

DEEDS NOT WORDS!

The race equality challenge for social housing in Wales

Update: October 2020

Recent events have shone a new light on the racial inequalities and racism experienced by BAME communities across the globe, in the UK and in Wales.

The impacts of Covid-19 pandemic on Black, Asian and other Ethnic Minority groups have been profound, with BAME communities up to two times more likely to die from the disease than others. Many of the reasons for this impact are linked to long standing socio-economic disadvantage, structural racism and lack of BAME representation within decision making to influence better outcomes. The Covid-19 pandemic has magnified these inequalities.

The murder of George Floyd, the Black Lives Matter movement and the subsequent protests across the globe, have also highlighted the systemic inequalities and injustice, with BAME communities in the UK and Wales demanding lasting changes to how we tackle systemic racial inequality.

Tai Pawb has developed a Pledge with its Social Housing members in Wales to begin the process of addressing the concerns of communities threatened due to racial inequalities.

At Pobl we have committed to taking the following actions in the next 5 years...

1. Mitigate the impact of Covid-19 on black, Asian and other minority ethnic staff and communities.

We will... Adopt the All Wales Covid-19 Risk Assessment Tool which recognises the increased risk of COVID-19 to BAME colleagues and act on findings (we will ensure concerns of Black, Asian and other minority ethnic colleagues are treated seriously and addressed in a compassionate way, without the fear of being disadvantaged if work is realigned).

How

In July 2020 Pobl applied the All Wales Covid-19 Risk Assessment Tool to 1369 front line colleagues. At the time, the majority of front-line colleagues who were identified at greater risk (following either the detailed Risk Assessment and/or Occupational Health assessment) were already off work shielding.

This included colleagues who are age 70+, have complex health conditions or are pregnant. Over 60 colleagues who were shielding and off work on full pay were subsequently furloughed, thereby protecting their employment status. The decision to furlough was not solely based on the fact that these individuals were shielding.

The shielding arrangements have since been reviewed in line with Welsh Government guidance. and the majority of colleagues who were shielding have returned to work. We will continue to monitor the WG advice in respect of the risk to BAME individuals.



We will... Commit to wellbeing/psychological and other support to Black, Asian and other minority ethnic colleagues who might feel affected or vulnerable right now.

How

We will continue to promote the colleague well-being service and offer internal coaching at every touch point with BAME colleagues. We have already commissioned a specialist counsellor in addition to our 'Time for Talking' offering, who is specifically used for any Covid related counselling that our colleagues may need.

We also have introduced the new post of an Internal Coach and mentor to assist colleagues with their overall health and wellbeing. We will continue to monitor whether BAME colleagues are using these services, whether there are any barriers and if the offer is seen as a trusted mechanism for support.

A 'Race Equality Matters' discussion/support forum for colleagues has been established on Poblpoint, led by a BAME colleague.



We will... Investigate reasons for overcrowding and worse housing conditions amongst some BAME groups and start acting on findings.

How

We are committed to ensuring that our systems will allow us to interrogate data in a way that allows us to understand how BAME customers are impacted by overcrowding and poor housing conditions. We will use this data to develop responses and new solutions, working in partnership with others whenever appropriate.



In Homes and Communities our Regeneration team is leading a piece of work on multigenerational living. The long-term objective is to establish what demand there is for multi-gen living options, to understand the business viability of building those types of properties and options to overcome any existing barriers.

In the short term, as part of our future lockdown preparations with the Wellbeing team, we will be asking the Neighbourhood Managers and Assets teams if there is anything we can offer high risk BAME residents living in multi-gen/overcrowded properties in the event of a 2nd wave of Covid (e.g. the option to occupy a void property on a temporary basis to support shielding).

2. Improve the ethnic diversity of board and staff at all levels.

We will... Adopt the Rooney Rule in all job levels where we identify under representation.

How

We will be partnering with Race Council Cymru to help us open out and widen channels of recruitment and collaboration. The Executive Director Organisational Development is currently developing a Talent Management strategy and the following commitments will be incorporated into the new strategy:



- Adopt the Rooney Rule where we will commit to having at least one woman and one under-represented minority in the slate of candidates considered for every open senior position, as long as the criteria for the role is met.
- Ensure ethnically diverse recruitment panels where possible (for senior and Board roles we will incorporate an independent, diverse view onto the panel).
- Train all colleagues in Unconscious Bias and raise awareness of white privilege .
- Invest resources in positive action initiatives aimed at improving BAME representation at levels showing gaps. This can include paid internships and apprenticeships, leadership development programmes, mentoring/ shadowing/coaching opportunities and internal talent pipeline initiatives.



