

SBiA

SCOTTISH BORDERS
HOUSING ASSOCIATION



More Inclusive Steps 2023-26

www.sbha.org.uk

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1 Introduction & Purpose

More Inclusive Steps sets out our strategy for delivering our equalities, diversity and inclusion commitments over the next 3 years. This Strategy underpins the delivery of our Strategic & Business Plan 2020-2025 and emphasises our commitment to provide fair and inclusive services to all Tenants and customers.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) are at the core of SBHA's Values and inform everything we do. Housing is a fundamental human right and contributes towards the overall health, well-being and equality of individuals and communities. It also contributes to the sustainability of places and enhances people's quality of life.

As a registered social housing provider, we play a crucial role in safeguarding the well-being and access to opportunities for all. We provide over 5,630 quality, affordable homes across the Scottish Borders.

We recognise that the people and communities we serve are distinct and diverse with various differing needs and identities. To deliver inclusive services, we cannot therefore take a 'one-size-fits-all' approach. Various factors influence the experiences and needs of people - lack of understanding of these can cause disadvantage and adversely impact lives. It is therefore important that we understand our customers' needs and offer a range of options for them to engage with us to reduce inequalities and achieve fair outcomes for all.

The shifting demographics locally and nationally have a major influence on how we evolve and adapt our services to meet diverse and changing needs. We are committed to strengthening our approach to EDI, ensuring that our services and our people reflect the diversity of Tenants and communities – including how we engage with individuals and groups; the decisions we make; how we recruit and train; and the culture and behaviour of our people.

This Strategy acknowledges the challenges and opportunities, both now and in the future, and with that, the need to be enterprising and innovative to meet new and changing demands. It emphasises our commitment to the investment in and nurturing of our people and recognises that organisational success depends on all our people playing their part and performing in their role through understanding, committing to and taking responsibility for the actions and expectations set out in this Strategy.

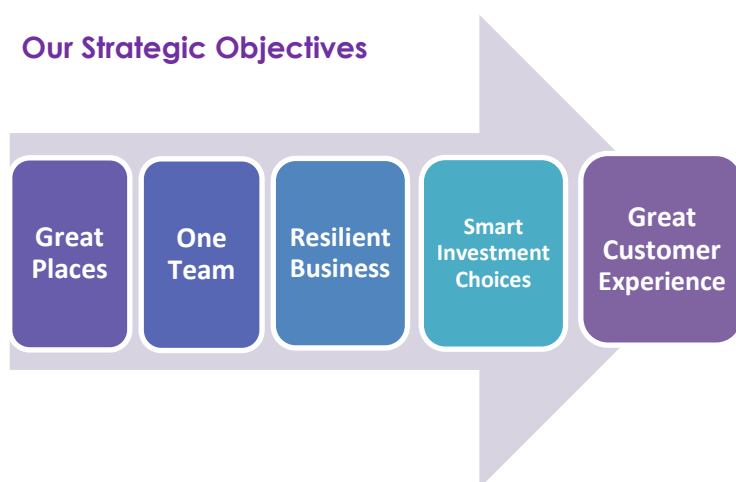
2 About SBHA

“Created by Tenants for Tenants, we enhance lives and communities across the Scottish Borders. We shape our homes and services to meet changing needs and expectations.”

SBHA's Mission Statement

More Inclusive Steps Strategy supports our mission and underpins the successful delivery of our 2020-25 Strategic & Business Plan commitments, alongside our People Strategy. It demonstrates our approach to meeting Outcome 1: Equalities of the Scottish Housing Charter: ***‘Every tenant and other customer have their individual needs recognised, is treated fairly and with respect, and receives fair access to housing and housing services’.***

Our Strategic Objectives



Our Strategic Objectives provide the basis to drive forward the direction and the culture of SBHA. This Strategy seeks to contribute towards achieving “Great Customer Experience” and “One Team”.

SBHA's Values seek to ensure Tenants remain at the heart of the SBHA. Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion are integral to SBHA's vision and mission and enshrined within our Values, specifically our value of “*Everybody Matters*”, defined as:

“Caring and respecting people in all our dealings, being inclusive, sensitive and responding to diverse needs.”



