

**Ongo Partnership Ltd.  
Equality Diversity & Inclusion Steering Group  
Meeting Minutes**

**Date:** Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021

**Time:** 9:30am-12:00pm

**Venue:** Virtual Meeting, MS Teams

**1. Welcome and apologies**

- 1.1 KC welcomed all to the meeting, Dan North is a new starter in the PR team and joined us as part of his induction
- 1.2 Present: Karen Cowan (Chair) (KC), Colin Boyce (CB), Lauren Robinson (LR), Leah Gillott (LG), Pauline Smith (PS), Wendy Wolfe (WW), Matt Kelly (MK), Erica Sanderson (ES), Emma Kershaw (EK), Aaron Simpson-King (ASK), Grace Fixter (GF), Michael Taurone (MT), Paige Whittingham (PW), Rabul Ibrahim (RI), Tanya Brookes (TB), Helen Wright (HW), Claire Sparrow (CS), Jessica White (JW) Dawn Warwick (DW), Nayeema Choudhry (NC), Laura Dodsworth (LD) Richard Morfitt (RM) Stacey Hammond (SH), Michaela Paxton (MP), Dan North (DN), Christine Fowler (CF)
- 1.3 Apologies: Katie Herron (KH), Lisa Smith (LS) Julie Collins (JC) Mazen Abd-Alhak (MAA), Jo Sugden (JS), Tim Mills (TM), Jane Crookes (JC), Kerry Copson (KCo), Becky Johns (BJ), Claire Coyle (CC)
- 1.4 Laura Dodsworth attended on behalf of Lisa Smith, Aaron Simpson-King attended on behalf of Becky Johns and Stacey Hammond attended on behalf of Jane Crookes.

**2. Notes and actions from the previous meeting (Chair KC)**

- 2.1 All agreed minutes were accurate and true reflection of meeting
- 2.2 Actions from last meeting

	<b>Action</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>Progress</b>
1	Request to the police that the Arc be listed as another official Hate Crime reporting building & also consider whether the Viking Centre should be added	KCo	
2	Ensure there is a split between full ASB and Hate Crime figures for Board level separation with Natalie / Janine	KC	Complete 1 <sup>st</sup> July - September 420 ASB cases but only 1 was hate crime, we do not have a major hate crime issue in our area
3	Consider Masters in Diversity	KC/ES	Complete Discussed and agreed that we would consider the move to

	Action	Who	Progress
			Masters in Diversity in the future. Not the right time to move forward with it at the moment. Need to do work on improving representation at senior leadership and board before moving forward with Masters
4	Contact Liesel Dickinson from NLC to enquire about local Disability Forum / group	ES	Actioned but no response back as yet
5	Look at our other buildings becoming recruitment centres and how to make use of the Arc drop-in sessions for feedback next time.	KCo	<p>Complete</p> <p>Ongo roles are regularly promoted to all customers through the Arc, Viking Centre and Cole Street. We've had some recent success with Westcliff residents gaining roles with us – 1 lady gaining a Kickstart role within the Arc café, 1 lady gaining an apprenticeship within Ongo and another man gaining the horticulture apprenticeship with John Cavill. Really happy for them and the team, will also provide ongoing support to them throughout their roles too.</p> <p>For note: Customer Engagement are looking to go out to other venues as well could recruitment come to those drop in as well?</p>
6	Make changes on the EDI action plan	EK	Complete
7	Pick up the accessibility project with MA and discuss the way forward	KC	<p>Complete</p> <p>Chloe Sanderson has provided an update on this and she is leading a project and has started to set individuals up with the training for the software that will be used to manage the web accessibility</p>

	Action	Who	Progress
			for PDF documents on all our websites
8	Look at ways Ongo can communicate to colleagues, especially at induction – what expectations are around keeping each other safe	LR	Complete This will be built in to the Positive Workplace training that all new starters undertake – Lauren has already had discussions with the trainer on building this in. The HR team will produce an e-leaflet to summarise some key points of the training before a new starter gets chance to go on the course which will be added to the induction.  Then in terms of the safe walking routes between office and parking, the HR team suggest putting together some tips around keeping safe as part of the remit of the Women’s Forum.
9	Set up impact assessment session with BJ, JC, MP and ZP (post note - following the meeting ZP contacted ES to confirm she would be happy to be involved in the process as an external critical friend)	ES	Complete

