

Sheffield City Trust

Submission to the Sheffield Race Equality Commission

Context

Sheffield City Trust is a charity founded in 1991 with objectives to operate sport, leisure, and entertainment facilities in the city of Sheffield, for the benefit of its citizens, and to promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing of the citizens of Sheffield.

Venues operated include large-scale entertainment venues, Sheffield Arena and Sheffield City Hall, national and international sports venues, Ponds Forge International Sports Centre, the English Institute of Sport, Sheffield and IceSheffield, and local, community sport and leisure venues, Hillsborough Leisure Centre, Concord Sports Centre, Springs Leisure Centre, Heeley Pool and Gym, sports facilities at Westfield School and golf courses at Beauchief, Birley and Tinsley.

Most of the venues are leased from Sheffield City Council (SCC) or have been built by the Trust on land leased from SCC. SCC also provides revenue funding to support the net cost of operating the venues and some capital funding support in specific circumstances.

Nonetheless the Trust is an independent charity governed by a board of non-executive trustees and led by a six-person senior leadership team. The objects of the charity are set by its Memorandum of Association and policies to deliver them are agreed by the board of trustees and enacted by the SLT.

The venues are operated in a way that makes them as financially sustainable as possible while also aiming to be attractive to all parts of the community. In addition, the Trust operates several programmes in partnership with community organisations and on its own to encourage and enable higher levels of physical activity in those who don't or can't access the venues.

The commercial activities of the Trust such as catering and commercial events are conducted by Sheffield International Venues Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary of the Trust, and the profits are gifted to the charity.

Pre-Covid the Trust employed 1,500 people, half on permanent contracts and half on a casual basis. The contracted staff represented approximately 500 FTE. At present, employment levels are well below that measure, but we are recruiting and would expect to be close to pre-Covid levels by the end of the year.

Current Position

The Trust does collect data from its customers, but this tends to be members and regular users, not occasional users. In addition, data collected on the ethnicity of customers was not regularly collected, either because customers didn't want to provide the information or because staff were reticent to ask. As a result, we held race data on only a small proportion of our customers. Given the requirement of GDPR to only hold data which we will use in the fulfilment of our objects, we have stopped collecting data on the ethnicity of our customers.

Based on old data about 9.5% of users were of Asian background and about 4% were Black. However, we consider these figures to probably be over-stated. We've spoken to leisure trusts operating in other parts of Yorkshire and they, similarly, don't collect data on the ethnicity of users, for similar reasons.

However, we are aware that we don't have a representative user base and when we discuss attendance with people of ethnic minority backgrounds, they tend to tell us that they don't use our venues as they don't see people who 'look like them'.

We are also aware that part of the explanation for this is the ethnic mix of the workforce. All our trustees and SLT members are white and the proportion of ethnic minority people in the total workforce is 11% compared with 16% in the city's population.

The Trust has been taking steps to address the underrepresentation of people from ethnic minority backgrounds in our workforce and customer populations for a few years and several projects are starting to be effective. Some of them are detailed below.

Approaches to Race Equality Duties

The Trust is working with Community Groups, Local Authority Councillors, and others to break down any barriers that exist and embed itself into ethnic minority communities enabling promotion of health, wellbeing, and employment opportunities. We deliver activities and programmes that are sensitive to cultural needs. Through the trust and engagement that continues to be developed, these outcomes and conversations are becoming more frequent which leads to a greater connection to the communities in need.

As an organisation we are signatories of the Race at Work Charter and as such, have the following commitments:

- Appoint an executive sponsor for race.
- Capture ethnicity data and publicise progress.
- Commitment at board level to zero tolerance of harassment and bullying.
- Make clear that supporting equality in the workplace is the responsibility of all leaders and managers.
- Take action that supports ethnic minority career progression.

We recognise we are the start of our journey with the Charter, but we will be implementing actions in all these areas as part of an over-arching Diversity & Inclusion strategy for the organisation over the coming months.

We have recently engaged in an exercise to refresh our employee data on ethnicity, as well as other protected characteristics. We have benchmarked this data against representative data for the city and have found that we are under-represented with regards minority ethnic groups, by 5% overall (our employee data shows 89% white British as opposed to 84% in Sheffield), by 7% for Asian employees (0.9% as opposed to 8% city-wide) and 0.5% for black employees (2.5% as opposed to 3% city-wide.)

As the data we have on ethnicity relates to less than 40% of the total workforce we recognise we have more work to do to obtain representative and meaningful data on ethnicity and other employee demographics in general, and we will be implementing further work in this area over the coming 12 months as well as looking at ways to take action to address any disparities identified.

This includes some of the work we are doing directly with community groups in ethnically diverse areas of the city. Our People and Services Team, for example, are working with Reach Up Youth, a project based in Burngreave, Sheffield aimed at encouraging and enabling members of minority ethnic communities based in S5 to participate more effectively within their local community.

