



## RACE AND HOUSING WORKSHOP: SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

Shelter Scotland carried out [research](#) led by Heriot-Watt University, in partnership with CEMVO Scotland and funded by the abrdn Financial Fairness Trust into the barriers that people from minority ethnic groups experience when trying to access social housing. This research made a series of recommendations on how to improve access to social housing for people from these groups.

Following this publication Shelter Scotland hosted two workshops with over 50 stakeholders from the housing sector and beyond to discuss the research and to define the actions required to take forward the report's recommendations. People from minoritised ethnic groups who took part in the research also joined to share their expertise. This paper provides a summary of the discussions which took place with the workshop participants. It sets out the insight and suggestions made by workshop attendees on the practical steps that they felt their own and other organisations could consider taking. We hope that it provides a useful starting point for individuals and organisations to consider what they can do to improve access to social housing for people from minoritised ethnic groups.

### **Recommendation 1: There needs to be greater emphasis from senior management to promote and create an anti-racist culture.**

#### **The importance of publicly making this commitment:**

It is important for an organisation to visibly and publicly make this commitment to become anti-racist. This will demonstrate their values and intentions to clients, stakeholders and the wider sector. A public commitment will also empower staff to feel comfortable to challenge instances of racism and ensure the organisation is held accountable to this commitment. This public commitment could be done for example through a press release, on social media or through a statement published on their website.

**Good Practice:** Wheatley Group have a statement of commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) on their website. This sets out what EDI means for them, why it is important and how they will implement it in their organisation. This was developed by Wheatley's EDI staff group called Different Together, approved by Board and signed by Wheatley's CEO and Group Chair, signalling top-level commitment. Available here: [Wheatley-Group-EDI-Statement-of-Commitment-signed-2023.pdf](#)

### The need for structural change:

In order for an organisation to successfully create an anti-racist culture, senior management must implement structural changes to embed this approach from the top down, and to ensure it is treated as a priority. Some suggestions made as to how this should be done included:

- Creating a senior management position whose role it is to lead on implementing anti-racism in the organisation.
- Explicitly writing anti-racism into the organisation's mission statement and/or including it in their strategy.
- Creating an internal anti-racism working group to drive forward anti-racism work and ensure this lens is applied to all of the organisation's work.
- Ensuring that there is dedicated budget and resources towards becoming an anti-racist organisation.

**Good practice:** As part of their Equality, Diversity and Inclusion work Wheatley Group have launched their *Different Together* approach including creating six staff network groups, with an Executive/senior sponsor for each one. One of these groups focuses on the protected characteristics of race and multicultural.

**Good practice:** Shelter Scotland made a commitment in 2020 to become an anti-racist organisation. They have explicitly included this in their organisational strategy, and have dedicated budget and resources towards anti-racism activities. Their activities include: setting up an anti-racism steering group, appointing a Director of Equality, Inclusion and Diversity, dedicated diary time for anti-racism training and undertaking research and policy work into racial inequality and housing

### Monitoring and accountability:

It is necessary that there is ongoing monitoring and accountability throughout an organisation's work towards becoming anti-racist. This will help the organisation to understand their progress, as well as any gaps in their practices and what is and isn't working so they can adapt accordingly. This monitoring and accountability may look like:

- Identifying key indicators which will allow progress towards anti-racism to be measured. This must be accompanied along with timescales for reporting on this progress.
- Regular internal conversations to identify gaps in practices as well as positive progress.
- An internal audit of practice and policy around anti-racism.
- Senior leadership having performance measures related to racial equality.
- Anti-racism should be included as part of the staff appraisal process each year.
- Regular consultations with minority ethnic communities that the organisation works with, to sense check how they are progressing towards anti-racism and achieving a more inclusive culture.

### Anti-racism training

Within the workshops, attendees shared that they considered that their organisation should offer specific mandatory training on anti-racism and how to become anti-racist, rather than it just being part of broader diversity training. This training also needs to be engaging, meaningful and continuous, rather than just a tick box exercise.

There was also a suggestion that front line services are given fact sheets with commonly asked questions or misconceptions around ethnicity, in order for staff to feel confident in their ability to challenge bigotry and ignorance.

