

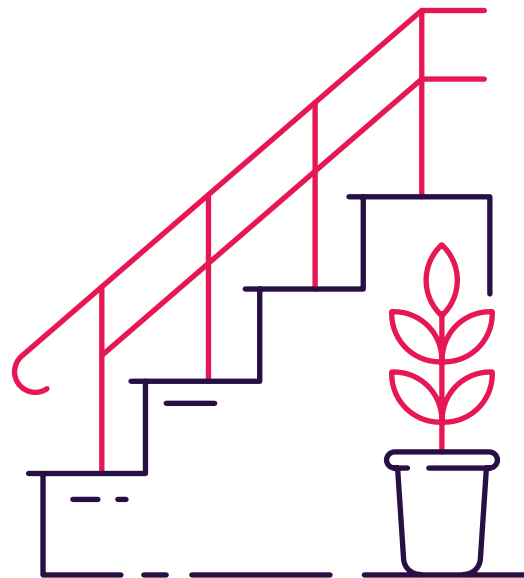
equalities report

2022

2023

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introduction

We hope our equalities report will give you an insight into how we ensure that equality, diversity and inclusion is a key part of our business, our vision and our values.

Throughout our organisation, our people understand the importance of being equitable, fair and understanding of all. They acknowledge and embrace differences and ensure that we aim to provide a great service for everyone.

We believe in diversity of thought. As a business, we strive to ensure that we employ the best people for our roles. And we encourage all our people to feel safe to be their true selves at work.

Throughout this report we will give you an overview of work that we have undertaken across the business since April 2022 in support of our Equalities Framework, while showing you how we have met our equality promises from last year. As with our previous report, and in line with our Corporate Plan, we have grouped our information into 'our people, our customers and our business'. Within each section you can find out more about our activity and achievements since April 2022.



our approach

Our approach to equality, diversity and inclusion lies firmly within our value to ‘do the right thing: for our people; for our customers; for our business’

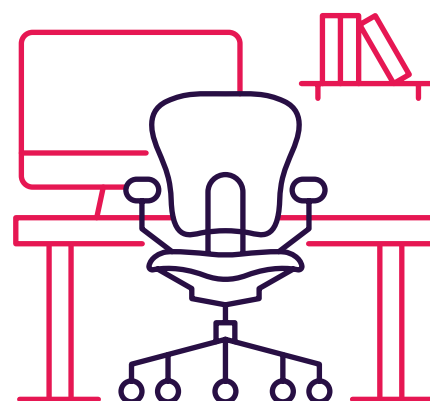
In line with our vision ‘we believe in life without barriers’, we want to make sure that our services are delivered in a way that recognises and meets the needs of our customers. At the same time, we want to create an environment where our people see believe housing as a great place to work and can be themselves.

Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Framework:

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, diversity and inclusion activity should be viewed in isolation. Instead, it is an integral aspect of our day-to-day behaviours and working the believe way.

We will:

- Ensure we work to remove all direct and indirect discrimination and eradicate any harassment or victimisation.
- Recognise that no two people are the same and treat everyone as an individual.
- Make a positive impact and enhance equality, diversity and inclusion across our workforce.
- Understand the diversity of our customer base and deliver services that recognise this.
- Appreciate the positive impact an inclusive and diverse workforce brings to believe housing, to help us achieve our vision of a life without barriers.
- Identify the challenges and needs of our communities and find ways to support them to reach their potential.
- Improve the quality and use of our equality data to improve our understanding, help identify priorities and demonstrate the impact of our equality activities.



our people

As an inclusive employer, we strive to provide a culture and environment for all our employees that provides flexibility and choice while supporting us to deliver an effective service to our customers.

Since April 2022, we have:

