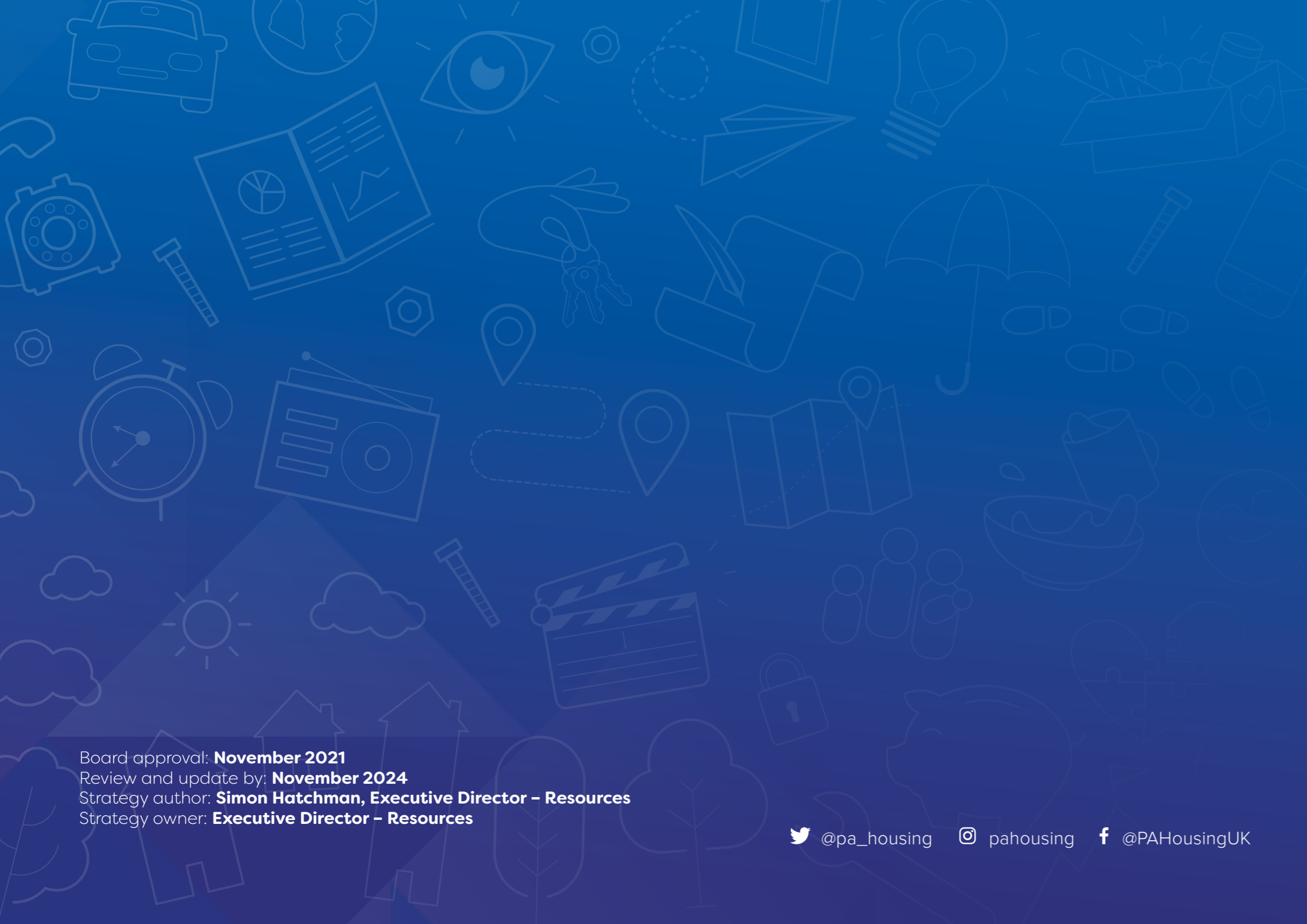





Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2021



Board approval: **November 2021**
Review and update by: **November 2024**
Strategy author: **Simon Hatchman, Executive Director – Resources**
Strategy owner: **Executive Director – Resources**

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What is meant by equality, diversity and inclusion ('EDI')

Equality

means treating people fairly and consistently regardless of their background, beliefs and defining experiences.

Diversity

means the various differences between people, and recognising these differences as a positive force.

Inclusion

means making all people feel welcome and valued, with no barriers to their opportunities and participation.

In combination then, our ambition around EDI is to develop a culture and environment where everybody is respected, supported and empowered. PA is absolutely committed to equality, diversity, inclusion, and human rights. We will take every opportunity to strengthen our approach in order to deliver the best possible service to our residents and to fully support and develop all our employees.

The importance of EDI

EDI is intrinsically linked to values which promote compassion, respect and empathy for others. There is therefore nothing new or to be feared about EDI, these are principles that everyone should feel able to fully support and they align well to PA's own values:

- We always do the right thing
- We're there when you need us
- We never give up

We face a rapidly evolving society where fundamental challenges need to be responded to – including but not limited to climate change, the relentless advance of the digital age, major political flashpoints, and of course the ongoing disruption caused by Covid-19 which has affected so many lives. To thrive in this environment, good organisations will need to develop deep and trusting relationships with their customers, employees and partners. This can only succeed if these relationships are built on principles which genuinely embrace and embed EDI.

Of particular relevance to the social housing sector, socio-economic disadvantage plays a leading role in systemic discrimination and in holding people back ([Source: UNDESA World Social Report 2020 | DISD](#)). This talks directly to the mission of housing associations in working to address these structural issues and providing both support and opportunity to those who face such challenges. Often, people who face other forms of inequality and discrimination also find themselves in positions of socio-economic disadvantage.

