

Respect and Inclusion Annual Review 2024



We treat everyone with dignity and respect



We create an environment where everyone can be themselves



We seek out diverse perspectives and hear all voices



We seek to understand other cultures, practices and experiences

“Difference matters at Housing 21. We are committed to creating an inclusive culture for all: residents, our employees, and our partners. We aim to champion a culture of belonging, where everyone feels valued and respected”

Bruce Moore, Chief Executive

Introduction

This is our annual review reporting on progress being made towards Housing 21 becoming a truly inclusive organisation through its respect and inclusion plans.

Housing 21 Respect and Inclusion Strategy



The Respect and Inclusion Strategy was established in 2022 setting out the embedding of equality, diversity and inclusion at Housing 21, covering all activities relating to its workforce, residents and other stakeholders.

At the same time, the Respect and Inclusion charter, which sets out a series of principles driving activities, was rolled out to employees and residents to embed those key elements.

The strategy sets out 'what' we aim to achieve; the Charter identifies 'how' that inclusive culture will be created.



Housing 21 Respect & Inclusion Charter

This report sets out progress in 2024 against each element of the strategy and what plans are in the pipeline for 2025.



Housing 21 has an inclusive working culture

Diverse employee engagement groups and activities

2024 progress:

- Disability Action Group active throughout the year, leading on significant change/improvement actions to address previous lower satisfaction figures amongst disabled colleagues. Activities, aimed at improving that satisfaction, have included:
 - > Disability Confident level two alignment actions to progress towards full compliance and achievement in 2025.
 - > Review of performance of Occupational Health provider services.
 - > Access to Work process review, awareness raising and service signposting.
 - > Commencement of onboarding review including facilities and IT support.
- New LGBTQ+ employee group established, driving accreditation and resident links.
- New Adjustments Passport introduced to support a stigma-free, supportive culture.
- Connecting Employees activities, removing digital exclusion barriers.
- Policy Review Group has taken oversight of ensuring policy reviews and formation have an inclusion lens and voice represented.
- Wellness Action Plans launched encouraging self-ownership of personal health through utilisation of Housing 21 services and support.
- Flexible ways of working embedded wherever possible to allow for autonomy and support for those with caring responsibilities.
- Parental paid leave periods for maternity, adoption and paternity leave increased.

In the pipeline for 2025:

- Embed new workplace adjustments process.
- Fresh review of Occupation Health service, considering alternatives.
- HouseProud Pledge or equivalent accreditation to be targeted for residents.
- Continue to embed the Wellness agenda as a day-to-day activity.

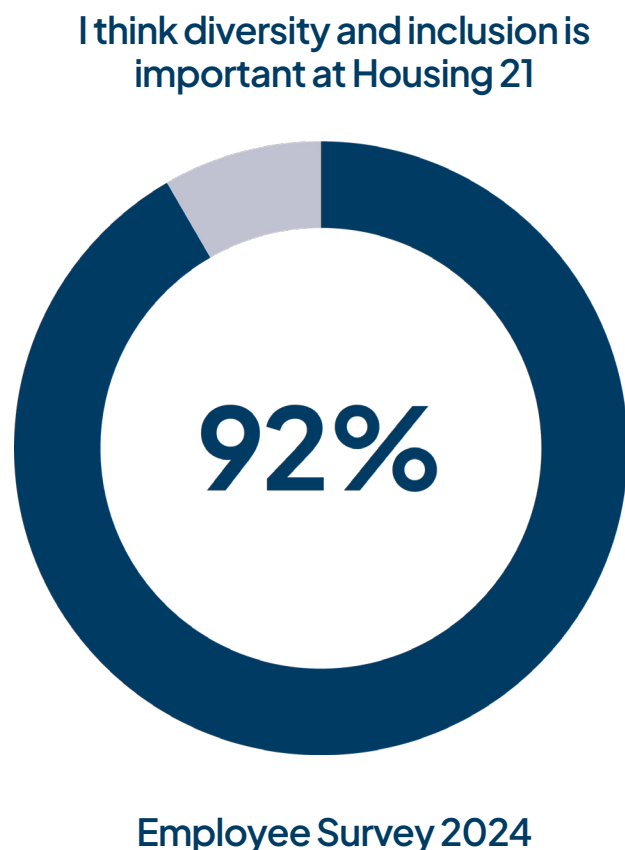
We encourage and empower people to contribute