3 Context

Understanding the diversity of Tenants helps us deliver more targeted services and support better and stronger community relationships. The equalities data we collect helps us to make informed decisions on current and future services.

We know that:

- **Gender:** A greater proportion of SBHA Tenants are female, however, we do not hold gender data for 7% of Tenants which may impact on this.

Gender	SBHA Tenants	Scottish Borders	Scotland
Female	53%	51%	51%
Male	40%	49%	49%

- **Age:** Compared to regional and national levels, there is a lower level of SBHA Tenants aged 75 years and over. Projections are, however, that over the next 10 years, the Scottish Borders population is set to increase with a pronounced increase of up to 29% in those aged 75 years. Over and 45 – 65 years are projected to remain the largest projected age group. Overall household projections are also set to increase by 7% with an increase in smaller households. This ageing population and increasing households in the Scottish Borders suggests that there will be a shift in demand for SBHA homes and services over the next 10 years with an increased need for smaller, more adaptable homes.

Age Group	SBHA Tenants	Scottish Borders	Scotland
16 – 24 years	6%	9%	10%
25 – 44 years	32%	20%	26%
45 – 64 years	35%	30%	27%
65 – 74 years	19%	14%	11%
75+ years	8%	11%	9%

- **Disability:** Tenants who advise that they have a disability is lower than the Scottish Borders and Scotland levels, however, this is likely to be under-stated

Disability	SBHA Tenants	Scottish Borders	Scotland
Yes	14%	22%	26%

as we do not hold data on this for 25% of Tenants. Disability includes those who identify as having a long term health condition (deaf or partially hearing impaired; blind or partially vision impaired; learning disability; learning difficulty; developmental disorder; physical disability; mental health condition; or Other Long-term health condition).

- **Ethnicity** - According to 2011 census data, 4% of the Scottish Borders population are from a minority ethnic groups compared to 4% in Scotland as a whole. 1% of SBHA Tenants are from minority ethnic groups, however, this is also likely to be under-stated because we do not hold ethnicity data for approximately 15% of Tenants.

We know that socio-economic factors (e.g. education, employment and income) contribute to people's health and quality of life. With 6% of the Scottish Borders identified as areas of multiple deprivation, we provide homes in some of the most deprived areas in Scotland. Now more than ever, it is important that we understand the equalities, diversity and inclusion of customers to target relevant support services to help them achieve improved outcomes and reduce poverty.

4 Aims and Objectives

The overall vision of this Strategy is to create a diverse and inclusive environment where Tenants, customers and colleagues have a sense of belonging, where they feel their voice is heard, their opinion matters, and their input and contribution is valued.

We aspire to be sector leading in our approach to equality, diversity and inclusion. **Equality** means that we are striving for a better balance in opportunities, resources, and decision-making processes for customers, communities and our people. Being more aware of and proactive about the **diversity** of customers will ensure we provide the right services and meet the right needs and aspirations. As an **inclusive** organisation, we will act transparently and fairly; build good relationships; and work collaboratively with Tenants, partners, customers and communities to achieve better outcomes.

SBHA has an important role to play as a community anchor organisation in EDI, but also an employer and as a commissioner of goods and services. This Strategy includes focus on community-wide challenges and opportunities, and on objectives and outcomes that relate to the Tenants and communities we serve. It also includes an important commitment to ensuring that we meet our own high standards and expectations as an inclusive employer with a diverse and talented workforce that exemplifies everything we aspire to be. We have identified the following three themes which we feel are fundamental to meeting our EDI priorities over the next three years:



5 INCLUDED CUSTOMERS

We value the diversity of Tenants, customers and communities and recognise that they have different housing and community needs.

We understand that some groups and individuals face discrimination, harassment, and exclusion in society due to various aspects of their identity. These experiences can significantly impact their lives, limiting opportunities available to them. We are committed to actively addressing this discrimination and disadvantage. This means being fair and inclusive in all aspects of our service delivery and working collaboratively with partners across the Scottish Borders to remove barriers and facilitate positive and sustainable opportunities.