## **Recommendation 2: More attention needs to be paid to ensure the right affordable housing stock is supplied, which is reflective of the needs of an ethnically diverse population.**

### **Increased understanding of need:**

There is a need for both local authorities and housing associations to better understand the housing needs of minoritised ethnic groups in their area. This will help to inform decisions on what social housing stock is built and where, as well as their allocation policies.

Attendees suggested this could be done in a number of ways:

- Social landlords should conduct meaningful consultation with minoritised ethnic communities in the local area to inform their housing deliver programmes.
- The Scottish Government must improve the collection of data on ethnicity and homelessness, to give a more accurate and detailed picture of the diversity of the populations in need of social housing.
- Campaigning organisations should explicitly make the link between the lack of larger family homes and how this disproportionately negatively impacts minoritised ethnic communities. They should also show the devastating effects of this inappropriate housing stock, for example overcrowding.
- There needs to be stronger guidance and better training for local authority staff carrying out personal housing need assessments, for them to better understand and advocate for the importance of cultural needs.

### **Better planning for housing supply:**

When social landlords are designing their future housing supply, they must ensure they consider the needs of the minority ethnic populations in their area. These needs can then be used to inform their delivery plans. Some suggestions from the workshops on how this could be done are:

- The guidance for Housing Need and Demands Assessments needs to be updated by the Scottish Government to ensure that the needs of minority ethnic communities are explicitly considered.
- The local authority planning department should better engage with the local authority homelessness team to get an improved understanding of the housing needs of the homeless population in their area.
- Social landlords should conduct Equality Impact Assessments and share these findings with the relevant teams to support their understanding of who wants to access social housing and their needs (including cultural needs). This should then feed into each local authority's Local Housing Strategy.
- Evidence from front line staff in local authorities and housing associations of larger families in temporary accommodation or of overcrowding in social housing stock, as

well as better quantitative data, should be used to inform planning for new build social housing.

### **Better management of existing housing stock:**

There needs to be better oversight and management of existing housing stock to meet the needs of ethnically diverse populations wanting to access social housing. The workshop discussions identified many different ways in which this can be done:

- Local authorities should look to match empty properties to the needs of households on waiting lists for social homes. When doing this they should consider needs such as household size and cultural needs. These properties should then be offered to them as soon as possible.
- The Scottish Government (and organisations that can lobby) should ensure that a focus of the National Acquisition Plan is to purchase larger homes for the larger families trapped in temporary accommodation, including families from minoritised ethnic communities. This is in line with the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group on Temporary Accommodation [*Link T&F group report*].
- Social landlords should be alive to the changing needs of their tenants. For example, if their family size changes this could result in a tenant wanting or needing to move to another social home which better meets their needs.

**Good practice:** City of Edinburgh Council has a policy which encourages downsizing for a household in social housing if they are under occupying. Households occupying 3 or more-bedroom houses who no longer require that size of home and are willing to move to smaller accommodation, are entitled to Silver Priority due to under occupation. This then frees up a larger home for a family who needs it. This only applies to tenants of the Council, Housing Associations and Housing Cooperatives'

### **Increased resources from Scottish Government:**

The Scottish Government must provide adequate resources to allow local authorities to meet the housing needs of ethnically diverse populations. Increases in building and labour costs means that the Scottish Government funding for social house building is not going as far.

The Scottish Government carried out a policy of block buying properties to meet the needs of Ukrainian households. This indicates that political will and commitment can lead to increases in social housing supply. The Scottish Government needs to replicate this response by providing adequate funding to supply social homes, particularly for large families stuck in temporary accommodation for long periods of time, including those from minoritised ethnic communities.

### **Recommendation 3: Social landlords need to proactively engage with minoritised ethnic communities across Scotland.**

There was a recognition from the workshop discussions that engagement with minoritised ethnic communities across Scotland will help to better shape social landlords' services and practice to improve support to these groups.

## Translation services

In order to effectively engage with minoritised ethnic communities, translation services are key – both in terms of written materials and in person translators. This will help these communities to fully contribute to this engagement work in a meaningful way. It will also allow social landlords to build up trust and enable people to communicate their needs fully. These translation services should also be publicised by social landlords to make people aware they are available and give them the confidence to engage.