2024 progress:

- Inclusion and wellbeing events' calendar, recognising every key diversity event, is now embedded and published on the Intranet.
- Thrive Live Wellbeing and Inclusion podcast launched to make learning about wellbeing and inclusion more engaging through case studies.
- Design of new website to be a model of responsive design to accessibility needs.
- Respect and Inclusion Intranet Toolkits now available for all employees.
- Alternative formats policy review and standardisation has begun.
- Inclusive language and tone of voice established across all communication channels.
- Reasonable adjustments for residents' process review has started.
- Employee survey conducted to thematically measure inclusion, engagement and relationships.
- Financial wellbeing and education sessions delivered.
- Housing 21 60th celebration activities delivered inclusively, locally, and nationally.

In the pipeline for 2025:

- Delivery of accessible new website exceeding regulatory minimum standards.
- Complete and finalise review of resident reasonable adjustments.
- Capture of first language needs through employee self-service.
- Review to be undertaken of surveys to allow monitoring of the respect and inclusion agenda.



Inclusive recruitment

2024 progress:

- Job advertisement wording has been gender neutralised to avoid favouring male or female applicants.
- Successfully achieving 15 percent male target for new recruits.
- Did not achieve 15 percent minority –ethnic target for new recruits.
- Job adverts are now being placed with SCOPE, Forces Friendly, Housing Diversity Network and SEETEC Plus to attract more candidates from diverse backgrounds through partnership working.
- Recruitment job board microsites created highlighting the organisational culture and inclusive practices.
- Assistant Talent Partners have drastically cut the use of agency usage in pilot areas to almost zero, thus keeping control over workforce appointments in house, aligning to our inclusivity aims and also achieving significant financial savings.
- Hiring manager training has been rolled out to include a significant volume of content around recognising and reducing bias, panel diversity and ensuring recruitment outcomes are based upon on skills and behaviours.
- Onboarding experience review started to minimise friction or bias, particularly for disabled colleagues where adjustments are required.
- Early career activity undertaken promoting careers in social housing and care within schools.
- Role evaluation and benchmarking processes carried out through external partner to ensure neutrality.

In the pipeline for 2025:

- Complete onboarding review with clear lines of responsibility for each stage.
- Consider innovative and tailored recruitment techniques like male-biased adverts/ simplified applications for frontline roles to support specific underrepresented areas.
- Assistant Talent Partners to spot check recruitment processes and provide feedback to remove barriers to diverse hiring.
- Capture employee testimonials to promote our workforce diversity.
- Activities and events to support increasing subscribers to Housing 21 job alerts and create a diverse employer following.

- Early career activities focusing on pre-employment education providers.
- Progression of apprenticeships to support employee development opportunities and the monitoring of participant diversity.
- Review of barriers to engagement in continuous development activities.

We understand that everybody has something to offer



We will support an amazing experience for our residents

Understanding the diversity of our residents

2024 progress:

- Three active resident networks for protected characteristics: Race Equity And Cultural Heritage (REACH), disability, and LGBT+. The REACH group (cultural diversity) was not engaging effectively so has been refreshed with new membership through face-to-face connections and dialogue.
- Launch of the People and Property Visits project enabling a one-to-one with every resident and getting their position on their experience/ tenancy. Included within this project will be an update on personal characteristic data and also communication preferences.
- Wi-Fi roll out to all schemes reducing digital exclusion and disparities and supporting inclusive technologies.
- New Resident Board Members appointed.
- Resident representation upon all relevant recruitment campaigns.

In the pipeline for 2025:

- Resident feedback mechanisms to be reviewed.
- Resident membership on advisory boards to be reviewed.
- Inclusion champions to be explored.
- Easy to ignore voices: a series of principles that hard-to-reach, minoritised residents can expect to see.

We value and appreciate difference and promote inclusion



2024 progress:

- Charter-based sessions rolled out to schemes with many putting up signed copies as a demonstration of the residents' commitment.