### 3. Yorkshire & Humberside Equality Diversity and inclusion report (Karen)

- 3.1 Karen presented the report from the Yorkshire & Humberside Chief Executives Forum. Housing associations have been asking what more they could do to improve outcomes for Black & Minority ethnic communities to improve EDI within their organisations and across the sector.
- 3.2 The National Housing Federation (NHF) led on this, conducting an EDI insight review survey into housing association staff. The CEO forum commissioned the NHF report to establish a baseline performance on EDI for 22 housing providers in the Yorkshire & Humber region, Ongo being one them.
- 3.3 The following findings of this survey showed that in March of 2021, out of the 22 Housing Associations in the region:
- Most organisations had an EDI forum, group or champion (77%)

- Most were signed up to EDI charters, frameworks of benchmarking schemes (73%), e.g. Disability Confident Employer, Investors in Diversity and HDN- these being the most frequent
- Only a small number felt their organisations boards, leadership teams and workforces were representative in terms of gender and less than half felt they were representative in terms of ethnicity
- Benchmarking data shows that boards and leadership teams tended to be disproportionately older, male, white, non-disabled, relative to the workforce, customer base and population.
- Most organisations are taking steps to improve diversity at board, leadership and workforce levels using positive diversity recruitment practices and some have gender and ethnicity targets in place
- Many organisations report challenges in collecting data such as leaving “no comment”

#### 3.4 Recommendations:

- Organisations to set ambitious targets for diverse representations within Leadership Teams and on boards
- Organisations to adopt policies and practices that work towards delivering on EDI commitments
- Organisations to work to improve the quality and use of data
- Organisations to commit to sharing best practice and learning from across the housing sector
- Organisations to collaborate with organisations across the region

#### 3.5 Questions:

Question	Answer
Out of the 22 Housing Associations where are we ranked roughly?	We are around 10 <sup>th</sup> – it was a 3.5 hour survey to complete so a large piece of work by all Housing associations involved, well done KC

- 3.6 It was suggested that a reminder be sent to teams via managers to remind everyone to update their personal information on the HR portal so we have a real accurate up to date profile of our employees.
- 3.7 Neighbourhood services do not currently have access to the HR portal so within the meeting chat JW informed all that IT are aware of this and are designing a mobile version which is pending HR testing at the moment.
- 3.8 A discussion was held around the NHF new diversity profiling tool. KC to discuss benefits of us making use of it with Annie Akande.

**\*Action\* KC- NHF have a profiling diversity tool, KC to liaise with Annie Akande to see if this is worthwhile.**

#### **4. EDI Action plan update (Karen)**

- 4.1 Karen gave background to the group on the EDI action plan and provided updates:
- 4.2 **EDI1.5** The Leaders in Diversity survey feedback highlighted that some people were favoured when recruited so the assessor said we needed to look into this. KC reassured all when looked into, all recruitment follows the approved process. If a member of the interview / recruitment panel knew any applicant on a personal level or who could potentially be favoured they would not be involved in the process. If anyone wanted to question an appointee then formal notes of the interview could be shown as evidence and if there were issues around this they would be addressed as and when presented. HR have not been approached about this issue, it's usually something brought up in anonymous surveys.
- 4.3 **EDI1.6** Survey tenants to gain insight into the fairness of the organisation in respect of the protected characteristics: There has been little movement on this so far as actions need to be planned in but WW is going to be doing some work with Dawn Hill to include this kind of information within current surveys.
- 4.4 **EDI1.7** Partners and suppliers to demonstrate a commitment to EDI, in line with our own policy: John Baker is going to be doing some training with managers and some specific teams in what we expect of our contractors in terms of fairness. Contractors will then be monitored at contract management meetings throughout the year.
- 4.5 **EDI4.2** Implement the HDN board trainee programme to ensure board succession planning takes into account underrepresented groups: Lincolnshire Housing Partnership and Acis have now had approval to join the HDN board development programme with us so we can progress this action.
- 4.6 **EDI4.9** Advertise all vacancies by targeting and sharing information via local or National Diversity Networks by including positive statements within job adverts: This can be moved to 100% complete from the current 50% as we have really improved and done all we said we would and there is no more we can do. We will continue to monitor but at this moment in time happy to complete to 100%.
- 4.7 **EDI6 Engagement:** This is all about awareness raising such as Black History Month. LG has done a great events awareness calendar which EK will circulate. LG is currently working with RM on hidden disability awareness. We would really appreciate some more volunteers for things such as upcoming Diwali and events such as Armistice Day and Christmas. In our action plan we also have International Men's Day. JW is in conversations within the Health and Wellbeing Group so we have some cross over, JW will feed back to us regarding International Men's Day.
- 4.8 EK has covered Octobers Black History Month with digital screen savers for the weeks over BHM as well as posters around Ongo HQ.

