

# do the right thing

April 2019

**believe**  
housing

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## without barriers

**Formed in April 2019, believe housing delivers services to customers across County Durham. We have over 20,000 customers spread across a range of geographical locations with a range of needs and challenges.**

We have over 500 employees and 19 members of our governance structures who all play a key role in delivering our vision.

Our approach to diversity, equality and inclusion lies firmly within our value to 'do the right thing for our customers, our people and our business'.

We want to make sure that our services are delivered in a way which recognises and meets the needs of our customers. At the same time, we want to create an environment where our employees see believe housing as a great place to work and where being unique is something to be proud of. We respect individuality knowing that diverse talent brings creativity and innovation, which can only benefit us all.

Diversity, equality and inclusion is a key business enabler that will help us deliver greater levels of productivity, employee and customer engagement and our long term strategic objectives.

# equality statement

**Following on from our 2018/19 equality annual report we have developed an equality statement and equality framework that will shape our approach and help us hold ourselves to account.**

We are committed to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion through all our activities as a housing provider and employer. We do not believe that equality and diversity activity should be viewed in isolation, instead, it is an integral aspect of our day-to-day behaviours and working in the believe way.

We will:

- Ensure we work to remove any direct and indirect discrimination and the eradication of any harassment or victimisation.
- Recognise that no two people are the same and treat everyone as an individual.
- Understand the diversity of our customer base and deliver services which recognise this.
- Recognise the positive impact a diverse workforce brings to believe housing to help us achieve our vision of a life without barriers.
- Recognise the challenges and needs of our communities and finding ways to support them to reach their potential.

Ensure that the behaviours we expect of our people are integrated into how we work and how we treat each other. They will be embedded into how we attract, recruit and retain our people as well as how we performance manage and manage talent/succession across our business.

## **we believe in life without barriers**

**If everyone expects more, they can achieve more and we can transform lives together. It is this power of ‘more’ that will let people realise what is possible – change perceptions, raise aspirations and create inclusive, vibrant communities and workforce.**

## **annual report**

**This annual equality report brings together a summary of some of our activities and plans in line with our equality statement.**

Under each commitment, we have shown how we are supporting our people and our customers to thrive and achieve in a way that works for them.

We are striving to ensure that we understand our people and our communities, and the final section of this report brings together our data and compares it across County Durham and the North East region. Using this data, we can identify trends and areas where we can undertake activities that improve equality of opportunity and diversity as well as identifying areas further development and support.

# ensure we work to remove any kind of direct and indirect discrimination and the eradication of any harassment or victimisation

We believe that everyone has the right to come to work or engage with us safely and securely and in a way that does not put them at risk of harassment or victimisation. During 2019/20 our business and our people have achieved the following:

## Developing our culture:

- Culture audit conducted in December 2019
- Change Catalysts recruited January 2020
- We have developed a behaviour framework with 14 competencies, which will set out what our people do at believe housing and what they don't do
- We have agreed a partnership with the supplier of a new people platform which will be built around our behaviour framework, enabling our people to recognise each other and provide feedback on behaviours observed as well as performance against objectives

## Reviewing our recruitment for governance structures:

- Values Group formed April 2019 made up of customers, independent, councillor and employee representatives
- Simplified our recruitment process for the group to make it more inclusive to a wider range of applicants implemented June 2019
- Video, text, interactive application methods introduced

## Equality impact assessments (EIAs)

- Full impact assessments were carried out on the new repairs policy and accommodation move highlighting some of the considerations we have already taken to address different needs for our customers and employees
- Screenings carried out on asbestos management; fire management; expenses; gas; solid fuel and electrical testing; and legionella, ensuring that we are checking the potential equality impact of all our policies

## Supporting customers with dementia:

- We have continued to joint fund the Dementia Friendly Communities initiative in County Durham with other local housing providers
- Continued rollout of Dementia Friends to employees to help them understand and spot the potential signs of dementia in customers
- Our internal Dementia Friends have also supported schools and other organisations through the delivery of training
- Our internal steering group works with our assets team to ensure that dementia needs are considered during any refurbishment programme of our communal facilities
- The believe housing lettings manager sits on the County Durham Dementia Friendly Action Group

# recognise that no two people are the same and treat everyone as an individual

We understand that one size does not fit all, and we are committed to ensuring that we understand and consider the needs and aspirations of everyone engaged with or employed by believe housing. During 19/20 our business and our people have achieved the following:

## Recognising the needs of our people:

- Our staff have been encouraged to update personal data regularly
- We put in place an annual data cleanse of people data held within our HR system
- We have ensured that we review this data as part of our internally focused Impact Assessments
- Engaged an expert partner to support absent employees suffering from mental health concerns
- All our team leaders and managers encouraged to have regular conversations with individuals to understand any additional support needs or adjustments

## Working the believe way:

- Throughout 2019/20 we have transformed our ways of working to support our staff and the business to thrive, building on the pilots previously taking place in our Neighbourhoods and Accounts Payable teams
- We used the learning from these pilots to help develop the believe way of working with the right people working in the right place at the right time
- Our staff have been empowered to work remotely and given specific equipment to work safely
- Our employees have seen the benefits of being able to plan their working week more effectively and support their work-life balance
- Teams across the business were encouraged to think about how they could work differently and more flexibly and responsively, giving employees more autonomy and empowering them to do the right thing
- The moving forward group, a cross-service employee group was formed to help support employees to understand and embrace the new way of working
- We have ensured that we have responsive technology that enables us to move away from traditional working practices whilst keeping our workforce connected and engaged
- Our leaders and line managers have been supported to effectively lead and support staff working across different settings
- We held roadshows led by the CEO which told our business transformation story so far and our journey yet to come
- We have developed and agreed our strategic plan which includes a 3-year people strategy aimed at developing an award-winning people experience at believe housing

## New office accommodation:

- In February we opened our new, accommodation, designed to create working spaces which encourage collaboration and innovation
- Through the design of these spaces, we have provided adaptable equipment to provide a range of options for employees including rising desks, ergonomic seating options and flexible ICT options
- We produced regular communications and asked people to tell us if they needed additional support prior to the office move
- We supported full homeworking where the move made it difficult for people to get to their new office base
- Through the flexible workstations, we have already seen improved communication between teams which we will continue to build on

### **Empowering our people through learning and development:**

- In the last year, 291 employees accessed training opportunities including further education, conferences and external training
- We have spent £79,000 ensuring our staff are well trained and empowered to do their job whilst striving to achieve
- 262 technical qualifications have been successfully achieved in the last year by our staff
- 5 members of staff in the last year have achieved further education qualifications
- Reflecting our aim to recognise and support our existing great employees, in the last year 59.52% of appointments came from our existing workforce

### **Delivering apprenticeship opportunities:**

- During the last year, we have employed 25 apprentices across the business including apprentice who is a believe housing tenant
- 2 apprentices secured roles within the organisation as a result of their apprenticeship
- 1 apprentice secured a developmental role as a result of the initial apprenticeship
- We will work with the business to identify further opportunities and we will partner with external agencies to help those underrepresented groups access opportunities at believe

### **Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation:**

- Following last year's pledge to the Chartered Institute of Housing's make a stand campaign, this year we achieved Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation
- This accreditation recognises the clear standards we have in place for responding to Domestic Abuse
- Our approach has been shared and highlighted as best practise at regional and national events

### **Armed forces and veterans support:**

- We have signed the Armed Forces Covenant to demonstrate our commitment to ensure those who are or have served in the forces are treated fairly
- We achieved the bronze level accreditation in January 2019 and are working towards silver
- We support and encourage our staff to become or remain reservists whilst working for us
- Working in partnership with Durham County Council we have provided a tailored support service to new and existing customers through the Armed Forces Outreach Service

### **Introducing our new repairs and maintenance policy:**

- In October 2019, we launched our new Repairs and Maintenance Policy
- We created a customer focussed policy which provides a tailored service based on the individual
- Customers can access and report repairs in a range of ways including our customer app launched this year. This allows them to select a date and time which works best for them and let us know any specific requirements they have
- The new policy also builds in specific alerts if there are a high volume of repairs to help us check for any underlying issues and support our customers effectively

# recognise the positive impact a diverse workforce brings to believe housing to help us achieve our vision of a life without barriers.

We know that employing a diverse and varied workforce, empowered to effectively undertake their role helps us to create a great place to work and deliver great services to our customers.

We believe that by becoming an employer of choice we will enhance our ability to attract, recruit and retain a workforce that is committed to delivering our vision and values.

