

equalities report

2023

2024

believe
housing

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introduction

Welcome to our annual equalities report for 2023/2024.

As an organisation we are committed to embedding equality, diversity and inclusion across our day-to-day behaviours and through each contact with our customers, our stakeholders and our colleagues.

The housing sector is currently facing significant challenges and as a housing provider our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion supports us to respond effectively and think about the impact of our decision-making.

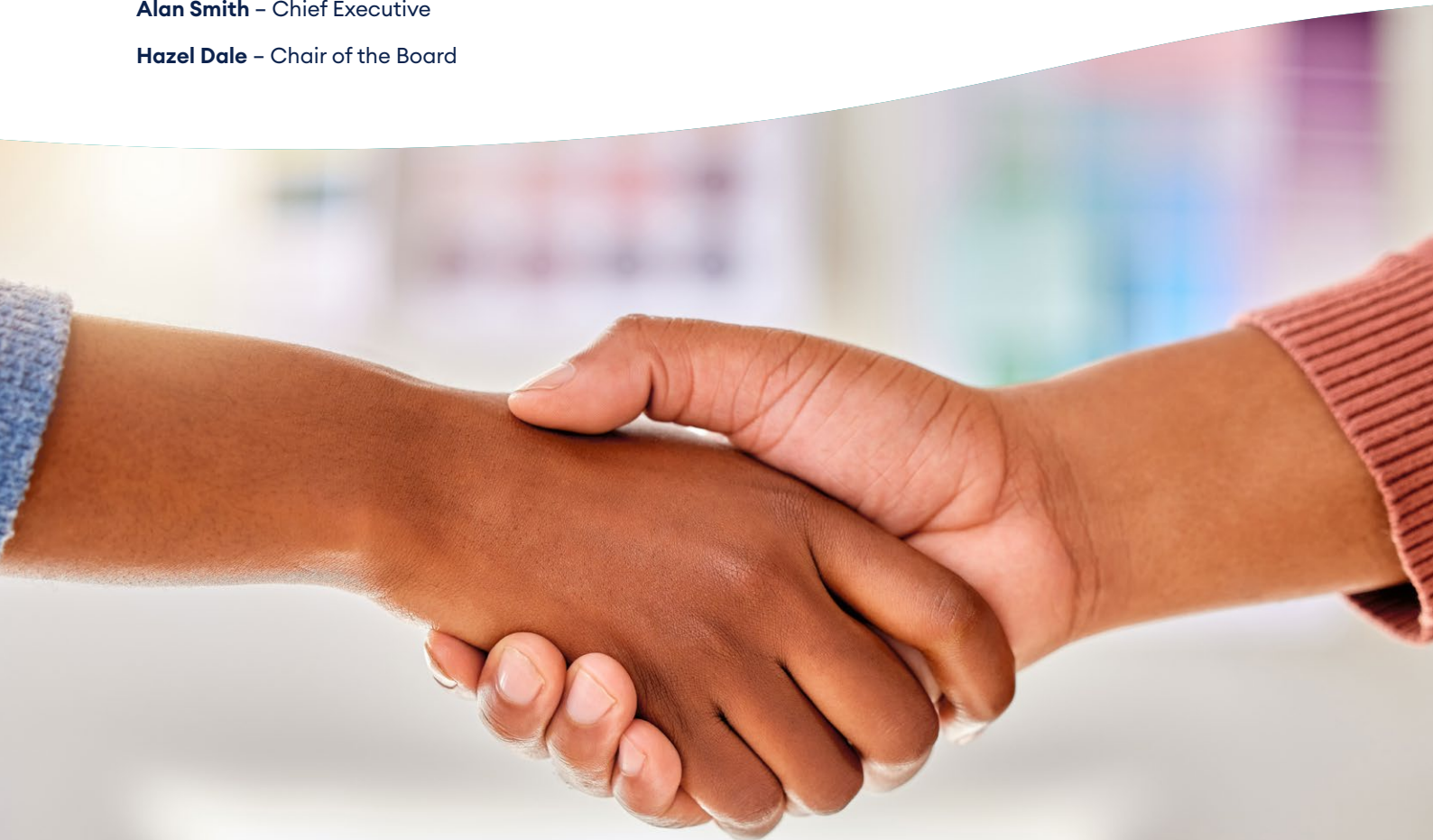
We are confident that we deliver a fair and equitable service to our customers and that our colleagues understand the importance of delivering a service that takes an individual's needs into account.