We will... Report annually and act on findings:

- **Ethnicities pay gap (where pay gap reporting is not possible due to small sample sizes – report BAME employee ratios at different levels).**
- **Recruitment, promotion, and retention ethnicity data.**

How

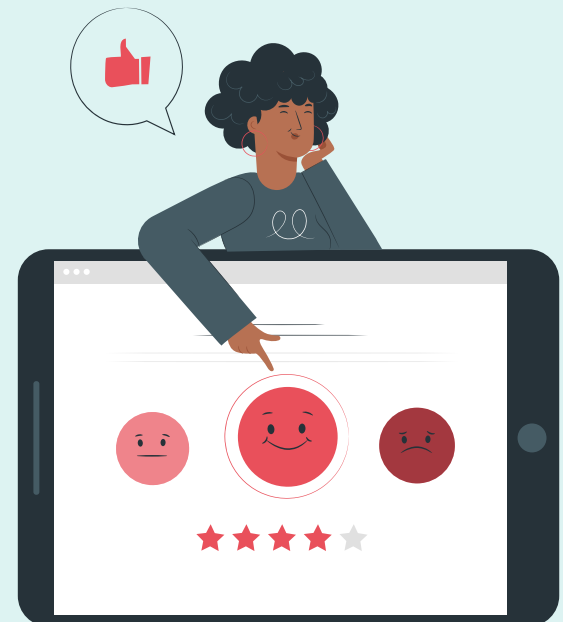
We are currently working on a system to extrapolate the ethnicity data from our systems in relation to recruitment, promotion and retention. A report will be considered by the FREDIE steering group at the end of 2020. During our 2020/21 Gender Pay Gap reporting we will also consider the ethnicities pay gap to identify any irregularities. A report on the data findings will be presented to the Executive Committee in early 2021.

3. Communicate and engage.

We will... Publicise our support for racial equality, including voiced support for Black, Asian and ethnic minority colleagues and tenants/communities, commitment to anti-racist practice and awareness of specific challenges facing our organisation or community.

How

- Use our intranet (Poblpoint) and external social media channels to raise awareness and publicly support all campaigns to end racial injustice.
- Widely publicise the work of the **FREDIE** (Fairness Respect Equality Diversity Inclusion Engagement) steering group at every opportunity.
- Ensure **FREDIE** is a standing item on all Directors, Managers and Heads of Service meetings.
- Conduct more pulse surveys on targeted topics to check that we are doing what colleagues and customers need and want and to gather ideas on where we should be directing efforts.



Together with the above we will...

- **Publish our commitment to take specific actions to tackle the challenges identified and report on progress annually.**
- **Disaggregate ethnicity data in our tenant satisfaction surveys and other tenant surveys. Use other channels to learn about the experiences of BAME tenants and act on findings.**

How

- We will investigate our own performance in delivering services to determine whether data suggests unconscious bias in how we let and manage our homes.
- We will improve our data collection on customer profiles so that we have 90%+ data accuracy for all of our households.
- We will use our data to determine ethnicity of those we allocate homes to and compare results to local demographic information. Where BAME groups are under-represented we will work with local communities and groups to ensure our housing offer meets needs and there is awareness amongst BAME groups
- We will interrogate our data on how we let homes, in particular looking at applicants who are 'skipped' and not offered a home and address any issues which arise suggesting unconscious bias.
- Where our homes are allocated through Local Authority Choice Based Lettings we will work with our partners to extract data from these systems so we can understand our performance.

Community engagement has already begun in a key community in Newport and colleagues are building a good rapport with residents. We are hopeful this is laying the foundations for some open, honest, informal conversations. This should allow us to build more meaningful relationships and really understand the people living in that area, which can then inform/improve our service offer.



We will... Build links with, and support BAME community groups in the area and beyond, invest in building their capacity to support local communities and bring in community knowledge and challenge to the organisation.

How

We are currently progressing other relevant workstreams including:

- Supporting foodbanks to introduce culturally appropriate parcels.
- Offering customers the option of receiving standard correspondence in alternative languages.
- Understanding the barriers, discrimination or disadvantage that BAME individuals face through housing processes/systems.
- Building relationships with and supporting two community organisations in Newport that have significant BAME engagement/use, Maindee Unlimited (collaborating on a digital inclusion project) and The Share Centre (supporting their plans to reopen and adapt to the 'new normal').
- Inviting guest speakers to internal meetings to inform and challenge.
- Partner with Race Council Cymru to enhance links with community leaders.



We will... In asylum dispersal areas, we will commit to donating or leasing housing to refugee housing initiatives (where these exist).

How

Tai Pawb have brought us together with The Gap in Newport to look for suitable homes for refugees settling in the City as there is a block with the move on after asylum seekers receive refugee status in the UK.

The Newport Team have worked directly with Newport City Council and The Gap to move a number of refugees successfully into homes around the City. We are now exploring the possibility of The Gap leasing a three bedroom flat from us in Pill to create a shared home for young refugees, which they will manage. They are a small organisation but are experts in helping refugees settle into communities and really understand the needs of their client base.

We are working closely with 'City of Sanctuary' in Swansea on a project to support the provision of housing for asylum seekers and refugees who have no access to public funds. We are working with local organisations to pull together an offer for destitute refugees. We don't have a firm proposal but it will be similar to the Newport project whereby we have for example 5 units and we rent 3 to refugees with leave to remain and offer 2 rent free to those with no recourse to public funds. The partnership will need to address meeting health and support needs and proving legal assistance re asylum appeals and for those with settled status, family reunification. We are looking at our existing homes and the possibility of attracting external capital from the Big Lottery Fund. The partnership is taking shape and will include SASS, Share Tawe, Tai Pawb and the Welsh Refugee Council.