## Outreach work

Outreach work with minoritised ethnic communities should be carried out by social landlords in order to gain trust and increase understanding. There were several suggestions from organisation in the workshops as to what outreach work could take place, including:

- Community Engagement Officers should actively seek out community groups that represent people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds and encourage these groups to engage with consultations and/or discuss social landlords' policies and practices in relation to their needs.
- Social landlords could set up minority ethnic community panels to give communities a voice to directly feed into policy and practice, and ensure it is being considered through a minority ethnic lens.
- Social landlords could carry out a survey of their tenants from minoritised ethnic groups. This survey would need to be clear on why the data is required as they may be viewed with suspicion.

**Good practice:** Wheatley Group's *Stronger Voices, Stronger Communities* framework outlines their approach to customer engagement. This includes customer engagement to inform and influence policy design and service delivery. The Group undertake equality data monitoring including within the 'Customer Voice' programme to help identify any gaps in terms of representation, for example, if there is a lack of engagement with minoritised ethnic communities. In recently developing their new Group Hate Crime policy, the Group engaged with both a mixed and all-female ethnic minority group to shape this.

**Good practice:** Glasgow and West of Scotland Forum of Housing Association shared that community-based housing associations see it as especially important that their offices are as open, visible and accessible as possible, as footfall hopefully starts returning to pre-pandemic levels. This very physical presence of the office complements the online services which some people prefer but which may be less likely to be used by some individuals and groups, including some people from minority ethnic groups.

## **Recommendation 4: More effective zero tolerance approaches against perpetrators of racial harassment, and to provide better support for victims to enable them to remain in their homes safely.**

### **Visible support and straight forward reporting routes**

Social landlords need to make it visible that racial abuse will not be tolerated. This could be done by displaying posters in communal and public spaces such as housing office and community notice boards. Housing association newsletters may also be used to publicise this message.

The reporting process for racial harassment is often long and convoluted, and this deters people from reporting. There should be clear signposting for people wanting to report racial abuse, letting them know how to report it and giving them the confidence that their report will be taken seriously.

### **Training staff**

Housing association and local authority housing officers should receive training on how to respond to instances of racial harassment. They must not dismiss complaints and every complaint of this nature must be taken seriously and fully investigated. It was expressed that this culture change must come from senior management with clear processes for escalation.

**Good practice:** City of Edinburgh Council staff undertake Active Bystander Training. This training gives staff the tools to tackle incidents of abuse and discrimination, and to back each other up in challenging inappropriate behaviour.

### **Ensure no repercussions for victims.**

It was shared that tenants often fear reprisals for reporting racial harassment. In order to tackle this issue social landlords should provide assurance that the identity of the person making the report will be protected. Training of staff is also important here so that they understand the importance of anonymity. Staff should also be educated to not blame (or be perceived to blame) the victim of the abuse.

### **Involve the community.**

It is important for an inclusive and zero tolerance approach to be promoted within the wider community. This could be done through newsletters, training, a charter, and events which encourage community engagement.

**Good practice:** Queens Cross Housing Association have a Good Neighbour Charter which tenants are encouraged to sign up to. This promotes community and encourages respect and acceptance of diversity among their tenants.

### **Review current policies.**

It appears from the research that social landlords' current approaches to dealing with racial harassment are often insufficient. Social landlords should review their policies, for example through engagement with minoritised ethnic community groups, and consider what needs to be changed so they are more effective in challenging racial harassment, and ensuring victims are properly supported. It was also suggested that learnings could be taken from social landlords' own policies around reporting and supporting victims of domestic abuse.

There should be fresh guidance from the Scottish Government around the roles for social landlords in acting on instances of racial abuse among tenants, and how their duties relate to those of law enforcement.

## **Recommendation 5: There needs to be a program of capacity building in the housing sector to enable social landlords to respond effectively to the needs of an ethnically diverse population.**

### **Training**

As discussed under recommendation 1, all staff should carry out anti-racism training, and this should be built into professional development as a mandatory requirement.

Beyond this there also needs to be training on better understanding and responding to the needs of the ethnically diverse populations that the organisation interacts with. This will allow service to be better designed and support for these groups to be improved. This training could be tailored for specific roles to influence their practices and staff could be required to evidence how they have implemented this learning.

