

# Equality, diversity and inclusion Update

**Equality** is everyone being treated in the same way and being afforded the same opportunities, where fairness is not only encouraged but underpins the standard of the organisation and its operations.

**Diversity** is recognising that everyone is different and not only being supportive of this but embracing it. This incorporates, but is not limited to, sex, gender identity and orientation, ethnicity, disability, religion and neurodiversity.

**Inclusion** is making sure everyone feels respected, empowered and confident to contribute and participate.

Hightown Housing Association is a committed equal opportunities housing association and employer. We strive to ensure that equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) is embedded across both our workforce and operations.

Hightown continues to attract, employ and retain a diverse workforce. Despite some incremental changes to the number of staff reporting certain protected characteristics trends remain consistent in terms of sex, age and those from ethnically diverse groups. When comparing the EDI data we hold for our staff and Board against that of the National Housing Federation (NHF) and local population census, we can determine we employ a workforce which is broadly representative of our customers and have a Board considered more diverse than the sector average.

As an organisation we still have significant gaps in the data we hold about our staff, particularly related to areas such as declared disability, sexual identity and sexual orientation; these gaps limit our ability to gain a comprehensive understanding of the diversity within our workforce. While we have broadened the scope of the EDI data we collect, participation levels remain significantly lower than anticipated, with fewer individuals choosing to share their information than we would like. In line with our actions from last year, we added a number of EDI focused questions to our staff records. Communications activities have been undertaken to encourage our staff to share their information, highlighting how it would be used to inform how Hightown can support the diverse needs of our workforce. It is key over the coming year that additional, regular communications and engagement takes place promoting the benefits of sharing diversity data, to encourage higher levels of staff participation.

The demographics of our customers is broadly in line with year on year trends. Whilst we hold a good level of data across many categories, there are notable gaps particularly for gender identity, relationship status and disability declared.

The NHF and Chartered Institute of Housing set out recommendations following the Better Social Housing Review, and the Regulator of Social Housing's updated consumer standards. Hightown is committed to working in line with these recommendations and improving how we collect and use our customers' data. A key strategic priority for Hightown in 2025/26 will be the implementation of a customer data collection exercise and a cross-departmental working party has been created to take the project forward.

Meanwhile, we are maintaining clear and consistent messaging and terminology when discussing EDI and characteristics both internally and externally. This has improved our ability to report our findings and benchmark against national figures.

## Data parameters

Throughout this report comparisons have been made to 'local population'. For the purpose of this document, the local population is defined as the areas in which Hightown operates and the data has been taken from the 2021 census[1].

These areas are:

- Aylesbury
- Bedford
- Broxbourne
- Buckinghamshire
- Central Bedfordshire
- Dacorum
- East Hertfordshire
- Hertsmere
- Luton
- Milton Keynes
- North Hertfordshire
- St Albans
- Stevenage
- Three Rivers
- Watford
- Welwyn and Hatfield

Analysis and comparisons have been made using full data sets including "declined" to answer, no data held and "preferred not to say" for each question. As such, all percentages reported are representative of total numbers of workforce, board members and residents. This gives the truest and clearest possible data analysis.

The only exception to this rule relates to some reporting of resident data where the lead tenant has been used as opposed to all tenants in any one property and, when this is the case, it is clearly stipulated.

## Demographic

For the purpose of this report and full transparency, the total numbers reported on are:

- Workforce: 1,186
- Board members: 10
- Lead tenants: 9,079
- All tenants: 19,982

## Terminology

The description of terms used in this report are as follows:

- Customer - a person residing in a Hightown property or receiving support.
- Lead tenant - the primary contact on any tenancy agreement, sole occupant or person receiving support.
- All tenants - all named people on a tenancy agreement or receiving support.

## Caveats

It has not been possible to fully benchmark this year's report to that of 2023/24. The data used for last year's report redacted those staff members and customers who choose not to supply responses to certain questions.

In order to get a truer, more accurate picture of our staff and customers' profiles, in this year's report, all data has been analysed and included. For those choosing not to supply information, they have clearly been identified as either "no response", "prefer not to say" or "declined to answer".

As such where percentages in the 2023/24 only included "of those who responded", the percentages in this report are of total workforce/board, lead tenants or all tenants.

Benchmarking data against previous years has been completed where 'like for like' statistics are available. Where 'like for like' data is not available but clear trends are present, assumptions have been made to allow comparisons to be shown.



