# Strategy Matters

**An Analysis of Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Strategies in the Housing Sector**

**November 2023**

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# Equality Diversity & Inclusion Strategy

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategies are important both for driving real change and holding organisations to account.

While EDI policies play an important role in setting guidelines and expectations and ensuring compliance with relevant legislation, EDI strategies go beyond this to foster equality, diversity and inclusion on a much broader scale. They provide a comprehensive framework that guides an organisation's long-term commitment to EDI and helps to shape their culture, values, and practices. Strategies align policies, practices, and initiatives toward a common goal, encouraging a holistic view of EDI that goes beyond the scope of individual policies.

As well as requiring commitment and endorsement from leadership, a well-defined strategy will also encourage employees at all levels to take ownership of diversity and inclusion initiatives. Organisations can foster a culture of collective responsibility by empowering individuals to contribute ideas, initiatives, and actions. Including mechanisms for measuring progress and assessing impact helps organisations to remain accountable through the tracking of their successes and identification of areas that need improvement. A strategic emphasis on ongoing learning and improvement also encourages organisations to adapt in the face of inevitable changing circumstances (be they local, national or global) along their EDI journey.

# Methodology

This study has been conducted to explore the top themes and prevailing approaches to EDI in strategies from housing providers. Through analysis of many of the 'Top 100' housing providers (based on stock-level figures provided publicly by the Regulator of Social Housing), the report identifies the 10 most common themes and organisational approaches. This report aims to build an account of the implementation of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy in the housing sector, allowing organisations, regulators, and stakeholders to share best practices and identify areas for improvement across the sector.

The report analyses the EDI strategies of 42 of the 'Top 100' Social Housing Providers; these organisations having made their EDI strategies publicly available. The remaining providers were contacted, but unfortunately did not respond or provide a strategy document within the publication timeframe of this project.

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In our analysis of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) strategies within the housing sector, several critical findings have emerged, shedding light on the current landscape of EDI initiatives. Our research indicates that while EDI discourse has gained prominence in recent years, there are notable gaps between rhetoric and action.

# Executive Summary

## 1. Lack of Transparency and Accountability:

A concerning revelation is that only 42% of the 'Top 100' housing organisations publish their EDI strategies. This discrepancy between the rhetoric surrounding EDI and the actual dissemination of strategies raises questions about the authenticity of these efforts. Furthermore, a significant proportion of organisations that do publish their strategies fail to include specific timeframes, which undermines accountability and commitment to effecting real change.

## 2. Marketing Over Substance:

These findings suggest that some housing organisations may be using EDI strategies primarily for marketing purposes, rather than as genuine tools to drive tangible transformation. To bridge the gap between intentions and outcomes, it is imperative for organisations to align their EDI efforts with measurable goals and timelines.

## 3. Neglected Dimensions:

Our analysis also reveals shortcomings in addressing certain critical dimensions of EDI. Notably, strategies in the housing sector often fall short in addressing socio-economic (or class) disparities and effectively tackling inequalities. Additionally, tenant engagement and involvement receive inadequate attention in many EDI strategies, potentially hindering the development of inclusive housing communities.
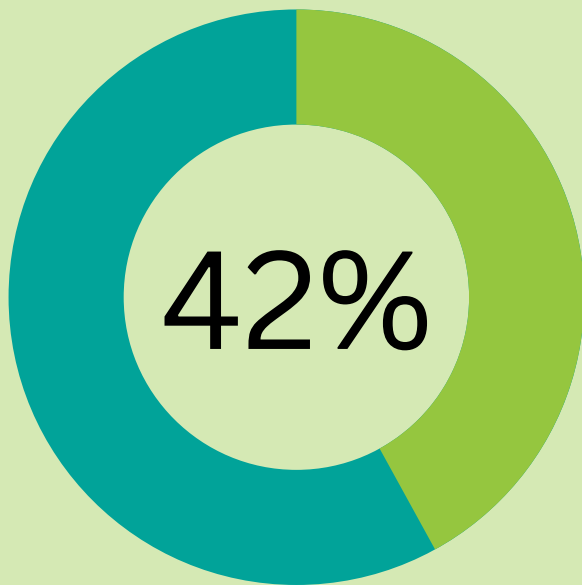
## 4. Race and Housing Provision:

The Better Social Housing Review underscores the significance of race/ethnicity as a predominant factor contributing to poor housing provision. It is crucial that EDI strategies explicitly acknowledge and address racial disparities in housing to drive meaningful change.

