

CULTURAL DIVERSITY EQUALITY STATEMENT & ACTION PLAN



CULTURAL DIVERSITY EQUALITY STATEMENT & ACTION PLAN

WELCOME FROM THE GROUP CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Welcome to our first Cultural Diversity Plan. We've done lots to promote cultural diversity in recent years, but we're far from complacent. Organisations like ours still have a long way to go before we can demonstrate that Cultural Diversity is effectively embedded and consistently implemented throughout all our work.

Only by working together can we housing services and achieve the goal of equality of opportunity for everyone.

This Plan will help to ensure that Cultural Diversity continues to be at the centre of all we do. Building Cultural Diversity into all our functions policies, and strategies is an enormous challenge but one that cannot be ignored. This document sets out how we will do this over the next 3 years. It identifies the barriers we face and how we will overcome them. It makes clear the size of the task and establishes our priorities for the future. All Board Members and employees will be made aware of the Plan and their individual and collective responsibilities. We are also committed to ensuring our services and policies are responsive and inclusive for all black and minority ethnic people within the areas we operate.



Angela Lockwood
**Acting Group Chief
Executive**

INTRODUCTION

This is our first Cultural Diversity Plan. During its final year we will carry out a comprehensive review to assess how well we have complied with the General Duty to promote Cultural Diversity. A progress report will be published annually. The Cultural Diversity Plan is a strategy setting out our approach to promoting Cultural Diversity. The Plan sets out how we intend to meet our legislative obligations under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. The Act places a general duty on all public authorities to promote Race Equality. There are also a number of specific duties to help public authorities meet the general duty. This includes producing a Cultural Diversity Plan.

At the heart of the Government's agenda is one overarching aim: to create thriving, vibrant, sustainable communities which will improve everyone's quality of life. A sustainable community is a place where people want to live and work now and in the future. The Housing Sector has a key role to play in 'place-shaping' and working with residents to develop and deliver high quality public services that meet the needs and preferences of local people.

Cultural Diversity Plan

Everything we do is focused around delivering our ambitious vision for North Star Housing Group. We are committed to providing the best possible services for all. This plan outlines our approach to ensure that the needs of diverse communities are anticipated and met as part of our approach to excellent customer service.

This document sets out our overall vision for Cultural Diversity together with the objectives and priorities that will help us turn our vision into reality. It describes the key actions we will take and the close partnership working we will develop to improve outcomes for black and minority ethnic communities.

Why Do We Need A Cultural Diversity Plan

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 amended and updated the previous Race Relations Act 1976. Realising our vision cannot be achieved in isolation and as we move forward we recognise that service planning, commissioning and delivery must be planned, consistent and joined-up. All of our services must remain focused on improving outcomes for all of our communities

A key juncture in the development of race relations in modern Britain was the Macpherson Inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence in 1993. The Inquiry's findings were published in February 1999, and made recommendations regarding the need to tackle institutional racism in a wide range of organisations.

The Macpherson report defines institutional racism as:

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

The Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003 protect workers from discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief as well as those who have no religion or belief.

The law means that as an organisation's our recruitment and selection procedures, as well as our employment policies– such as dress codes and disciplinary procedures – must not discriminate on grounds of religion or belief.

Under the Housing Act 2004 Gypsies and Travellers and under the Race Relations Act we have a duty to promote good community relations in regard to accommodation provisions for Gypsies and Travellers.

North Star Housing Group is committed to achieving cultural diversity. We recognise our duties under the Race Relations Act, and related Codes of Practice, the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003 and Housing Act 2004 Gypsies and Travellers and undertake to strive for cultural diversity in our service provision and employment to promote good relations between all racial and religious groups and organisations. The 2000 Act placed a general duty on all public authorities to promote race equality. There are also a number of specific duties to help public authorities meet the general duty.

SPECIFIC DUTIES (CULTURAL DIVERSITY PLAN)

The Cultural Diversity Plan must identify functions and policies relevant to the general duty, and prioritise these for more detailed assessment; and set out arrangements to:

The aim of the General Duty is to make Cultural Diversity an integral part of the way all public functions are carried out. In practice, this means we must take account of Cultural Diversity in all day-to-day work of policymaking, service delivery and employment practice. The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 is government's legislative response to the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report. The Act requires public authorities to proactively pursue racial equality in everything that they do. This is generally referred to as the Race Equality Duty. The Duty comprises a set of general and specific duties that organisations must comply with.

