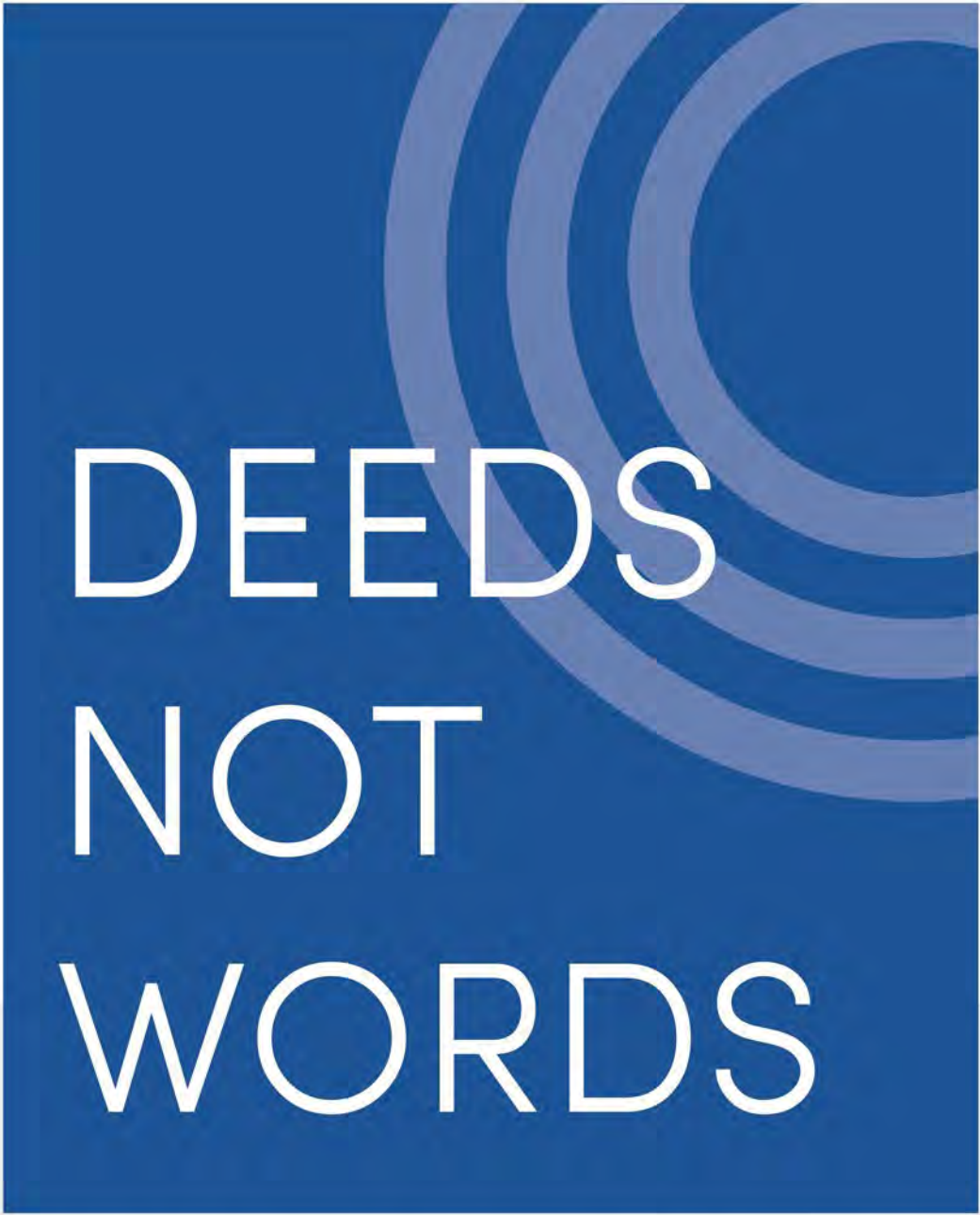




DEEDS NOT WORDS

THE RACE EQUALITY CHALLENGE FOR SOCIAL HOUSING IN WALES

Update: February 2022

In October 2020 we shared with you details of a Pledge to action, developed by Tai Pawb in partnership with Social Housing members in Wales, to begin the process of addressing the concerns of communities threatened due to racial inequalities. The Pledge was drafted following recent events which have shone a new light on the racial inequalities and racism experienced by Black Asian Minority Ethnic communities across the globe, in the UK and in Wales. At Pobl we are committed to making lasting changes to eradicate systemic racial inequality and as such we signed up to the Pledge which includes taking a number of actions across a 5-year period. This update sets out our progress over the past year.

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 Black Asian Minority Ethnic 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).

In 2020 Pobl applied the All Wales Covid-19 Risk Assessment Tool to 1369 front line colleagues. Over 60 colleagues who were already shielding and off work on full pay were subsequently furloughed, thereby protecting their employment status.

The shielding arrangements have since been reviewed in line with Welsh Government guidance, and all colleagues who were shielding have now returned to work. We have continued to monitor Welsh Government advice in respect of the COVID-19 risk to individuals with Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic origin and no further recommendations have been made.



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.

The colleague well-being offer has been well received during the Covid pandemic and has provided support to those colleagues who have needed it the most. An Internal Coach and mentor are available to assist colleagues with their overall health and wellbeing and a specialist external counsellor has been commissioned in addition to our 'Time for Talking' offering, who is specifically used for any Covid related counselling that colleagues may need. We will continue to monitor whether Black, Asian and other Minority Ethnic 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 is available on Poblpoint which acts as a 'safe space' for any colleagues who wish to participate.

We will... Investigate reasons for overcrowding and worse housing conditions amongst some Black Asian Minority Ethnic groups and start acting on findings.



