



Solihull
Community Housing
Shaping our neighbourhoods



Meeting the Equality Duty

January to December 2021

(Report published March 2022)

1 Introduction

Solihull Community Housing (SCH) is the largest social housing provider in Solihull. We are proud to set out how we champion equality, diversity and inclusion in everything we do: the way we are governed, deliver homes and services and work with our customers.

We manage around 10,000 tenanted homes, 1,200 leasehold properties and 5,000 garages on behalf of Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC). We also deliver SMBC's statutory duties on housing options, manage the Council Housing Register, deal with emergency homelessness and tackle anti-social behaviour across the Borough.

Most of the homes we manage are in North Solihull, mainly in the three wards of Chelmsley Wood, Kingshurst & Fordbridge and Smith's Wood, which have relatively high population density, less green space per head and lower educational attainments compared with the picture across the whole borough. Low employment rates and lower income are notable. Although the Solihull Place Survey 2020 found that 89% of residents are more satisfied with the local area as a place to live compared with 76% across England, the satisfaction rate drops to 80% for residents in North Solihull.

SCH is fostering a culture where everyone contributes to meet our vision to **create better homes and thriving communities**.

We are governed by a Board of eight directors and employ around 310 people. As a social landlord, SCH is required to meet the Consumer Standards set by the Regulator of Housing. We are also expected to operate by the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Code.

2 Commitment to creating an inclusive society

Equality is part of the way we work and deliver services to ensure that everyone is treated fairly, and that diversity is valued.

The principles of fairness, equality of opportunity, diversity and inclusion are embedded in our strategies, policies and procedures. We do not tolerate discrimination, bullying or harassment. We routinely check the accessibility of our services, homes and jobs and tailor services to meet individual circumstances whenever possible.

We positively embrace and celebrate diversity and promote an inclusive culture. Everyone at SCH and partners with whom we work are expected to abide by our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy.

The Equality Act 2010 protects people from discrimination on nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. The 'Public Sector Equality Duty' requires public sector organisations to:

- a. **Remove or minimise disadvantages** suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.
- b. **Take steps to meet the needs of people** from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.
- c. **Encourage people from protected groups to participate** in public life and in any other activity where participation is disproportionately low.
- d. **Annually publish relevant and proportionate information** demonstrating compliance with the Equality Duty.
- e. **Set specific and measurable equality objectives** every four years.

3 Summary of key achievements in 2021

We summarise actions completed to deliver SCH's Annual Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Plan for 2021/2022.

Actions impacting customers

1. 'Equality checked' how our digital access portal, 'MySCHAccount,' impacts on vulnerable people and those who cannot access the internet.
2. Supported SCHape (customer Scrutiny Panel) to scrutinise the accessibility of SCH's Digital Offer for a diverse range of customers.
3. Worked with diverse customers to improve our website.
4. Introduced an Inclusive Services Register so that we can tailor and fast-track essential services for vulnerable customers.
5. Ensured that the way we deliver key services reflects fairness and inclusions.
6. Introduced a 'Reasonable Adjustments' policy to make it easier for vulnerable customers to complain.
7. 'Equality checked' the Customer Engagement Strategy through Fair Treatment Assessment.
8. Recruited diverse members for SCHape to reflect the diversity of our customers.
9. Delivered diversity training to SCHape members to support the reflection of fairness and inclusion scrutiny processes.
10. Ensured that the voices of diverse customers are heard through the routine 'STAR' surveys.
11. Worked with SMBC to develop our approach to supporting victims of domestic abuse.
12. Continued to work with local partners to prevent and deal with anti-social behaviour.
13. Carried out weekly estate inspections to ensure resident safety.