- Developed our Influencers programme for our managers and leaders, to ensure that they are equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge and tools to coach and support their teams as we strive to continually improve and develop as a business
- Launched our Moving Forward trials with colleagues working on a self-managing team pilot, an enhanced neighbourhood officer pilot and a digital delivery pilot. All three pilots have required colleagues to understand their communities, understand frustrations and identify gaps in provision, using both qualitative data gathered through conversations and quantitative data recorded on our systems
- Updated our personal data collection form on our HR and Governance systems to ensure that we capture useful and meaningful data from all our people to enable us to provide bespoke, person-centric support and adjustments where appropriate. This update will also allow us to further explore our data with the forthcoming renewal of the National Housing Federation EDI Tool
- Become a Disability Confident Committed employer, ensuring that our recruitment processes and workplace are inclusive and welcoming to all. This also ensures that we support our people to be more aware and understanding of disabilities both within and outside of the workplace
- Worked with 37 different organisations providing support at 40 different careers events, careers fairs and school assemblies. Discussed options available at believe housing and particularly within the construction sector, and how to access employment opportunities within social housing
- Encouraged our current people and those leaving the organisation to give us an honest rating on Glassdoor providing a valuable insight for potential applicants into the business, our culture and our priorities
- Reinstated our Positive Action Group, giving our people the chance to positively impact and influence the delivery of equality activity across our business
- Revised our approach for inducting new employees with our ‘Welcome to believe housing’ events, giving people the opportunity to meet members of our Executive Management Team, visit our estates and learn about our work from colleagues working in different areas of the business
- Revisited our approach to wellbeing across the business with the launch of our monthly ‘Little Book of Balance’, providing our people with focused discussion opportunities and signposting information around many different aspects of health and wellbeing including: menopause; mental health; exercise; healthy eating
- Delivered targeted wellbeing activities for all our colleagues, ensuring that our people not only perform well at work but are also given the opportunity to access a range of options that support their wellbeing
- Become a corporate sponsor of the Lighthouse Charity ensuring that all our people are able to access confidential, non-judgemental support and advice whenever it’s needed
- Reviewed and revised our recruitment methods following feedback from applicants to allow potential recruits to submit a CV and cover letter instead of our previous lengthy application form, which had the potential of being a barrier to many individuals.
- Reviewed and revised salaries across our Neighbourhoods and Repairs teams to ensure that they are in line with other organisations and provide a fair reward to our people.

Inclusive recruitment for all:

Unemployment levels continue to decrease and sit at approximately 4% of the working age population with employment levels reaching 76%. As vacancy numbers continue to drop to below pre-pandemic levels, it is important that we do all we can to encourage and support individuals to apply for roles within our business.

As part of a wider review into our recruitment practices we have removed our requirement for applicants to submit full application forms and instead ask for CVs and cover letters, giving us the opportunity to receive a wider scope of applicants, particularly in our trade roles.

CVs and cover letters give the applicant an opportunity to show both their past experiences and tell us something about themselves. This not only assists in shortlisting but also gives us an indication of how an individual will meet our values and organisational culture.

By standardising our approach, we ensure that all applicants are subject to the same shortlisting process, giving them an equal opportunity to reach interview stage.

In signing up to the Disability Confident scheme, we have committed to shortlisting all candidates who meet our criteria and declare that they have disability or life-limiting condition. We ensure that all recruiting managers consider any requests for reasonable adjustments and support all candidates through the recruitment process. We now ask candidates if they would like to spend time with the questions before interview and ensure that all our interviews are held in a supportive and relaxed manner and, where appropriate, take place both virtually and in-person.

Following recruitment processes we offer all interviewed candidates the opportunity to gain feedback and support on their individual experience, ensuring that unsuccessful candidates are encouraged to apply again or take the learnings away to successfully apply for other roles either within our business, the sector or other sectors.



our customers

We believe that, as a housing provider, we should provide homes that meet the needs and aspirations of our customers in communities that are able to thrive and achieve. In the last year we have increasingly seen levels of inequality rise as the cost of living continues to significantly impact people.

This has increased the need for support within our communities and the need to fully understand what is required and where we can enable change.

Since April 2022, we have:

- Supported 20 warm hubs across our delivery area providing free support and a warm space for all members of the local community to meet and come together as a response to the current cost-of-living crisis
- Expanded our Safeguarding Team to ensure that we are able to effectively manage and handle safeguarding referrals and cases, providing non-judgemental person-centric support and professional guidance to our customers and people
- Provided suicide intervention support to 99 customers
- Managed 112 adult safeguarding cases
- Managed 125 child safeguarding cases
- Supported 887 customers who are experiencing financial difficulties or worries
- Secured over £1.2 million in additional welfare benefits
- Worked with Promising Outcomes to undertake a survey of customer expectations as part of our Moving Forward project to understand expectations and areas for development during the trial period
- Undertaken our 2022 annual satisfaction survey of customers with a customer satisfaction rating of 78.54. And 87% of our customers believe we treat them fairly and with respect
- Developed an approach to patch-mapping, which allows our Community Investment Team to interrogate internally- and externally-collected data to understand pressures and issues within local areas. Using this information, we are able to provide focused and targeted interventions and project support that fills gaps and meets the needs and aspirations of our communities
- Implemented a Repairs Action Team to tackle a backlog of repairs provision relating to Covid and the storms of 2021. By focusing resources, we were able to talk to 5,945 customers and complete their repairs while keeping in touch with customers and giving them a point of contact who was able to keep them updated about the status of their repair
- Used our existing and newly-collected customer data to prioritise damp and mould work within our properties, ensuring that we understand the needs of our customers and provide bespoke solutions to any medical need or vulnerabilities
- Used our community investment funding to support 112 projects, providing £239,084 of funding and creating £3,293,730 in social value from our investment