A piece of research has been undertaken by colleagues in the Community Regeneration team, looking specifically at the housing needs of multi-generational families living within our communities. A presentation was given to the **FREDIE (Fairness Respect Equality Diversity Inclusion Engagement)** steering group and ideas were put forward on how to address the issues identified in the research. We are bringing together a number of colleagues to form a focus group to explore the ideas further. As a regeneration area, Pill in Newport may provide opportunities for a pilot location. We are currently looking at the area to determine the need for larger homes to help us make informed decisions. We are also working with colleagues in Newport City Council and other Housing Associations to access specific data around the housing needs in the area, share information and work together to identify solutions.

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.

We have partnered with Race Council Cymru to help us open out and widen channels of recruitment and collaboration. We have also identified new platforms for attracting talent to ensure we reach a more diverse workforce.

We have streamlined the ways people can apply for a job with us, including allowing CV only uploads so people don't have to complete a full application form. This can be particularly helpful for applicants whose first language isn't English.

We have invested resources in positive action initiatives aimed at improving Black Asian Minority Ethnic representation at levels showing gaps. This includes paid internships and apprenticeships, leadership development programmes, mentoring/shadowing/coaching opportunities and internal talent pipeline initiatives.

We are working towards adopting the Rooney Rule to have at least one woman and one under-represented minority in the slate of candidates considered for every open senior position, if the criteria for the role is met. We will also ensure where possible that recruitment panels are ethnically diverse (for senior and Board roles we will incorporate an independent, diverse view onto the panel).

A development programme is ongoing to train all colleagues, who are part of the recruitment process, on Unconscious Bias. This is a mixture of e-learning and virtual classroom sessions.

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

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

We have run several campaigns over the last 6 months with the aim of increasing our colleague Equality and Diversity data. We continue to monitor this bi-monthly, encouraging completion rates in areas of the organisation with low participation. A complete data set will enable us to implement positive action within our recruitment activity and also allow us to analyse the ethnicities pay gap to identify any irregularities. Whilst ethnicity pay gap reporting is not yet a legislative requirement, we aim to voluntarily compile ethnicity pay reports to improve inclusion and tackle inequality in the workplace.



