

Notes of the Torbay Racism Review Panel

3 August 2021

-: Present :-

Councillor John Thomas (Vice Chair), Councillor Andrew Barrand, Councillor John Thomas (Vice-Chair) and Councillor Robert Loxton, Kofi Yeboah-Aidoo, and Kevin Dixon

Also in attendance: Hayley Austin: Director of Housing, Westward. Julie Bingham: Regional Manager Neighbourhoods, Live West.

21. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Atiya-Alla, Councillor Steve Darling and Tara Harris.

22. Action Notes

The notes of the meeting held by the panel on 21 January 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

23. How do we make Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic lives matter at Torbay's public organisations?

Julie Bingham and then Hayley Austin presented information about their organisations in response to the question plan submitted by the panel. The panel members then directed a number of questions based around the key question of how do we make Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) lives matter at Torbay's public organisations?

The key aspects from the Live West presentation are detailed below:

- Live West employs 1417 employees. Their goal is 2.5% BAME staff in Senior Management roles and 10% BAME representation on their non-executive board. Currently there are 0% for both but this is a recognised concern for the organisation and work is being done to promote roles and develop careers. 2.1% of Management and Team Leaders are from a BAME background.
- Live West work closely with the SARI (Stand Against Racial Inequality) company based in Bristol. Live West funds SARI to carry out individual case work. SARI also acts as a critical friend offering advice to the organisation. Live West's Board, Executive and Operational teams have all received training from SARI.
- Live West have re-introduced Equality Risk Assessments for their new and existing policies and procedures and all policies will reference Equality and

Diversity. The Anti-Social Behaviour and Hate Crime Policy outlines that Hate Incidents are responded to by Live West within 24 hours and SARI are involved in offering support to victims of hate Incidents. If a person believes they are the victim of a Hate Incident, it is categorised as such in Live West's records.

- Live West had an increase in reported Hate Incidents from 2019 to 2020 and during the period of COVID-19 lockdown. This increase was also seen by other Housing Providers. It was recognised that there were probably further incidents which were not reported and there is more that could be done across the sector to identify the underlying themes of ASB incidents.
- The Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Board at Live West have changed the way they work to become more effective, better at challenging, to make faster changes to support communities and teams with issues around EDI, and identify areas where they could do better. Each member is a decision maker from a different area of the organisation who takes responsibility for actions and reports back to the board. A number of action plans have been developed to break down, monitor and deal with their identified challenges.
- An ambitious new strategy based around six pillars; Growth, Accessibility, Belong, Individuality, Trust and Challenge, has been developed by the EDI board and is in the final stages before being adopted. As part of the strategy, Live West are promoting the work they are doing to improve Hate Crime reporting on their website.
- Equality Diversity and Inclusivity is listed among Live West's 2021/22 Key Strategic Priorities which highlights the importance of the work of the EDI board and its outcomes.
- Live West have launched diversity groups to reach out to customers and staff and take an active role in promoting Equality and Diversity. One of these groups, the Race and Ethnicity Equality Network (REEN), support the organisation by challenging them with issues around racial equality and fairness and share stories and experiences to help make positive changes to working practices. The group attend EDI board meetings and are currently working to help Live West support underrepresented communities.
- Live West works to retain BAME staff in a number of ways including promoting apprenticeships to BAME communities, encouraging diversity in the workplace, supporting individuals with personal development and wellbeing and providing inclusive facilities i.e. prayer rooms.
- Live West received a small number of complaints connected to unconscious bias, often connected to how they have dealt with bias from neighbours. Live West ensure they take a zero-tolerance approach to hate incidents, taking steps to educate customers and involving SARI to improve relationships between neighbours. Cases are reviewed for learning and improvement opportunities and outcomes shared with colleagues.
- There are various policies at Live West to support staff in reporting Hate Crimes including those for grievances and unacceptable behaviour from customers. Reports are logged via the Assure Portal and investigated by an assigned manager.

- Live West take the opportunity to learn from other groups such as SARI, the Race Equality Strategic Leaders' Group and the Race Equality Covid-19 Steering Group to improve their support to BAME customers and staff.