General Duty

The Act also introduced a set of specific duties on public authorities, which are designed to assist in fulfilling the general duty.

The duty applies to all public authorities. The duty requires the Group to give due regard to:

- assess policies for any adverse impact on the
- promoting equality of opportunity promotion of Cultural Diversity;
- assess and consult on, the likely impact of proposed
- eliminating unlawful discrimination policies;
- promoting good race relations
- ethnically monitoring and analysing grievances, disciplinary action, performance appraisal (when this results in benefits or sanctions), training, dismissals and other reasons for leaving;
- monitor policies for any adverse impact on the promotion of Cultural Diversity
- publish the results of these assessments, consultation and monitoring;
- make sure that the public have access to information
- publishing annually the results of ethnic monitoring and services.

UNDERSTANDING OUR CURRENT POSITION

In order to develop the Cultural Diversity Plan it is important to understand the characteristics of the areas in which we operate, our communities and the Group.

Cultural Diversity

The vast majority of the population in the local authorities (no data available for Teesdale) were white and/or Christian. For those who declared another religion represented under 0.5% in each other area except those who declared themselves Moslem in Middlesbrough and Stockton, 4.2% and 1.4% respectively. Those who declared that they had no religious beliefs represented around 10% of the population in each area. Similarly most ethnic minorities represented less than 1% of the population in each area. The exception to this was those who described themselves as Asian making up 4.6% of the population in Middlesbrough and 1.7% in Stockton. Middlesbrough had the highest non-white people 6.3%, while in Hartlepool and Redcar and Cleveland it is just over 1% and in Stockton it is 2.8%.

Results from the 2006 Tenants Survey 93.9% of Endeavour's tenants were White. 87.7% are White British and 6.2% are White Irish. 6.1% of respondents described themselves as one of a number of ethnic origins. Of those that stated they were another ethnic origin; 4 were Arabic, 1 was Portuguese, 1 was mixed Portuguese and Arabic, 1 was Persian. 5 of these households lived within Middlesbrough, 1 in Redcar and Cleveland, 1 in Hartlepool and 1 in Thornaby.

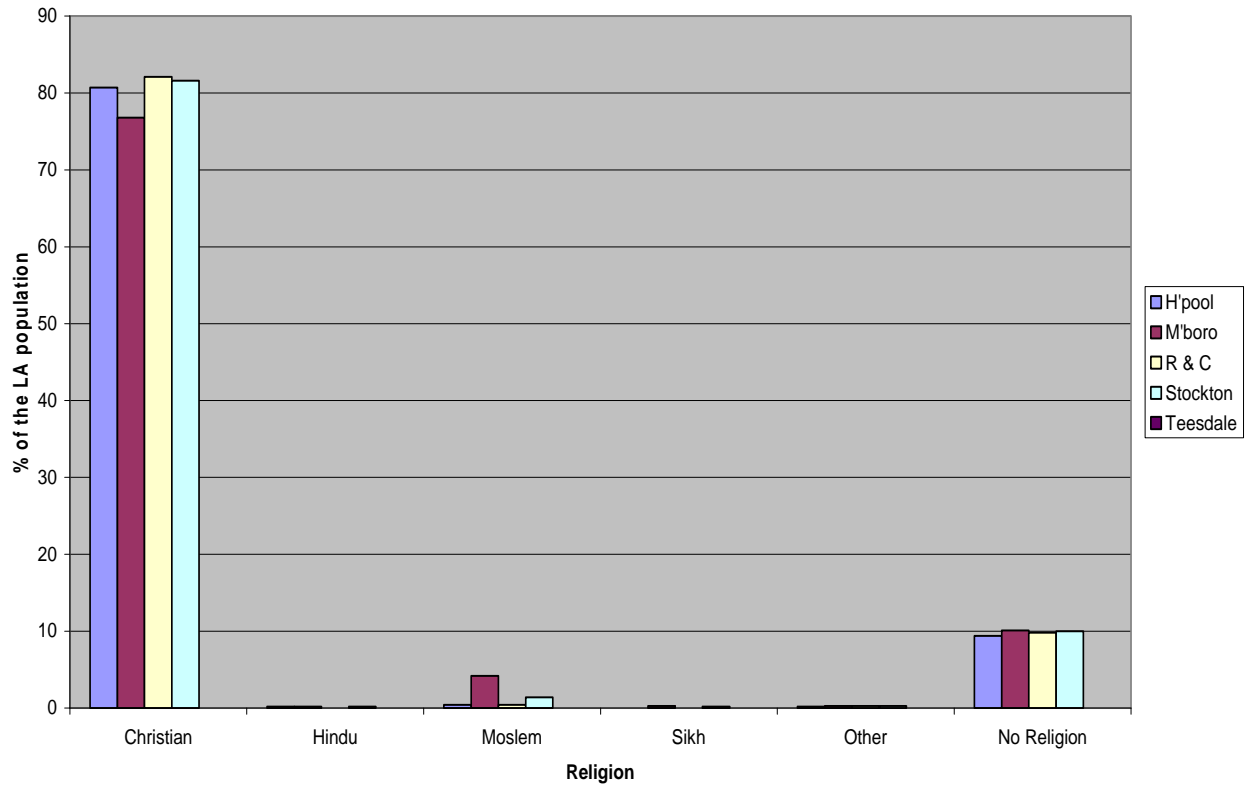
Teesdale's 2007 Tenants Survey showed that all households described themselves as white with 87.4% stating that they were White British, 12.4% said they were White Irish and 0.2% stated they were from any other white background.