In the pipeline for 2025:

- New and inclusive 'Welcome' scheme poster and signs to be rolled out to every scheme.
- Printable resources for every scheme setting a respectful tone to be made available.
- Respect and inclusion insert into tenancy pack establishing expectations from day one.
- Extra Care Service Review included resident needs at the centre of reviewing tasks, roles, and responsibilities.



We will make brilliant decisions

Equality Impact Assessments (EIA)

2024 progress:

- New EIA process embedded since January 2024 and has seen an increase in quality of assessments presented to Policy Steering Group.
- EIA Intranet page launched with supportive guidance.
- EIA best practice case studies being collated.

In the pipeline for 2025:

- Spot checks and feedback on completed EIAs to be undertaken.
- Best practice case studies to be updated and shared.
- EIA principles to be extended to process changes.

Data

2024 progress:

- Diversity data now embedded into People and Culture dashboard metrics.
- Categorisation of metrics has been updated to be more respectful and accurate.
- Quarterly People and Culture Operations Report shared at Executive and Board level for monitoring.
- Managers have an employee personal data review report available to them through reporting self-service.
- Induction process amended to embed the importance of data self-ownership and completion.
- Manager self-service reports made available via self-service for proactive workforce monitoring.

In the pipeline for 2025:

- 'Check. Complete. Confirm.' Campaign push from February 2025 to reinforce the necessity for accurate and complete monitoring and support data.

In the pipeline for 2025:

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- Complete data set comparison with every local authority's population to enable understanding of our representation as part of Chair's Challenge outcomes.
- Diversity Data Dashboard monitoring reports to be made available to business areas.

Partnership working

2024 progress:

- Investors In People partnership commenced with collaborative working to identify best practice and innovative ways of working.
- Relationship established with Positive about Inclusion.
- Relationship established with Housing Diversity Network.
- Conference session delivered identifying inclusion best practice.
- People Services were awarded winner for Best Response to the Cost of Living Crisis by Rewards Strategy 2024, for work around financial affordability of pensions and healthcare.
- Simply Health cash plan provided for all employees removing financial barriers of day-to-day healthcare, access to online GP services and health monitoring and assessment services.
- Recognition platform introduced to allow for equity monitoring of recognition and distribution.

In the pipeline for 2025:

- Investors In People to broaden cross-organisation engagement activities.
- Recognition platform to be developed to include the ability to recognise and encourage positive and inclusive behaviours and celebrations.
- Health plan services to be widely promoted through roadshow activities.
- Benefits to be broadened where possible to include partners and wider family benefit access.



We are an organisation that promotes diversity and is committed to respect

Employee training

2024 progress:

- 'Leading Inclusion' essentials training for managers refreshed with wide attendance and very positive feedback on impact.
- Workshops on a patch-by-patch basis that focus on social value, respect and inclusion and resident engagement piloted. These are practical experiences that are designed to get employees to share their real-world examples and learn from each other. Overwhelming feedback is greater understanding and awareness afterwards.
- Wellbeing material reflective of removing engagement barriers and stigmas launched with signposting to support.
- Apprenticeship programmes undertaken and widely promoted.

In the pipeline for 2025:

- Modules being drawn up on: 'How to challenge discriminatory language', 'Building cohesive and inclusive teams'.
- Review of training awareness modules relating to disability, race and gender to improve knowledge and understanding.
- Specific role modelling coaching for senior managers and Executive on inclusive practices.
- Toolkits for meaningful check-ins and dialogue with team members.
- Unconscious bias awareness activities to be introduced.
- Early Interventions Framework.
- Mentorship and reverse mentoring activities to be explored.



2024 progress:

- New partnership established with Inclusive Employers to embed best practice and collaborative working.
- Inclusion Community Fund to pilot innovative projects which encourage cohesion and wellbeing as well as raise the profile of Housing 21 to the wider community to promote best practice.
- Launch of Respect and Inclusion 4 REAL principles.
- Policy review framework established along with best practice guidance.
- Communications to celebrate cultural diversity events (festivals and wellbeing) prompted and promoted.
- Cohousing: first project now on the ground and management arrangements/ lettings and general practicalities are being finalised.