Many of PA's residents and indeed our employees will be grappling with these issues, and will need trusted allies to help them find a way through. Working to improve social justice can therefore be a powerful motivator for us. We recognise how EDI in its broadest sense has the power to generate positive change – we are all different and while those characteristics protected by law rightly take precedence, we also

recognise that a holistic approach to EDI must encompass other points of difference which shape our experiences and outlooks. For example:

- Social class
- Where and how we were brought up
- Levels of formal education
- Work and life experience
- Family status (current and historic)
- Mental health and wellbeing

But we also have many points of similarity and things in common which can bind and unify us. Fully committing to EDI can equally bring these aspects to the fore, through improving our mutual understanding and building a shared humanity. If we deliver our EDI objectives, we will create opportunities to challenge assumptions, preconceptions and prejudices.

The benefits of EDI

Fundamentally, consistent and successful application of EDI principles should over time help to develop a more cohesive society where people of all backgrounds live, work and socialise harmoniously, and discrimination is eradicated. For PA in particular though, we see the following benefits as key:

- An environment where everyone has opportunity to reach their full potential, with no barriers based on what makes people different
- Decisions which take into account different perspectives within society, meaning our services will better match our residents' needs and wants
- An organisation which promotes change and innovation
- A workforce which feels welcomed and included regardless of their background, supporting a motivation to do their very best for our residents
- Stronger recruitment and retention, better employer-employee relations and increasing skill levels over time – leading to higher quality services for residents

PA's EDI history

Our heritage is steeped in the Black and Minority Ethnic ('BME') social housing movement. One of our founder organisations, asra Housing Association, originated as a Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) housing provider in 1984 and its initial remit was to provide homes and services for Asian older people.

Today PA Housing is a prominent provider of housing services to multi-cultural communities. PA contains the former asra Greater London HA, asra

Midlands HA and Black Roof HA – these were all at the forefront of the BME housing agenda in the 1980s and 1990s. PA has been the managing agent for two independent BME Housing Co-ops in Leicester for the last 25 years and it remains the largest specialist provider in the UK of housing services to older Asian people.

In the 1980s when most BME housing associations were formed, racism in society was an acute concern to BME

- A culture which enables people to positively challenge behaviours and attitudes, with a clear and consistent position on what our standards and expectations are
- Ability to have a greater impact on our communities
- A stronger brand and reputation – being seen as an organisation which acts with integrity and focuses on mutually beneficial outcomes rather than merely transactions

In summary then, embracing EDI simply makes good business sense. Any modern and progressive organisation should naturally wish to harness the power of EDI to thrive and develop – creating a better business for customers, employees and stakeholders alike.

communities in the UK. The role of BME housing associations was to act in the interests of these communities and to challenge the discrimination and disadvantage that they faced. Racism is still a major social issue, but equalities legislation has now been embedded and discriminatory practice and racism is not as overt as it was when BME housing associations were first formed. Consequently the role of BME housing associations, and of PA Housing, has moved on.

Our role today is less about specialist housing and more about strong, diverse communities. PA now also provides many homes to residents who don't have a BME background, but who are diverse in a number of different ways. We work to understand how their differing needs and expectations shape our approach to service delivery, influencing decisions about targeted community investment to enhance opportunity and cohesiveness.

Organisationally, we maintain strong awareness of different cultures, beliefs and ways of living. We recognise and celebrate a number of EDI-related events through the year, encouraging our staff to participate in these and discuss the issues which can be highlighted as a result. Our pay gap reporting (Making Progress: Gender Pay Gap Report 2020 | PA Housing) already includes voluntary disclosures about our ethnicity pay gap status, in addition to the standard gender pay gap information. We have also commenced work on exploring the broader social backgrounds of our Board members and senior leadership team, with a view to assessing the extent to which those who run the business represent the communities we are working to serve.

Corporately then, we have a sense of pride that over a number of years we have been there for people from a wide range of backgrounds. We have a fully committed Board which wants to move PA's EDI agenda even further forward. And we have an active cross-departmental EDI Working Group which is delivering a range of relevant actions with Board oversight. Key elements of this workplan include:

- Improving the diversity of our community engagement and analysing how evolving

community demographics will shape our services

- Reviewing the accessibility of our digital channels to prevent inadvertent discrimination
- Promoting employment opportunities directly to PA residents and their families
- Creating an environment which enables people to have courageous conversations
- Working to better align our EDI values with key suppliers
- Delivering EDI bitesize training to line managers, in order to stimulate discussion and understanding that contributes to culture change
- Developing our employee recruitment, retention and progression frameworks in line with our EDI ambitions

We have invested in two dedicated roles to support delivery of the EDI Working Group's plans, one focusing on recruitment and retention and one to co-ordinate our overall effort.

Our work around EDI is underpinned by our ongoing Everybody Is Unique campaign. This commits us to promoting diversity, inclusion, and a culture that actively values difference. It

is wholly endorsed by our Board and it applies to all residents, employees and other stakeholders, such as contractors, volunteers and partners. We believe that everyone is entitled to respect and dignity and we are committed to building an environment where our employees, residents, contractors and visitors are treated in this way.

The Equality Act 2010 provides the legislative bedrock but our EDI ambition is to go well beyond what is required in law. And we recognise that the legal and regulatory framework continues to evolve – we want to place ourselves at the forefront of that evolution rather than find ourselves reacting to enforced change.