All Teesdale's staff have declared themselves White British. This group makes up the majority of the entire group's staff members. North Star has two people described themselves as Asian/Asian British: Pakistani (7.7%) and one not known. Endeavour have 3 white other (5%), one Black/British: Caribbean (1.7%), one Asian/Asian British: Pakistani (1.7%), one Mixed: White & Black African (1.7%) and one not known. All members on the North Start Board have declared themselves as White British.

Religion as a percentage of the total LA population

	Hartlepool	Middlesbrough	Redcar & Cleveland	Stockton
Christian	80.7	76.8	82.1	81.6
Hindu	0.2	0.2	0	0.2
Moslem	0.4	4.2	0.4	1.4
Sikh	0	0.3	0	0.2
Other	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.3
No Religion	9.4	10.1	9.8	10

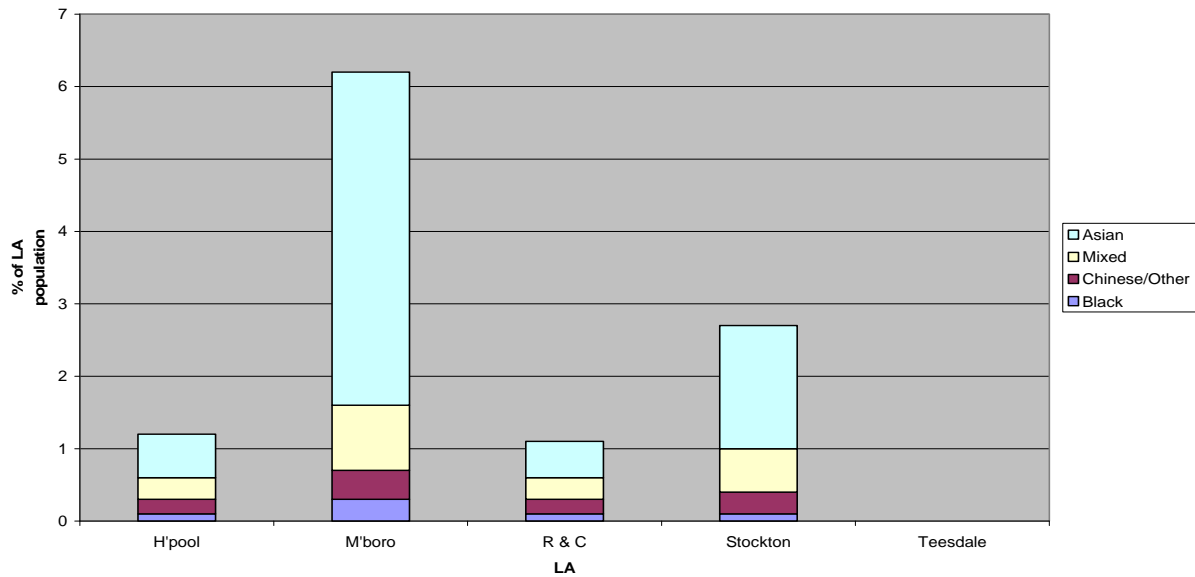
Religion % (2001)