[1] [https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/sources/census\\_2021/report](https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/sources/census_2021/report)

# Key Findings

## Our workforce and Board

- We are able to report on 51% of the total diversity data the NHF recommend we collect for our workforce and Board, this is a 13% improvement on our reporting capabilities from last year.
- Despite increasing the categories we can report on by four in the last 12 months, levels of response to our staff EDI data request have been low.
- The profile of our Board is more ethnically diverse when compared to others in the social housing sector in the East of England. We also have a higher representation of female members.
- 68% of our workforce is female which is a consistent trend when compared to previous years. We also employ more women when compared to the wider sector where they represent 55%.
- Women form a majority of our workforce at the levels of manager, senior manager and director
- 53% of our workforce are from ethnically diverse groups; this is down 2% when compared to last year, however we are still up 23% on the sector average.
- 4% of Hightown's workforce has declared a disability. This is the same as in the previous year, however less than the wider sector where the representation of those with disabilities is 11%.
- When comparing the diversity profile of our workforce to that of our customers and the local population, we can see our workforce is more ethnically diverse. This is also true when compared to the NHF workforce and resident data for the East of England.
- When considering age ranges, Hightown's workforce and Board are on average older compared to our customers and the local population.
- Overall, bank staff tend to be slightly more diverse than those working at our central office. They are notably more diverse when looking at ethnicity.
- When seeking EDI data from those applying to work at Hightown, as many as 93% choose not to disclose some information, for example disability or sexual orientation.
- 59% of disciplinary cases which went through to investigation or meeting stage were related to ethnically diverse workers, down 8% on 2023/24. This does not include those with no further action.
- 60% of grievance cases have been brought by White British workers and 100% of cases by females, this continues a year on year trend.
- 76% of flexible working requests came from females in the workforce, three of the requests were refused, all of which were from women.



## Our customers

- We are able to report on 59% of the diversity data for our customers which is a 10% increase on last year. We have achieved this by increasing the categories we report on and now collect data on 8 of the 9 protected characteristics.
- 58% of our customers are White British; this is a small decrease when compared to 2023/24 as well as a slight over representation compared to the local population.
- Only 17% of our customers have chosen not to share their ethnicity data, this is a significant reduction compared to 26% over the previous two years.
- Significantly more of our lead tenants are female; this is a year on year trend and has increased by a further percentage point in the last twelve months to 62%. In comparison, a majority of customers who accessed our homelessness services are male.
- Only 5% of our customers have declared they have a disability, however 80% have chosen not to share this information. Disclosing a disability is one of the main EDI questions our customers do not answer.
- The number of customers who have stated they had no religion has decreased by 2% over the last twelve months. The percentage points for all other religions have broadly stayed the same.
- 31% of our customers chose not to disclose their sexual orientation. Heterosexual remains the most disclosed orientation at 67%.
- When looking at the sexual identity of our customers, 14% state they have the same sex as birth and 86% chose not to answer the question. This indicates there is a strong reluctance to share information of this type.
- 39% of our customers state they are working full or part-time, 24% have chosen not to answer this question.
- 75% of new lettings have female lead tenants compared to 63% in 2023/24 and 63% of all customers.
- Hightown's lead tenants are under-represented across 5 of the 8 protected characteristic categories when compared to the local population. Categories include Age 50+, ethnically diverse and disability disclosed.
- The level of female general housing tenants is higher compared to customers in Care and Supported Housing (C&SH) where the majority is male. We also have a higher proportion of ethnically diverse general needs customers than we do in C&SH.
- 58% of those that were evicted are younger males; this has decreased from 74% in 2023/24.



# Our Activity

In the last twelve months we:

## Invest

Continued to invest in training and support in inclusive practices for line managers and the wider workforce

## Engage

Engaged with our workforce to promote EDI actions, achievements, and activities to build trust

## Disability Confident

Worked through the Disability Confident Scheme and became a disability confident leader

## Mindful

Continued with the Mindful Employer accreditation

## Monitor

Continued to monitor ethnicity trends related to grievances, disciplinaries and flexible working requests

## Explore

Explored ways to promote and support management career progression opportunities for ethnically diverse staff

## Report

Produced an annual gender pay gap report and EDI data analysis

## Support

Continued to support the EDI forum, its activities and events

## Drive

Embedded the approach to EDI through Board task and finish groups to drive improvements across all directorates

## Track

Tracked diversity characteristics through the recruitment process via our new application system

## Improve

Mapped data to improve customer reporting processes to increase the level of completed data we report

## Plan

Considered resources, data quality and protection, and logistics in planning the collection of data from customers

## Promote

Promoted EDI actions, achievements and activities to customers to build trust in our commitment and practices

## Review

Completed a review of the Service Involvement Strategy to ensure engagement opportunities from underrepresented groups

## Increase

Undertook an organisational wide project to expand the categories of data we collect from our workforce, including 8 of the 9 protected characteristics, plus caring responsibilities. The aim is to better understand our staff in order to provide a supportive and inclusive working environment. We do not currently collect data on pregnancy and maternity but may consider this in the future.

# What we are doing

Hightown is committed to maintaining a genuinely inclusive workspace, as well as ensuring we provide equal and inclusive services for our residents and people we support. We seek to actively demonstrate and communicate our commitment to EDI in various ways, including:

## Our workforce and Board

### Reporting

As an organisation we continue to report back to our workforce and Board on updates and data relating to EDI. This includes quarterly reports linked to the actions of the EDI forum and dedicated webpages on our staff intranet.

### Ethnicity and gender pay gap report

Hightown has a genuine commitment for pay equality, ensuring we are doing everything possible to address any inequalities in this area. To support this, on an annual basis we commission an external report to review the organisation's performance in this area. To ensure transparency and encourage trust from our workforce we publish the results.