What PA needs to do now

In recent years we have moved into a more challenging operating environment, due to factors including:

- Difficult political developments which have tended to polarise views
- Funding challenges for services aimed at more disadvantaged members of society, arising from the credit crunch and government austerity
- The rise of social media and the proliferation of hate, division and disinformation through various channels, with potential to damage communities
- The terrible impact of Covid-19 which will undoubtedly have longer term ramifications for the UK's citizens and economy
- A growing sense of inequality and injustice within certain sections of society

To respond to these issues, we at PA need to push our EDI agenda forward and move on to the more challenging workstreams which will allow us to play our part in tackling them. Our EDI Working Group has made a good start

and we can build on these solid foundations. We want to become fully connected with and trusted by our communities. We want to show how diverse communities can thrive. And crucially, we want to place EDI at both the heart and the head of our business decisions – as something which truly matters to everyone, but which enables us to combine our emotions and passions with a logical and level-headed approach to make tangible progress.

Recent feedback from our residents and employees has highlighted areas where we need to further develop our EDI approach. Although there is recognition that we have worked hard to put good corporate frameworks in place, in some respects our organisational culture still lags behind and day-to-day behaviours don't always match our ambitions and intentions. Put simply, we need to align what we do with what we say.

This Strategy is designed to address the issues described above. In developing it we have consulted with our EDI Working Group, our senior

leaders and an external EDI specialist to provide quality assurance input. It needs full commitment and significant effort to be delivered, and we are of course aware that the landscape will continue to evolve as we go along. PA must adapt to this, which may entail periodic changes to our strategic approach and intent.

We accept that there will be further challenges along the way, and at times we will have tensions, conflicts and difficulties to overcome. Our ability to swiftly recognise, resolve and learn from these challenges will be a measure of our EDI maturity as an organisation.

As we move through the uncertain and potentially volatile 2020s then, now is the time for PA to refresh and re-set our ethical compass. Things that have

worked well for us in the past may no longer be enough because the challenges we face are changing and becoming more complex. We should aspire to be a thought leader on EDI, within the social housing sector and beyond, but to achieve that we must modify our approach.

Link to PA vision and corporate plan

Our Corporate Plan 2020-2023 ([available here: corporate-plan-2020-2023.pdf \(pahousing.co.uk\)](#)) sets out our broader strategic objectives. It confirms our overall vision as follows:

To connect with customers in every community we serve, providing quality homes and services, creating places where people thrive and are proud to live

This EDI Strategy aligns strongly with the above vision, emphasising themes around connectivity, community cohesion and a sense of place and belonging. More explicitly, the Corporate Plan identifies a number of headline strategic objectives and supporting goals. Those which are of most relevance to this Strategy are:

Providing great services to customers

Supporting goal	Link to EDI Strategy
Work with customers to continuously improve our customer offer and provide great services	Hinges on our ability to build meaningful relationships with all residents regardless of background
Continue to develop our resident involvement and scrutiny arrangements, creating flexible new ways for residents to work alongside us	Must develop in line with residents' diverse needs and preferences, taking into account a range of life situations
Ensure our services are what people want, easy to access, and are inclusive and accessible to all	Directly links to inclusion – will evidence full customer journey based on diversity characteristics
Support residents through our job ready programme, working with our partners to provide volunteering, apprenticeship and training opportunities	Will involve work to improve equality of access to opportunities for people from under-represented backgrounds

Increase construction of affordable and social homes

Increase the proportion of social rent homes we build whenever possible	A fundamental ambition in order to maximise the affordability of our homes, thus increasing opportunity for people who might otherwise face exclusion
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Positive relationships in our neighbourhoods

Supporting goal	Link to EDI Strategy
Listen to our customers, hear them, and take action. We will challenge ourselves and be bold in making changes	Will entail taking diversity of views into account for decision making
Live our clear belief that ‘everybody is unique’ and ‘everywhere is unique’	Underpins our approach to EDI, building on our successful ongoing campaign
Create safe, sustainable neighbourhoods where people choose to live	Creating a sense of belonging regardless of background is central to this

Maximise our capacity to deliver

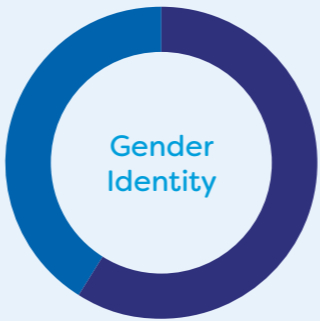
Improve our customer experience	Must improve consistently for people from all backgrounds, with focus on those who currently report a poorer experience
Understand our assets and neighbourhoods to direct investment and drive value	Targeted investment will allow certain neighbourhoods to accelerate a move towards cohesion
Obtain value through robust procurement processes and effective contract management	Social value for our residents will become increasingly central to our procurement activities
Work with our customers to improve our service offer and make them an integral part of decision making	Will place diversity of views front and centre of our decision making processes

Our people - delivering the plan

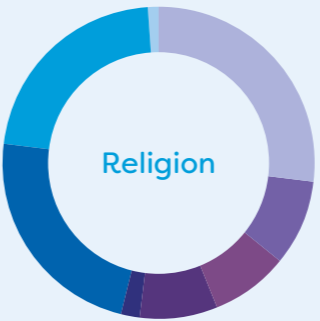
Inspire and support our next generation of leaders	Creating improved opportunities for staff from under-represented backgrounds will be central to this
Ensure brilliant performance through an inclusive environment	Directly links to our inclusion aims and ambitions
Improve diversity and opportunity	Directly links to our EDI ambitions for staff
Maximise social value by giving back to communities	Will allow our staff to better understand the communities they serve, in turn improving the connectivity of our relationships

Facts and figures

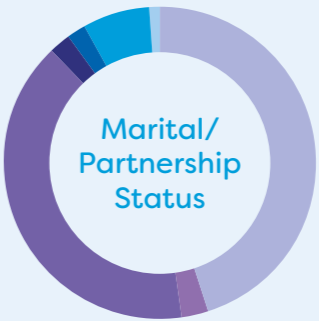
The graphs below set out the distribution of PA's employees in relation to the characteristics which are protected under the Equalities Act 2010 (data taken as at November 2021, 696 employees in total).