Ethnic Origin as a percentage of the total LA Population (2001)

	Hartlepool	Middlesbrough	Redcar & Cleveland	Stockton
Black	0.1	0.3	0.1	0.1
Chinese/Other	0.2	0.4	0.2	0.3
Mixed	0.3	0.9	0.3	0.6
Asian	0.6	4.6	0.5	1.7
Non-White	1.2	6.3	1.1	2.8

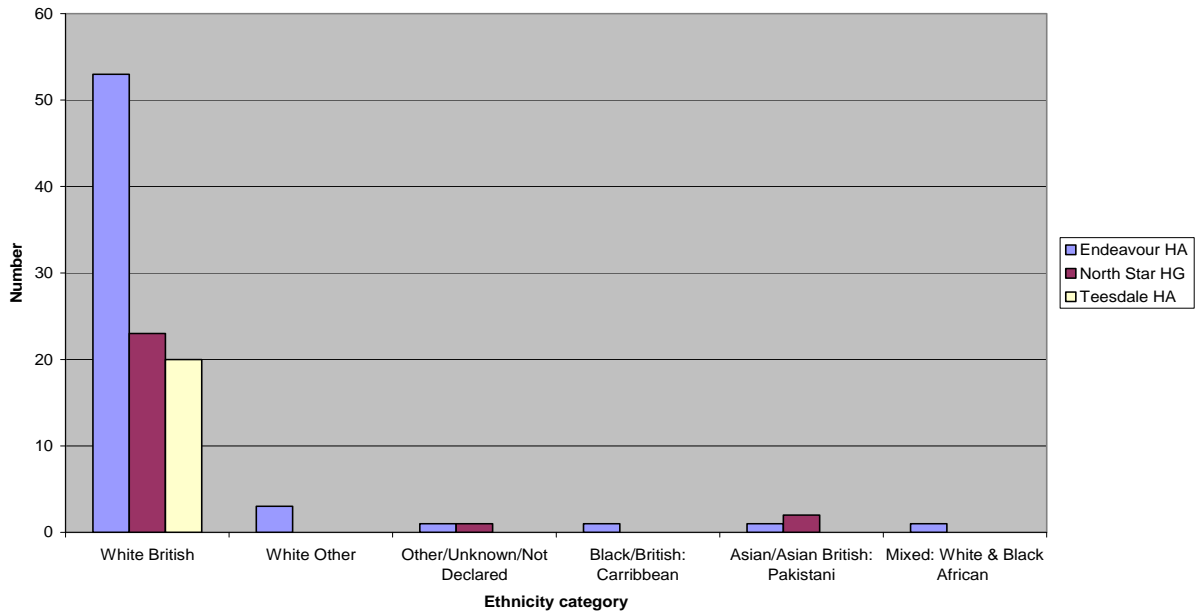
Ethnic origin as % of LA population (2001)



The ethnicity distribution of North Star HG staff as at 31 April 2008

	Endeavour HA	North Star HG	Teesdale HA
White British	53	23	20
White Other	3	0	0
Other/Unknown/Not Declared	1	1	0
Black/British: Caribbean	1	0	0
Asian/Asian British: Pakistani	1	2	0
Mixed: White & Black African	1	0	0

Ethnicity of North Star HG staff



OUR VISION FOR OUR CULTURAL DIVERSITY PLAN

Eliminate Unlawful Discrimination

The Group will take proactive steps to ensure it does not discriminate against Black and minority ethnic people in their access to services and within employment.

Key areas for North Star Housing Group

➤ Involvement of Residents

Our Resident Involvement Strategy is designed to ensure that all our tenants and service users are positively encouraged and have equal opportunity to be involved in the governance and management of the Association. As part of this strategy, we aim to remove any potential barriers that could exclude certain groups from becoming involved.

North Star Housing Group offers the Language Line service to all our customers and has access to local and responsive translation services. We offer all our leaflets and newsletters in a variety of languages to ensure our services are accessible to the communities we serve.

The Group aims to build links with the travelling community through targeted surveys to allow us to adapt our Housing Strategy and promote our services to the travelling communities needs.

The Group will also continue to demonstrate our commitment to cultural diversity through our involvement with the Middlesbrough MELA.