4.9 All the group were invited to have a think about what we want to do next year and to volunteer ideas around events awareness.

**\*Action\* JW to feed back to EDI group around work on International Men’s Day from the Health and Wellbeing Group**

**\*Action\* WW to discuss with Dawn Hill around incorporating information of fairness around protected characteristics in current surveys**

**\*Action\* EK to circulate events calendar to EDI group with minutes**

**\*Action\* EK to update action plan on Pentana**

**5. Open Discussion – Bridging the diversity gap - why is inclusive leadership so important?**

5.1 ES facilitated this session to discuss in an open discussion to consider the following things:

- Why is inclusive leadership important?
- What can our leaders do to help foster inclusive leadership?
- What are the top five things to help us get an inclusive leadership?

5.2 A lengthy discussion was held around appearances, e.g. tattoos, piercings, hair colours, extreme body changes like tongue splitting and nose removal and alienating people based on first judgments & impressions. The group discussed what is professional and that ‘professional’ is individual to everyone. It is more important to have the core values of respect, loyalty, support, being a good listener.

5.3 ES rounded up the open discussion with, professionalism is an attitude and to repeat another members quote, “Aspire to inspire, inside and out of work”. It is the way you come across in your attitude not how you look on the outside and being an inclusive leader. Agreed that what we can do is listen to understand and educate ourselves. Not having a hierarchy culture, we all bring experience and perspectives, it doesn’t matter what job role we do. We can include everyone in the conversations we have at Ongo. Ongo are very good at inclusion but we need to do more listening so we can make informed choices and decisions.

5.4 Questions:

Question	Answer
Is this going to be raised and discussed at leadership level?	KC to ask ELT if they would like a group discussion at that level

**\*Action\* KC to ask ELT if they would like a group discussion around inclusive leadership at leadership level**

**Ten minute break**

**6. Impact assessment quality check- Annual Leave Policy (Erica) Changes to the Customer Service Directorate (Becky)**

- 6.1 Erica updated the group that the annual leave policy impact assessment was carried out as part of the full review in the focus group, it was evident that people felt it was not fair around different leave allowances being allocated dependant on when they were employed, for example a new starter joining now would only receive 25 days with no opportunity to increase. A proposal was made that the people who only receive 25 days would be able to gain 1 additional days leave per year for 5 years however we cannot move forward with this as this is all part of the pay and benefits review, this is currently taking place with an external company reviewing all our benefits, annual leave entitlement, pay and benchmarking us against other housing associations.
- 6.2 Christmas leave was also discussed around colleagues who do not celebrate Christmas however celebrate at other times of the year. We will now refer to this period of time as “agreed company shutdown” if the business closes between Christmas and New Year.
- 6.3 All agreed and happy to sign off quality check for impact assessment.

Question	Answer
Would the proposal apply to 2 year or non-fixed permanent contracts?	We are unsure as yet so LR will get back to us on this.
If someone who has worked here for a long while on the 25 day allowance would they jump straight to 30 days?	
When is this report due and when will we know?	Timescale - we hope to have this ready for April 2022, as soon as the report is ready it will go to board and whatever outcome it will reflect in April 2022 pay.