14. Carried out regular health and safety checks in homes and communal areas to ensure resident and community safety.
15. Completed a review of the Fire Policy to ensure resident safety.
16. 'Equality checked' the impact of the proposals for redesign of the Kingshurst Regeneration on diverse communities.
17. Worked with SMBC to carry out a comprehensive review of the Home Assistance Policy and carry out property adaptations for disabled customers across the Borough.
18. Reflected the views of the local community in the regeneration plans for the Kingshurst Regeneration Area.
19. Worked with residents affected by the plans for the Kingshurst Regeneration Area to find alternative homes and rehouse them.
20. Worked with local partners to deliver an Apprenticeship Programme and offered short-term contracts to support employability.
21. Supported tenants and others to reduce debt and fuel poverty and introduced a furniture recycling project.
22. 'Equality checked' processes for procuring work from outside contractors.
23. Worked with SMBC to review the Housing Allocations Policy.

Actions impacting employees

1. Reviewed arrangements for hybrid working under the Blended Ways of Working Policy.
2. Developed a 'Passion in People' policy to provide for a comprehensive approach to workforce engagement and ensure employee well-being.
3. Introduced 'Resolution Policy' to ensure speedy and appropriate responses to dispute resolution in the workplace.
4. Reflected fairness and inclusion in employee surveys.
5. 'Equality checked' employment policies when developing new policies and reviewing existing ones.

4 Covid-19 pandemic

Throughout the period covered in this report (January 2021 to December 2021) the Covid-19 pandemic has continued to challenge the way we operate.

We are proud that our people, stakeholders and partner agencies have continued to work together to support our residents and vulnerable people across the Borough. The crisis has strengthened relationships within SCH, SMBC, the local community and community agencies.

Lockdowns resulted in staff working in an agile way to respond to the needs of our customers. At times, our repairs service was restricted to emergency repairs. Support for vulnerable residents through the well-being and care teams who worked with partners and other stakeholders continued to protect rough sleepers and the street homeless from the virus.

Staff embraced home working and flexible working arrangements to meet the challenges of our business and deal with personal circumstances, such as home schooling and supporting family members who had contracted the Covid-19 virus.

We operated in line with government guidelines and are now returning to some levels of normality, thereby enabling us to catch up with non-emergency repairs and re-letting empty homes. The journey described in this report reflects our commitment to ensuring safer and Covid-free environments for residents and staff.



Remote working

In line with government guidance, our offices remained closed to visitors during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown periods with many staff continuing to work remotely. Employees have been provided with tools and technology to deliver services and work collaboratively and continue interaction through virtual meetings. We are especially proud of our Asset Management Team members who continued to provide the invaluable emergency repairs service. We are equally proud of our Customer Contact Centre Team, who continued to deal with telephone calls and handle frontline enquiries.

All SCH workplaces continued to comply with the Government's Covid-Secure requirements including enhanced cleaning regimes, provision of protective equipment, gloves and hand-sanitisers. Staff who visit residents in their home have regular briefings about controls such as seeking information from customers before entering a property, social distancing, wearing of face coverings and other protective equipment.



Customers continue to be encouraged to contact us via the 'MyAccount' portal. The telephone Contact Centre has been prioritising calls in three key areas: emergency repairs, wellbeing service and homelessness. In December 2021, 33% of our tenants and leaseholders (2,870) had registered to use 'My SCH Account'. They can use this online service to check their rent account, download rent statements and pay charges. They can also report repairs, book and

cancel repairs appointments and review and update their personal details.

Customers can access information in different formats such as large print, audio, Braille and other languages and via interpreters. Our newsletters routinely inform readers about the availability of information in alternative formats and languages.

We use plain language in all our publications to support people with literacy difficulties and consider the use of Easy Read format where this is requested.

Providing a link to 'Google Translate' on our website enables users to translate information in more than 50 languages.



Where we know a customer's needs, we automatically send routine information such as rent statements in different formats where customers' preferences are known.

Our offices have accessible facilities and portable hearing loops.

Although home visits are currently limited, they are offered to customers who cannot come to our offices. We also allow more time for disabled and older people to

get to the front door and offer choices for repairs appointments, for example when people have hospital appointments or to avoid school-run times.