Our latest report from April 2024 shows when women's median hourly pay was 3.1% lower than men's (97p paid to women for every £1 paid to men). The difference in average pay was 9.7% lower. When looking at bonus payments, this figure was equal for both women and men.

### Feedback from our workforce

It is important to us that our workforce has the opportunity to input into our EDI activities as well as gain an understanding of how they feel we are performing when it comes to inclusivity. To ensure they have this ability we undertake an annual staff survey and also ask all staff to complete a leaver's survey should they choose to move on from the organisation. The surveys are designed to include open text sections encouraging feedback for areas of improvement, including EDI.

### Learning and development

All new starters at Hightown completed online EDI training as part of their induction. EDI training is also mandatory for all managers. Future plans include consideration being given to the organisation delivering in-person EDI training.

Hightown's Employee Relations team has developed a suite of training and information on topics including periods, menopause, pregnancy, adoption, working parents, and infertility. These are available to all staff and can be accessed at any time. Alongside this an updated faith and culture guide is available to the workforce and holds specific information on religions and cultures. This guidance is designed to support our workforce when working with, supporting or visiting our residents and people we support, to give them insight, understanding and information in respecting other's needs and beliefs. Our guidance and training is regularly reviewed to ensure that it holds the most up-to-date information.

Care and supported housing (C&SH) staff continue to be able to access training for autism and learning disabilities. They are also able to benefit from online resources and videos relating to meeting the needs of people who identify as LGBTQ+.



## Our customers

### Customer involvement

We actively promote and encourage involvement from all those who want to be involved and in particular from underrepresented groups. We have a number of customer panels and groups, included a dedicated provision for our C&SH services, VoiceBox.

We regularly review our customer engagement strategies to ensure we are reaching as many people as possible, including hard to reach groups.

Where we have staffed schemes, we aim to share information, celebrate and encourage participation in events relating to various cultures.

### Information sharing

We have a dedicated EDI page on our website where we seek to promote and raise awareness of our EDI focused activities.

This page is regularly monitored and updated with the aim of promoting a positive EDI culture both internally and externally. On this page you can find Hightown's EDI report and statement as well as our three year EDI plan.

## Leadership

### Senior management involvement

Hightown's Board, Executives and senior leadership team continue to seek ways to strengthen the organisation's approach to EDI.

When comparing our data against published data from the NHF, the representation of diverse groups on our Board is higher than that of the sector average and the most diverse in the organisation's history.

The senior leadership team (SLT) is well represented on the EDI forum with four senior managers and an Executive Director as active members. They not only provide valuable input and feedback but drive new initiatives from a senior level.

### National representation

We have maintained our presence and involvement on the NHF's EDI steering group and also attended national EDI focused conferences. This allows us to bring fresh ideas, share best practice. We are also able keep up to date with new ways the sector delivers on EDI both internally as an employer and externally as a social housing provider.



# What's next?

In the next twelve months we plan to:

Organisational area	Activity	Responsibility	Deadline
Workforce and Board	Increase the promotion and awareness raising related to the collection of staff EDI data and the importance of understanding workforce demographics	EDI Forum	October 2025
Workforce and Board	Commission, produce and publish a gender and equality pay gap report and produce and publish the annual EDI report incorporating wider range of EDI data including all protected characteristics for staff and applicants	HR and Social Impact	September 2025
Workforce and Board	Provide training opportunities for line managers and wider staff in inclusive practices	L&D	On-going
Workforce and Board	Monitor and report on diversity data related to flexible working requests, grievances and disciplinary action	ER	On-going
Workforce and Board	Creation and launch of the managers 'moving up' programme linked to the HDN mentoring programme, continue to also promote the existing HDN opportunities	L&D	On-going
Workforce and Board	Continue to support the work of the EDI Forum whilst communicating the group's achievements and raising awareness	SLT	On-going
Workforce and Board	Explore ideas for quarterly EDI themed events and workshops with the aim of inspiring and giving our workforce the confidence to be themselves at work, while showing support for diversity and building trust	EDI Forum	On-going
Workforce and Board	Consider the adoption of the LGBTQ+ Housing pledge and explore opportunities for additional staff training related to LBGTQ+	EDI Forum	On-going
Workforce, Board, and customers	Explore options to publish a monthly blog, article, interview or case study focused on different EDI topics via social media, the staff intranet and other communications channels	Communications and External Engagement	On-going
Customers	The introduction of a new customer data project which will support collection of current and accurate data to be used to better support our customers	All	On-going
Customers	Explore options for additional EDI related resident engagement activities and events to demonstrate support and commitment for diversity and inclusion	Housing/C&SH	On-going
Customers	Ensure that under represented groups are provided with engagement opportunities and the ability to become involved in forums	Housing	On-going
Customers	Promote and communicate achievements and actions related to EDI through social media and the website as well as other resident focused publications	EDI Forum	On-going
Customers	Continue to monitor eviction and to understand EDI related issues and trends	Housing	On-going