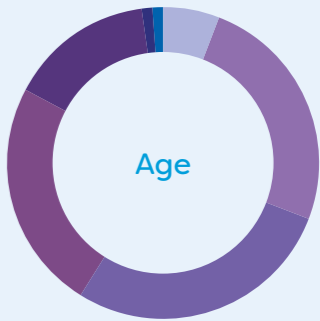
Female **59%**
Male **41%**
Prefer not to say **0%**
Don't know **0%**



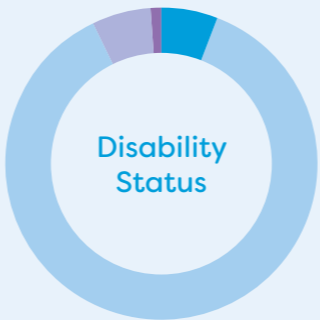
Christian **27%**
Buddhist **0%**
Hindu **9%**
Muslim **8%**
Sikh **8%**
No Religion **23%**
Prefer not to say **22%**
Don't know **1%**



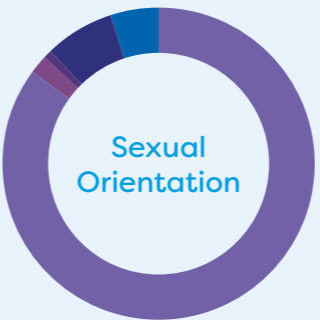
Married **45%**
Cohabiting **3%**
Single **40%**
Widowed **0%**
Divorced **2%**
Civil Partner **2%**
Prefer not to say **7%**
Don't know **1%**



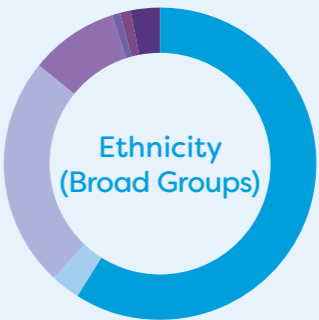
16-24 **6%**
25-34 **25%**
35-44 **28%**
45-54 **24%**
55-64 **15%**
65+ **1%**
Prefer not to say **1%**



Current disability **6%**
No disability **87%**
Prefer not to say **6%**
Don't know **1%**



Heterosexual **85%**
Gay or Lesbian **2%**
Bisexual **1%**
Prefer not to say **7%**
Don't know **5%**



White **59%**
Mixed ethnic group **3%**
Asian / Asian British **24%**
Black / Black British **9%**
Other ethnic group **1%**
Prefer not to say **1%**
Don't know **3%**

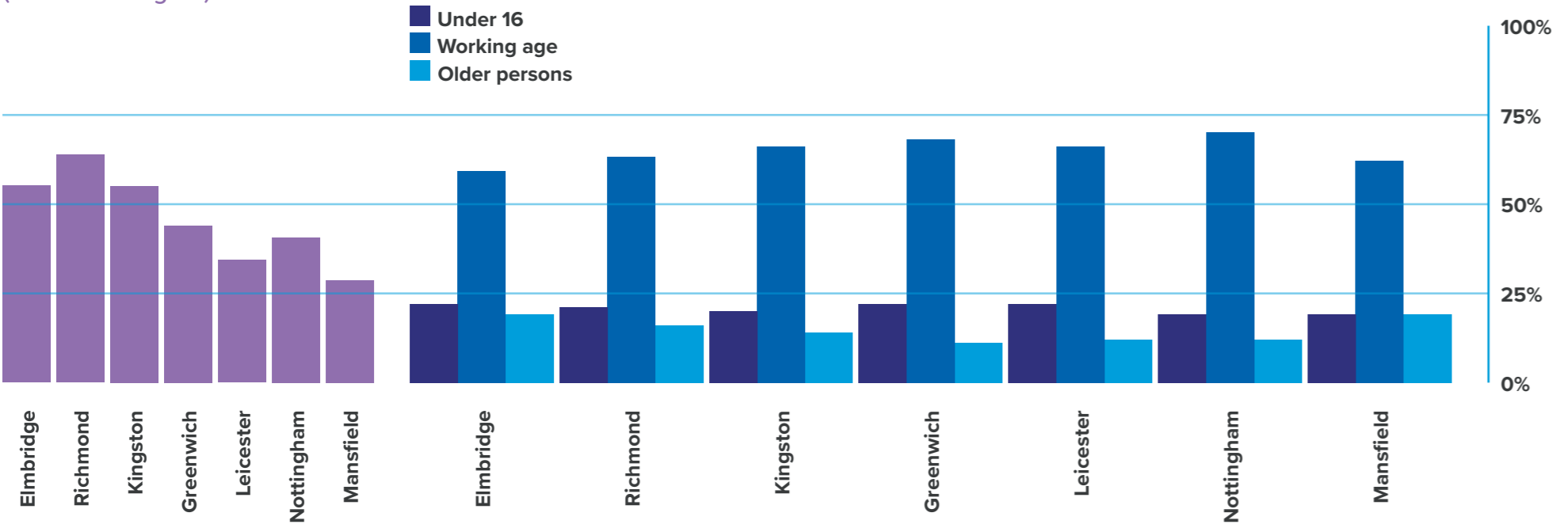
These graphs paint a picture of a diverse workforce. It is particularly noteworthy that our employees come from a range of ethnic and religious backgrounds. When compared to headline data for our residents (based on the lead tenancy or lease name), there is good alignment:

- **60%** of our residents are female and **40%** are male
- **75%** are at traditional 'working age' and **25%** are older
- **68%** are White, **14%** are Asian / Asian British, **11%** are Black / Black British, **4%** from a Mixed background and **3%** from other ethnic backgrounds

The graphs below set out some of the key wider demographic factors within the seven local authority areas where PA has the most homes. In total, these seven areas comprise around two thirds of our total homes and so they give a good representation of issues affecting the majority of our residents. All data is taken from government / Office for National Statistics online resources.