During the past year our highlights have included:

## Senior Leadership Team:

- In April 2019, our new Senior Leadership Team came together with the purpose to ensure that we have the right capacity, skills, knowledge and experience to lead the organisation to effectively deliver our corporate objectives

## Gender pay and our 100-day action plan:

- In March 2020 our board approved our gender pay gap report
- A key aspect of this was the development of our 100-day equality at believe housing action plan
- This plan set out clear objectives to carry out some short term actions to help push forward our longer-term goal of removing our gender pay gap and achieving gender parity.
- We have written our equality @ believe strategy, our ‘three-year plan to make a difference’ which is focused around 5 strategic themes and formed a progress committee which will meet monthly to review and monitor actions delivered against the committed timescales

## Women in Social Housing North East (WISH NE):

- We have continued to be a corporate sponsor of WISH North East with our Chair sitting as a member of the regional board.
- We have ensured that training and event attendance opportunities are available to women within the business
- Our more senior members of staff have supported younger women to become engaged in personal development opportunities
- Following attendance at WISH events, several women were encouraged to attend board meetings within believe housing and one employee went on to secure a role on an external board

## Supporting women in the construction industry:

Our senior female leaders are also represented on a range of other boards and groups.

- This includes the National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC) and Constructing Excellence in the North East (CENE)
- They have provided mentoring and coaching to women in the Construction Industry by supporting them to achieve in a typically male-dominated industry
- Staff from within the organisation have attended events and networking opportunities
- Senior leaders have spoken at events promoting the role of women within construction

#### **armed forces employer recognition scheme:**

- We actively encourage applicants who are veterans, service personnel, reservists or partners of those involved in the armed forces
- Our involvement with the Armed Forces employer recognition scheme complements and supports our commitment to supporting the armed forces through the armed forces covenant
- Our HR policies actively support reservists to undertake their duties alongside their working day

#### **supporting our future workforce:**

- In the last year, we have worked with local colleges to provide opportunities for young people to undertake relevant work experience
- Our apprentice “speed dating” sessions allowed participants to find out more about the different opportunities available and led to a significant interest in our apprenticeship positions
- Through a programme of industrial placements, we have supported college students to develop practical skills and experience in a supportive environment
- We also are represented by one of our employees on the Generation for Change Committee which provides a strategic approach to harness the young professional voice and drive continuous improvement in the UK built environment industry
- We have continued to support and sponsor the Young Enterprise awards to celebrate entrepreneurship and business skill development
- Several our staff have volunteered to work with Young Enterprise to work in local secondary schools highlighting the variety of career opportunities available in the social housing sector

# understand the diversity of our customer base and deliver services which recognise this

To ensure that we can deliver a service that meets the needs of the customer we need to know what our current and future customer base is. Our highlights of 2019/20 have included:

## Reviewing customer data:

- We now ensure that we hold customer data for all equality strands
- As part of our tenant visits, we ensure that we collect up-to-date, relevant equality data for all customers
- We are now ensuring that data held is easily accessible to all staff to ensure customers receive a service that is tailored to their needs
- We compare data across the region to ensure that we can effectively plan for the future and support service changes with specific evidence

## STAR 2019:

- Our annual STAR survey was carried out in December 2019
- Our customers reported an overall satisfaction rate of 86%
- Customers scored us 8.9 out of 10 when asked if we treat them fairly
- We noted lower levels of satisfaction in customers aged 35-45 which will be further investigated and taken into account in service delivery and planning

## Understanding customer experience:

- We have introduced customer journey mapping to understand how our services impact upon our customers
- A key aspect is engaging with customers and working with them to understand their experience and how we can improve this
- We have completed 3 customer journey mapping exercises; income; complaints and allocations
- Actions from these exercises have fed into our corporate projects and 2020/21 corporate plan

## Supporting our most vulnerable customers:

As a housing provider, it is key that we understand and know our customers so we can provide a tailored, effective and efficient service that is responsive and acknowledges their needs. Some of our actions this year have included:

- Introduction of Property Experience Officers within our repairs team to support our more vulnerable customers throughout the repairs journey
- Our in-work poverty projects support customers who are working but are earning below the poverty threshold to access more sustainable, better-paid employment
- We have carried out workshops with young people who are leaving support and care with moving on to independent living
- We have supported survivors of domestic abuse to rehouse and settle
- We have supported customers in rent arrears gaining benefit awards and backdates, preventing legal action as well as giving debt advice
- We have helped vulnerable customers obtain essential items of furniture and white goods through grant applications
- We have worked with customers who are subject to safeguarding concerns, ensuring they are safe and supported in their homes
- We work with Durham County Council Intensive Support Team, referring vulnerable customers so they can remain in their home
- We have introduced Welfare calls in response to the Covid-19 pandemic to provide support and assistance to customers

# recognise the challenges and needs of our communities and find ways to support them to reach their potential.

As well as providing homes that people want live in and supporting all our people be they customers or staff we are also committed to supporting the development and future of the neighbourhoods and communities where our people live.