5 Homelessness: Prevention & Emergency Housing

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 requires local authorities to provide advice and assistance to people who are threatened with homelessness or are homeless. In 2021 we provided advice and assistance to 473 people to prevent homelessness and provide temporary accommodation.

Duty to prevent homelessness

Under the 'prevention' duty, we have worked with 244 households to stop them becoming homeless. This includes working closely with other agencies such as St Basil's Solihull to give advice and support to 16–24 year olds without dependents and the specialist Rough Sleeper Co-Ordinator employed by SMBC. Other key partners with whom we work to

prevent and relieve homelessness include SMBC's Public Health and Commissioning Directorate and Domestic Violence Advocates to support people fleeing domestic abuse. Under the law, our prevention duty is complete when a customer has suitable accommodation with a reasonable prospect of the home being available for six months.

Homelessness has a disproportionate impact in respect of some equality characteristics – the majority were aged 18 to 44; more women than men faced homelessness; slightly over half of clients declared a disability; and the proportion of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) customers is slightly higher than the estimated 15% in Solihull.



Age	Number	Percentage
Under 18	6	2.46
18 to 24	88	36.07
25 to 34	62	25.41
35 to 44	41	16.80
45 to 54	23	9.43
55 to 64	13	5.33
65 to 74	10	4.10
75 to 84	1	0.41
Gender	Number	Percentage
Female	130	53.28
Male	102	41.80
Transgender	1	0.41
Unknown	11	4.51
Disability	Number	Percentage
Yes	129	52.87
No disabilities	115	47.13
Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
BAME	41	16.80
White		
British/Irish	203	83.20

Relieving homelessness

We rehoused 229 households into alternative accommodation under the relief duty. The provision of emergency accommodation includes a purpose-built scheme with 41 places for people without dependents, other fully self-contained properties managed by SCH and a range of hotel providers within Solihull and other parts of the West Midlands.

There was a disproportionate representation amongst certain characteristics: most people rehoused under the relief duty are aged

18 to 44. Of this group, a higher proportion are men, disabled and BAME compared with Solihull's population. This is partly explained by the fact that single people approaching the service are more likely to have a solution because of our availability of smaller stock. Also, there is likely to be a degree of success in mediating with family members to enable a person to remain in the family home. Families who approach us tend to be where the main applicant is a female. Due to lack of larger properties being available there is less or limited ability to provide a relief option during the 56 day relief period. The above points, taken together, represent an anomaly in that there are more approaches from females compared with males. However, more males are provided with a relief option than females.

Age	Number	Percentage
Under 18	6	2.62
18 to 24	71	31.00
25 to 34	74	32.31
35 to 44	41	17.90
45 to 54	24	10.48
55 to 64	8	3.49
65 to 74	4	1.75
75 to 84	1	0.44
Gender	Number	Percentage
Female	84	36.68
Male	136	59.39
Prefer not to say	1	0.44
Transgender	2	0.87
Unknown	6	2.62
Disability	Number	Percentage
Yes	128	55.90
No disabilities	101	44.10
Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
BAME	47	20.52
White		
British/Irish	182	79.48

6 Supporting homeless people with complex needs

Street homeless and rough sleepers

We have a duty of care to look after people who are street homeless and rough sleepers whose needs are more complex and are not well suited to traditional emergency and supported housing.

Our Tenancy Support Officers work in partnership with SMBC's Rough Sleeper Co-ordinator and local agencies such as the Solihull Integrated Addiction Service and Fry Accord, part of GreenSquare Accord Housing Association, to help people with challenging needs. Over the last two years we have given intensive assistance to 27 individuals who would otherwise have remained destitute and spiralled into even further social exclusion.

We have worked with SMBC's 16+ Team to work with care leavers who are setting up a home for the first time. Our Tenancy Support Officers help care leavers to set-up their first home and keep to tenancy terms and conditions so that they do not become homeless.

Domestic Abuse

A significant reason for customers needing housing advice and emergency housing is domestic abuse. As the table below shows, we worked with 300 people in partnership with SMBC colleagues, Birmingham & Solihull Women's Aid and Victim Support.