What We Have Achieved

- A long-established track record of engaging Tenants. This includes but is not limited to working with Scottish Borders Tenants Organisation, focus groups and community events
- Launched our 3-year Voices Together Strategy setting out our commitments to provide opportunities for engaging with Tenants and communities to help shape and improve the services we offer
- Reshaped our service delivery model and expanded our service offer through our “Borders Without Barriers” transformation programme
- Provided more digital services
- Extended the range of support services we offer, including financial inclusion and energy advice
- Strengthened partnership working to tackle important local issues such as homelessness, addressing the needs of younger and older people, anti-social behaviour and domestic abuse
- Reviewed and improved our data collection processes and systems in line with good practice

What We Will Do:

- Address data gaps and introduce more consistent data review practices to ensure effective understanding of who lives in our homes
- Gain greater insight into under-represented Tenant groups’ needs and expectations to improve their experience of our services
- Use the insight we gather to inform our future plans and the tailoring of services, particularly for those most vulnerable
- Develop and promote positive action projects to work with under-represented groups and communities
- Expand our partnership working to reduce inequalities and those living in poverty
- In collaboration with partners of the Borders Housing Network, challenge the stigma of and promote the value of social housing
- Create customer experience groups to ensure that the services we provide are user friendly and inclusive

6 INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP

Our Governing Members and Senior Leaders have an instrumental role in creating an inclusive culture where diversity is valued, people feel they belong and are empowered to be at their best to deliver great customer services. SBHA's Board of Management and Senior Leaders are committed to championing diversity and inclusion and leading by example.

We strive to ensure that our Governance and Senior Leaders are representative of Tenants and communities. We have a high proportion of women (77%) in senior leadership roles, however, women are under-represented (20%) in Governance. Most of our Senior Leaders and Governing Members are aged 45 – 64 years, reflecting the Tenant profile, however, no ethnic minority groups are represented, and no-one has a declared disability.

We know that there is more to do to increase diversity and representation of our Governance and Senior Leaders. During 2023, the Board actively sought to do so through a recruitment campaign and engaged a recruitment agency, however this remains challenging.

What We Have Achieved

- Strong inclusive focus in Mission, Values and Codes of Conduct
- Revised our EDI Policy
- Tenants involved in decision making at Governance level
- Senior Leaders champion EDI within networks - Healthy Living Group and Employee Strategy Group
- Disability Confident Employer
- Investors in People silver accredited
- Equalities impact of policy decisions
- Membership of positive action groups (e.g. Women in Social Housing; PATH)
- Signatories of Chartered Institute of Housing's Make a Stand pledge to tackle domestic violence

What We Will Do:

- Continue to promote and encourage greater representation in Governance.
- Launch the Equal Voices campaign
- Develop our gender pay gap report to understand the impact of our diversity and inclusion initiatives on our workforce
- Collaborate with local partners to raise awareness of EDI and build effective pathways of support e.g. neurodiversity, dementia
- Explore options for Board trainee programme aimed at under-represented groups
- Work towards achieving excellence in Social Housing Equality Framework and become a signatory of the CIH Equality & Diversity Charter for Housing

7 INCLUSIVE CULTURE

We aim to nurture a positive and inclusive workplace, where everyone feels they are respected and belong and where difference is valued. Inclusive organisations attain a rich pool of skills, mindsets and experiences which lead to resourcefulness, greater resilience and dynamic solutions, which in turn drive consistent service experience for our customers.

Unlike the tenant profile, there are more men than women in the SBHA Team, which is inflated by the high proportion (96%) of men working in trades-based technical roles in our Property Services Team and reflects the gender imbalance in the construction industry. Reflecting the regional profile, we have an ageing workforce with 66% of age 45 - 65 years. There is under-representation of people with disabilities and ethnic minority groups.

All our people have a role to play to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation; foster good relations; and equal opportunities between different groups. This goes beyond understanding our legal obligations and means actively listening and responding to lived experiences of customers and colleagues, challenging their own and each others' behaviours and attitudes when these do not align to our Values. We aim to develop our Team's understanding of unconscious biases and raise awareness of the barriers that result, providing them with the skills and tools they need to deliver inclusive services.