## Our highlights of 2019/20 have included:

Providing homes for the future:

- In 2019/20 we won the Guardian Public Service award for our new build programme
- Our new properties are designed to make them flexible, providing homes that are easily adaptable and allow people to live there throughout different stages in their lives
- We have commissioned external research to understand what the future needs for housing to help shape our plans

## Improving employment opportunities:

- Our employability service has worked with 200 customers through our triage service
- 18 customers gained employment and 7 took on volunteering roles as a result of our support
- Our in-work poverty project has supported 31 customers to access more sustainable and secure employment
- During the first 10 days of lockdown for Covid-19 (at the end of 2019/20) we successfully supported 2 tenants to access employment opportunities within the key worker sector

## Small grants programme:

- Our tenant led Community Grant programme has supported 81 community organisations with grants totalling over £40,000, some of the projects funded include:
- Barrington Luncheon club providing a Christmas lunch for isolated older people in St. John's Chapel
- Food provision for the Weardale foodbank
- Funding to supply food parcels to vulnerable customers in East Durham as part of the Covid-19 response

## Community investment grant programme:

- Our larger community investment grants of up to £10,000 have provided funding to 14 community organisations
- Our investment of £83,000 has led to a social return in excess of £2,000,000, some of the projects funded in 2019/20 have included:
- Family-based community garden and gym project in Coundon providing families with the opportunity to develop healthier lifestyles whilst supporting the development of improved mental wellbeing
- Community pantry project in St Helen's Auckland ensuring that families and individuals within this community can access affordable food whilst working with local supermarkets to tackle issues of food waste
- Support RT projects to deliver mindfulness and mental health wellbeing sessions through the delivery of focussed, practical arts-based activities, empowering service users to take control of their creativity and overall wellbeing
- Supporting CALM East Durham to deliver yoga and mental wellbeing sessions across east Durham within local primary schools and with adults experiencing poor levels of mental health and wellbeing

## our plans for the future:

Building on the areas we have outlined in this report, and in line with our Corporate Plan and objectives, some of the next steps for 2020/21 are:

- Deliver on our Equality Framework and 'three-year plan to make a difference'
- Working across the organisation we will ensure that we continue to capture the right data for our customers and employees, using this to provide the best possible service for all and ensure that we recognise and applaud diversity
- Deliver refresher training to our Board on unconscious bias to support their decision-making processes
- Deliver equality awareness sessions for employees
- Continue to use customer journey mapping exercises to understand in more detail the impact on our customers from the way we currently deliver some of our key service areas
- Further explore customers within the 35-45 age group to understand reasons for lower satisfaction and put plans in place to improve this
- Through our homes for 2050 project, we will use intelligence and data to understand future housing needs and aspirations to help create our future development plans
- Continue to identify opportunities to work in partnership with others to deliver on our equality aims
- Through our people experience and culture project we will work to embed the final theme of our equality framework ensuring that all our people know and are accountable for the behaviours we expect of them
- Continue to review the impact of Covid-19 on our customers and our employees to develop any necessary plans for additional support

# who are we?

## gender

|         | electrics | colleagues | customers | governance structures | co. durham | north east |
|---------|-----------|------------|-----------|-----------------------|------------|------------|
| Female  |           | 45.44%     | 58.77%    | 41.67%                | 50.8%      | 50.9%      |
| Male    |           | 54.56%     | 41.09%    | 58.33%                | 49.2%      | 49.1%      |
| Unknown |           | 0%         | 0.14%     | 0%                    | 0%         | 0%         |

## sexuality

(accurate data unavailable for Co. Durham and North East)

|                       | customers | governance structures | governance structures |
|-----------------------|-----------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Bisexual              | 0.19%     | 0.12%                 | 0%                    |
| Gay man               | 0.19%     | 0.14%                 | 0%                    |
| Gay woman /lesbian    | 0.38%     | 0.13%                 | 0%                    |
| Heterosexual/straight | 43.01%    | 19.77%                | 100%                  |
| Other                 | 0%        | 0.10%                 | 0%                    |
| Unknown               | 56.23%    | 79.75%                | 0%                    |