## 5. Collaboration for Greater Impact:

Collaborative efforts are imperitive to address complex EDI challenges. To enhance the effectiveness of EDI strategies, we strongly recommend placing a greater emphasis on collaboration and cross-sector working by explicitly articulating and prioritising collaborative initiatives, leveraging collective expertise and resources for more significant and sustainable impact.

The housing sector's approach to EDI strategies reveals both promising steps and notable shortcomings. While some organisations are taking meaningful steps to promote principles of EDI, others may need to re-evaluate their strategies to ensure they are more than just lip service. Achieving genuine and lasting change requires a holistic approach that addresses all dimensions of EDI, with a clear commitment to transparency, accountability, and collaboration.

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# Transparency and Accessibility

## 42%

**Of the 'Top 100' registered housing providers, 42 organisations have published publicly accessible EDI strategies**

The publication of an EDI strategy is not a legal requirement, however in recent years public commitments from organisations to better understand and address issues surrounding EDI have been advocated by leading bodies within the sector, such as the G15 2020 Diversity Pledge, in which signatory organisations committed to improving diversity within board and senior management positions.

Published EDI strategies and public pledges create transparency and commitment to a proactive organisational approach to EDI beyond the legal scope of EDI policies.

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# Top 10 Key Themes

All of the EDI strategies analysed contain organisational goals and aims for improving approaches and representation of Equality Diversity and Inclusion. This section shows the most commonly occurring themes and objectives.
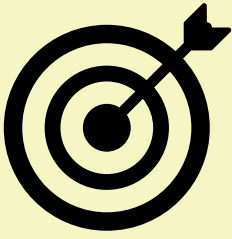
## Top 10 EDI Strategy Themes

| | |
|---|---|
| **Promoting Equality, Diversity and Inclusion** | A foundational commitment by organisations to promoting and instilling values of inclusivity diversity, inclusion and fairness in business culture for colleagues and customers. |
| **Education and training** | Expanding and updating staff training in equality, diversity and inclusion. |
| **Data and analysis** | Seeking to improve the collection and application of EDI data to understand the makeup of staff and customers-allowing for a greater level of evidence based action. |
| **Recruitment** | Improving practices and processes to attract diverse talent to better reflect the community served. |
| **Customer engagement** | Expanding opportunities for customer voices to be heard through customer networks, to better understand the diverse and unique needs of communities |

# Top 10 EDI Strategy Themes

| | |
|---|---|
| **Accessibility of services** | Organisations seek to create services which meet the unique and specific accessibility needs of the community served- i.e. language, age, or disability. |
| **Supporting staff development** | Designing and enhancing staff development schemes to cultivate diverse talent and remove barriers to progress for underrepresented demographics. |
| **Board and leadership diversity** | Improving the diversity makeup of senior roles to better reflect the communities served. |
| **Reporting and tackling discrimination** | Aiming to create a culture which challenges discriminatory behaviour and practices at all levels. |
| **Regular internal reviews of EDI policies** | This represents a long term commitment to review and improvement of policies and practices surrounding equality diversity and inclusion. |

Ranking the top 10 EDI strategy themes in order of prevalence was not practical on this occasion, as the top themes had a similar level of uptake across the strategies analysed. This nonetheless emphasises a general trend in areas of focus for this sample.