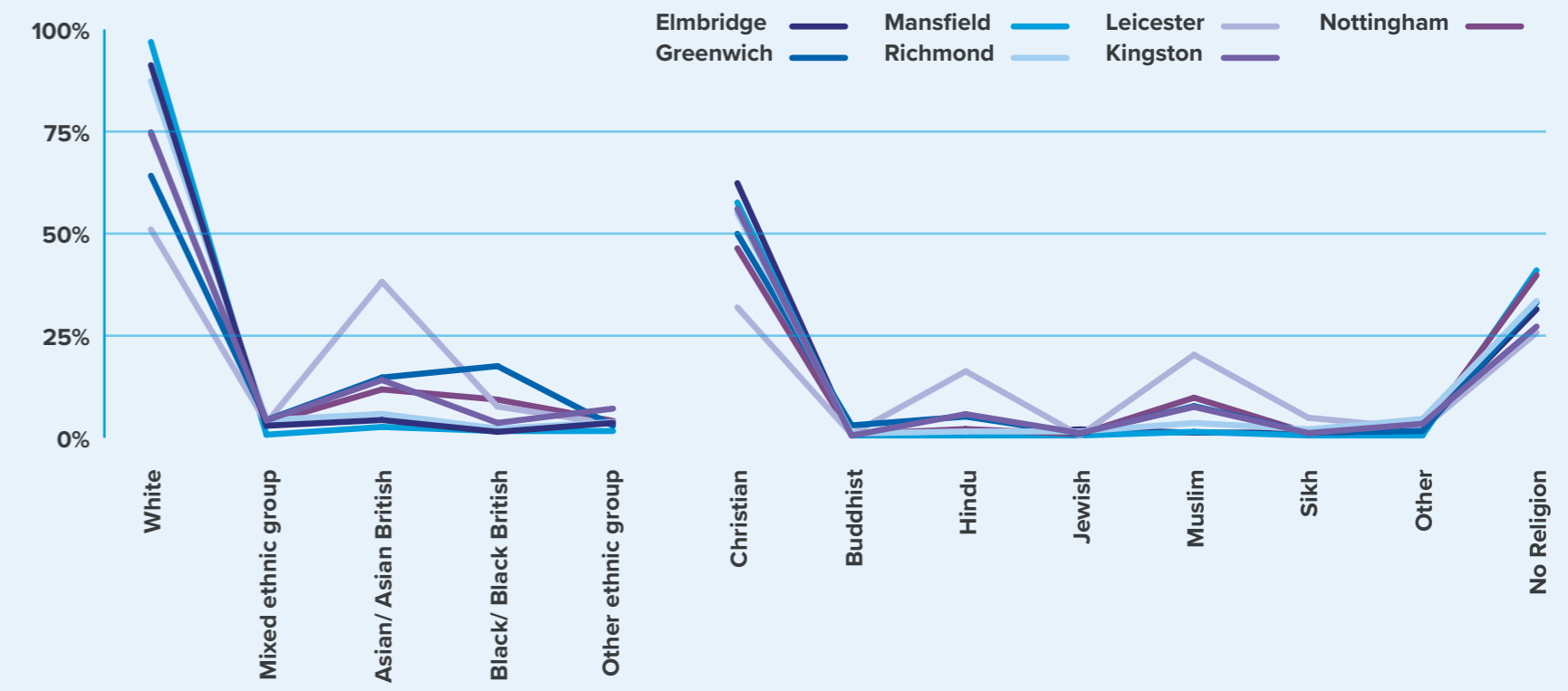
Further Education
(A Levels or higher)