- 6.4 Erica Sanderson, Becky Johns, Jane Crookes and Michaela Paxton carried out an impact assessment on the changes to the customer service directorate which aims to improve the customer experience for our tenants and customers. A lot of consultation took place ASK gave the group a whistle-stop tour of the changes to the service, we are getting a new IVR system on the phones with more detailed options and specialised operators to give a more tailored experienced.
- 6.5 There was some impact identified around disability for people with visual impairments and the IVR but there is always going to be a real person available also. In the pods at Ongo House HQ reception area there is going to be an iPad with access to Microsoft Teams for tenants and customers.
- 6.6 All happy with quality check and signed of impact assessment.

**\*Action\* LR to check around annual leave allowances if all colleagues will increase to 30 days and how it will be given and to whom**

**7. Updates from other groups**

**-HDN Northern Diversity Forum 14/09/21 (Erica)**

**-NHF Chief Executives and Chair's EDI Forum (Erica)**

7.1 Erica presented her feedback after attending the HDN North Network meeting:

- 7.1.1 The CIH have introduced a new set of tailored characteristics of the modern housing professional that help to self-reflect and guide individuals on their professional journeys.
- 7.1.2 Eidos Consulting, specifically, Debbie Larner, who worked on the development of the standards at the CIH whilst in her role there, and Paul Marston shared their new project with the group. They have created and completed a self-assessment with some Housing Associations (HAs) on the standards to establish what training / development is required for HAs. The next step is to pull together a working group for the housing sector to understand the types of learning to inform the development of the e-learn on the standards. They will be working with the HDN on the rollout of the programme when it's developed.
- 7.1.3 A network member shared what South Yorkshire Housing Association (SYHA) have been doing around addressing the issue surrounding use of the term "BAME". She agreed, whilst there is no right or wrong, the term is deemed amongst her colleagues as derogatory and something else should be used. SYHA have consulted across the organisation and have agreed they will replace the term BAME with racially and ethnically diverse. This removes the negative "minority" reference, which causes individuals to feel other'd.
- 7.1.4 Two colleagues from Penningtons Law Firm shared their free policy template for HDN members to access when reviewing their EDI policy. The template is aligned to the Equality Act 2010 and also the new NHF Code of Governance. HDN will share the template with members and Erica will use this template in the next review of the Ongo EDI Policy
- 7.1.5 The HDN Health and Wellbeing Network will take place on the 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2021. Jo-Anne in HR will be attending representing Ongo.
- 7.1.6 There will be a Black History Month webinar – In conversation with Louis Julienne – on 14<sup>th</sup> October. Information will be shared on this.
- 7.1.7 The HDN Autumn Conference is being held in Birmingham on the 18<sup>th</sup> October 2021. Erica and Karen are booked to attend
- 7.1.8 A new Policy Officer at the HDN is busy updating the webinar programme. Coming up in the next few months:
  - Refugees
  - Homelessness

- Black History Month
- Tackling Islamophobia
- Tackling Transphobia

## 7.2 **NHF Yorks & Humberside Chief Execs & Chairs Forum 14/09/21 (Erica)**

7.2.1 Erica attended this virtual meeting with Steve Hepworth and our Chair of the Group Common Board, Bob Walder, launching the Yorkshire & Humber EDI Baseline Survey Report.

7.2.2 The report was developed following research carried out with 22 HAs in the region completing a survey and 18 providing benchmarking data. All in all, the report was really positive, bringing with it 5 recommendations for social landlords to improve EDI across the sector. The first three being what organisations can do internally and the last 2 about how organisations can collaborate across the sector. A few things that were noted:

- Really important to publish race and disability pay gap information
- Really strong consensus that HAs set targets for gender balanced boards and leadership teams to ensure representation of racially and ethnically diverse colleagues and those with disabilities. Our Board have been really strong on not setting targets, although we can't revisit that now, it may be worth raising as part of the annual EDI report that is shared with the Board and including the recommendation in this report as a push to reconsider.
- We don't have representation of racially and ethnically diverse colleagues in Leadership roles or on the Board, which impacts on our colleagues' aspirations to develop and grow into those roles. It's important to have role models. White, non-disabled men and women have lots of people to look up to who are 'just like me' in those roles which is great but what about our colleagues who are disabled or who are different races / from different cultures?
- There were discussions around having EDI strategies in place. At Ongo, we have the roadmap in place, which shows where we are and where we're going. The EDI action plan will link to the roadmap to make sure we achieve the aims
- A recruitment consultant recommended that organisations consider the wording they put out on their job adverts. She said to avoid generic statements such as 'We welcome applications from everyone, particularly those from underrepresented communities and disabled people' for example. The reason behind this is that research suggests it actually puts people off because people who 'fit into the box' could be seen as a 'token' or 'to tick a box'. She recommended that the language we use in these statements is considered and includes a 'why' and detail what the issue is. So be open and honest that "we are underrepresented at LT and / or Board by racially and ethnically diverse colleagues, disabled colleagues and younger colleagues; we want to change this to

make our leadership more inclusive and to give our people and customers leaders they can relate to and wo inspire them'

- The final point was that colleagues in the group need to consider this report and discuss at their Leadership / Board levels and treat the recommendations as catalysts for change and, in turn, manage as a change project within organisations. The priorities for collective action as a group were:
  - Consider the data we hold, why we hold it, what we do with it and does it add value?
  - Set ambitious targets
  - Have a dedicated EDI Officer. This was cited as being key to ensuring embedding and continuous improvement within the organisation in respect of EDI

**8. AOB – N/A**

**9. Reflection of today's meeting (all)**

9.1 Everyone agreed today's meeting went well and we will continue holding our EDI group via Microsoft teams the majority of the time for value for money purposes. However the next EDI group will be a blended meeting, so if you anyone would like to attend in person they are welcome to or instead join via teams.

9.2 All agreed agenda items are suitable and we will alternate between guest speakers and large group discussions.

9.3 If anyone wants something adding to the agenda just get in touch with EK ES or KC.

9.4 KC thanked everyone for great attendance and input and closed the meeting.

**\*Action\* EK to look into booking suitable venue and re send team link for Decembers meeting.**

**10. Date and time of next meeting**

**Thursday December 16<sup>th</sup> 2021 blended meeting between Microsoft Teams and a meeting room TBC**

## 11. Actions

	Action	Who	By when?	Progress
1	KC- NHF have a profiling diversity tool now, KC to liaise with Annie Akande if this is a worthwhile.	<b>KC</b>	ASAP	COMPLETE Response from Annie - having spoken to Erica and Mo on this, we did not feel that the tool was of use to us just yet. Mo has said she is not in a position to provide the required data and at present they are not sharing the analytics with us. So our thoughts on this was that we want to collate the data but just not at present
2	WW to discuss with Dawn Hill around incorporating information of fairness around protected characteristics in current surveys	<b>WW</b>	ASAP	Details have been included in the STAR response plan that Dawn is working on
3	JW to feed back to EDI around work on Interational Mens Day from the Health and Wellbeing Group	<b>JW</b>	December's meeting	Helen Pearce circulated some information on Yammer for the wider business, but in terms of doing anything further Helen mentioned struggling for capacity during November and has plans to share the workload among other group members next time around
4	EK to circulate events calendar to EDI group	<b>EK</b>		COMPLETE
5	EK to update action plan on Pentana	<b>EK</b>		COMPLETE
6	KC & ES to do a group discussion around inclusive leadership at leadership level	<b>KC/ES</b>		COMPLETE Response being that this is something they would like to consider at a later stage

	<b>Action</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>By when?</b>	<b>Progress</b>
7	LR to check around annual leave allowances if all colleagues will go to 30 days leave and how will it be given and to whom.	<b>LR</b>		This will be confirmed as part of the pay and benefit review outcome which is due to be communicated around March/April 2022 once all agreed
8	EK to look into booking suitable venue and re send team link for December's meeting.	<b>EK</b>		COMPLETE/CANCELLED