse impact.

Literacy

Although not directly related to any of the Section 75 socially defined groups those with low literacy levels are likely to have greater difficulty in accessing information as much of the Associations information is in the written word.

6. Mitigating Measures

The following measures could potentially improve our performance in promoting and providing housing management services and information:

- Enhanced access to the website – browse aloud, text only, large print, alternative languages and improved colour schemes
- Provision of more information in pictorial form
- Promotion of language line
- Increased flexibility in service provision – contact outside normal office hours
- Improved promotion of information in alternative formats
- Support staff to undertake training in sign language and other languages
- Staff and Board of Management training to raise awareness on equality, diversity and social inclusion
- Staff training to raise awareness on promoting access to services and information
- Developing greater tenant participation by general needs tenants

7. Consultation

7.1 Oaklee Housing Association has endeavoured to give careful consideration to the measures that might be taken to make Housing Management policy

fairer. The measures outlined in section 6 are not intended to be definitive or exhaustive. The Association is planning to formally consult on its findings over a 12 week period and would welcome feedback on these proposals and any other comments that would assist us to improve the policy.

- 7.2 Oaklee Housing Association will ensure that it consults effectively with those groups directly affected by Housing Management policy, and their representatives.
- 7.3 Staff will be available to discuss these proposals in person, by telephone, or by e-mail, as requested. Meetings may also be arranged to discuss the way forward and the Equality Impacts of this document, if required.
- 7.4 The period of consultation will end on **Friday 5th October 2007**.
- 7.5 Comments in relation to this report should be submitted in writing to:

Mr Maurice Mackey
Personnel & Training Manager
Oaklee Housing Association
37-41 Leslie Morrell House
BELFAST
BT1 4DN

Tel: 028 9044 1391
Email: admin@oaklee.org.uk

- 7.6 Comments in any other format will also be accepted
- 7.7 If you require any further information, you may contact the Association using the contact details given in 7.5.
- 7.8 If you require information about housing associations generally or about the Joint Equality Exercise co-ordinated by NIFHA please contact

The Northern Ireland Federation of housing Associations
38 Hill Street
Belfast
BT1 2LB
☎ 028 9023 0446
🌐 www.nifha.org

8. Next Steps

- 8.1 Oaklee Housing Association will seriously consider all comments received when making a final decision on the recommendations of this EQIA.

8.2 The results of the EQIA will be published in the final report, which will be made available to all consultees. Alternative formats will be available on request.

8.3 A system will be established to ensure the ongoing monitoring of the impact of the policy on relevant groups.

APPENDIX A

Estimated Populations of Minority Ethnic Communities in Northern Ireland

Source: Multi-Cultural Resource Centre N-I

Community	Numbers	Main Mother Tongue Languages	Main Geographical areas within NI
Chinese ¹	7000- 8000	Cantonese, Mandarin, Hakka, English	Belfast, Craigavon, Londonderry, all NI
Indian ²	1500	Punjabi, Hindi, English, many others	Belfast, Derry and various others
African	1600	English, Swahili, Fulani, Xhosa, Arabic, Shona, Yoruba, French	Belfast, Ballymena Co. Antrim
Arabic speaking communities ³	1000- 1500	Arabic, English and many others	Belfast, Craigavon
Irish Travellers	1500	English, Gammon/ Cant/ Shelta.	West Belfast, Derry, Craigavon, Newry
Pakistani Community	700- 1000	Punjabi, Urdu, English others	Greater Belfast Craigavon
Portuguese community	700	Portuguese	Craigavon area, Tyrone, other
Bangladeshi Community	450-500	Sylheti, Bengali	North Down, Ards, Greater Belfast
Filipino community	300-350	Tagalo, English and others	Various
Persian/ Iranian community	300-350	Farsi, English	All NI
Jewish Community	230	English	North Belfast

Other communities (with estimates where available):

- **S&E Asia:** Koreans (100), Japanese (80-100), Vietnamese, Thais, Indonesians, Malaysians (140), Indochina and others, also: Australia & New Zealand
- **Central Asian:** Afghans (20), Kurds, Turkish, former Soviet Republics
- **The Americas:** US citizens, Canadians, Latin Americans (200-250) including Brazil (50), Colombia (35) and others
- **Europeans:** Dutch, French, Albanians (50), Kosovans (80-100), Spanish, Russians (50-100); Polish, Romanians, former Yugoslavia, Italians, Germans, Greeks, and many other

Notes for table:

1. The **Chinese** community includes Hong Kong and the New Territories, Malaysia, Taiwan, Singapore, and Mainland China; the majority originate from Hong Kong and are Cantonese speakers (with some Hakka speakers) for those with written Chinese the traditional form is

used; for people from the mainland Mandarin is mainly spoken and the simplified written form used. All are colloquially referred to as "Chinese".