Age Distribution

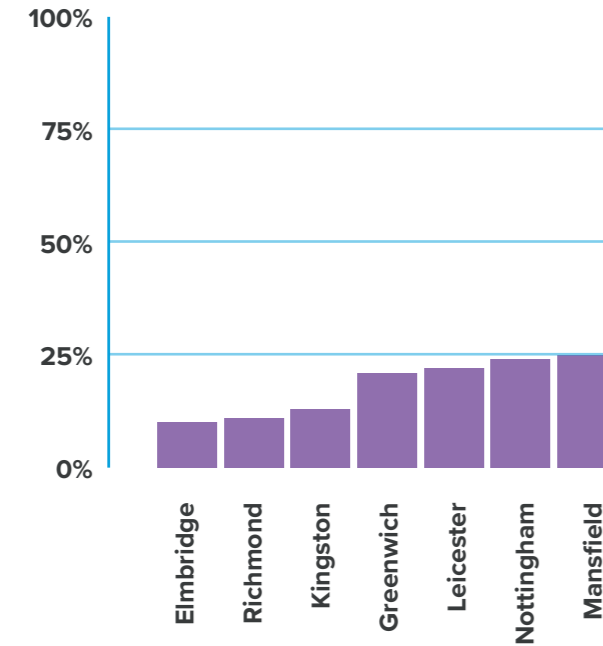


Ethnicity

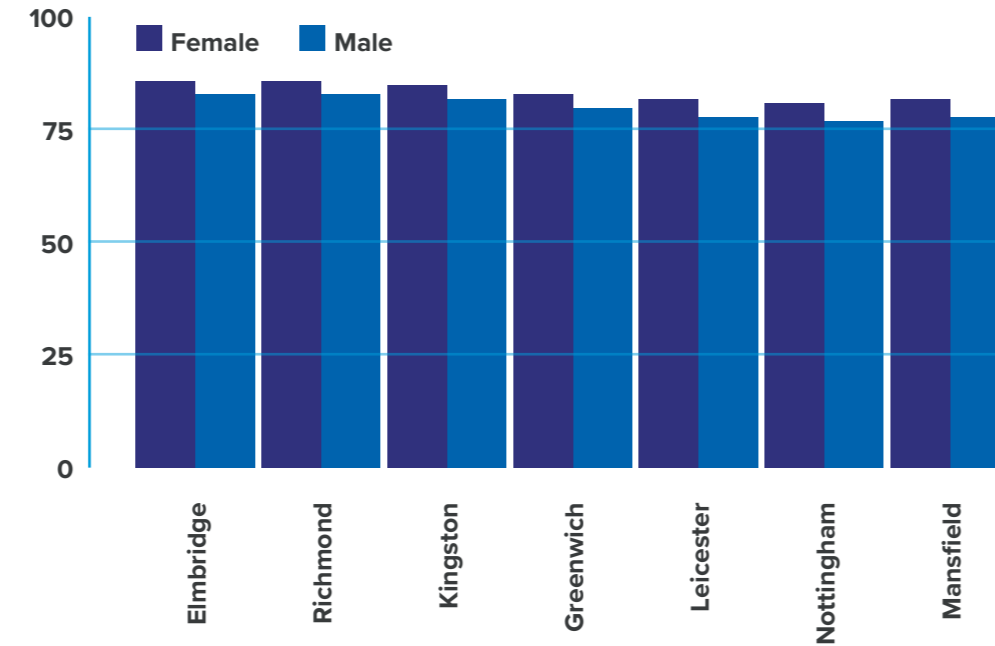
Religion



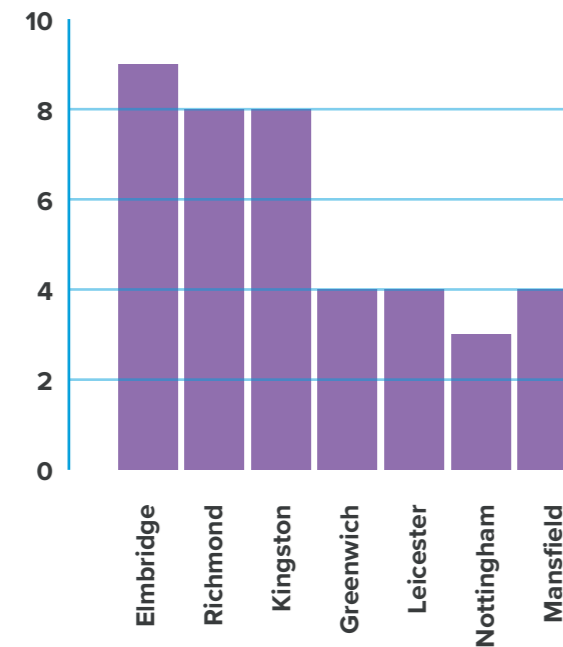
Residents with a disability



Life expectancy (newborns)



Deprivation index decile (average by ward)



This data confirms some key points of difference between our main local authority operating areas, which will influence delivery of this strategy:

- The West London and Surrey boroughs contain significantly higher numbers of residents who have progressed their education beyond GCSE level, compared to East London and the Midlands.
- Elmbridge and Mansfield have a higher proportion of older residents.
- Leicester has a very significant Asian / Asian British population and Greenwich has a significant Black / Black British population. Mansfield's population is very predominantly White.
- Leicester has a good deal of religious diversity, with Christian, Muslim and Hindu faiths all well represented.
- The Midlands boroughs have the highest incidence of residents with disability, at roughly twice the proportion of West London and Surrey boroughs.
- Life expectancy is lower in the Midlands.
- Greenwich and the Midlands boroughs are above the national average deprivation index whereas the West London and Surrey borough score very low.

The overall message is one of stark regional disparity. This presents challenges to our service delivery but also opportunities to consider how we can refine our approach to better align to the diversity of our customer base.

In line with the strategic objectives and supporting actions outlined below, we intend to collect additional data to inform delivery of this Strategy. This will go beyond the characteristics protected in law to examine factors such as social background, levels of educational attainment and experience of social housing in order to help us identify where action needs to be targeted for greatest impact and outcomes.

Strategic objectives

We have developed four headline strategic objectives. Together, these will enable PA to significantly enhance its approach to EDI:

1. Use our commitment to EDI as a driver for investment in our residents and communities
2. Ensure that PA is a vibrant and inclusive place to work, where people can reach their potential regardless of background and experiences
3. Harness EDI as a positive force behind our business decisions and ways of working
4. Prioritise and influence partnerships with others who share a similar EDI vision and ethos



Supporting actions

The following supporting actions have been identified to make the strategy happen. Internally, these will be developed into a SMART action plan with regular progress tracking and reporting. Some actions are already embedded within other PA strategies and will be tracked through those delivery mechanisms; these are identified as such below.

1. EDI as a driver for investment

This strategic objective relates to: Understanding and responding to the EDI challenges faced by our residents; targeting our investment to address the issues we identify.

