

## **NE LGBT the fed Housing Event**

### **Introduction**

In February 2011 the LGBT Federation NE (the fed) hosted an informal event in collaboration with 8 housing providers from across the North East region. 40 LGBT Fed members, with representation from across the region, (T & W, Northumberland, Middlesbrough, Darlington, Hartlepool, Durham and Stockton) and 16 housing representatives attended the event which was held in the Quaker Meeting House, Newcastle upon Tyne.

### **Purpose of the Event**

The purpose of the February event was to create the opportunity for the housing providers to

- meet with engage with LGBT people
- explore positive action for employment of LGBT people
- identify barriers to housing services for LGBT people

The housing companies were also meeting the requirements of Stonewall submissions by consulting and engaging with the LGBT community.

Other issues concerning equality, information and hate crime were also discussed.

### **The Consultation**

The event was structured to enable time for LGBT the Fed members to visit stalls provided by the housing companies to meet providers, exchange ideas and collect information. In addition a facilitated session of roundtable discussions enabled dialogue between LGBT the fed members and housing providers on positive action and implementation and identification of barriers. As a starting point for discussion and a measure of change the fed had summarised issues of concern for LBGT employment and services which had been highlighted in previous consultations and local research.

### **What We Found**

#### **Meeting and Engagement**

Evaluation of the event demonstrated that the opportunity for LGBT the fed members and housing officers to meet and have face to face discussions proved to be a positive experience. Comments made by both parties on what they found to be most useful

included

*'opportunity to speak to someone who experiences discrimination because of their sexual orientation'*

*'to get feedback from LGBT customers to help inform how we deliver services'*

*'dialogue with housing providers in discussion groups'*

*'talking with housing officers face to face'*

*'information provided by stalls'*

*'useful to take part in discussions and listen to people's experiences'*

*'meeting with housing staff and finding out how they work'*

In addition most people felt better informed after the session and welcomed the opportunity to work together and influence service provision.

### **Positive Action on Employment**

- Work Benefits

Some LGBT people had expressed concern in the past about the availability and accessibility of certain benefits e.g. compassionate leave, maternity / paternity leave and pension rights for those in same sex relationships. The housing companies gave reassurance that equality of employment rights was available for all as this was a legal requirement.

- Positive Images

A recurring concern from all LGBT participants was that of promoting the visibility and acceptance of LGBT people through positive images in the work environment and in general publicity. The housing providers acknowledged the need for positive images to affirm the value of LGBT people in the workforce and to represent them as part of 'mainstream' society and felt that whilst they had taken steps to achieve this there was still room for improvement. Recent work undertaken by Age Concern UK on positive images of LGBT people was highlighted and it was suggested that the housing companies could follow this lead.

- Training

All staff in the housing companies attending the event undergo Equality & Diversity training but not separate training specifically on LGBT issues. It was generally felt that this would be of benefit and

that it was essential that all staff (including managers and frontline staff) should receive training.

- Policies

The housing providers had inclusive policies in place as a legal requirement and took action against anti-discriminatory behaviour. Feedback from the discussions reinforced the need for this to include both transphobic as well as homophobic behaviours.

- Recruitment

Targeted advertising had been identified as a way for the housing companies to let LGBT people know that they are positive employers. Most of the companies at the event do advertise in LGBT publications but felt that they could improve the extent to which this happened.

- Networks

Participants felt that provision of LGBT networks were important for those staff who wished to attend and that information about these should be readily available. Not all of the housing companies had networks so it was felt that this was a positive action which could be followed up.

- Monitoring

Monitoring employee sexual orientation to establish targets for improving representation was felt to be of importance as long as systems are better established and maintained and that it doesn't just become a tick box culture. The need for discretion and consideration of LGBT safety was highlighted as a crucial element of any monitoring system. An important aspect raised was the need to monitor and measure the take up of e.g. compassionate leave by LGBT staff. Some participants also felt that LGBT people need to have courage to respond positively to monitoring to contribute to culture change.

- Stonewall Employers

Most of the companies attending the event were Stonewall employers and it was felt that those who weren't could pursue this as it gave a positive message to current LGB employees and potential employees. It was noted that Stonewall does not address or include gender orientation and that focus also needs to be given to 'T'. It was suggested that The Gender Identification Research & Education Society (GIRES) would provide a useful source of information.

- Safer Work Environment

LGBT participants felt that implementation of these actions, in particular suggestions made above, would work towards ensuring that the housing companies gain a reputation as being positive employers and good places to work. Discussions indicated that the housing companies had made inroads into creating safer work environments and they recognised the need for on going review and improvement

## **Removing Barriers to Housing Services**

- Positive Images

Participants indicated that the implementation as in employment above would reduce barriers and encourage LGBT people to use services. In addition the need to include images of young, old and disabled LGBT people was reiterated.

- Training

Comments on training were also as employment above with the addition of training for all staff on young trans people, vulnerable adults, anti – social behaviour, disability & deaf awareness and working with older LGBT people. Some participants suggested the need for some of the trained staff to become known mentors particularly for young people, older people and victims of hate crime.

- Older LGBT People

It was suggested that housing companies could make links with age related organisations e.g. Age Concern UK around training provision.

The provision of better support for families of LGBT people was also raised.

- Young LGBT People

The need for training for all staff around trans young people was identified.

A barrier to young people was seen as the appropriateness of some of the questions in information packs provided by housing companies. It was suggested that housing companies make links with support groups for LGBT young people to revise these.

The provision of LGBT staff for mentoring would reduce barriers to some.

- Hate Crime

The need for a zero tolerance policy was identified as a requirement for reducing barriers. Most of the housing companies do have zero tolerance policies in place and tenancy agreements that cover LGBT harassment.

The actions undertaken by Gentoo were applauded and it was suggested that other companies could follow their lead. ie people can request an interview with a member of staff who has experience of homophobia/transphobia, and LGBT staff are available where possible.

### Conclusions

Many of the concerns and issues raised in the past by LGBT people have been, or are being, addressed by the housing companies who attended the event. Implementation of the additional actions identified above will support the housing companies to enhance their role as positive employers and providers. It is important that dialogue continues with LGBT communities and housing companies so that LGBT people are aware of achievements and progress.

