



Different but Equal



**A record of our journey
March 2018**

Introduction

Welcome to our seventh Equality and Diversity Report that shows how Solihull Community Housing (SCH) continues to value diversity and equality of opportunity through fairness and inclusion.

We focus on activities and achievements since January 2017 to support our vision to **‘provide homes, improve wellbeing and strengthen communities’** that underpin Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council’s vision to ensure that **‘Everyone has an equal chance to be healthier, happier, safer and more prosperous’**.

Our aim is to make fairness and equality part of everyday work so that we can give the best service to tenants, leaseholders and other customers, provide a thriving workplace where employees feel valued and be judged as a value-based organisation. Our Equality and Diversity Policy, revised in 2017, sets out the following principles and objectives. This report provides evidence of how we put the policy into practice.

Principle	Objectives 2017-2022
Treat everyone fairly, with dignity and respect	Policies, procedures and working practices are free from discrimination
Promote equality of opportunity for access to our homes and services	Deliver appropriate, accessible and flexible services
Value diversity and talents of all individuals	Create a diverse workforce and inclusive workplace
Take positive action to promote equality	Pro-actively identify barriers to employment opportunities, access to homes and delivering services
Challenge prejudice, discrimination and harassment	Work with partners to prevent and reduce discrimination

In line with our customers’ wishes we have kept the report brief and concentrated on citing practical examples of meeting equality principles and objectives. Numbers are rounded up where appropriate and information is presented in a way that protects individual identity. Figures are based on proportion of information provided by tenants on a voluntary basis.

[Click here](#) to see our latest Equality and Diversity Statement and Delivery Plan that is integral to SCH’s wider Delivery Plan so that our approach to equality and diversity is embedded in everything we do.

We welcome your views about this report. Please tell us if you want it in large print, audio or want it explained in alternative languages by [clicking here](#).

Contact us for more information

[Click here](#) to contact us by internet or to send an email.



Solihull Community Housing – the company

Solihull Community Housing (SCH) was set up in 2004 to manage over 10,000 Council homes across Solihull on behalf of Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (the Council). We are the largest provider of affordable housing in the Borough.

We let empty homes, support people who are or may become homeless, keep homes and estates repaired and well maintained, deal with anti-social behaviour, collect rent and service charges, give advice on money management and help people to live independently.

SCH is governed by a Board of 12 who direct our work. We employ 286 people, led by the Chief Executive, Chief of Assets and Business Development and Chief of Operations.



Solihull – the place and community

Geography

Solihull is close to Birmingham, Coventry and Warwick. A large part of Solihull's 69 square miles is designated as green belt, including 1,300 acres of parks and open spaces. It has excellent public transport connections including the West Midlands' motorway network, rail network and Birmingham Airport.

Solihull is a broadly affluent Borough in both regional and national contexts, characterised by above-average levels of income and home ownership and a high proportion of residents (50%) classified as belonging to the Prosperous Suburbs socio-demographic classification. However, there is a significant prosperity gap in the three main areas where SCH operates: Chelmsley Wood, Kingshurst & Fordbridge and Smith's Wood where there is a greater proportion of socially rented housing, less green space per head, relatively higher population density, higher levels of deprivation and below average income levels.

Population

The 2011 Census found Solihull as having 206,674 residents across 86,100 households. 99.2% of people live in established households and 0.8% in communal institutions. The key findings from the Census are summarised below.

Gender

51% of residents are women and 49% are men.

Age

19% of Solihull's residents are aged under 15, 62% are aged between 16 and 64, 10% are aged between 65 and 74 and 9% are aged 75 and over. The average age of the Borough's population is 42, the highest compared with other West Midlands Boroughs. Interim population projections indicate that by 2021 around 22% of local residents will be aged 65 and over, presenting significant and growing challenges for housing, health and social care.

Ethnicity

Nearly 11% of the Borough's population is from Black and Asian Minority (BAME) groups, almost half of which are Asian. Despite an increase of nearly 50% between 2001 and 2011, Solihull remains less diverse than England and neighbouring Birmingham (42%) and Coventry (26%). There is a growth in younger people within BAME groups, from 15% in 2011 to 17% in recent years. BAME communities are concentrated in Silhill, Shirley East and Olton with smallest numbers found in the South of the Borough (Dorridge, Hockley Heath, Knowle and Meriden). Compared with overall figures for England and the West Midlands, migration has been less significant in Solihull. 7.4% of Solihull residents were born outside of the UK.