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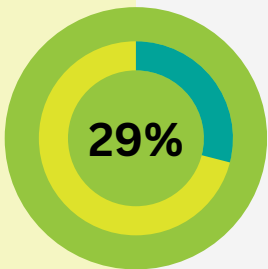
# Targets & Time Frames

The EDI Strategies investigated have displayed a range of approaches to implementing the strategic objectives. Less than a third were found to employ tangible short to long-term targets and measures of successful strategy implementation. Adding tangible targets and timescales allows organisations to envision how they will look and operate if the strategy is actioned successfully.
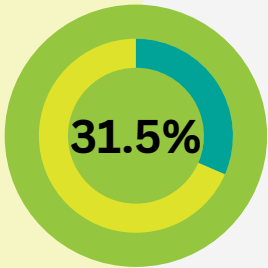
**31.5%** Published EDI strategies with **no** timeframes for measures of success
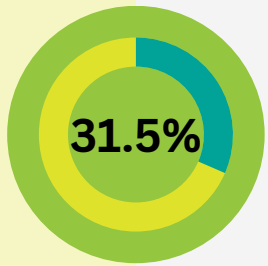
**31.5%** Published EDI strategies with **1-5** year plans

**29%** Published EDI strategies with independent **short**, **medium** and **long-term** measures

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**This section outlines some insightful but lesser adopted features of EDI strategies analysed during the research. The wider adoption of these features by organisations in the sector could improve EDI engagement and outcomes.**

## Bright Insights

## EDI Strategy for All

In the interests of accessibility, a small number of organisations publish a simplified pamphlet/version of their EDI strategy. This improves accessibility, providing an appropriate and **digestible format** for more stakeholders. Additionally, this supports and encourages collective responsibility for EDI at all staff levels, not restricted to senior and board positions.

## External Assurance

**20** of the 'top 100' housing providers have published EDI strategies featuring a commitment to working with external bodies and networks to review and advise on their organisations' EDI practices.

## Diversity Networks

**18** organisations have an objective to create or expand engagement with Staff Diversity Networks (sometimes called Employee Resource Groups or otherwise). Diversity networks can give space for marginalised voices to be heard, this can help organisations to understand the experience of colleagues with diverse identities and from a range of different backgrounds.

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# Recommendations

Based on the findings of this report, these recommendations have been compiled to aid organisations in future development of and engagement around EDI Strategies.

## 01 Transparency

Less than half of the 100 organisations examined in this report have publicly accessible EDI strategies. There is a commitment across the sector to improve equality diversity and inclusion, and wider publication can improve the sharing of best practice and transparency in the actions employed to achieve high standards in EDI outcomes.

## 02 Accountability

The inclusion of realistic targets for implementation of EDI strategy and achieving its objectives can be vital to maintaining accountability. A constructive strategy not only sets out the intended actions but also makes clear who is responsible and by what time scale actions are expected. Strong examples have short, medium and long term implementation targets.

## 03 Engagement

High quality EDI strategies will encourage engagement with the EDI agenda from all levels of an organisation, from board down to the operational level. While senior buy-in and strategic guidance is of course important, in the housing sector in particular it is integral that frontline staff are encouraged to embrace EDI and take ownership over it- to ensure that inclusivity is at the forefront when dealing with customers who may be from marginalised backgrounds.

## 04 Proactivity

EDI strategies produced in recent years have been influenced by or created in response to the increase in societal awareness of Equality and Diversity, as a result of the global events such as Black Lives Matter and the Covid-19 Pandemic. In order for organisations to maintain improvements in EDI sustainably, the long term approach must be proactive as well as reactive. Having awareness of and responding to external events is important, but a proactive strategy seeks improvements on a continued basis- through for instance internal reviews and other EDI work such as external EDI accreditation.

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## Conclusions

This report has shown a snapshot of the sector's current practices and approaches to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy. Organisations feature some clear trends in themes and objectives in their strategies.

However, there are disparities in the strategic implementation of targets and accountability regarding objectives. This identifies the need for transparency and sharing of successful practices for the sector to find out what works best and collectively raise standards. A significant limitation in conducting this research has been the need for more organisations to publicly publish their EDI strategies.

This research has also focused solely on EDI strategy documents, but could be further explored in board and employee surveys to better understand the attitudes and intentions which underpin EDI strategic priorities within organisations.

We hope that this report will provide organisations seeking to create or renew their EDI strategy insight into current content and trends, along with recommendations for building on this.

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