➤ **Employment**

As part of our commitment to equality and diversity the Group aims to ensure that staff at all levels and across business areas reflect the communities and diverse groups we operate in. During 2005-2007 the Group were involved in the Open House Project that placed Black Minority Ethnic (BME) trainees into our organisation. We will continue with our commitment to recruiting BME applicants through the Housing Diversity Network and our work with COFEM and other partnership agencies.

We will ensure that our recruitment and selection, training and development opportunities are open and accessible to all.

The Group is committed to ensuring equality and diversity in all aspects of employment and recognises the importance of religious observance for staff of all religious beliefs. Where staff wish to take leave of absence to observe religious festivals/holidays, every effort is made to accommodate their request.

The Group also recognises the importance of having an effective work-life balance and the provision of any kind of leave is necessary to achieve this. The Group has implemented the following policies to ensure the fair and consistent management of leave.

- HR8 Annual Leave
- HR8a Special Leave

➤ **Board Membership**

As part of our commitment to equality and diversity the Group aims to ensure that Board representation is reflective of the communities and diverse groups we operate in.

We will ensure that our recruitment and selection opportunities are open and accessible to all.

➤ **Harassment & Bullying**

North Star is committed to a Harassment & Bullying policy that ensures the fair treatment and dignity at work of all its employees. Bullying and harassment of any kind will not be tolerated in the workplace. Such behaviour will be treated as a disciplinary offence and in certain circumstances it may be unlawful. It is expected that all employees comply with this policy and treat colleagues with dignity and respect.

We will support staff fully in dealing with discrimination or harassment of any kind. Our commitment to staff is to provide a positive working environment for all.

A robust policy and monitoring mechanism is established together with links and representation at Racial Harassment Forums. This mechanism allows for our customers to access services and report any incidents.

➤ **Contractors & Suppliers**

As part of our commitment to cultural diversity we will ensure that our contractors and suppliers work within our equality and diversity framework. North Star will ensure that our contractors and suppliers receive training and development and are aware of their legal obligations in relation to equality and diversity. We will ensure that cultural diversity is embedded within our tendering process and that our tenders for services are accessible to contractors and suppliers within the BME and Travelling communities.

➤ **Customer profile – Mapping Communities**

We recently collected data from a 'Getting to know you Questionnaire' which has gathered information about our tenants and the members of their household. The aim of this questionnaire is to ensure continuous improvement of our services and that they serve the needs of our customers.

The information from these questionnaires and our resident information sheets ensures that our services are delivered in a fair and equal way.

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Equality impact assessments will be used as the main tool for assessing whether the Group meets its cultural diversity duties and the relevant legislation. We will continually assess whether our procedures and strategies meet the current needs of our staff and customers. These assessments will provide the basis for action to improve our policies where appropriate.

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY AT NORTH STAR HOUSING GROUP

The Cultural Diversity Action Plan is designed to support North Star Housing Group's Commitment to Equality and Diversity Statement and will be in keeping with the "Fairness & Freedom Report".

GATHERING & USING INFORMATION

The gathering of information from various sources is essential to ensure the success of the Cultural Diversity Action Plan. This will be done through the demographic profiling of our staff, service users and the wider communities which we operate in. We will also annually review our Equality and Diversity statistical information and benchmark this across the sector. Each business area across the group will collect their own data.

North Star is committed to maintaining high standards of confidentiality in all aspects of its work and uses any private information in a sensitive manner. The information gathered regarding equality and diversity will only be used for benchmarking purposes and assessing our performance in achieving objectives set out in the action plans.

MONITORING & REVIEWING

The Cultural Diversity Action Plan will be monitored and reviewed by the Board and Group Senior Management Team.

Roles & Priorities

Board Members	Will monitor our success, set targets and performance indicators that will measure our achievement of success against needs analysis, objectives and action plans.
Group Chief Executive	Will champion Equality & Diversity
Group Senior Management Team	Will ensure the mainstream implementation of the action plan through effective leadership
Head of HR & Corporative Services	Will co-ordinate implementation of the Plans and report to the Board, GSMT and Equality and Diversity Group on progress
Heads of Service and Managers	Will oversee implementation, compliance and monitoring of the plan in their business area
All Staff	Will adhere to the Equality and Diversity values

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Equality and Diversity Commitment Statement
- Equality and Diversity Strategic Objectives
- Gender Equality Statement and Action Plan 2008
- Disability Equality Statement and Action Plan 2008