Living environment

75% of households in Solihull live in owner-occupied homes and 15% of residents live in social housing. The majority (70%) of Council homes are in North Solihull, an area of high deprivation. The 2011 Census found that 2.7% of households across Solihull are overcrowded, far fewer than across either England (4.8%) or the West Midlands (4.6%). However, 5.8% of households in the three North Solihull regeneration wards (Chelmsley Wood, Smith's Wood and Kingshurst and Fordbridge) report overcrowding.

Family

There are 9,319 lone parent households in Solihull of which 6,136 have dependent children. 41% of the lone parent households with dependent children live in the three North Solihull regeneration wards, where they represent 15.5% of all households compared to 5.2% in the rest of the borough and 7.1% across England.

Health, care and life expectancy

82% of people in Solihull described their health as either good or very good. 12% of people in Solihull provide unpaid care to a family member, close relative or friend.

Life expectancy for both men and women is higher than the average in England, although it is 9.8 years lower for men and 10.3 years lower for women who live in the most deprived areas of Solihull. Estimated levels of adult smokers and smoking related deaths are lower than average for England. Lower than average rates of health-related and mortality issues are found for sexually transmitted infections, TB, people killed and seriously injured on roads and early deaths from cardiovascular diseases as are rates of violent crime and drug misuse. However, rates of new cases of malignant melanoma are worse than average.

Religion

66% of people in Solihull describe themselves as Christian and 22% have no religion. Relatively small numbers of people describe themselves as Muslim (2.5%), Hindu (1.8%), Sikh (1.7%); Jewish (0.25%) and Buddhist (0.2%).



About our tenants

We have 10,972 tenants. At December 2017, their overall profile showed the following characteristics: figures below are from the Nov 2017 performance report and there is very little change from the previous year's figures.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY	
Age	%
18-25	6
26-45	31
46-55	19
56-65	16
66-74	15
75 and over	13
Disability	%
Yes	29
Not disabled	10
Prefer not to say / don't know	61
Race / Ethnicity	%
Asian / Asian British / Indian / Pakistani	1
Black / Black British / Caribbean / African	3
Chinese / Other ethnic group	1
Irish	2
Mixed	2
White British	82
Prefer not to say / don't know	9
Sex / Gender	%
Female	61
Male	39
Religion	%
Buddhist	Less than 1%
Christian	30
Hindu	Less than 1%
Jewish	Less than 1%
Muslim	Less than 1%

Sikh	Less than 1%
No religion	15
Other	2
Prefer not to say	5
Unknown / Not collected	46
Sexual Orientation	%
Heterosexual	45
LGBT	Less than 1%
Other / prefer not to say/unknown	54

Comparison of SCH tenants with the Census information

The 2011 Census found that 19% of people in the Borough are aged 65 and over. In comparison, 28% of our tenants are aged over 65.

Compared with 51% in Solihull, 61% of our tenants are women. This appears to be linked to population trends in older age groups, and a higher proportion of women-headed single parent families living in our homes.

In comparison to 18% of the local population having limited day-to-day activities due to ill-health and disability, 29% of our tenants report at least one form of impairment. The most common physical disabilities are mobility, hearing, eyesight and learning impairments. Mental health disabilities are reported to have increased significantly in recent times.

We believe that around 10% of residents have literacy problems.

9% of our tenants are BAME compared with 11% across the Borough. We believe that the lower number is linked to the higher levels of owner-occupation generally found in the Asian community, which is the largest ethnic group in the Borough.

When making strategic decisions, the above relevant information is considered when appropriate.

Frontline Customer Services

We collect information about our tenants to tailor core services and consider their emerging needs. The information has influenced arrangements for frontline services in a variety of ways, including:

- Ensuring that our customer-facing offices are accessible for people with mobility impairments, offer hearing loops, have wheelchair and family-friendly facilities.
- Continuing to be responsive to less mobile customers by offering home visits.
- Providing tools on our website to make accessible for people who have eyesight and literacy problems or need the information translated into alternative languages.
- Ensuring that our information published for customers meets standards set by the Plain English Campaign and considering the use of Easy Read format where this is requested.
- Promoting digital technology such as email, text messaging and online tools to offer greater choices for customers to access services and setting up Facebook and Twitter accounts to maintain communications between us and residents and between different customers.
- Offering repairs appointments at suitable times, such as avoiding school-run times for non-urgent repairs.
- Introducing a Rent Payments Hotline to make it easier and quicker to pay rent and service charges and installing new kiosks that accept a wide range of payment methods.

