

JOINT HOUSING POLICY AND DELIVERY GROUP

7 NOVEMBER 2018

GROUP DISCUSSION ON RACE EQUALITY

This is a record of the points made by participants and does not necessarily represent the views of the Scottish Government or the Group.

Background and context setting

- Lesley Fraser briefly set out progress to date in respect of the housing actions in the Scottish Government's Race Equality Action Plan (paper JHPDG 79) which was published in December 2017.
- Lesley Fraser welcomed Rohini Sharma Joshi (RSJ), Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager at Trust Housing Association and invited her to set out the key housing issues faced by ethnic minority people in Scotland, as outlined in paper JHPDG 80.

THE SCOPE OF DISCUSSION:

Rohini's top five suggestions for action were in respect of:

- Understanding the changing housing needs of ethnic minority people
- Improving information and communication
- Increasing the number of ethnic minority people employed in the housing sector
- Making equality training mandatory for leaders and decision makers in the housing sector
- Providing sheltered and care housing developments for ethnic minority older people which meets their needs

Understanding changing needs

- It was recognised that there was a need to better understand the housing requirements of ethnic minority communities, especially as these can vary across communities and for different generations within a community. This would require more proactive engagement on the part of housing providers and it was suggested that a good starting point might be for providers to identify the leader(s) in a BME community and actively engage with them.
- More research into the housing needs of ethnic minority people could provide qualitative evidence that could supplement existing statistics.

- It was important that housing providers understood their local community, so they could support capacity building as well as promoting information about their housing services.
- There is a lot to learn from the experience of minority ethnic tenants who have successfully navigated the housing system (housing and associated services). More could be done to tap into this knowledge and experience in order to support other ethnic minority people in the community.

Information and communication

- It was felt there should be a greater focus on tackling language barriers and the practical steps needed to reduce these. In addition to providing information in a range of different languages, service users should have the option of a face-to-face discussion with a housing officer, involving a translator. However, it was recognised that this could be an expensive service to provide.
- It was recognised that many ethnic minority people have difficulty accessing information. A particular issue is where older members don't have access to information online.
- There was a need for more 'outreach' work i.e. where minority ethnic people have a known contact to go to for advice/information etc. It was felt that outreach work had narrowed in recent years.

Employment

- Action should be taken to recruit more housing professionals from an ethnic minority background. This is partly in response to the difficulties that minority ethnic people have in gaining experience in this field of work. Practical steps proposed included quotas and/or giving qualified candidates from a minority ethnic background an automatic interview, in line with the practice for disabled candidates.
- It was suggested that organisations should collect better diversity data and use this to ensure that employees better represent the people they provide services for.
- Steps could be taken to improve the employment pathway for BME candidates e.g. improve the availability of housing internships and graduate apprentice programmes, make use of ethnic minority networks to ensure candidates are aware of job opportunities in the housing sector.
- Employment through City Deals and the Inclusive Growth agenda may be improved by utilising community benefit clauses when undertaking procurement, funding for training, and also linking it to community planning partnerships.

- It was suggested that there was an important role for professional bodies to consider their recruitment processes and training – potentially drawing on the pool of ethnic minority talent.
- A portal could help link employment agencies with the skills/qualifications of ethnic minority people, as well as highlighting employment opportunities in the housing sector to ethnic minority people. Representative groups could have a role in ensuring that the portal was working effectively.
- We could learn from the activities of RSLs that have been particularly effective in recruiting ethnic minority people. In particular, what networks and/or technology is being utilised to make this happen?
- It was suggested that many ethnic minority people may not have the entry level qualifications to study professional housing courses at university, so we need to consider provision in the college sector in order to widen access.
- Organisations could employ/encourage ethnic minority volunteers to support others in their communities. This would help them to build relationships with customers and communities.
- It was recognised that leadership was really important in increasing the number of ethnic minority people employed in housing.

Training

- Equalities training for housing professionals, policy makers and housing providers should be mandatory. It was felt that this could potentially lead to the design and administration of ‘allocations’ policies being more sensitive to need. For example, the requirement for a particular location was often viewed to be very important.
- It was recognised that housing professionals, policy makers and housing providers also need to understand how to translate the training into practice. It was suggested that if ‘equalities’ duties were promoted in the same way that Health and Safety duties are, then it would have a positive impact.

Older people

- It was queried whether there were other ways to support elderly ethnic minority people beyond providing separate sheltered housing for them. There was some concern that the latter might result in ethnic minority people being/feeling isolated from the wider community. It was felt that integration was important.

Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government – response

In response to this feedback, the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government, Aileen Campbell MSP, set out her thoughts and reflections. Ms Campbell emphasised the need to focus on practical actions which individual JHPDG members,

their wider organisations, and the Scottish Government were able to implement going forward. She picked out the following as themes for future work:

- Exploring the routes into employment in the housing sector for people from minority ethnic backgrounds, and whether there was scope for college entry or internship opportunities.
- Identifying leaders who represent BME communities, nurturing them and enabling them to progress. Ensuring there was better community engagement with people from minority ethnic communities.
- Ensuring that housing's role as a contributor to good health and wellbeing is recognised in a health and social care context across Scotland, and how to ensure the needs of minority ethnic communities were recognised within this.
- Ensuring there is a focus on equalities at the heart of the Scottish Government's work on Housing Beyond 2021.

Key outcomes/actions

- JHPDG members were encouraged to consider what each of the organisations they represented could do by way of creating and offering recruitment opportunities to people from ethnic minority communities.
- Each member was asked to either make a personal commitment to take forward a race equality action or to commit to a race equality action at an organisational level. These commitments should be reported back to the Group.
- It was agreed that a race equality outcome should be developed and added to the existing JHPDG list of 32 outcomes. The outcome would need to be considered within the context of the Scottish Government's Race Equality Action Plan to ensure it aligned with the Plan and there was no duplication.
- It was agreed that another meeting should be held to consider whether any further work on race equality should be taken forward by the Group.