We are proud that our colleagues feel comfortable to be themselves at work. And the refresh of our 'working the believe way' and launch of our new behaviours for colleagues have strengthened our positive culture and commitment to our values.

We hope you are inspired by our successes this year and enjoy finding out more about the work that we do, not only as a provider of social housing but also as a large employer and contractor of external services.

Alan Smith – Chief Executive

Hazel Dale – Chair of the Board



our approach

Our approach to equality, diversity and inclusion lies firmly within our values. At believe housing we all agree to ‘Do the right thing: for our colleagues; 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 colleagues see believe housing as a great place to work and somewhere they 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.

Our EDI framework sets out our key aims. We will:

- ensure we work to remove all direct and indirect discrimination, 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 which recognise this
- recognise the positive impact an inclusive and diverse workforce brings to believe to help us achieve our vision of a life without barriers
- recognise 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 impact of our equality activities.



our colleagues

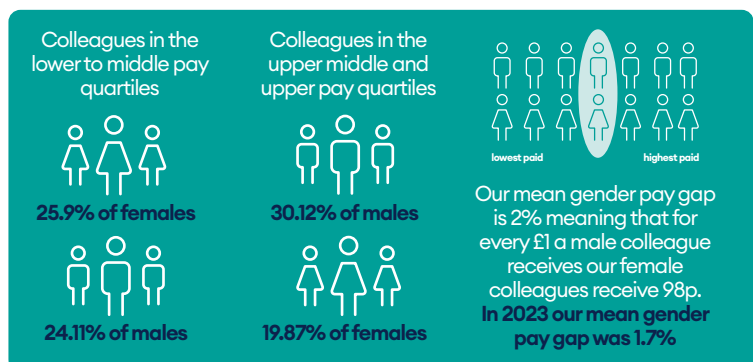
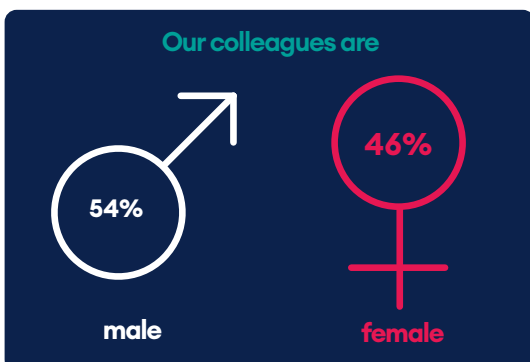
As an inclusive employer we strive to provide a culture and environment for all our employees that provides flexibility and choice while supporting us to deliver an effective service to our customers.

Since April 2023, we have:

- become an accredited Mindful Employer, underlining our commitment to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of our colleagues
- implemented our Simple Done Right approach to improving our services, engaging and involving colleagues in identifying problems and developing solutions throughout the process
- achieved Disability Confident Employer status, demonstrating our commitment to making our recruitment processes as inclusive as possible, enabling us to recruit and benefit from a diverse employee body
- implemented a corporate volunteering calendar, providing our colleagues with opportunities to take time out of their working day to support local projects or organisations; for example, colleagues volunteering to pack hygiene and baby packs supported the vital work of local charity Lifeline Community Action
- continued our membership of the Lighthouse Foundation providing free, confidential mental health support and advice to all our colleagues
- held a number of wellbeing events encouraging colleagues to learn more about the importance of wellbeing and mental health
- introduced WageStream to provide financial management and budgeting support to colleagues
- reviewed our approach to internal communications to ensure that information is delivered to all our colleagues in a variety of ways to suit different communication styles
- introduced our Workforce Strategy, providing workstreams for the future of our business, ensuring that our colleagues have opportunities to develop and are supported to do the right thing at all times
- focused on trying to raise the amount of data we have about colleagues to help us shape our colleague offer
- refreshed our ‘working the believe way’ to provide clarity and support to managers and colleagues throughout the business.