- Launched our Customer Voices group, ensuring that our customers’ voices are at the heart of our decision-making and that all our people understand its importance. Following a recruitment exercise, we were able to recruit to our remaining vacancy, meaning that we now have 11 members of the panel, eight of which are believe housing customers
- Held three focused ‘talk money’ events, providing money support, advice and guidance in communities most at risk of rent arrears and eviction. This multi-team approach meant that we were able to provide specific targeted support to 120 customers including support with money matters, tenancy sustainment, employability, tenancy issues and energy efficiency advice, leading to a reduction of £6,244 in rent arrears
- Supported 148 customers to access well-paid, sustainable and secure employment opportunities
- Worked in partnership with colleagues in Northumbrian Water to support over 1,000 vulnerable customers to access a social tariff and save over £117,000.

The importance of data collection:

If we don’t know our customers, we can’t expect to deliver services that meet their expectations or needs. We also can’t ensure that our organisation is truly representative and understands our customers and communities.

As part of the process to ensure we hold the correct information about our customers and our people, we have worked with our Board members to gather EDI data. Not only to meet the needs of the business but also to support the National Housing Federation’s desire to understand how the housing sector represents its’ communities.

We last completed the NHF EDI data tool in 2021 and have used the data to explore how we could increase diversity and representation on Customer Voices and the Board. By developing a more user-friendly and simplistic process, including working with our Engagement Team and Neighbourhoods Team, we have been able to encourage customers to become involved in our decision-making process.

Data is really important when deciding how we allocate support to organisations and local communities through our community investment funding. After identifying a lack of wraparound childcare in their local community, Stanhope Barrington Primary School were awarded £500 of grant funding towards resources for their provision, which runs from 7.30am until 5pm during the week. This allows parents and carers to access employment opportunities and vulnerable young people to access free food and support. A key aspect of developing the provision has been the development of an activities programme in partnership with the young people, which gives them the opportunity to develop new and existing skills in a number of areas including the arts, sports and sciences.



our business

Equality, diversity and inclusion are not standalone issues. The key to our approach is to see them as part of our day-to-day and longer-term decision-making.

We make sure that we consider the impact of our plans and changes on the people affected and link this back to how we deliver our vision.

Since April 2022, we have:

- Trialled more user-friendly and meaningful impact assessments and review processes, ensuring that service managers feel able to confidently consider and mitigate any impacts where necessary
- Completed actions identified in the annual equalities report and Positive About Inclusion report
- Undertaken our annual Culture Audit and achieved a business-wide healthy culture score of 84 (an increase of six compared to previous years)
- Carried out a data audit of all customer EDI data held across the business ensuring that data is GDPR compliant and also managed in an effective and appropriate manner. By reviewing data, we are able to understand how this can be better stored on our CRM system, what meaningful data is needed and how it's used
- Invested in our new build developments, ensuring that we can provide homes that are energy efficient, insulated and cost less to run. We have been able to provide homes that meet local needs – including adaptable properties, bungalows and family sized homes – by understanding and investing in stock and communities
- Aligned our governance data collection methods with the National Housing Federation's EDI Tool to ensure that we are collecting data in the most appropriate manner, and that this data can be effectively compared with regional and local 2021 Census data. This allows us to play a role in contributing to how the sector responds to and understands the needs of its communities, and also ensures that we represent and acknowledge the diversity of customers and their communities
- Held a successful International Women's Day Recognition Café, recognising the successes of women and allies across our business and our stakeholders
- Continued to support and maintain our membership of WISH (Women in Social Housing), including supporting staff to attend, and hosting events for members from across the North East region.

Board traineeships and developing our business:

Our Board trainee programme allows us to support people to begin their journey to become a Board member at believe housing or another organisation. The two-year programme provides the successful participants with the opportunity to learn and develop Board and committee skills and an understanding of governance and its role both within and outside of the housing sector.

Following an open recruitment process that saw 56 individuals apply, we successfully appointed five people to the programme including two of our customers. A key aspect of our recruitment was to encourage greater diversity amongst Board members and as a result we undertook targeted recruitment, including advertising in bus stops across County Durham, using social media platforms and other mechanisms to ensure that we received applications from as many people as possible. As a result of this work, we've been able to recruit five individuals to the programme with an average age of 39, compared to a national average in 2022 of 59.9 years and a believe housing board with 50% of members over the age of 45. In comparison to the national average of 40% female board members, we currently have a Board gender split of 40% female, 35% male, 25% unknown and a board traineeship programme of 100% female.

progress against our 2021/22 action plan

Our progress against our 2021/22 Action Plan is detailed below. Of the 11 actions, five have been completed, three are in progress and three have not yet started.