Statement & Action Plans to be Formally Reviewed September 2009

Cultural Diversity Action Plan

Actions	Target Date	Responsibility	Resources required	Outcomes
Ensure that the principles of equality & diversity are embedded across the organisation, through a broadening of policies and focussed training.	September 2008 and on-going	GSMT/HR	£5,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Making our services more inclusive to all cultures & origins. ➤ Developing new & existing services for all cultures & origin. ➤ Making sure we involve our diverse community and that our outcomes meet their needs. ➤ Making sure that the impact of our outcomes are assessed to ensure that they do not present a negative effect or discriminate against cultural diversity.
Aim to let 10% of empty properties to BME applicants by further promotion and links	On-going	Head of Housing/Head of Supported Housing	Within existing resources	
Refresh the Racial Harassment Policy/Procedure and reporting mechanisms	December 2008	Head of Housing/Head of Supported Housing	Within existing resources	
Explore BME tenant satisfaction through focus groups	December 2008	Resident Involvement Officer	Within existing resources	
Explore the development of a BME scheme pending outcome of research into housing needs of the BME community across Tees Valley	December 2008	Head of Housing/Head of Supported Housing	Within existing resources	
Review our transfer/allocations policies to alleviate overcrowding that is prevalent in BME households	December 2008	Head of Housing/Head of Supported Housing	Within existing resources	
Review resident involvement and community development to better focus on BME/Travelling community needs	December 2008	Resident Involvement Officer	Within existing resources	

Actions	Target Date	Responsibility	Resources required	Outcomes
Broaden the way we advertise/tender our work to ensure key links are made with the BME/Travelling community	April 09	Head of Property Services/ Development Manager / Resident Involvement Officer	Within existing resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Making our services more inclusive to all cultures & origins. ➤ Developing new & existing services for all cultures & origin. ➤ Making sure we involve our diverse community and that our outcomes meet their needs. ➤ Making sure that the impact of our outcomes are assessed to ensure that they do not present a negative effect or discriminate against cultural diversity.
As part of the current work on community profiling ensure that services are accurately targeted	December 2008	Resident Involvement Officer	Within existing resources	
Ensure that at least one NSHG Board member if from the BME community	On-going	GCEO	Within existing resources	
Train All Staff on the CRE code for Housing and Equality & Diversity	October2008	Head of HR/ Group Senior HR Advisor	£5k	
Develop an intensive work programme to involve hard to reach groups including BME	November 2008	Resident Involvement Officer	Within Existing Resources	
Contribute and attend the Mela Festival	July 2008 Complete	Resident Involvement Officer	£1k	
Link with BME/Travelling Community groups to explore barriers to employment that will inform our recruitment and selection policies	April 2009	Head of HR/Group Senior HR Advisor	Within Existing Resources	
Explore the employment of BME trainees	April 2009	Group Senior HR Advisor	Within Existing Resources	
Review the needs of staff and adjust policies accordingly	April 2009	Head of HR/Group Senior HR Advisor	Staff Survey	
Review recruitment policies to include best practice	December 2009	Head of HR/ Group Senior HR Advisor	Within Existing Resources	
Train tenants to carry out an impact assessment	October 2008	Head of HR/Resident Involvement Officer		
Ensure our Cultural Diversity Action Plan in embedded in our tendering process to encourage contractors and suppliers for the BME/ Travelling communities	December 2008	Head of Property Services	Within Existing Resources	

Actions	Target date	Responsibility	Resources Required	Outcomes
Collect data on Gypsy and Travelling Communities	April 2009	Policy / Research Officer	Within existing resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Making our services more inclusive to all cultures & origins. ➤ Developing new & existing services for all cultures & origin. ➤ Making sure we involve our diverse community and that our outcomes meet their needs. ➤ Making sure that the impact of our outcomes are assessed to ensure that they do not present a negative effect or discriminate against cultural diversity.
Build links with the Travelling Communities to promote our services	July 2009	Community Initiatives Co-ordinator	Within existing resources	
Develop a good practice guide for Gypsy and Travelling Communities	July 2009	Housing Operations Manager (Teesdale)	Within existing resources	
Raise awareness of religious observance festivals	December 2009	Senior HR Advisor	Within existing resources	
Encourage cultural diversity working group/ build networks with other Housing Associations	On-going	Head of HR/Senior HR Advisor	Within existing resources	