Our gender pay gap figures were analysed in April 2024. Further information can be found in our gender pay gap report.

As of April 2024:



Becoming a Disability Confident Employer:

After achieving Disability Confident Committed status in 2022/23, we made the decision to work towards achieving Disability Confident Employer status. To achieve this, we were required to undertake a self-assessment and gap analysis highlighting where we met the code and areas for future development.

As part of this process, we reviewed our recruitment practices across the business to ensure that these were accessible to all. This included rolling out a business-wide approach to accepting CVs and cover letters instead of traditional applications, and continuing to use our dedicated application platform that allows individuals to complete applications over a period time, download applications and make preferred interview bookings.

We now regularly advertise our vacancies through a number of local organisations and agencies that work with and promote opportunities to a diverse community of individuals. At shortlisting all managers are now aware that any applicant who identifies themselves as having a disability and meets the minimum criteria is guaranteed an interview. We ask all interviewees to identify any reasonable adjustments that can be made during the interview process and we are currently trialling giving questions to all applicants prior to the interview. These changes are designed to ensure that each applicant feels comfortable during the interview process and is given every opportunity to perform at their highest level.

Our behaviours:

Following the approval of our workforce strategy, we have worked with colleagues across the business to review and reframe our behaviours to reflect our vision and core purpose, as well as ensuring that we put our customers first.

As part of this process, we:

- listened to our colleagues
- explored what our expected behaviours really mean and how these can come together to provide the best possible experience for our customers
- ensured that our colleagues understand the importance of treating others with dignity, respect and fairness.

Throughout this work our culture team have placed equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) at the heart of the discussions, ensuring that each statement and expected behaviour reflects our desire to do the right thing. By placing EDI at the heart of our culture and expected behaviours, we are able to ensure that all our colleagues treat people fairly, tailor our services to meet individual needs and understand the importance of doing so.

A key aspect of this work has been the simplifying of our behaviour statements to allow us to ensure that our colleagues:



There are now clear expectations below these statements setting out how every person within our business will behave and how they will be supported to do this at times. As well as forming part of regular catch-ups and team meetings these behaviours will help leaders and managers to have great conversations with their teams to identify areas of best practice as well as areas for development.

our customers

As a housing provider, we should provide healthy homes that meet the needs and aspirations of our customers. 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 our need to fully understand what is required and where we can enable change.

Since April 2023, we have:

- provided suicide intervention support to 135 customers
- supported 342 survivors of domestic abuse
- managed 142 adult safeguarding cases
- managed 52 child safeguarding cases
- supported 3,119 customers who are experiencing financial difficulties or worries
- secured over £1.6million in additional welfare benefits
- used our community investment funding to support 139 projects, providing £268,397.92 of funding and creating £5,336,820 in social value from our investment
- supported 148 customers to access well paid, sustainable and secure employment opportunities
- secured funding to enable five economically inactive customers to join our New Start work placement programme; in total, we have supported eight customers to gain valuable experience, a qualification and holistic employability support to access further employment
- reviewed our support for vulnerable customers reporting damp and mould issues, taking into account the Housing Ombudsman’s Knowledge and Information Management Report and ensuring that we’re able to deliver a tailored service that takes individual needs into account
- revised our complaints processes to ensure they meet the requirements of the new Code of Practice and that we provide responses and information in a clear and user-friendly manner. We have expanded our Customer Insight Team and all customers have access to a named contact who will speak to them throughout an investigation process
- used our data and local knowledge to deliver 208 new homes of which 18 were bungalows and 31 were accessible/adaptable to meet needs in local communities
- provided voluntary careers education support to a local provider of specialist education for children and young people with emotional and behavioural challenges
- learned that 88% of customers interviewed as part of our tenant satisfaction survey were satisfied that we treated them fairly and with respect
- worked with HACT to develop their community insight tool, allowing us to access up-to-date, comparable data about our communities.

Understanding need in our local communities:

Our approach to community investment relates specifically to our ability to understand the needs of our local communities. We're fully aware that this cannot be done in isolation, so use our business intelligence and local knowledge to identify where our money will make most difference.