Appropriate information is gathered so that every case can be handled sensitively and in a supportive way. We develop support plans for individuals and households to ensure people's safety.

The table below shows that most people fleeing from domestic abuse are women, predominantly aged between 25 and 44 with nearly six out of every ten people having a disability. The proportion of customers from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities facing domestic abuse is higher than the BAME population in Solihull.

Age	Number	Percentage
Under 18	1	0.33
18 to 24	33	11.00
25 to 34	154	51.33
35 to 44	78	26.00
45 to 54	25	8.33
55 to 64	6	2.00
65 to 74	3	1.00
Gender	Number	Percentage
Female	264	88.00
Male	33	11.00
Not known /		
Other	1	0.33
Prefer not to say	1	0.33
Transgender	1	0.33
Disability	Number	Percentage
Yes	172	57.33
No disabilities	128	42.67
Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
BAME	70	23.33
White		
British/Irish	218	72.67
Not known/not disclosed	12	4.00

We recognise that men are less likely to seek help if they face domestic abuse. If our staff spot any issues, they refer men to 'Respect' and 'Mankind', who operate nationally and can provide dedicated advice and support.

Case studies

Rough sleeper with complex needs

In the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, all partners worked with a middle-aged male rough sleeper who had become homeless following the death of his parents. He is an ex-prisoner and has severe mental ill health. We offered him a 12-month tenancy, worked out his income and expenditure to ensure that he could afford the rent and put in place support mechanisms so that he would sustain the tenancy. Our Tenancy Support Officer keeps in touch with him regularly and he is receiving help from our partner agencies. The short-term tenancy continues to be successfully maintained and is likely to be extended to full security.

First home for care leaver

We provided a short-term tenancy to an 18-year-old care leaver with medical conditions that affect his mobility. He requires intensive help with budgeting, paying bills, shopping, cooking, cleaning and general life skills. We are continuing to work with him in partnership with his foster parents and friends. He is getting welfare benefits and can fulfil his dream of having his own home. He will be offered a secure tenancy if he maintains the tenancy conditions.

Domestic abuse

Working with our partners, we moved Mrs B and her children to a safe-house and worked with her to apply and successfully obtain an alternative permanent home that is away from the area in which she lived previously.



7 Reletting existing homes

Council Housing Register

We maintain SMBC's Housing Register which contains households who are not in emergency housing need and require permanent accommodation. We let 155 properties during 2021. The figures are lower than usual as there was limited lettings activity during Covid-19 lockdown periods.

We collect tenants' details when they sign a tenancy for monitoring purposes and to help identify circumstances that we need to be aware of when delivering services. The profile of new tenants is as follows:

Age	Number	Percentage
Under 18	1	0.65
18 to 24	24	15.48
25 to 34	64	41.29
35 to 44	41	26.45
45 to 54	15	9.68
55 to 64	8	5.16
65 to 74	2	1.29
Gender	Number	Percentage
Female	107	69.03
Male	48	30.97
Disability	Number	Percentage
No	131	84.52
Yes	24	15.48
Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
BAME	25	16.13
White		
British/Irish	104	67.10
Not Known	26	16.77

Our policy is to let homes to people who are in greatest need and unlikely to get appropriate accommodation from the private rental market. As the table above shows, many lettings are to women and people of working age. The most common disabilities found amongst new tenants are mobility, mental health and learning disabilities.

Mutual Exchange

Many of our existing tenants wish to move but do not have a priority need. Tenants have the legal right to exchange their home with a tenant of another local authority or a housing association, under a scheme called Mutual Exchange, if they meet the necessary criteria which include having a clear rent account and no breach of tenancy conditions.

45 SCH tenants exchanged their property during the year, the majority of whom were aged between 25 and 34, and female. Less than a quarter were disabled, and four out of the 45 people were from a BAME background.