In the pipeline for 2025:

- Housing 21 to sign Chair's Challenge.
- 4 REAL toolkits to be published every month.
- Launch of completely new Thrive Model co-created with wellbeing partner -innovative approach to employee lifecycle experience maximisation.
- Annual Board review and workshop around equality, diversity and inclusion.
- External equality, diversity and inclusion accreditation will be sought for the whole business.
- Recognition for inclusive best practices on an individual and team basis to be introduced.
- Cohousing: identify and develop second site, establishing a template based on learnings from the first.



2024 progress:

- Input inclusion aspects into individual tender documents on renewal.
- Standard supplier agreement now to include commitments to organisational ethical practices.
- Collaborative working with People and Culture software providers to develop systems reporting to support diversity and inclusion monitoring.

In the pipeline for 2025:

- Communication of supplier expectations.
- Celebration of supplier best practices.
- Monitoring of supplier network activities around diversity and inclusion.
- Capture of supplier case studies on their own inclusion activities.

**We aim to create a positive experience for those around us
by role modelling inclusive behaviours**



In August/ September 2024, Housing 21 brought in an external consultant (Positive About Inclusion/ High Peak) to audit equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in selected areas, namely: visible commitment, recruitment, scheme inclusivity, recruitment and data. That report and its recommendations is available separately but can be summarised as follows:

- Housing 21's 'visible commitment' is quite clearly apparent, and it recommended housekeeping around certain published reports on the website and greater clarity on hate crimes and how they are dealt with.
- Scheme inclusivity: "Our research has identified a real commitment from Housing 21 to create and sustain an inclusive environment in which residents feel a sense of belonging. All of the Local Housing Managers with whom we have spoken are passionately invested in doing the right thing; arranging inclusive activities, removing any barriers to engagement and using feedback to improve services." To top and tail that sense of inclusivity, there are plans for inclusive welcome signage and written commitment statements to be made available as and when required, as per the existing plans on page six.
- Data is noted as being incomplete and lacking in a number of ways, as is recognised in our strategy. The recommendations to improve that situation are already underway as per page seven.
- Recruitment: again, the consultant confirmed challenges and shortcomings already identified. Although their visit did not coincide with the more recent completion of a major review of the entire recruitment function, many of its recommendations are aligned with existing plans or completed tasks.

A number of our 2025 activities will be directly aligned to the assurance report to continue to ensure we are not only compliant with legislative requirements but also champion innovative practices. These include:

- Addressing missing data issues through proactive actions.
- Ensuring online material is updated, widely shared and accessible.
- Promoting and recognising areas of best practice.
- Monitoring resident complaints for emerging themes.
- Making visible materials available to courts to establish the culture.
- Continuing to champion employee and resident-led engagement networks and channels.
- Broadening pay gap reporting and making information in respect of pay widely available.
- Continuously monitoring inclusive recruitment practices.

In summary, it was very useful to have an objective view on the organisation's progress towards inclusivity. Much of what has been noted is already in progress or in the planning stages and it is good to know those plans are based on accepted good practice.

What's next?

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The journey to true inclusion is a very long one with plenty of challenges which have the potential to knock you off course; it requires continuous focus and commitment. Many well-meaning organisations do lose steam in these circumstances and default to performative inclusion.

Housing 21's approach has greater potential; it has been authentic in terms of ambition, and it has been based on the principle of 'respect' for all. This is far more inclusive and was ahead of its time; it still is. For that reason, the buy-in from the business and residents has been enthusiastic and engaged. The conversations around inclusion at Housing 21 are now focused on the 'how' rather than the 'why.'

We now enter a period of embedding respect and inclusion in all that we do, making it come to life, making it 'real.' The new 4REAL campaign aims to break down the components of an inclusive culture and make it accessible to all through day-to-day behaviours.

However, while we bring the agenda to life, we can't rest on our laurels and in a fast-moving, ever-changing field; it is very easy to fall behind in a short time. Therefore, it is planned to hold a Board workshop to help us focus on the taking respect and inclusion to the next level, leading to a fresh strategy for 2025 to 2028.

This way, we will not only continue with the momentum already built, but also be equipped to move up into a faster lane on this crucial journey with a determination to not lose sight of the bold ambition for Housing 21 to be truly inclusive for all.





INVESTORS IN PEOPLE®
We invest in people Platinum

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