

Sheffield Race Equality Commission 2021 - Civic Life & Communities

Submission by Arches Housing - June 2021

1. Summary

- Arches Housing is a long-established Burngreave based housing association providing homes to a rich mix of residents in diverse communities in Sheffield and Rotherham.
- Housing associations are refocusing and strengthening their role in further improving equality and diversity opportunities in housing following the establishment of the Black Lives Matter campaign.
- There is a great deal of evidence of decades-long discrimination in housing and ethnic minority households continue to be disproportionately affected by poor housing opportunities across Britain.
- Good practice examples included in the paper are the development of high-quality properties that are designed to accommodate a range of cultural preferences, recruitment practices that ensure the best candidates are attracted to roles and strategic priorities that focus on levelling up services for all customers.
- Our ask includes more support to deliver new developments in areas of north Sheffield with diverse communities and a focus on further support and regeneration to areas with low quality mixed tenure housing and with poor urban environments.

2. Background information and context

2.1 Introduction to Arches Housing

Established in Sheffield in 1975, Arches is a housing association that owns and manages 1,300 properties, predominantly in Sheffield and Rotherham. Arches is a Co-operative and Community Benefit Society, is regulated by the Regulator of Social Housing, and at March 2021 had a turnover of £6.6m and assets of £61m.

Arches has always been based in Burngreave and the majority of our stock is still in Burngreave, Pitsmoor, Darnall and other areas of north and north-east Sheffield. Much of the annual £2.5m repairs and reinvestment programme is spent in these areas. We are a developing housing association and took handover of 53 new rented and shared ownership properties in 2020/21, all in Rotherham.

Arches is a member of BMENational, a collective of over 40 mainly BME-led housing associations working in diverse neighbourhoods. From the late 1980's to early 2000's Arches collaborated with three unregistered BME-led housing associations in Sheffield, including Walter Rodney HA. After the unregistered bodies ceased to operate Arches continued to work closely with the diverse local communities in our home area. Up to 2010, and the enactment of government austerity measures, Arches took a lead role in employment initiatives for BAME communities as well as leading on the design of properties sensitive to the preferences of ethnic minority households.

Just over half of our resident households are from a diverse range of ethnic minority communities and our top strategic priority is to improve the consistency and range of services to all our tenants and residents and to improve levels of satisfaction.

2.2 A very brief history of BME-led housing associations

A number of BME-led housing associations were set up in the 1980's and 1990's. Government policy, through the Housing Corporation (the regulator and funder of HA's at the time), was to support and fund the associations as one of the responses to longstanding discrimination in housing, following the Scarman Report and other enquiries. There were a number of attempts to set up a registered BME-led housing association in Sheffield which were, ultimately, unsuccessful. As an established association working in north Sheffield, Arches took a leading role in working to improve housing and other opportunities for ethnic minority households.

The Federation of Black Housing Organisations (FBHO's) was set up as the representative body and the profile and influence of such organisations grew in the 1990's. Reductions in funding and consolidation in the housing sector saw the number of BME-led HA's reduce in the 2000's and following the economic crash of 2008 the profile of the organisations waned further. The FBHO was wound up in 2008 and government austerity measures and the introduction of the four-year rent reduction for housing associations in 2015 further reduced the focus on race equality until the advent of the Black Lives Matters movement.

2.3 Recent activity - Y&H Chief Executives forum

The Yorkshire and Humberside Equality, Diversity and Inclusion baseline survey report was carried out by the Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust and Joseph Rowntree Foundation in spring 2021 and captures examples of good practice and current equality and diversity data from housing associations across the region. The report is due to be launched in June 2021.

3. Evidence of discrimination in Housing

There is a large body of evidence of discrimination in housing against members of ethnic minorities over many decades. The linked page on the BMENational web site gives a summary of discrimination since the end of the second world war. Commissioners will also be familiar with the findings to date of the Grenfell Tower fire enquiry.

<https://bmenational.co.uk/our-roots/>

Inside Housing, the social housing website and monthly magazine is currently running a series of articles entitled 'Racism and Housing'. The linked item is from 3 June 2021.