**Good practice:** The Chartered Institute of Housing offers an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion [Framework](#) which can be used by individuals or housing organisations to make positive changes across the sector. It features self-assessment tools so you can think about where you are currently with regards to EDI and consider how you can make further improvements to working practice.

### **Resource allocation**

In order to build capacity of organisations to respond to the needs of an ethnically diverse population there needs to be a specific allocation of resources to achieve this aim, and also strategic planning of where these resources will go and how they will be used. This is not just financial resources but also staff time and practices around recruitment and data gathering. This allocation of resources needs to be led by senior management and regulatory bodies.

### **Build relationships with partners.**

Organisations should work together to share resources and learnings. This will help to build capacity across the sector. This could look like sharing training materials, joint blog posts or newsletters sharing good practice, or even a sector working group to create a forum for these ideas to be discussed.

**Good practice:** Housing Options Scotland in collaboration with the UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence have launched a podcast on Equality in Housing. The aim of the podcast is to highlight the work taking place around Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in housing. It provides a forum to share insights, best practice and challenges, as well as reflecting on the use of research and evidence in day-to-day practices.

**Good Practice:** Shelter Scotland have established a Race and Housing Network to create a forum with social landlords and service providers in the housing sector, for discussion on racial inequality and housing, as well as sharing learnings and good practice.

## **Recommendation 6: Increased ethnic diversity in the workforce at all levels.**

### **Recruitment practices**

Organisations in the housing sector should consider how their recruitment practices could promote greater ethnic diversity in their workforce. Suggestions from the workshops for what this could look like included:

- Ensuring diversity on interview panels. This could mean that external interviewers are invited to sit on panels, for example members of minority ethnic communities that the person in the role would be working with.
- Removing names and schools from CVs to tackle unconscious biases.
- Offering annual leave and bank holidays as discretionary days rather than on fixed dates which often align with Christian holidays such as Easter and Christmas, may attract more ethnically diverse participants and enable other religious holidays to be on a more equal footing.
- Looking at where their jobs are advertised and consider if they should be advertised in places that are more visible to minority ethnic communities.
- Specific graduate and trainee schemes should be offered to people from minority ethnic communities to encourage them to join the housing sector.

**Good practice:** Wheatley Group have reviewed their recruitment process from an EDI perspective and are continuing to work to improve their recruitment practices to attract and retain a diverse workforce. For example, advertising on different job boards and also engaging with Black Professional Scotland to gain their expertise.

### **Retention of staff from minoritised ethnic groups**

Organisations need to look beyond just recruitment to what is needed to retain staff from minority ethnic groups. Some suggestions of how this could be done included:

- Diversity at senior leadership levels will make visible the opportunities for progression.
- Ensuring the right support is available to minority ethnic employees.



- A promotion of an anti-racist culture is likely to create a welcoming environment to staff from minority ethnic groups.
- Encouraging the creation of a minority ethnic network for staff within the organisation to act as a support network and forum to discuss concerns.

**Good practice:** PATH Scotland offers trainee and leadership programs in partnership with social landlords and housing associations. These aim to encourage people from minority ethnic groups into the housing sector, but also to help them achieve professional development and promotion within their organisations.

## **Recommendation 7: Steps must be taken to improve the collection, use and evaluation of data on equalities, in particular on ethnicity.**

### **Social landlords**

There were a number of suggestions made at the workshops as to how social landlords could improve their collection of equalities data. These included:

- Reviewing their method of data collection on ethnicities and considering what is lacking or not working.
- Building trust and rapport from the communities that they are collecting data from, emphasising why it's being collected, how it will be useful positively, and explaining the importance.
- Carrying out surveys of their tenants from minoritised ethnic groups. This needs to be proactive and tenants encouraged and supported to fill it in.
- Train staff to ensure that this data is collected effectively when dealing with homelessness applications or new tenants.

Social landlords must then publish this data in easy to use and accessible ways, this will allow them to monitor progress.

### **Scottish Government**

For the Scottish Government's improvements to the collection and publication of data on ethnicity and homelessness must be considered as part of the homelessness statistics review. It is important that those in the sector call for the Scottish Government to do this.