Finding a suitable home for an existing tenant

We support existing tenants to move to more suitable accommodation. Our tenants, Mr & Mrs M, lived in a first floor flat without a lift. Mrs M's severe stroke left her with extensive physical and mental disabilities. She is also unable to stand and walk unaided. Close working relationships between SCH, SMBC and Occupational Therapists means that the couple have been moved to a suitably adapted property where they live in comfort and safety. Carers visit her several times a day. Offering the couple a property with an additional bedroom means that specialised equipment can be accommodated and used in a safe setting.



8 Building new homes



Over the last few years, we have had a programme of building new homes, the funding for which comes from SMBC and Homes England, a government agency. Since January 2020, we have developed 43 new homes, of which 14 are for rent and 29 are for part-own and part-rent basis, known as Shared Ownership. All newly built properties meet 'Lifetime Homes Standards' which allows homes to be made easily adaptable at minimum cost.

Of the 14 homes built for rent, 7 are bungalows designed for disabled, frailer and older customers. Examples of criteria for lifetime homes include level access entrances at the front door, wider internal corridors and circulation spaces to support wheelchair users and



dedicated wide-bay parking bays to support people with mobility impairments.

All new homes provide modern facilities with energy efficient boilers and solar panels. Plans are in place to build a further 130 new homes.

9 Understanding and responding to customer needs



Using learning from our response to delivering services to more vulnerable customers during Covid-19 lockdown periods, we have assessed our processes for tailoring services where we make a real difference. Arrangements for collecting, storing, using and updating the necessary data have been

strengthened. We now have an Inclusive Services Register (ISR), based on good practice found in the utility sector. Customers on the ISR receive additional support, advanced information, or alternative access in response to the vulnerability. Vulnerability categories include physical disabilities such as sensory and mobility issues, chronic illness, learning difficulties, and mental ill health. We plan to continue with this journey, collecting more information from customers and delivering dedicated training to frontline staff.

Residents living at our purpose-built housing scheme for older and frailer residents, Saxon Court, have continued to enjoy a range of events. These included celebrating Black History Month in October 2021 when residents had the chance to learn about life and culture in Tanzania, East Africa, from a staff member whose mother tongue is Swahili. Residents were also encouraged to recognise the Breast Awareness Month in October 2021 by wearing something pink.

10 Repairs and health and safety

Between January 2021 and December 2021 we carried out over 32,000 day to day repairs. Repairs staff are provided with alerts to inform them if the householder has any specific requirements, such as giving them extra time to get to the front door. Some repairs, such as heating and hot water breakdowns, are fast tracked to support households with young children or frailer/older residents.

The health and safety of our customers is extremely important to us. In line with legislation and best practice, we carry out fire risk assessments, gas boiler inspections, asbestos checks and regular testing of electrical installations, fire alarms, lifts and water hygiene. During 2021 we carried out nearly 9,000 gas service checks, over 2,600 asbestos checks, over 2,000 electrical checks, and 234 fire risk assessments.

We regularly speak with residents to identify issues so that personal evacuation plans can be set up and monitored for households with vulnerable people.

A significant area of investment is the sprinkler installation programme at 37 high-rise blocks, covering over 1,900 homes. Our staff carry out walkabouts at least twice each week to identify health hazards that could have a significant impact on people with disabilities, mobility impairment and older people.

Property adaptations for residents with disabilities

In 2021 we completed over 1,400 home adaptations for disabled Council tenants and other residents across the Borough. We strongly believe that residents should be supported to continue to live independently and in their present home for as long as is possible. Work done ranges from simple installations such as grab rails and lever taps to major projects such as installing stair lifts and wet rooms.

Adaptations are carried out for older and frailer residents as well as to meet the needs of households that have people with disabilities, including young children and younger adults.

The most common types of minor adaptations carried out are grab rails, access work to get in and out of a property and provision of stair rails. A significant proportion of major adaptations were level access showers, ramps and stairlifts.

Handyperson Home Support Service

We provide a Handyperson Service to support older, frailer, and disabled residents. During the year, 1,004 jobs were completed. The most common item fitted was key safe. A key safe is a mechanical metal box that is fitted on the outside of a property, usually by the front door. It holds a key to the property. The key is accessed via a combination lock, enabling easy access for carers and family members. Key safes are usually fitted to facilitate hospital discharge.