2. The **Indian** community reference here includes around 200-250 members of the Sikh community and people from Sri Lanka;

3. The **Arabic speaking communities** include Jordanians, Palestinians, Lebanese, Syrians, Egyptians, Libyans, Saudis, Iraqis, Moroccans, Algerians and others from North Africa, the Middle East and other areas.

Appendix B

Oaklee Housing Association - Lettings 2006/07

Age

18-24	13%
25-44	27%
45-59	15%
60+	45%

Gender

Male	38%
Female	62%

Marital Status

Married	11.4%
Single	47.5%
Divorced	13.9%
Separated	4.7%
Widowed	22.5%

Ethnic Group

White	99.5%
Irish Traveller	0.25%
Black African	0.25%

Religious belief

Protestant	43%
Catholic	40.5%
Other	0.5%
None/No response	16%

Head of Household with disability

Yes	30.2%
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Dependents

Responsibility for care of child	28%
Care of disabled person	3%
Care of an older person	1.5%

Oaklee Housing Association – Tenant Attitude Survey

Summary and Conclusions

SATISFACTION WITH CURRENT PROPERTY (Section 4.1)

✧ The vast majority of tenants (86%) are satisfied with their current property, although this falls to 71% among tenants in general needs housing. One in ten tenants (10%) are dissatisfied and the main reason for dissatisfaction is the poor repairs and maintenance service.

✧ This is reinforced in terms of their future intentions, with the vast majority of tenants (86%) planning to remain as an Oaklee tenant in their current property, and a further 6% planning to transfer to another property elsewhere in Oaklee.

OVERALL ATTITUDES TO THE SERVICE PROVIDED BY OAKLEE (Section 4.8)

✧ Overall, 85% of all tenants are satisfied with the service provided by Oaklee, with 51% “very satisfied” and 34% “quite satisfied”. Satisfaction levels vary quite substantially by housing type, with levels of 90% and 91% satisfied among those in sheltered housing and supported housing respectively, but dropping significantly to 73% among those in general needs accommodation.

✧ Almost one in ten of all tenants (9%) are dissatisfied with the overall service provided by Oaklee, rising to 14% among those in general needs housing. The main reasons for dissatisfaction are the poor repairs and maintenance service and the perception that the organisation does not listen to or respond to enquiries.

✧ The most important aspects of service that tenants feel Oaklee needs to provide relate to repairs and maintenance and the overall quality of home, each mentioned by 23% of tenants. The repairs and maintenance service is particularly prevalent among tenants in general needs housing, mentioned as the single most important factor by 42%.

RENT/RENT STATEMENT (Section 4.2)

✧ Over three-quarters of tenants (77%) believe that the rent they pay for their property represents good value. Just 10% feel that it is poor value.

✧ Just over half of all tenants (56%) receive a rent statement; however 37% claim not to have received one, despite being shown an example. Of those that do receive a statement, over three-quarters (76%) of these find it “very” or “fairly” helpful. Of the 13% who do not find it helpful, the main reasons are that it is too complicated or too difficult to understand.

CONTACT WITH OAKLEE (Section 4.4)

✧ 39% of all tenants have had contact with Oaklee in the last 12 months, rising to

60% of those in general needs housing. Most contact Oaklee by phone and almost two-thirds (66%) of those who have contacted Oaklee in the last 12 months have done so regarding repairs or repairs-related issues.

⚡ In terms of contact with Oaklee, the areas which tenants rate highest are the speed of answering calls, rated "very good" or "good" by 90%; the fact that calls are answered by a person and not automated (rated "very good" or "good" by 86%); and politeness/friendliness of staff (also rated good by 86%). Factors on which Oaklee fares lowest relate to the query being resolved quickly (rated "very good" or "good" by 56% but "poor" or "very poor" by 31%); and the tenant being provided with information about what would happen resulting from the query (with 60% rating this as "very good" or "good" and 28% as "poor" or "very poor").

⚡ Almost two-thirds of tenants (66%) are satisfied with the way Oaklee dealt with their last query. However, 29% are dissatisfied, with 20% "very dissatisfied". Dissatisfaction in this respect is highest among general needs housing tenants, where 34% are dissatisfied, and 28% "very dissatisfied". The main reasons for dissatisfaction are that the problem has not been resolved, the repairs have not been done or that the repairs are taking too long.