Examples of actions taken

Going the extra mile

Mrs S, a long-term resident, has impaired vision. Routine information that we send to customers, such as Rent Statements and quarterly newsletters, are automatically sent to Mrs S in large print format.

Mr J attends regular meetings where tenants help us improve our services. We organise and pay for wheelchair accessible taxis for him.

Estate Assistants, are frequently commended for going beyond their normal duties. Examples include clearing snow in and around a tenant's home so that a customer could use their mobility scooter safely. Staff help parents to negotiate prams and buggies when lifts are being serviced, repaired or replaced. They keep communal areas free from hazards to provide greater protection for people with physical impairments. During inclement weather we contact tenants who are known to be vulnerable or disabled to make sure that they are well, safe, warm and have access to medication and essentials.



Access to homes

Preventing homelessness is a key priority, making every effort for an individual or household to remain in their current home. Key prevention measures include mediation, working with private landlords, providing debt advice and working with external agencies such as health and social care, police and financial institutions. We provide emergency and short-term accommodation for homeless people and those who are deemed to be statutorily homeless. We maintain the Council's Housing Register and work with other social landlords operating in the Borough to allocate empty properties to house people on the Council's Housing Register. Homes are offered to those with the greatest need.

Between April 2016 and March 2017, we prevented 458 households from becoming homeless and accepted 415 cases as statutorily homeless, bringing the total of applicants on the Housing Register to 7353.

Examples of actions taken

Short-term accommodation

Our newly developed Ipswich House facility in Chelmsley Wood provides short-term housing for 25 residents who receive support, advice and guidance from our partners, Fry Housing Trust. The aim is to help residents to manage a tenancy so that they can be moved to permanent homes.

Downsizing

We worked with Mrs D to move into a single person home from a two-bedroom property, resulting in Mrs D having a more manageable rent and freeing up much needed larger properties for families within the Borough.

Moving into a suitable home

Mr and Mrs Y required a ground-floor home due to their increasing mobility problems. Our in-house Occupational Therapist worked with them to find a suitable bungalow that is perfect for their needs with several mobility aids.

Managing tenancies and maintaining estates

As guardians of Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council's properties, our role is to manage tenancies and maintain estates and neighbourhoods.

Examples of actions taken

Tenancy sustainment

We are accredited with the Advice Quality Standard that allows our trained staff to give appropriate debt advice and support them during financial hardship. Our Tenancy Sustainment Team has worked with 178 households to prevent them from losing homes due to financial hardship. The Team has helped tenants reduce fuel poverty by finding cheaper utility deals. We have referred 127 people to Advance Credit Union to set up savings accounts and get cheaper loans, thus safeguarding them against loan sharks and pay-day lenders. Our Money Advice Team secured £1.44m in welfare benefits for 705 tenants, of whom 27 were disabled and were entitled to disability-related benefits.

Supporting victims of anti-social behaviour

Between April 2016 and March 2017, we dealt with 997 cases of varying levels of severity relating to unacceptable behaviour. In response to a significant proportion of complaints relating to noise nuisance, residents can now download the 'Noise App' that allows them to record the noise so that we can investigate the reasonableness and level of noise and take appropriate action.

Creating pleasant estates

Our Street and Block Champions are residents who act as our eyes and ears to help monitor estates and report issues and concerns about services such as communal cleaning, grounds maintenance, dumped rubbish and communal repairs. This helps to create sustainable and safer neighbourhoods.

Wellbeing Service

We offer a range of services to residents to enable them to live independently including access to a Handyperson Service at affordable costs. The services have been developed for people who are house-bound, at high risk of falls, people who are dependent on a non-live-in carer, vulnerable people who live alone or have life threatening medical conditions and people who have been victims of serious crime such as domestic abuse.

Services available include adapting properties to make them more suitable for people with physical disabilities, providing Assistive Technology and Telecare services that support a safer living environment. The Handyperson Service is provided by trained staff who carry out small jobs in and around a home.

The property adaptations service, often referred to as the Home Improvement Service, is provided via the in-house Occupational Therapists, specialist surveyors and Repairs Operatives. They carry out minor adaptations, such as fitting handrails, lever taps and special alarms as quickly as possible to prevent slips, trips and falls and minimize other risks in the home. Since April 2017 99% of minor adaptations have been completed within 5 working days.