The key aspects from the Westward Housing presentation are detailed below:

- The impact of the Black Lives Matter movement has brought race inequality to the fore prompted the sector to consider its role in addressing the issue.
- The report from the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities has been criticised by the sector as it acknowledged inequalities in housing but did not explore the issue.
- The trade magazine – Inside Housing, are running a series of monthly articles on racism and housing to explore the impact on communities.
- The National Housing Federation review report on Housing Association staff and webinar on tackling discrimination and fostering inclusion within communities was recommended to the panel.
- Westward carry out mandatory training for staff on Equality and Diversity and on safeguarding (including modern slavery) to ensure their staff are equipped to work with all communities. There is also a wealth of information and support on their intranet under the banner of equality. Staff are also supported by policies, networks and local agencies and both individually in 1 to 1s and in team meetings.
- Westward are in the process of completing their Equality Statement and Equality Policy. The statement sets out what Westward will do as an organisation to work towards addressing discrimination and the promotion of inequality. It is reviewed by the board annually and monitored twice a year by the Executive Team.
- Westward also carry out an LGA Social Housing Equality Framework self-assessment which is an equality performance measurement tool.
- The broad policy framework at Westward also includes Equality Impact Assessments, Hate Crime, ASB and whistleblowing policies.
- Westward promote awareness events and campaigns e.g., Black History Month, their Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement, National Hate Crime Awareness Week and the Torbay Racism Review Panel.
- Westward recognises its Vision, values and workplace culture as well as its policy framework are its strengths in working with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Communities. There was recognition that the sector does not have representation at senior level, equality and diversity work is being done in isolation and the sector could improve its equality data and benchmarking to learn where the gaps are to help spot trends.
- Westward have been keen to develop links to gain knowledge and improve how they work with communities. One way they have been doing this is their Community Involvement Officer has been attending the Torbay Racism Review Panel meetings.

- Westward doesn't currently record if complaints are made by people with BAME backgrounds but uses a variety of methods to review customer feedback and learn from it.
- At Westward 2.8% of the workforce are from Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic backgrounds. At senior there is a positive gender balance but no representation from the Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic population. It recognises that strong values are not enough to ensure a diverse workforce.
- Westward would like to do more to understand how many people from BAME backgrounds are applying for jobs and look at shared data from the sector.
- Westward works to retain staff by striving to be a desirable place to work in terms of pay and conditions and maintains a focus on staff wellbeing. Feedback from independent exit interviews is used as a learning opportunity.
- Staff can report incidences of racism in 1 to 1s. Equality and Diversity training and the Bullying and Harassment Policy support the process of dealing with reports.
- Westward would like to work with other Housing Providers in the Torbay area to share data, experiences and good practice in order to support customers from BAME backgrounds.

Key responses to Panel questions by Live West and Westward Housing are detailed below:

- Live West engaged the REEN group to develop their Equality Strategy and help them understand BAME communities, their history and what's important to them.
- Westward carry out customer journey mapping to learn from customers to inform policies. The organisation's Hate Crime policy is being reviewed so members of BAME communities will be asked to feedback on what they'd like to see included.
- Both Housing providers expressed the importance of carrying out visits to customers to engage with them and support those who do not have access to technology. It is also important that the operatives going out into the community have awareness training to help identify areas of safeguarding concern for customers e.g., Domestic Abuse and Hate Crimes. There remains a challenge in effectively consulting with groups without using technology.
- Both Housing Providers are committed to ensuring messages on equality are promoted throughout the year and not just for Black History Month.
- It was suggested that the panel look at the problem of the private rented sector in terms of security of tenure and overcrowding and review the housing waiting list in terms of demographics.
- Live West have experienced issues in obtaining land in the South West to build affordable homes due to increasing competition from developers. It has also been difficult to find accommodation for tenants who have had to leave their homes due to fire or flood because of the lack of available properties and hotel rooms as a result of an increase in holiday makers.

- Housing Associations have been subject to a regulation rent reduction by the government for the last four years. They have recently been allowed to raise rents by Consumer Price Index +1%. This reduction in income has impacted on the amount of new affordable homes being built by Housing Associations.
- A Housing Association's response to reports of ASB is in collaboration between multiple agencies. The resources of all agencies have been stretched by their response to the pandemic and Housing Associations are finding themselves dealing with new issues such as county lines and cuckooing. The periods of isolation during the pandemic have resulted in more reports of ASB which are actually neighbour disputes, for which their available response is often limited to offering coaching and mediation to mend relationships.