

FOR DISCUSSION	AGENDA ITEM: 6.4
Meeting:	PEOPLE AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
Date of meeting:	1 MARCH 2023
Title:	Newlon's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Framework
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report updates the People and Governance Committee about work on Newlon's draft EDI Framework.

Summary of significant risks

Good EDI practices within organisations are vital for the sustainability of business, and to maintain and improve resident service provision. Newlon continues to take all aspects of EDI seriously and to consider EDI issues when developing any policies, procedures and practices.

Newlon's current EDI framework (Reflections) is due for renewal. An effective EDI framework impacts on staff retention, motivation and recruitment, and reduces the likelihood of potentially damaging legal challenges.

Newlon has a diverse workforce, with 65% of staff recording themselves as BAME, and 58% of staff as female. This is at all levels from Executive and throughout the organisation. This is reflective of our residents, and communities in which we operate. It does however mean that our EDI challenges can be somewhat different that other Housing Associations based elsewhere.

There are currently fewer women on Newlon's Board and we remain mindful of gender diversity at Board level in recruitment of any new Board members.

Recommendations

The Committee is invited to comment on the attached draft EDI framework (Appendix A), and approve plans for staff and residents to now be consulted on the framework (Section 2)

1 BACKGROUND - NEWLON'S EDI FRAMEWORK 'REFLECTIONS' (2019 to 2022)

- 1.1 Good EDI practices within organisations are vital for the sustainability of business, and to maintain and improve resident service provision. Everyone stands to benefit when we embrace and value the diversity of thoughts, ideas

and ways of working that people from different backgrounds, experiences and identities bring to an organisation. It:

- Helps people grow and learn.
- Tackles underutilisation of skills by enabling people to reach their full potential.
- Improves decision-making.
- Boosts engagement and innovation.
- Enables businesses to better meet the needs of a diverse resident base.

1.2 Newlon's EDI framework for 2019 to 2022, called 'Reflections', aimed to ensure Newlon's policies, procedures and practices relating to our workforce, residents, and contractors and suppliers, reflected and promoted good practice throughout.

1.3 The Framework set out our approach to equality, diversity, and inclusion and applied to all Newlon staff, resident involvement, customers and stakeholders, service delivery and procurement. It focused our equality, diversity, and inclusion activity around three different domains:

- As an organisation that values our staff.
- As a provider of services.
- Through partnerships.

1.4 The Framework was well received, and was used as a basis for organisation-wide training undertaken in partnership with GGT consultants. The consultants were impressed with the Framework.

1.5 Actions were set against each domain and developed with each relevant area to reflect their EDI actions already in place. Progress each year was reported to the People and Governance Committee, and Resident Services Committee against the Action Plan.

1.6 Newlon's current position, and the progress made over the last three years would form the basis of a Foreword by both the Chair of the Board and Chief Executive Officer at the front of the new Framework (see paragraphs 2.11 and 2.12)

2. NEWLON'S NEW FRAMEWORK

2.1 In considering a new framework a review of other organisations' Frameworks was undertaken, including a number of Housing Associations.

2.2 Most adopted the 'three theme' approach in one form or another, looking at staff, customers/ residents, and partnerships. This approach worked well for the previous Framework and it is recommended it is retained for the next three years.

2.3 However it was apparent that some organisations operated in a very different environment, and had a very different culture than Newlon (photos of the workforce with only one or two BAME staff visible, signing up to the Halo Agreement which stated that the workforce champions the right of staff to

embrace Afro-hairstyles, where hair texture and style have no bearing on an employee's ability to succeed).

- 2.4 Newlon has a diverse workforce, with 65% of staff recording themselves as BAME, and 58% of staff as female, and this is at all levels from Executive and throughout the organisation. This is reflective of our residents, and in the communities in which we operate. It does however mean that our EDI aims and actions are somewhat different from the EDI challenges faced by other Housing Associations based elsewhere. There are currently fewer women on Newlon's Board and we remain mindful of gender diversity at Board level in recruitment of any new Board members.
- 2.5 However, despite our rich staff mix, we can do more to celebrate and embrace diversity in all its forms. The Staff Consultation Forum have taken on this challenge, and are running an 'International lunch' where staff are encouraged to bring in favourite dishes, and we are developing an EDI calendar where we can publicise EDI events such as Pride, and religious days and festivals from a range of religions.
- 2.6 As well as gender and ethnicity, we could provide more support for LGBTQ+ staff and residents, increasing LGBTQ+ visibility, and providing staff training to improve understanding of LGBTQ+ lives. For instance in one survey undertaken by a HouseProud one in five gay men reported modifying their home in some way (e.g. moving pictures or books) to hide their sexual orientation from visiting repair operatives or housing officers.
- 2.7 From our data there also appears to be under-reporting of disability. Newlon supports reasonable adjustments, and flexible working, and there would appear to be more staff who could record themselves as having a disability than do so. The reason for this needs to be explored.
- 2.8 Newlon has undertaken a series of 'Safe Space' discussions, but this did not appear to have a great uptake, although informal groups on Workspace have had greater traction. Other support mechanisms need to be explored. Specific networking/support groups can be quite difficult in such a small organisation, and staff have reported they feel more comfortable in informal discussions with friends and colleagues, rather than a formal setting. Specific issues can be raised at the Staff Consultation Forum, weekly well-being discussions with line managers, or with HR.
- 2.9 EDI issues for residents and partners are being mainstreamed, with a greater understanding of the intersectionality issues, for instance in dealing with reports of anti-social behaviour issues.
- 2.10 Newlon's Learning and Development platform has a range of training modules linked to EDI which staff and managers are required to undertake.

Foreword

- 2.11 It is suggested that the Framework has a Foreword from the Board Chair and Chief Exec to show commitment from the Board and senior management. This

can also be used to draw out our current position and the different challenges Newlon faces in taking EDI forward.

2.12 This could include:

- Reference to where we are now (65% BAME, and 58% female, from Board across all levels, and staff range from 17 to 70).
- Being reflective of the communities we serve.
- Needing to do more, in terms of recognising diversity in other ways, and celebrating our different cultures, and life experiences of our staff.
- Support other aspects of diversity, by recognising and celebrating religious days and festivals, and having EDI calendar of events, including Pride Month, Black History Month, Positive Aging, Disability History Month, International Women's Day.
- Exploring partnerships and accreditation such as the Diversity Network Accreditation or HouseProud.

Format

2.13 Please note that, before publishing, the draft will have additional formatting and photos to bring it more alive. This will be done after the text and content are agreed, as this will effect where pictures are placed.

3 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 The People and Governance Committee are asked to comment on the draft EDI Framework at Appendix A, before it is used to consult with representatives of staff and residents.