The Handyperson Service can also deal with odd jobs around the home, putting up curtain rails and shelves, changing lightbulbs and assembling flat pack furniture. Staff are trained and undergo security checks. Charges start from just over £25 per hour.

11 Hearing the customer voice

Customer engagement

We revised the Customer Engagement Strategy in 2020 and started a full implementation programme in 2021. Customers have a wide range of ways in which they can participate in local activities such as estate walkabouts and attending consultation events. For example, we completed a door-knocking exercise to capture the views of people affected by the fire sprinkler programme at high-rise blocks. Information gathered was used to ensure systematic processes for sharing relevant information with individuals and to take into account specific needs.

Customers with recent experience of our services are randomly contacted by external specialists to get views about service quality. We ensure that people contacted are representative of our customer base.

Customer scrutiny

Our Scrutiny Panel (SCHape), a group of 12 customers who consider our overall performance, is working with TPAS, specialist consultants, to carry out in-depth service reviews. Their reports are received by our Housing Operations Committee. The SCHape Panel obtains the views of other customers via the Virtual Improvement Panel (VIP), which has 360 participants.

Complaints and compliments

We welcome complaints from customers as they help us to understand where things go wrong and where we can improve. In 2021 we received 219 complaints, of which 59% were upheld and 41% were not upheld.

Our Complaints Policy and Procedures were reviewed during 2021 to ensure compliance with the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaints Handling Code. Our self-assessment against the Code was positive and strengthened our procedures for making reasonable adjustments when handling complaints from people with disabilities and from people with literacy issues and communication barriers relating to non-English speaking skills.

We want to make sure that BAME customers are not disadvantaged. Monitoring statistics are provided below, but there is a reliance on complainants to reveal their diversity profiles.

Complaint breakdown by ethnic group

Ethnic group	Number	% of total	Upheld	% upheld
Asian Indian	2	0.91	0	0
Asian Pakistani	3	1.37	0	0
Black British/Caribbean	4	1.82	3	75.0
Black Other	3	1.37	1	33.3
Mixed White/Black African	1	0.45	0	0
Mixed White/Black Caribbean	11	5.02	2	18.2
Not specified	7	3.20	3	42.9
Unknown	49	22.37	26	53.1
Other Ethnic Group	2	0.91	2	100.0
White British	133	60.73	88	66.2
White Irish	1	0.45	1	100.0
White Other	3	1.37	3	100.0
TOTAL	219			

	Number	% of total	% upheld
Complaints from non-White British customers (including unknown)	86	39.3	46.6
Complaints from non-White British customers (excluding unknown)	30	13.7	40.0
Complaints from White British customers	133	60.7	66.2

In summary, 137 of the 219 complaints received were from persons identifying as white British or white other (63%) and 26 from the BAME community (12%). Although the overall statistics are small for breakdown of complaints with almost a quarter of complainants’ ethnicity as ‘unknown’, quality control checks indicate that complaints received from BAME tenants are handled without bias. SCH has put in place arrangements to offer advice and support to staff investigating complaints. Plans are also in place to continue to deliver more training on handling complaints.

The BAME population of Solihull was found to be 11% according to the 2011 Census. It is estimated that this percentage increased to 15% in 2019. The breakdown of complaints statistics for BAME groups compared with the Census data shows that the percentage of complaints upheld were 67% from those who are White British or White Other and 31% for complaints from BAME residents. However, the complaints numbers are relatively low numbers across the wide range of services complained about. Therefore, quality control checks will continue to be done.



12 Money advice and debt management services

A significant aspect of our work relates to collecting rental and service charge income from tenants and leaseholders. We support people who fall into rent arrears and have other debt problems. We also signpost people to other debt advice agencies where appropriate.