- Use our capacity to build new affordable homes, with as many at social rent as possible (embedded within Development Strategy)
- Achieve high standards of accommodation for all residents (embedded within Asset Management Strategy)
- Where possible, ensure that our buildings and estates design is sympathetic to the needs of people from different and / or particular backgrounds

- Utilise Neighbourhood Profiles to agree and deliver EDI-related estate enhancements to improve cohesiveness
- Target investment in communities where help is needed to increase opportunity – for example college courses, university bursaries, trainee schemes
- Develop green space and communal areas to support wellbeing and community cohesion
- Take active measures to alleviate fuel poverty (partly embedded within Sustainability Strategy but additional work to consider support to residents around the energy supply market)
- Develop our employability programmes to produce stronger outcomes
- Continue work to support residents who plan to start their own business, particularly those which offer a benefit to the local community
- Give people a voice, understand the views of people of different backgrounds and use this to drive service development (embedded within RI Strategy)
- Establish a resident EDI group to receive feedback on

service delivery and share experiences as PA residents in their local communities

- Develop mechanisms to better capture the views of our younger residents, feeding in to service design for future generations

2. A vibrant and inclusive place to work

This strategic objective relates to: Nurturing a sense of belonging for PA's employees, and giving everyone the opportunity to meaningfully participate.

- Undertake survey of employee backgrounds beyond the characteristics which are protected by law (for example - social housing lived experience, level of education, care, where lived, family, mental health) and use the results to direct future recruitment / retention / development activities
- Conduct a 'culture audit' to fully understand the current culture experienced by those who work for PA and how they would like it to evolve

- Actively pursue PA residents or people with experience of living in social housing to work for us
- Explore avenues for attracting employees from under-represented backgrounds (for example – LGBTQ, particular disabilities, mental health, criminal record, neurodiverse)
- Work to ensure that PA is a safe and positive place for people from those under-represented backgrounds to be employed
- Develop analysis of our recruitment pathways to understand and address any barriers faced by applicants, increasing opportunity for people from under-represented groups
- Eliminate the ethnicity and gender pay gaps by 2027 (detailed targets to be determined by the People Committee)
- Broaden pay gap analysis and set targets to address any other shortfalls
- Develop the diversity of our senior leadership team (embedded within People Strategy)
- Develop a specific ethnicity career progression framework (by April 2022)





- Develop an EDI behaviours framework to set out expectations and enable colleagues to feel comfortable being themselves at work
- Embed inclusive leadership behaviours into all levels of manager training programmes
- Measure leaders' performance against relevant EDI-related criteria, as part of the annual performance review and PRP process
- Develop flexible working approach to fully embrace the needs of people with particular life / family circumstances
- Introduce diverse interview panels for senior roles
- Develop colleagues who wish to be involved into EDI leaders (similar to the role of Race Champions in the public sector), supported by appropriate training and accreditation
- Improve the onboarding process for new recruits by providing access to EDI networks and fully embedding EDI into the induction programme
- Provide suitable EDI training for all new recruits within three months of starting with PA
- Develop broader EDI networks with other like-minded organisations so that practices and experiences can be shared and discussed

- Analyse PRP and rewards distributions to ensure equality of access for all
- Monitor EDI distribution of leaving reasons for departing employees, to establish PA's strength of track record in supporting and developing diverse talent
- Use internal media (intranet, Microsoft Teams etc) to stimulate healthy debate about EDI issues
- Work to stimulate an 'EDI aware' culture where those with things to say feel comfortable in doing so
- Develop strengthened awareness of unconscious bias in order to improve outcomes for current and potential employees from all backgrounds

3. A positive force behind our business decisions

This strategic objective relates to: A key step-change which will place EDI at the heart of everything we do, embedding it within our leadership and recognising it as a cross-cutting theme which enables us to make better decisions.

- Develop EDI as a key facet of the PA 'brand' underpinning our culture and values
- Utilise website and social media to share how EDI shapes our service delivery

- Formalise / regularise EDI at Board – inclusion in papers and decisions, develop the role of our EDI Board Champion, regular interaction with staff and residents
- Introduce a mutual mentoring approach to give colleagues from under-represented groups insight into decision making and opportunities to share their experiences with senior leaders
- Provide opportunities for colleagues to hear from external experts about the power of EDI within a business context
- Develop a 'firm line' approach to who we choose to work with, using our own EDI values as a measure, and defining how we will robustly respond to those who fail to meet our expectations

4. Partnerships with others who share a similar EDI vision

This strategic objective relates to: Using our influence with and learning from others, to jointly contribute towards a world where EDI is the natural way of doing things.

- Reposition our successful 'Everybody is Unique' campaign as a tool to open up conversations with partner agencies

- Work with agencies who can help us improve the safety of our communities, particularly for people with backgrounds and experiences which may suffer a greater incidence of prejudice or abuse
- Support agencies who can provide specialist services to those who need them
- Enhance EDI aspects of our procurement and contract management processes utilising our supply chain to best effect in providing opportunities and maintaining standards
- Work to positively influence the EDI approach taken by partners, including specific effort to encourage sharing of EDI credentials from the start of 2022
- Forge links with local schools / education establishments to offer learning and development opportunities, life skills, pathways towards employment
- Work with our recognised Unions and other specialist agencies who can help PA develop its EDI approach (e.g. Investing In Ethnicity, Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion)
- Forge partnerships with specialist charities seeking opportunities for their service users (e.g. learning disabilities charities)

- From 2022, develop a thought leadership position on EDI including measures to share and promote PA's approach and future plans
- Undertake specific research and events in order to drive EDI thought leadership
- Contribute PA's perspective and experience to sector discussion and policy / regulatory development

The four workstreams outlined above will be supported by our EDI guiding principles, to help set the right culture throughout the business:

Fairness

Providing access and tools to those who may be disadvantaged

Equality

Safeguarding the differences between individuals (protected by law or otherwise)

Trust

Building trust based on evidence of our delivery, without tokenism

Respect

Recognising that all customers, colleagues and stakeholders are important

Dignity

Acting as a modern organisation should, to allow people their own space and voice



Strategy governance

This Strategy will be overseen by our EDI Working Group, with support from the EDI Business Partner. Following approval, the strategic objectives supporting actions detailed above will be translated into an action plan. The EDI Working Group will co-ordinate and monitor delivery of the actions and the outcomes achieved.