## disability

|         | Colleagues | Customers | Governance structures | County Durham | North East |
|---------|------------|-----------|-----------------------|---------------|------------|
| Yes     | 1.86%      | 18.29%    | 30%                   | 27.1%         | 26.7%      |
| No      | 40.22%     | 81.71%    | 70%                   | 72.9%         | 73.3%      |
| Unknown | 57.92%     | -         | 0%                    | 0%            | 0%         |

| Customers                 |        |
|---------------------------|--------|
| Hearing impairment        | 1.96%  |
| Learning disability       | 0.67%  |
| Medical condition/issue   | 8.44%  |
| Mental health             | 2.83%  |
| Other physical impairment | 2.17%  |
| Restricted mobility       | 1.82%  |
| Speech impairment         | 0.03%  |
| Visual impairment         | 0.24%  |
| Wheelchair user           | 0.13%  |
| None                      | 81.71% |

## ethnicity

|                                      | Colleagues | Customers | Governance Structures | County Durham | North East |
|--------------------------------------|------------|-----------|-----------------------|---------------|------------|
| British                              | 63.31%     | 45.84%    | 9.09%                 | 96.6%         | 93.6%      |
| English                              | 15.46%     | 36.74%    | 81.82%                | -             | -          |
| Scottish                             | 0%         | 0.41%     | 0%                    | -             | -          |
| Welsh                                | 0%         | 0.04%     | 0%                    | -             | -          |
| Northern Irish                       | 0%         | 0.07%     | 0%                    | -             | -          |
| Irish                                | 0%         | 0.10%     | 0%                    | 0.2%          | 0.3%       |
| Polish                               | 0%         | 0.18%     | 0%                    | -             | -          |
| Lithuanian                           | 0%         | 0.09%     | 0%                    | -             | -          |
| White other                          | 2.98%      | 0.38%     | 0%                    | 1.2%          | 1.3%       |
| Gypsy/Roma                           | 0%         | 0.05%     | 0%                    | 0.1%          | 0.1%       |
| Other member of travelling community | 0%         | 0.03%     | 0%                    | -             | -          |
| White and Asian                      | 0%         | 0.01%     | 0%                    | 0.2%          | 0.3%       |
| White and Black African              | 0%         | 0.04%     | 0%                    | 0.1%          | 0.1%       |
| White and Black Caribbean            | 0.19%      | 0.01%     | 0%                    | 0.2%          | 0.2%       |
| Mixed other                          | 0.37%      | 0.07%     | 0%                    | 0.1%          | 0.2%       |
| Bangladeshi                          | 0%         | 0.02%     | 0%                    | 0.0%          | 0.4%       |
| Indian                               | 0%         | 0.02%     | 9.09%                 | 0.3%          | 0.6%       |
| Pakistani                            | 0%         | 0.02%     | 0%                    | 0.1%          | 0.8%       |
| Asian or Asian British other         | 0%         | 0.08%     | 0%                    | 0.2%          | 0.5%       |
| Black or Black British other         | 0%         | 0.03%     | 0%                    | 0.0%          | 0.0%       |
| Chinese                              | 0%         | 0.02%     | 0%                    | 0.3%          | 0.6%       |
| Arab                                 | 0%         | 0.04%     | 0%                    | 0.1%          | 0.2%       |
| Other                                | 0%         | 0.05%     | 0%                    | 0.1%          | 0.2%       |
| Unknown                              | 17.69%     | 15.60%    | 0%                    | 0%            | 0%         |

## age

(data currently captured in different categories on iTrent system)

| Colleagues  |        |
|-------------|--------|
| Under 21    | 4.29%  |
| 21 -30      | 11.54% |
| 31 - 40 yrs | 24.58% |
| 41 - 50 yrs | 26.81% |
| 51 - 60 yrs | 27.01% |
| 61+         | 5.77%  |

|          | Customers | Governance | Governance structures | County Durham |
|----------|-----------|------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| Under 25 | 3.64%     | 0%         | 28.6%                 | 29.1%         |
| 25-34    | 13.61%    | 0%         | 12.1%                 | 13.0%         |
| 35-44    | 13.64%    | 8.33%      | 11.1%                 | 11.4%         |
| 45-54    | 16.61%    | 16.67%     | 14.2%                 | 13.7%         |
| 55-64    | 19.01%    | 58.33%     | 13.5%                 | 13.2%         |
| Over 65  | 33.35%    | 16.67%     | 20.6%                 | 19.7%         |
| Unknown  | 0.14%     | 0%         | 0%                    | 0%            |