As an example, in November 2021, 3,127 tenants owed us rent. Of this group, the largest proportion were people aged 26 to 35 years. Our Money Advice Team worked closely with 283 people, of whom 143 were assisted to apply for welfare benefits totalling over £220,000.



The poster features the Money Advice Service logo at the top right. The main text reads 'Free Money Advice' in large green letters, with the tagline 'Because it doesn't grow on trees' below it. Further down, it says 'Book a confidential appointment and get clear, unbiased money advice that will help you make the most of your money.' The phone number 'call 0808 800 0118' is prominently displayed. At the bottom, there is a small disclaimer: 'The Money Advice Service is here to give you unbiased money advice to help you make informed choices.' and the website 'moneyadvice.org.uk'.

The Covid-19 pandemic had resulted in an embargo on evicting tenants. We set up an internal staff panel to consider cases where arrears were extremely high. Following this, we started eviction proceedings against 13 households for non-payment of rent. Of these, 10 households had 'suspended' possession orders or evictions stopped so that they could remain in their home whilst clearing arrears. All ten households were White British, secure tenants and the average age was 52 years. The household profile of the three evictions that took place in 2021 shows that the average age was 39, two were White British and one was European.

Case studies



Serious arrears

Mr A has a range of problems, including diabetes, alcohol abuse and loss of job. His mental health condition and life circumstances have resulted in severe depression and anxiety. He owed over £4,000 in rent and rechargeable repairs. His benefit did not cover full rent as he was over-occupying the property with an extra bedroom. He also owed council tax to SMBC and could not afford to heat his home.

We worked with Mr A to apply for food and fuel vouchers under the government's hardship fund and obtain the correct level of welfare benefits. Our Tenancy Sustainment Team assisted him to downsize his home and thus reduce rent. He is now in a better shape both financially and with his personal health and circumstances.

Benefit correction

Ms Y was evicted by her private sector landlord and sought rehousing for her and her two young children. She was working until she was threatened with homelessness. We placed her in temporary accommodation and worked with her to assess her income and expenses.

We discovered that Ms Y was subject to a shortfall of Universal Credit of almost £92 per week. Our team helped her to not only start getting the correct level of welfare benefit but also get £2,000 of previous under-payments. She has cleared the arrears she owed to the private landlord.

13 Safer neighbourhoods

Locality Working

Making our neighbourhoods safer and stronger



A key aspect of looking after our estates is a robust regime of estate inspections and ensuring that communal areas are clean and safe. We check goods stored in communal landings and pathways that could affect people with mobility

impairments and parents who use pushchairs. Since April 2021 99.9% of planned estate inspections were completed. In the same period, 99.5% of cleaning inspections were judged as pass.

Between April and December 2021, we received 317 complaints about anti-social behaviour. The complaints ranged from serious issues such as drugs and criminal activity to neighbour disputes. Over 99.9% of complaints were successfully resolved.



14 Governance

The Board continues to strive to ensure it has a diverse range of people who bring different voices and experiences that contribute to decision-making. In January 2022, there were eight Board members, and two places vacant.

The profile of the eight Board members is as follows:

- The age range is 38 to 73.
- 37.5% (3) are female
- 62.5% (5) are male
- 100% are White British
- 12.5% or 1 person is disabled



Board members are expected to abide by an established Code of Conduct that requires each member to demonstrate fairness and equality and lead by example.

Board and Committee papers are 'equality checked' to make sure that decision-making reflects diversity considerations.

SCH has recently decided to consider remunerating Board members. Not only will this recognise their time and contribution, and enable us to attract relevant skills and experience, but it will also combat the indirect discrimination that might have prevented people with certain characteristics putting themselves forward.

The procedures for recruiting Board members follow good practice. Vacancies are widely advertised, and arrangements are in place to meet reasonable adjustments during and post-recruitment process. New Board members receive extensive training, including on our approach to fairness and equality.