Also, before the pandemic, Managers delivered workshops in ethnically diverse schools, including Fir Vale School and Parkwood Academy, to communicate with students about the type of job opportunities we offer and what we are looking for in potential candidates. We also are increasing the number of apprenticeships and work placements we offer and are promoting these to a diverse audience with a view to creating pathways into jobs with the Trust.

We also encourage our employees to contribute to volunteering opportunities with local community projects, for example Time builders, where our employees give up some time at work and assist in cooking for local groups in communities across the city as well as contributing to other community focused activities.

Overall, the focus of this work is on creating links and removing barriers between Sheffield City Trust and the communities we operate in, and from a recruitment point of view, we recognise the huge benefit of a diverse work force.

We hope to continue and develop these links over the coming months and forge new links with other community groups within the city and region to benefit from their knowledge and ideas for how we can be more inclusive as an organisation and more representative of the communities we operate in.

Causes of Racism and Race Inequality in the Sector

We don't feel qualified to comment on the causes of racism in British society, but we think we can see links between actions by and affecting the Trust and racial inequality.

All the venues operated by the Trust have been starved of investment for over ten years. This is mainly informed by the national austerity agenda, but decisions have been made more locally, even if there was little choice but to cut services. The impact of a lack of investment isn't just that buildings become tired and unwelcoming, potentially conveying a sense of not caring, but the facilities available are largely as designed twenty or thirty years ago; there is no response to a modern agenda.

Furthermore, a lack of investment in public venues and community physical activity translates directly to a widening of the health inequalities that have been exposed and exacerbated in the last 18 months. Sadly, people from ethnic minority background are disproportionately affected by health inequalities.

One major response to austerity and reduced financial support from SCC, year on year, has been many redundancies. These have been significantly weighted toward management positions, which reduces the capacity of the organisation to respond to strategic challenges and to shift it's thinking and performance in key policy areas. Crisis management, perpetuated over a considerable period, coupled with repeated justification for the work of the Trust does not leave the leadership and management space to identify and respond to the need to make the organisation more equal.

The largest message that leaders in leisure could take from the last ten years is that financial efficiency is the most important thing and, while its okay to try things, don't do anything that's going to increase costs.

Sheffield City Trust is not alone, throughout the leisure sector generally, and public facilities in particular, there has been a slow response to the EDI debate and a lack of investment in meeting the challenges. Unfortunately, it's easy to feel more comfortable about your own performance when it benchmarks well against its peers. There has been a lot of movement on this in the sector in the last couple of years (see below), but the racial inequality in health

and wellbeing is sector wide partly due to normalisation of the status quo. There are too many white male CEOs, like me.

Good Practice

The umbrella body for leisure trusts is Community Leisure UK. In the last four years it has transformed itself into a campaigning organisation and taken more of a leadership role. As part of this it has set up a special interest group for EDI which the Trust is part of.

As well as Sheffield City Trust another significant member of Community Leisure UK in Yorkshire is Kirklees Active Leisure (KAL). In Kirklees MBC area they have set up a 'Diversity = Innovation' network which brings public and private sectors together, recognising that organisations with diverse leadership perform better (based on US research) and promoting the EDI agenda.

KAL has been an active part of this for two years and this year appointed an EDI manager. This is a full time, dedicated role and will allow the management space to take the agenda forward. They have appointed a strong manager who will have to navigate the, sometimes contradictory, issues and pressures on the EDI agenda. This is a very positive step, showing that even in times of austerity and with a crisis in public health there are those that are prepared to invest in a strategic, long-term approach to the big issues facing us all.

The Trust has an established relationship with Swim England, who are working in partnership with the Black Swimming Association (BSA) after they acknowledged that the sport is underrepresented at all levels by people from ethnic minority backgrounds. Swim England will be developing programmes and initiatives suited to the unique aquatic needs of these groups. The Trust welcomes the opportunity to operate these programmes in our venues in the future, and further removing barriers and increasing the participation from ethnic minority groups.

Sheffield City Trust is also part of the Culture Consortium in this city. While the cultural sector faces many of the challenges of the leisure sector, it's important to look at the diverging management approaches to a challenge. The Culture Consortium has chosen to focus on one part of the city, Darnall, initially rather than try to deliver huge change across the city all at once. All members of the consortium are actively working in the Darnall community and seeking to learn from that in rolling best practice out in other parts of the city. This approach in many ways emulates the Trusts actions commented on above.

Thoughts on Best Way to Tackle Racism and Race Inequality in Sheffield

Again, we don't feel qualified to talk about racism directly, but we think that the existence of this commission and the approach to it is a good starting point in addressing racial inequality. The best way to build success is to work across organisations, across the whole city. Multi-agency solutions are necessary to see this through.

In trying to address health inequalities in the past we have found that if solutions don't give measurable change in the relatively short-term alternative solutions are sought. Additionally, funding is sometimes allocated for a project which proves successful, but the lack of funding to support continuity and sustainability leads to at best a loss of momentum and often having to re-start the project.

Lasting change will only come from building trust and involving communities in designing solutions. This will require patience and a collective will to see the programme through.

Andrew Snelling, Chief Executive and Mandy Parker, Head of People and Service

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