The item includes the results from recent analyses of housing data showing:

- Data reveals that mixed white and Black Caribbean people are 13% more likely to live in properties with damp problems than their white counterparts. Bangladeshi (10%), Black African (9%) and Pakistani (8%) residents are also more likely to experience damp problems than white households.
- Fuel poverty trends over the past two decades show that the rate at which people from ethnic minority backgrounds experience fuel poverty in England has risen by 22%, while it has reduced by 19% for those from white backgrounds.
- A recent report from Shelter which revealed that Black Britons are 70% more likely to be affected by the country's housing crisis than white people, while Asian people are 50% more likely to be impacted.

https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/insight/the-week-in-housing-racism-in-housing-exists-just-look-at-the-numbers-70902?utm_source=Ocean%20Media%20Group&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=12428249_IH-THE-LONG-READ-3-6-2021-GR&dm_i=1HH2,7EDP5,RE3R80,U1MIT,1

4. Good Practice – What has worked

4.1 Development of new culturally sensitive high-quality properties and refurbishment of existing properties.

Arches has undertaken a number of developments of new properties and the refurbishment of existing properties that have been designed to be universally attractive to all communities and faiths and which take account of changing lifestyles using our BME Housing design matrix.

4.2 Recruitment of board members and officers to reflect our residents' characteristics and the communities we work in.

We have had some success, and know we need to do more, to attract and recruit officers and members that better reflect our customers and communities. We have employed measures such as head hunting, advertising on specialist web sites for all vacancies and improving our web site and recruitment processes to recruit a diverse, high quality range of applicants. One third of the members of our current board are of an ethnic minority background, as are 30% of our staff. In the last 12 months four out of nine officer appointments were from an ethnic minority and we feel this will help to strengthen our engagement with residents from ethnic minorities.

4.3 Strategic prioritisation of levelling up our services.

We undertook a board-led review of our corporate plan in 2020/21 and we have agreed new five-year strategic priorities for 2021-26. Strategic Priority 1 is 'Homes, services, and support that are inclusive, easily accessible and recognise the differing needs and aspirations of our individual customers and their diverse communities.' This priority is driven by the recognition that while we have made considerable progress in improving overall satisfaction with our services there are still significant differences between different customer groups and some ethnic minority customers report lower satisfaction with our services. We have committed to better understand why diverse groups experience different levels of satisfaction and to do our best to remove the disparity.

4.4 Prioritising reinvestment in older properties in our core, home, area.

Arches operates a balanced business model which includes reinvestment in existing homes and the development of new properties to meet housing need. We have undertaken a programme of installing new kitchens, bathrooms, and other improvements to older properties in north Sheffield. While these improvements have been welcomed, we recognise that some of our older properties in areas with a diverse range of tenants do not meet the standards of our newer properties, many of which are in less diverse areas. We want to reduce the gap and have committed to a programme of more extensive improvements to our oldest properties beyond the replacement of kitchens and bathrooms so internally they are closer to the standards of our new properties.

4.5 Connecting with tenants - gifts to local residents during Ramadan 2021.

A colleague suggested the gift of dates to muslim residents, traditionally eaten to break the fast at the end of the day, would show solidarity with local residents in the month of Ramadan. A group of staff visited residents in Burngreave, and the gesture was well received.

4.6 Officers with language skills to engage with non-English speaking customers.

Arches employs a small number of colleagues that speak a range of languages. These staff provide an often informal and valued service to residents that do not speak English and value conversing in their first language for formal and also social purposes.

5. What next – what would help

5.1 The local authority and other partners facilitating the development of quality new homes in north Sheffield.

Arches has worked in partnership with the City Council in the past to develop high quality accommodation in Burngreave including developments at Ellesmere Road, Catherine Street and Woodside Lane. We are keen to do more but without support we will most likely continue to focus investing in new developments outside of the city.

5.2 The local authority and other partners facilitating reinvestment in existing properties and regeneration in multi-tenure areas of north Sheffield.

Some of the poorest quality housing is located in mixed tenure areas. These areas would benefit from co-ordinated approaches such as 'enveloping' works and other initiatives. The energy efficiency and decarbonisation agenda may offer opportunities for broader improvements to properties.

5.3 A long-term solution to sub-standard accommodation and the poor-quality urban environment at Page Hall.

The local authority and partner organisations have, for a considerable time, worked to improve conditions in the Page Hall area. The area continues to suffer a negative reputation and houses some of the most marginalised communities in Sheffield.

Submitted by Arches Housing

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