15 Workforce

In September 2021 SCH had 310 employees, of which 79% (246) work full time and 21% (64) work part-time. Their profile is:

Age	Number	Percentage
16 to 24	14	4.52
25 to 34	50	16.13
35 to 44	61	19.68
45 to 54	78	25.16
55 to 64	98	31.61
65+	9	2.90
Gender	Number	Percentage
Female	178	57.42
Male	132	42.58
Disability	Number	Percentage
No	240	77.42
Yes	12	3.87
Not specified	58	18.71
Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
BAME	36	11.61
White British/Irish	259	83.55
Not specified	15	4.84
Religion	Number	Percentage
Christian	153	49.35
None	70	22.58
Not specified	66	21.29
Other	21	6.77
Sexual orientation	Number	Percentage
Bisexual	0	0
Gay man	2	0.65
Gay woman/lesbian	0	0
Heterosexual/straight	238	76.77
Other	1	0.32

Not specified	69	22.26
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Blended Ways of Working (BWOW)

SCH has introduced hybrid working arrangements to enable staff to operate from different offices and from home. The scheme is designed to provide a more flexible approach to achieving work-life balance. An example of positive outcomes includes changing the working pattern for a full-time employee to take short breaks around school drop-off and collection times. Working hours adjustments have also been made for three staff in consideration of their health needs.

During 2021, two employees have amended their working patterns to meet their caring responsibilities. Additionally, two members of staff have taken short term carers' leave to deal with specific circumstances.

Carers' leave

The Carers' Leave Policy was discussed at all levels of SCH. SMBC's Human Resources Team attended team meetings to explain the policy and procedures in detail. Staff wishing to apply for carers' leave can have confidential discussions with the HR Team. Dedicated advice and information are available for managers who deal with requests for carers' leave.

Flexible retirement

Employees coming up to their retirement age, or wishing to work after their state pension age, can retire on a flexible basis. Several employees have taken this option, resulting in job share opportunities.

Apprenticeships

Twelve apprentice posts have been established between November 2020 and February 2022. Seven of the current cohort are female and five are male. Six people are aged between 18 and 21, three are aged

between 22-24 and three are aged 25+. Ten are White British and two are Asian. One person is disabled.

Passion in People Strategy

The strategy aims to ensure that our staff continue to feel valued and supported. Two key themes under development are Learning and Development, and Health and Wellbeing. SCH is currently working towards a Thrive at Work Award, a regional accreditation initiative for employers that recognises commitment to health and wellbeing. The Thrive at Work initiative focusses on providing appropriate information to enable employees to make healthier choices on subjects such as healthy eating and mental well-being and signposting staff to support services.

Celebrating diversity

Given the need to ensure everyone's safety during the Covid-19 pandemic, we have celebrated diversity by sharing with staff information about a range of international events and major religious and cultural occasions. A calendar of events is available on our intranet. This provides easy access to relevant dates via outlook calendars. Managers use this to avoid holding key meetings and job interviews on special days and to build on cultural awareness across SCH.

We know that our employees have worked extremely hard and under stressful conditions since March 2020 when the Covid-19 pandemic took hold across the UK. We share information about healthy living and reducing stress with staff.

16 Examples of actions planned for 2022/2023

The Equality and Diversity Plan is directly linked to SCH's strategic priorities and the annual Delivery Plan. The priorities that have direct links with the Delivery Plan for 2022/2023 include:

1. Continuing to deliver the Regeneration programme at Kingshurst Village and ensure that diverse customers' needs are met.
2. Building on our Inclusive Services Register to continue to capture the needs of individual tenants so that we can build on more specific ways to tailor services.
3. Achieving Level 2 of the Disability Confident Scheme.
4. Setting targets for recruiting more disabled and BAME staff at managerial levels.
5. Reviewing our Asset Management Strategy to reflect disability accessibility to communal areas.
6. Achieving the Thrive at Work Bronze Award.

Please [Click here](#) to contact us by internet or to send an email. Telephone 0121 717 1515 or write to us at Endeavour House, Meriden Drive, Solihull, B37 6BX if you would like more information about our work or how we practice and promote equality, diversity and inclusion.