Action	Completed	Update
Review our customer data collection form and processes to ensure that we hold up-to-date equality data for all our customers	In progress	We have updated our information collection processes to concentrate on face-to-face collection of vulnerabilities and disability as well as house condition.
Review of our impact assessment process and documentation	Completed	We undertook a soft launch of our new impact assessments in December 2022 with policy makers providing vital feedback on the documentation and overall process. The revised documentation and process was officially launched in April 2023 in conjunction with our Policy Team.
Review internal equality activity including the role and future focus for the Positive Action Group	In progress	Relaunch of the group is being undertaken and will include a review of activity and action plan of delivery for 2023/24.
Deliver EDI refresher training for all our people	Not started	Work is being undertaken to develop a bespoke package of EDI training for all our people using Learning Lounge software and best practice from other providers.
Review our employee data collection forms and data collection methods to ensure that we hold up-to-date, relevant data for all our people	Completed	
Undertake an annual employee data collection 'event' to update and increase data submissions	In progress	It is intended to undertake this exercise in April to allow for completion that aligns with the National Housing Federation data submission dates.
Ensure all language and terminology used in policies, processes and documentation is appropriate and consistent with our approach to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion	Completed	
Introduce transitioning principles and guidance for the business including providing bespoke training for all managers and team leaders	In progress	Work is being undertaken to develop actions associated with this including guidance and principals as well as the associated training package.
Consider applying for EDI recognitions, accreditation and national awards	Complete	Successfully achieved Disability Confident Committed status and working towards Disability Confident Employer status.
Review the use of Workplace to ensure the development of an EDI culture across the business	Complete	EDI messages are regularly communicated using Workplace alongside an EDI communications plan.
Work with managers, team leaders, operatives and those with limited digital access to develop a consistent approach to EDI across the business	Not started	Best practise approaches to be discussed at the equalities@believe steering group and positive action group

moving forward: our plans

As we move into 2023/24, it is important that we celebrate our achievements so far and strive to ensure that EDI continues to be part of our DNA and an integral aspect of our behaviours.

To ensure that this happens we commit to the following:

Action	Success Criteria	Completion date
<p>Workforce Strategy – an adaptable workforce plan that meets the challenges of the future</p> <p>Outcome: Culture audit results of 75+ 3 Star Best Companies results</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation with people at all levels within the business • Development of strategy • Completion of impact assessment • Approval of strategy by Board 	November 2023
<p>Disability Confident Employer accreditation</p> <p>Outcome: Recruitment and retention of people who are disabled and those with health conditions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of gap analysis • Submission of gap analysis and self-assessment • Achievement of Disability Confident Employer accreditation • Provide guidance to all managers on Disability Confident Employer accreditation • External and internal promotion of accreditation 	November 2023
<p>Mindful Employer accreditation</p> <p>Outcome: Increased engagement levels in relation to mental health at work Increased uptake of options available to support mental health and wellbeing at work</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of gap analysis • Submission of gap analysis and self-assessment • Attain Mindful Employer accreditation • Provide guidance to all managers on Mindful Employer accreditation • External and internal promotion of accreditation 	March 2024
<p>Sharing of lived experience by our people and our customers</p> <p>Outcome: Engagement levels with lived experience related content Increase in awareness Increase in completion levels by data set</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment campaign to promote desire to share lived experience stories • Work with frontline staff to target and encourage customers to share stories • Communications campaign to highlight the benefits of data collection including personal stories 	March 2024
<p>Development of self-led EDI networks</p> <p>Outcome: Growth in EDI linked networks Our people having a space to discuss specific issues and help us to continue to develop an inclusive culture</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications campaign to empower and support our people to set up and lead EDI networks • Provide support and encouragement to fledgling groups including hosting initial sessions, linking in with other groups in the county • Support existing groups to thrive by providing resource support where necessary • Use network groups to support consultation and provide insight into the development and implementation of policies and strategies across the business 	March 2024
<p>Customer data and improving our services to those that require reasonable adjustments</p> <p>Outcome: % customers who feel they are treated fairly and with respect (STAR survey) Ensure the right information is available to provide appropriate action based on individual needs Improved levels of trust and confidence from our customers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete a gap analysis against the Ombudsman's 'Knowledge and Information Management' report • Develop an appropriate project management plan • Implement actions identified in the project management plan 	March 2025

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