What We Have Achieved

- Increased flexible working opportunities and provided greater equitable terms of employment across the organisation
- Provided wellbeing support services to our Team including a series of bitesize Mental Health Wellbeing sessions
- Established a cohort of EDI and Housing Champions
- Delivered a bespoke Customer Services training programme
- Demonstrated a commitment to Fair Work and achieved Living Wage Accreditation
- Enhanced flexible working opportunities

What We Will Do

- Work with partners to develop opportunities to address gender imbalance in construction
- Enhance our commitment to Fair Work, achieving Living Hours Accreditation
- Establish a cross functional EDI working group
- Review our Customer Standards in the context of this Strategy and re-enforce our expectations of our supply chain
- Achieve Disability Confident Leader level
- Continue to expand SBHA's contribution to the Young Person's Guarantee
- Embed inclusive employment pathways to increase our social impact, working with partners and equalities & inclusion groups
- Develop greater Team member awareness and confidence in addressing EDI issues

8 Legislation & Strategic Links

In Scotland, housing associations and social landlords must adhere to various legal and regulatory frameworks that promote equality, diversity, and inclusion. Relevant key legislation is provided at **Appendix 1**.

This More Inclusive Steps Strategy is supported by suite of people policy and procedures covering key employment practice areas and links to other key SBHA strategies and plans including:

- Strategic & Business Plan 2020-2025
- More Sustainable Steps 2023-25
- Ageing Well Strategy 2021
- Asset Management Strategy 2021-26
- IT & Digital Strategy 2022-27
- Customer Service Standards
- Employee Code of Conduct

This Strategy reflects the commitments of Scottish Borders Community Planning Partners to reduce inequalities and the South of Scotland Regional Economic Partnership to support inclusive growth. We will continue to work with partners to both implement commitments and share opportunities.

9 Equality Impact

An Equality Impact Assessment will be completed for all recommendations that arise from this Strategy, to check there is no potential adverse impact on any team members and/or customers.

10 Resourcing the Delivery

Funding for the delivery of this EDI Strategy will be incorporated into SBHA's Business Plan and staffing related budgets will be set annually to reflect operational and strategic actions.

11 Monitoring, Review & Communication

This Strategy is supported by the Action Plan, developed to ensure that we are meeting the Strategy aims and objectives. Delivery of this Strategy is the responsibility of the Chief Operating Officer with support from the Senior Leadership Team. The Board will receive 6 monthly reports on progress against the Action Plan and outcomes achieved.

This Strategy will be reviewed in 3 years or in conjunction with any review of the SBHA's Strategic & Business Plan and connected People Strategy. It will also take cognisance of changing or evolving legislation, regulatory requirements, and good practice. We will produce a customer-friendly version of this Strategy which will be shared on our website.

12 Measuring Success

Achievement of the objectives of the Strategy will be measured using the key demographic indicators highlighted in this Strategy.

Appendix 1 - The Legal Framework

Equality Act 2010: The Equality Act is a comprehensive piece of legislation that prohibits discrimination, harassment, and victimization on the basis of several protected characteristics. These include age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR): The SHR is the independent regulator of registered social landlords (RSLs), which include housing associations in Scotland. While the SHR focuses on governance, financial health, and value for money, its regulatory framework indirectly supports the principles of equality, diversity, and inclusion by ensuring transparent and fair practices within housing associations.

Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED): Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities, including housing associations, have a legal duty to actively consider the impact of their policies and practices on people with protected characteristics. This involves promoting equality and fostering good relations between different groups.

Human Rights Act 1998: The Human Rights Act incorporates the European Convention on Human Rights into UK law. Housing associations must ensure that their policies and practices align with the human rights principles, including the right to respect for private and family life, and the prohibition of discrimination.

Scottish Social Housing Charter: The Charter sets out the standards and outcomes that social landlords, including housing associations, should achieve in delivering housing services. It includes a focus on equalities and tenant participation, ensuring that housing providers consider the diverse needs of their tenants.

Data Protection Legislation: Compliance with data protection laws, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018, is crucial. Housing associations must handle personal data, including diversity-related information, in a lawful and transparent manner.

Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015: This Act promotes community empowerment, involvement, and participation. Housing associations are encouraged to engage with local communities, taking into account the diverse needs and perspectives of residents.

Employment Laws: Employment laws in Scotland, including the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006 and others, prohibit discrimination in the workplace based on various characteristics. Housing associations must ensure fair employment practices.