⚡ Overall, 19% of tenants have been in contact with the Oaklee Services Centre (OSC) in the last year, increasing to 32% among general needs housing tenants. Telephone is the preferred method of contact with the OSC (especially among general needs housing tenants), while through a warden/scheme co-ordinator is the preferred means of contact among those in sheltered housing.

REPAIRS (Section 4.3)

⚡ Over three-quarters of tenants (77%) have received a copy of the Repairs' Handbook and of these, 64% consider it helpful (rising to 76% among those in general needs housing). 7% of tenants do not think it is helpful, while 30% have not used it.

⚡ Over half of all tenants (53%) overall, and 66% of those in general needs housing, have had a repair or repairs completed by Oaklee in the past 12 months. 83% are satisfied with how Oaklee has dealt with completing the repair, but those in general needs housing are less satisfied, with the satisfaction figure falling to 71%. Overall, 9% are dissatisfied with how Oaklee dealt with their last completed repair, with the primary causes of dissatisfaction being poor quality of work, the repair was not completed satisfactorily, or that it took too long to complete.

COMPLAINTS (Section 4.5)

⚡ Over half of tenants (56%) are aware of how to make or register a complaint with Oaklee, while of this number, just over a quarter (27%), have actually made a complaint, although this rises significantly to 43% among those in general needs housing.

⚡ Almost 45% of tenants who have made a complaint are satisfied with the way in which Oaklee has handled it but 42% are dissatisfied with how the complaint has been handled, with 30% "very dissatisfied". The main reason for dissatisfaction is that the problem has not been resolved or the repairs have not been done.

TENANT PARTICIPATION (Section 4.6)

⚡ Overall, just under a quarter of tenants (23%) are involved in tenant scheme meetings (38% in sheltered housing), while 5% are involved in regional tenant forums and 4% in central tenant forums. In total, almost half of tenants (49%) are currently involved with, or know how to get involved with, tenant participation in Oaklee.

COMMUNICATION WITH OAKLEE (Section 4.7)

⌘ At an overall level, 84% of all tenants receive the “Oakleaves” newsletter, increasing to 91% among those in sheltered housing. Around two-thirds (64%) of those who receive “Oakleaves” “always” read it, 22% “sometimes” read it, while 7% never read it. Of those tenants who read “Oakleaves”, 80% are satisfied with it and just 5% dissatisfied.

⌘ 79% of tenants believes that the publications and correspondence they receive from Oaklee is generally both of good quality and clear to understand. However, significantly fewer tenants (65%) consider the publications and correspondence provide the information they want to receive.

SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS TO SERVICE (Section 4.9)

⌘ Over half of all tenants (53%) have indicated that there are no improvements they would like to see in the service they receive from Oaklee, rising to 79% among those in supported housing.

⌘ Of those who suggested improvements, 15% of tenants want to see Oaklee provide an improved repair service (24% of those in general needs housing), while 10% want the organisation to provide more facilities and services.

CONCLUSIONS

⌘ Generally, the majority of respondents are satisfied with the service they receive, while 86% are satisfied with their current property and 83% with the way Oaklee has dealt with completing their repair.

⌘ However, satisfaction levels are significantly lower among those in general needs housing in most respects, and this should be closely monitored. 73% of those in this type of housing are satisfied with the overall service they receive (compared to 85% overall), while 71% are satisfied with their current property (86% overall) and the same proportion with the way Oaklee dealt with completing their repair (83% overall). By age, respondents aged 65 and over are more satisfied with the service at an overall level (89% satisfied), compared to 78% of those aged 35-64.

⌘ Satisfaction levels on some aspects of the service provided are relatively lower overall and these should be examined. For example, in terms of making a complaint to Oaklee, just 45% of tenants who have made a complaint are satisfied with the way in which Oaklee handled it, with almost the same proportion dissatisfied (42%), with 30% claiming to be “very dissatisfied”. The main reason for dissatisfaction is that the problem has not been resolved or the repairs have not been done.

⌘ There is also an issue surrounding how Oaklee deals with queries from tenants. While almost two-thirds of tenants (66%) are satisfied with the way Oaklee has dealt with their last query, a significant proportion (29%) are dissatisfied, with 20% “very dissatisfied”, indicating that this is an area which could be improved upon.