The Home Improvement Service also covers major adaptations such as house extensions, walk-in showers and stair lifts for all Borough residents. SCH funds adaptations to Council-owned properties. Home-owners are supported to obtain a means-tested grant from the Council.

Several members of the Wellbeing Team are trained 'Dementia Friends'. They raise awareness of the condition and its impact on sufferers and their families and raise funds for further research and support for organisations such as the Alzheimer's Society.

Examples of actions taken

The Home Improvement Team worked with a family with a child who has cerebral palsy. Physical adaptations included installation of a stairlift and door entry system and an accessible ground floor washroom.

The Team also worked with a family with a severely disabled child to continue to live in their present home and maintain local support networks. Property adaptations included an adjustable bath and a specialist toileting facility.

Our own in-house Occupational Therapists carry out assessments to ensure that disabled customers are matched with the right property so that tenancies are sustained for longer periods and the use of adapted homes is maximised. They worked with a tenant who has a progressive neurological condition affecting her mobility. They found a suitable property and completed adaptations before she moved. The work included an internal lift, wheelchair accessible kitchen and bathroom, ramped access to the property and a carport for an accessible vehicle.



Residents' health and safety

Ensuring the health and safety of our customers, visitors, staff and contractors' health and safety has always been important to us. The range of health and safety work in properties includes servicing and maintaining central heating systems and boilers, testing water where supply is via storage tanks, ensuring that asbestos containing materials are treated or removed, conducting electrical safety checks and carrying out fire safety work.

The tragedy at Grenfell Tower in London in 2017 has especially focussed our minds on fire safety arrangements at 37 high-rise blocks and low-rise blocks designated for older people. We have worked closely with the local Fire Service and reviewed procedures for conducting Fire Risk Assessments.

Examples of actions taken

Reassuring residents

Our staff visited residents in all blocks within a few hours following the Grenfell Fire to reassure residents that their homes were safe. We gave advice on protecting themselves, their families and visitors. The visits were followed up with 'drop in' sessions for people wanting more information and a further communications campaign about fire safety and fire-resistant doors.

Tenants with special needs

A resident was worried about how his wife would leave their flat in an emergency as she has limited mobility. We reassured the couple as we have put in place systems to record and share relevant information with the local Fire Service so that they would have awareness of households where members have disabilities, people who speak alternative languages, people who use oxygen cylinders and those with other issues that might make evacuating the building difficult.

Collecting rent and preventing debt

Universal Credit, one of the key changes to Welfare Reform, was introduced fully in Solihull in July 2017. With the impact of this on our residents and our duty to prevent homelessness across the Borough, our focus remains on working with customers to maximise their income and reduce debt. 'Any Day' Direct Debit payments have been introduced so that residents can choose the date for making regular payments, allowing them to budget more effectively.

Examples of actions taken

Preventing homelessness

Mr D stopped work due to surgery. His claims for welfare support failed as he did not appear to meet the criteria. With the support of the Birmingham Law Centre we helped him get nearly £7.5k in backdated entitlements, enabling him to clear rent arrears and other debts.

Sustaining tenancies

Mr H has mobility and speech impairment and is unable to communicate effectively. His condition appeared to have stopped him from getting the full benefit entitlement. Our work with him resulted in a back-dated welfare claim of nearly £7k. He uses the money for personal support and care.

Reducing poverty

We worked with Coventry Building Society whose staff had collected donated food and essential items for a Food Bank. We distributed food parcels to households in most need, especially families living in temporary accommodation over the Christmas period.

Involving and engaging with customers

Listening to customers

We consult with our customers to help us tailor our services, and recognise that many customers, especially those who work or have young families, cannot attend meetings and other events. We have introduced an online website tool called 'Rate and Review' through which any tenant can give us views and opinions about the quality of our services. The digital tools mean that tenants can use it at a time that best suits them.

Acting on customer feedback

Listening to customers has led to practical changes in the way we work. For example, residents complained about the way we provide special light bulbs for bathrooms. Residents had to travel to Council offices to collect new bulbs, causing difficulty and inconvenience, especially for older, disabled and frailer tenants. Discussions with residents led to a simple solution where SCH holds the particular type of bulbs at local offices.

Make it easier for people to have a say

Our Facebook Page has 1,466 followers and 1,489 likes.