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.

We continue to raise awareness and publicly support campaigns to end racial injustice. We regularly contribute to Government consultations on Equality matters which affect our colleagues or customers, such as the Welsh Government Race Equality Action Plan which is expected to be published in the Spring. Our intranet (Poblpoint) and external social media channels enable us to celebrate important dates in the Diversity calendar and **FREDIE** is a standard item in the weekly colleague update.

We encourage an attitude of learning and discussion via Poblpoint and team meetings; recent examples include building on the Black History Month activities by recommending books, films, music, TED talks etc. Sharing positive role models of Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority people.

The **FREDIE** steering group monitor and discuss any specific Equality challenges as part of their programme of work.

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 Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority tenants and act on findings.**



We recognise the implications of having insufficient data on our customers and this is an area we have been working to improve upon. The introduction of Dynamics will provide us with the mechanism for gathering and analysing our customer base to better inform our offer.

The Renting Homes Act will be implemented on 15th July and there is a requirement to hold certain information on our customers. In the work being done in preparation for the Act, gaps have been identified around the lack of customer data and demographics which are currently held. The Renting Homes project group are considering options to increase the amount of data held, including the effectiveness of door-to-door data collection and digital surveys. A recent pilot with door knocking in Penderi proved that although it was time consuming, it provided a rich source of information. There may be some limitations with regards to asking sensitive questions face-to-face and therefore colleague training will be necessary when using this method.

Another opportunity is to use local knowledge, for example the Neighbourhood Managers will have rich information on the demographics in their customer patch. Similarly, Trades and Contractors will be able to gather up to date information on the homes they are attending.

Community engagement is underway in four of our key communities and colleagues have built a good rapport with residents through open, informal conversations. Four Community Engagement Assistants were recruited directly from the Pill community to help draft a redevelopment masterplan for the area. By involving the community in our plans, we have built meaningful relationships and enabled us to really understand the people living in our communities.

We will... Build links with and support Black Asian Ethnic Minority 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.



We continue to support initiatives which build links with our diverse communities, such as:

- Working with foodbanks to provide of culturally appropriate parcels
- Using Language Line and translation services for customers whose first language isn't English.

Moving forward, we will invite representatives from charities and organisations to attend the **FREDIE** meetings to talk about their work. This will also be an ideal opportunity to forge links with 3rd sector organisations working with our communities. We always make a donation to any individuals or groups for the cost of their time if they don't specifically charge.

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

We previously reported to you on an innovative solution which was underway with Tai Pawb and The Gap in Newport to address Refugee homelessness in Newport. Pobl identified a vacant 3-bedroom property in the City Centre and The Gap took on the property as the landlord at a discounted rent. Pobl provided the investment to convert the property into a HMO and continued to offer maintenance services. The supported housing project with The Gap is now well established, The Gap have supported a number of Refugees to move into the property and the community have been really welcoming of the new residents. Six clients have since moved in to their own, permanent homes with independent living skills gained with support from The Gap and the stability and safe environment of the home which Pobl provided.

With the support of The Gap, the residents have cleared an area of land and planted an allotment, which has provided vegetables and herbs for residents to cook with. This has been really well received by the community and the produce grown has been used by them. The Gap are delighted with the progress, as are we. It is an excellent new partnership and has huge benefits for the community, as we have already seen.



4 Develop an inclusive culture.

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

The Board and Executive Committee receive regular updates on progress with the Deeds not Words pledges and the **FREDIE** agenda. We have introduced an Equality impact checklist to accompany all Board reports and all new and revised policies and strategies are accompanied by an Equality Impact Assessment.

Non-Executives and Executives attended a facilitated development opportunity in November 2020 to develop their thinking and planning around **FREDIE** to improve the business. Non-Executives have taken part in the Mutual Mentoring scheme referred to below to broaden their knowledge of **FREDIE** and what it means to our colleagues.