During 2023/24, we developed a patch-mapping approach to complement our existing community investment funding activity, allowing us to provide direct funding to activities and organisations meeting specific needs in local community. A key aspect of this work has been understanding local, regional and national data alongside local knowledge to identify communities and activities where our funding will make the greatest difference.

The Community Investment Team has worked closely with internal and external partners to identify, develop and improve relationships as well as setting performance baselines for activities and organisations. Projects currently being funded are tackling youth antisocial behaviour, and supporting the need for digital skills for older people, helping get people access to money guidance, banking, shopping, and decrease social isolation.



our business

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

We make sure 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 2023, we have:

- completed actions identified in the annual equalities report and Positive About Inclusion report
- continued to support and maintain our membership of WISH (Women in Social Housing), including supporting colleagues to attend, and hosting events for members across the north east England region
- implemented our ‘Simple Done Right’ approach to service transformation, working across the business to identify improvements and efficiencies to ensure we deliver the best possible service to our customers
- completed 14 impact assessments ensuring that our policies and procedures take into account the diverse nature of our customers and stakeholders
- submitted and contributed to the National Housing Federation (NHF)’s EDI data tool, providing a baseline of data to improve our understanding of our customers, our Board, our executive team and our colleagues and where we need to focus our attention
- completed self-assessments against the new Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling code and the new Consumer Standards and developed an action plan to ensure that we meet any gaps and are able to demonstrate full compliance including ensuring that we consider and understand the individual needs of our customers at all times
- reviewed our approach to customers in order to begin developing a business-wide customer strategy, working to support our vision of ‘we believe in life without barriers’
- led a session at the Constructing Excellence North East ‘All In’ inclusion conference, where we shared our learnings and EDI achievements, including findings from the NHF toolkit and our 2022/23 equalities annual report
- led the way, with our CEO chairing EDI sessions held by the National Housing Federation following the release of the equality tool
- developed a diversity calendar allowing us to promote key dates, messages and activities to all our colleagues; this raises awareness and understanding and provides opportunities to share lived experiences on topics including disability and the challenges for individuals with caring responsibilities.

our progress

In our last report we set ourselves a number of actions to implement and undertake in order to stretch ourselves and ensure that we continue in our commitment to embedding our approach to EDI across our business.

Action	What we've done	Progress
<p>Workforce Strategy - an adaptable workforce plan to meet 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 	In progress
<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 	Completed
<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 	Completed
<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"> • Worked with frontline colleagues to target and encourage customers to share stories • Communications campaign to highlight the benefits of data collection including personal stories 	Completed
<p>Development of self-led EDI networks</p> <p>Outcome: Growth in EDI linked networks Colleagues 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 	<p>In progress:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Menopause group has been set up • Welfare and wellbeing group initiated
<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 that we have the right information 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 Knowledge and Information Management report • Develop an appropriate project management plan • Implement actions identified in the project management plan 	March 2025

moving forward: our plans

As we move into 2024/25, 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	Progress
Embed equity as opposed to equality within the business Outcome: Improved levels of customer satisfaction Improved awareness of our approach to EDI 100% completion rate for EDI training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revise our EDI framework to highlight the importance of equity Develop awareness of equity across the business Development of a mandatory EDI training/awareness programme 	December 2024
Understand and listen to the voices of our colleagues Outcome: Improved levels of trust and confidence from our people Empower colleagues to influence decision-making within the business Increased levels of satisfaction in Best Companies and culture surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formation of a Colleague Voice panel Recruitment to a Colleague Voice panel Buy-in from colleagues to understand benefits of the panel and increase use 	March 2025
Review and update our customer data allowing the tailored delivery of services that meet individual needs Outcome: Reduced number of complaints Improved Tenant Satisfaction Measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data cleansing exercise of all customer vulnerability data Review of all customer data to highlight areas for improvement and collection Programme of collecting vulnerability data at first point of contact 	March 2025
Implement our menu of services for vulnerable customers Outcome: Increased level of satisfaction across our Tenant Satisfaction Measures indicators Increased level of customer satisfaction Decrease in missed appointments Improved service delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementation of a believe housing priority scheme Communication to identified customers encouraging sign-up Awareness-raising exercise within the business to highlight business need 	January 2025

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