Customer-led scrutiny

By being the 'eyes and ears' and working on behalf of our customers, the 11 members of our Scrutiny Committee hold us to account by monitoring overall performance and carrying out 'deep dive' reviews into our services. Their diversity profile is as follows:

- Two-thirds are women.
- Just over half are aged between 56 and 65 and the rest are aged between 66 and 84.
- 82% describe themselves as White British, 9% are White Irish and 9% are Black British/Caribbean.
- 45% are disabled.

Examples of the Scrutiny Committee's work include reviewing the way we handle complaints, the processes we follow to re-let empty homes and how we deal with fly-tipping. Their work involves speaking with relevant staff, visiting our estates and listening to customers via 'Hot Topic' meetings. In the last year members of the Scrutiny Committee have led "Hot Topic" meetings consulting other customers. Two of the Scrutiny Committee members are also void inspectors and carry out unaccompanied inspections of empty properties that are ready for letting to advise on lettable standards.

The Scrutiny Committee provides the important link between customers and the Board. The Chair of the Scrutiny Committee reports directly to the Board to present findings and recommendations.



Governance

SCH is governed by a Board of 12 members, made up of an equal number of tenants /leaseholders, Councillors nominated by Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council and four independents. Their profile is as follows:

- Collectively, the Board has 50% men and 50% women. 100% of Tenant Members are female. 75% of Council nominees and Independent members are male.
- The age range is between 26 and 84: 42% are aged between 26 and 55; 33% are aged between 56 and 65 and a quarter are aged 66 and over.
- 84% describe themselves as White British; 8% as White Other and 8% as Black Caribbean.
- 17% are disabled.

The formal induction programme for Board Members includes equalities and diversity training, supplemented by an annual refresher and is supported by the Governance Code of Conduct.

No complaints about discrimination, bullying or harassment by Board members have ever been made and no complaints have been made by Board members about such treatment from others.



■ Ashley Lane - Chair



■ Patricia Smith - Vice Chair

Employment

The total number of people employed in December 2017 is 286. Employee profile is shown in the following table.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY	
Age	%
16-24	3
25-34	15
35-44	17
45-54	33
55-64	28
65 and over	4
Disability	%
Yes	2
No / Not specified	98
Race / Ethnicity	%
Black and Minority Ethnic	8
White British	85
Not known / Prefer not to say	7
Sex / Gender	%
Female	44
Male	56
Religion	%
Christian	49
Hindu	Less than 1%
Muslim	1
No religion	17
Other	2
Sikh	Less than 1%
Not known / Prefer not to say	29
Sexual Orientation	%
Heterosexual	69
LGBT	0
Other / prefer not to say/Not known	31

Compared with the employee profile in December 2016, the most notable changes are:

- An increase of female staff by 3%
- An Increase of 3% in the proportion of employees aged below 34
- A decrease of staff aged between 34 and 54 by 5%
- An increase of 3% of staff aged 55 and over.

A quarter of staff work part-time. We do not use zero-hour contracts. Almost half of our workforce has been with us for more than 10 years, and one in 5 people have been in service for between 5 and 10 years.

The range of measures to reflect fairness and inclusion in recruitment and selection include:

- Using the 'Positive About Disability' symbol to encourage applications from people with disabilities, guaranteeing interviews to disabled applicants who meet the minimum job criteria and making reasonable adjustments as necessary.
- Considering religious requirements of shortlisted candidates where we are notified in advance.

Our human resource management practices are designed to:

- Provide support and make reasonable adjustments for disabled employees, for example re-designing work stations and reviewing working patterns.
- Support staff to deal with unexpected personal emergency matters.
- Support people to return to work following long term absence, such as phased and flexible working.
- Regular training for managers to help to achieve consistency of approach and enable sharing and learning.

Examples of what we do as part of day to day work

Volunteer opportunities

Our volunteer, Maura has been with us for four years and helps our Governance Team with administrative tasks once a week. She is a valued member of our team.

Apprenticeships

Following successful completion of training in administrative work, Melanie, placed with us from Skills for Jobs, is now employed by our main electrical contractor.

We have supported seven Apprentices from K2, a local Academy that helps young people aged 16-18 to get work-ready. Two of the young adults have gone on to further studies to obtain qualifications in Building Studies.



Want to know more?

[Click here](#) to contact us by internet or to send an email. Telephone 0121 717 1515 or write to us at Endeavour House, Meriden Drive, Solihull, B37 6BX