In 2021 we were successful in recruiting two Board Members with a Black and Minority Ethnic 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.

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 all model the **FREDIE** behaviours by having open, honest discussions with their teams and by being visible to the business.

Development of our colleagues in the areas of **FREDIE** has been a key focus, despite the challenges of the Covid pandemic. In the past year, the Learning and Development team have delivered:

- Over 50 Equality and Diversity virtual sessions
- 12 **FREDIE** Workshops covering all divisions in the Group.
- 4 training sessions on how to understand and complete an Equality Impact Assessment
- 12 'Leading for Inclusion' Workshops
- 8 'Anti Racism' Workshops

Which means that...

- 200 colleagues completed Unconscious Bias Training
- 500 colleagues completed Equality & Diversity e-Learning
- 800 colleagues completed the Equality & Diversity virtual classroom training including the **FREDIE** Workshops
- 160 Managers completed the 'Leading for Inclusion' workshop



In the pipeline we plan to further develop the Unconscious Bias Training and hold regular **FREDIE** sessions using the Pobl Knowledge Showcase arena. We have also invested in a Skills Booster eLearning package to support the Equality and Diversity L&D plan.

In October 2021 we conducted a colleague engagement survey which covered three main areas: Engagement, Health and Wellbeing and Diversity and Inclusion. The survey gave us great insight to where we are and how colleagues feel with every aspect of the colleague experience. The participation rate was 74% and high-level results were presented to all colleagues at the Executive Live webinar in November 2021. The results were also presented at the January 2022 Board meeting. The Diversity and Inclusion insights were positive and have helped to inform the next phase of our Group **FREDIE** strategy.

We continue to work with external organisations who have expert knowledge in this area to provide support and advice. Guest speakers have been invited to meetings of the **FREDIE** steering group to provide further understanding of Religion, Ethnic Minority groups, asylum seekers, migrants and refugees to reduce misconceptions and stereotyping.



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.

The Complaints policy has been revised to incorporate Compliments. We love to hear when our colleagues do a good job but we also want to know where we can do better, as we are always trying to improve the service we provide. The policy has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment to ensure there is an easy-to-understand route for colleagues and customers to follow should they feel they have concerns regarding Race or other issues. The process for submitting a compliment or complaint is easily accessible via an online form on our website.



The **FREDIE** steering group regularly carry out a review of customer complaints through a **FREDIE** lens to understand any themes or trends.

The recent colleague survey provided a platform for all colleagues to share any feedback on an anonymous basis. It was apparent there were no significant differences in how people felt, regardless of any protected characteristic they may have. Where specific comments were made suggesting there was discrimination, the People team were able to reach out to the individuals who confirmed the comments were made in the heat of the moment and didn't imply there were any systemic issues.

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

At the start of 2021 we ran a 'Mutual Mentoring' pilot in Pobl with a small number of colleagues who had certain Protected Characteristics acting as Mentors. The Mentees included a Member of the Board and representatives from the Senior Leadership Team. One to one conversations took place over the course of three or four virtual sessions and at the end of the pilot the cohorts met as a group to share their reflections. Feedback was positive and each cohort agreed the pilot was a success in terms of learning about each other's experiences. There were some open, honest conversations on the **FREDIE** principles of **Fairness Respect Equality Diversity Inclusion Engagement** and everyone felt comfortable and able to challenge. Later in the year we extended the programme across the Group to allow other colleagues a similar opportunity. We were delighted to have 15 participants, including further Board Members, Senior Leaders and colleagues from across all levels of the Group. Again, the feedback was positive and it was evident this is something which was highly valued in terms of learning about people's background and experiences.

Applications for the third programme have just opened and there is already a lot of interest from colleagues wishing to take part.

To find out more please contact: Nicola.jones@poblgroup.co.uk

We will continue to report annually on progress against the commitments we have made in the Deeds not Words Pledge.

