"Equality and diversity is at the heart of TPO’s role as a provider of consumer redress and as an employer.

As an employer, we are committed to eliminating discrimination and encouraging diversity among our workforce. Our aim is that our workforce will be truly representative of all sections of society and that each employee will feel respected and able to give their best.

As a redress provider, TPO is called upon to react to a wide range of issues from a wide range of people. We recognise that some consumers will require assistance in order to get the best from our service. If someone feels that they have been badly treated by the actions of another party it is only right that they can have access to our processes and we therefore have a responsibility to ensure that our service is accessible and that all consumers are dealt with evenly and that due regard is given to the difficulties they may face.

The purpose of this Single Equality Scheme is to ensure that we are alert to the need to handle different people appropriately and that we are all aware of the obligations placed on TPO under the Equality Act 2010. Most of all it gives an understanding of the importance of everyone who we become involved with being treated absolutely fairly and consistently."

Katrine Sporle
Property Ombudsman

The Property Ombudsman [TPO] scheme has been providing consumers and property agents with an alternative dispute resolution service for more than 27 years. The scheme was originally established in 1990 as the Ombudsman for Corporate Estate Agents. In 1997 the scheme was renamed as the Ombudsman for Estate Agents, eventually becoming TPO in 2009 to reflect its broader jurisdictions relating to sales, lettings, search providers, residential leasehold management, chattels auctions, international, and commercial property agents.

TPO provides consumers with a free, impartial and independent alternative dispute resolution service of complaints against property agents [TPO scheme members]. The Ombudsman’s resolutions are designed to achieve a full and final settlement of the dispute and all claims made by either party. The Ombudsman can, where appropriate make compensatory awards in individual cases up to a maximum of £25,000 for actual and quantifiable loss and/or for aggravation, distress and inconvenience caused by the actions of an agent.

Valuing diversity is one of TPO’s core values. This must drive how we treat consumers, the wider public, and one another. In order to handle complaints effectively our policies, processes and interactions must be fair, inclusive, accessible and responsive.

Our commitment to promoting equality and valuing diversity is central to providing excellent customer service. We know that organisations that deliver high standards on equality and diversity deliver high standards for their services generally. We strive to be one of those organisations.

The Equality Act 2010

A number of separate pieces of equality legislation have been brought together within the Equality Act 2010 and this has also extended and enhanced protection for people in relation to:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

TPO is a private body which, for the purposes of the Equality Act, provides a public function. As a public function provider, TPO is subject to the Act’s general public sector duty. This requires us to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
- Advance equality of opportunity between those with and without the above characteristics; and
- Foster good relations between those with and without the above characteristics.

TPO will comply with the general duty in the way we manage our people and the organisation. Our casework functions are exempt from this general duty so that the Ombudsman’s independence in decision making is not interfered with. Nonetheless, we will promote equal access to our service for all members of the community and tailor our service to meet people’s individual needs.

Vision Statement

TPO will demonstrate excellence in equality and diversity across all areas of policy and practice. In all aspects of our work we will be accessible, inclusive, responsive and fair.

TPO’s vision statement will be achieved by all of our staff working together to understand the needs of our consumers, so that we are able to provide an accessible service, by developing a diverse workforce at all levels which reflects the working population at our site, and by engendering an open and inclusive culture in the workplace.

Key objectives

- To improve access to our service for all sections of the community.
- To promote equality of opportunity, diversity, and inclusion in our workplace.
- To promote equality of opportunity, diversity and inclusion when implementing our policies and strategies.
Achuing the Vision

As a service provider:
TPO is committed to continually improving access to our service for all sections of the community. TPO has expanded and is continuing to expand the formats in which our information is available. Anyone coming into contact with TPO as a service provider can expect us to make reasonable adjustments in the way we deliver our services to anyone with a disability; to treat them with courtesy and respect; and to follow up any comments or concerns they have raised about the service we deliver.

Some specific steps we have taken or are working towards are:
- Recognising that London and the South-East accounts for 45% and 33% of our lettings and sales workload respectively, and recognising that the UK is increasing diverse, TPO is in the process of developing a library of information in the five most spoken languages, other than English. If you would like to request information in a language other than English, please contact us access@tpos.co.uk.
- TPO has developed a website with improved accessibility, and has increased the resources available online. Our accessibility statement can be viewed here.
- TPO can provide additional assistance to consumers where this is required to get the best from our service. Our guide to the available auxiliary aids can be viewed here.
- TPO is collecting feedback on the accessibility of our service via our consumer survey and consumer events, and is committed to continued development and improvement in this area.

As an employer:
The Property Ombudsman is committed to eliminating discrimination and encouraging diversity among our employees. Our aim is that our employees will be truly representative of all sections of society and that each employee will feel respected and able to give their best.

We oppose all forms of unlawful and unfair discrimination and will not discriminate because of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race or nationality, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation.

All employees, whether full or part time, permanent or temporary, will be treated fairly and with respect. Selection for employment, promotion, training or other benefit will be on the basis of aptitude and ability. All employees will be encouraged to develop their full potential, and the talents and resources of the workforce will be fully utilised to maximise the efficiency of the organisation. It is our commitment to create an environment in which individual differences and the contributions of all our employees are recognised and valued, and it is our belief that every employee is entitled to a working environment that promotes dignity and respect to all.

Some specific steps we have taken or are working towards are:
- TPO has policies in place for managing equality and diversity, and for responding to harassment and bullying.
- TPO carries out equality, diversity and inclusion training for all staff.
- TPO has a dedicated Equality and Diversity Officer to with whom all staff may discuss matters of equality and diversity in confidence.
- TPO will periodically review employment and promotion procedures to ensure that we develop a diverse workforce which reflects the working population at our site.

Informed decision making
TPO will think about the impact of our strategies and policies on our consumers, members, and colleagues. For significant new policies, or significant changes to existing policies, TPO will undertake an equality assessment. TPO aims to be guided by the needs of its consumers, members, and colleagues, and wherever possible, will consult directly with affected parties in the development of policy.

Action plan
TPO will continue to pursue and monitor our progress towards achieving our key objectives. In particular TPO will:
- Seek consumer feedback on the accessibility of our service, and implement changes where the need for change is identified.
- Continue to expand the formats in which we are able to provide information to consumers.
- Promote staff awareness of our equality and diversity obligations and policy.
- Encourage staff feedback on matters of equality and diversity within our organisation, and implement changes where the need for change is identified.
- Place our obligations under the Equality Act at the centre of our decision and policy-making.