The Chair of the Board and the Chief Executive are jointly accountable to all stakeholders for delivery of the strategy. All senior leaders, supported by the HR team, will be expected to fully understand and contribute to achievement of the strategy and ensure

that this commitment is cascaded down through line management into their teams. Success of the Strategy will be measured through actions, not words.

Over time the existing EDI Working Group action plan will merge into this EDI Strategy action plan, to create a single all-inclusive menu of work for delivery.

We will report annually on outcomes against the Strategy action plan, via our website. We also want to be involved in wider conversations about EDI, so that we can share ideas and learn from each other.

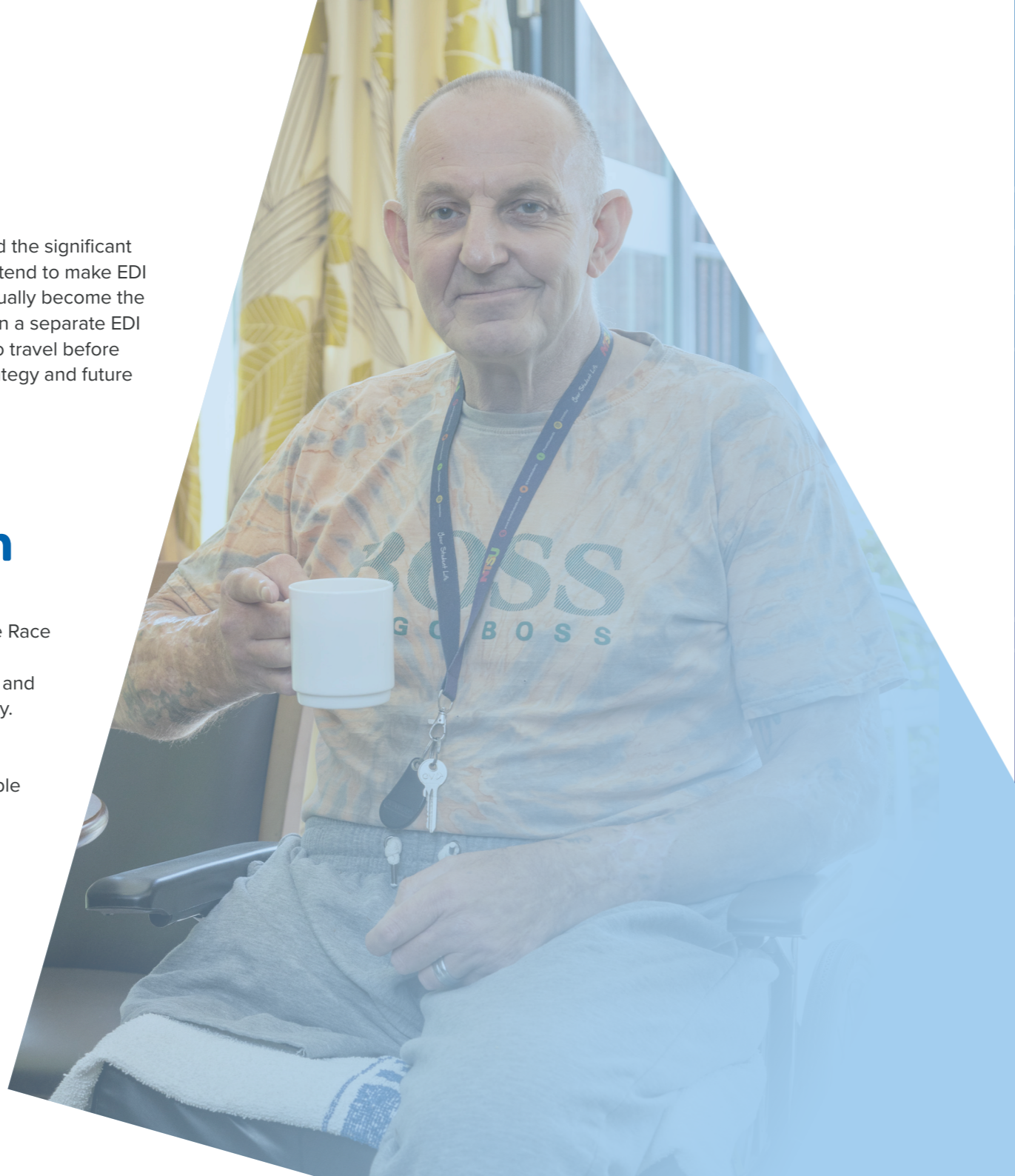
Conclusion

This Strategy provides a summary of PA's current EDI status, and the significant opportunities we see in further developing our approach. We intend to make EDI central to all that we do, to the extent that 'doing EDI' will eventually become the natural order of things. Once we reach that level of maturity then a separate EDI Strategy may no longer be required – but there is a long road to travel before we get close to that level of evolution. In the meantime, the Strategy and future updates to it will drive our EDI culture and approach.

Note on supporting legislation

The Equality Act 2010 replaced previous legislation (such as the Race Relations Act 1976 and Disability Discrimination Act 1995) with a single Act. The Act simplified the law, removed inconsistencies, and strengthened the law to help tackle discrimination and inequality.

The Act makes it law that every private, public and voluntary organisation must not discriminate against employees and people that use their services because of particular characteristics.



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 @PAHousingUK

 **PA Housing**

Pentagon House,

52-54 Southwark Street London, SE1 1UN

 housing@pahousing.co.uk

 www.pahousing.co.uk

 0300 123 2221