4. Develop an inclusive culture.

Chief Executives, senior leaders and boards will take a proactive role in championing and monitoring progress on these pledges.

How

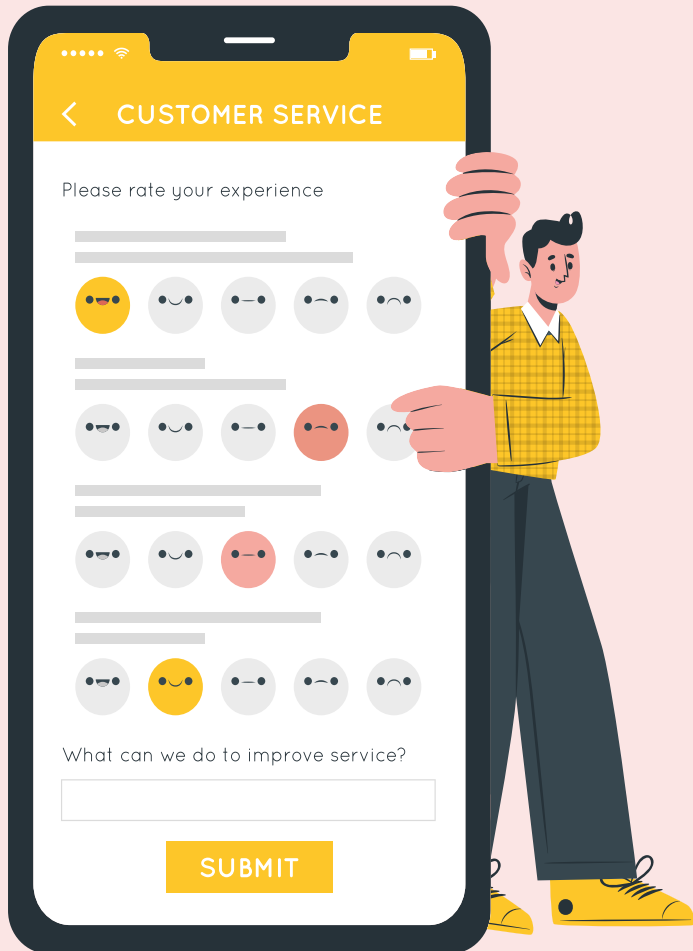
The Board and Executive Committee receive regular updates on progress and any issues are highlighted by the **FREDIE** steering group lead. We will ensure all Board reports consider the impact on equality and diversity and all policies and strategies are accompanied by an Equality Impact Assessment.

Non-Executives and Executives will undertake a facilitated development opportunity in early November 2020 to develop their thinking and planning around **FREDIE** to improve the business.

A Board recruitment campaign will run from October – December 2020. We will target individuals from a BAME background to improve the diversity of our Board.



Chief Executives, senior leaders and boards will actively support and promote an inclusive culture where people are comfortable talking about race and can bring their whole self to work.



How

- Our responsibility as a business is to be clear about behaviours and be willing to challenge. The Group Chair, Group Chief Executive, Group Board and Senior Leadership Team will all model behaviours by having open, honest discussions with their teams and by being visible to the business.
- We will invest in education and learning to open people's minds and promote thinking.
- We will test the culture using the Investors In Diversity **FREDIE** assessment and regular pulse surveys to gain a deeper understanding of our strong points and areas where improvement is needed.
- We will work with external organisations who have expert knowledge in this area to provide support and advice.

We will... Actively support and promote a culture where Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority colleagues and customers are comfortable to voice concerns related to race and are believed when this happens.

How

- Rolling out e-learning to colleagues on unconscious bias.
- Using experts in the field and guest speakers to give a further understanding of ethnic minority groups, asylum seekers, migrants and refugees, and religions such as Islam to reduce misconceptions and stereotyping.
- Promote our Grievance, Whistleblowing and Complaints polices to ensure there is an easy to understand route for colleagues and customers to follow should they feel they have concerns regarding race issues.
- Carry out a review of customer complaints through a **FREDIE** lens to understand themes and trends.
- Encourage an attitude of learning and discussion via Poblpoint and team meetings; build on the Black History Month activities by recommending books, films, music, TED talks etc. Share positive role models of Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority people.
- Support colleagues and customers to share their own views and experiences should they wish to do so.



We will... Invest in reverse mentoring schemes to share experiences and improve opportunities.

How

There is a commitment from senior colleagues to take part in a reverse mentoring scheme; we will treat reverse mentoring as a two-way process with mentees being mindful that the process is intended for mentors to also get something out of it and learn from mentees. We will ensure BAME mentors are comfortable with this type of process and there will be no expectation that BAME colleagues will want to mentor other colleagues. We will start initially with Race and then extend the programme to incorporate other protected Characteristics.

We will also be partnering once again with Chwarae Teg on the 'Step to Non-Exec' programme to offer 1 or 2 opportunities for young women to shadow a Board Member for a period of 12 months. We will be specifically targeting BAME applicants in the next recruitment round which is due to launch in early 2021.

