

# Our Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Strategy

(2025–2028)

## BACKGROUND

**RBH is committed to diversity, inclusion and belonging. The commitment is re-affirmed in this three-year strategy, which aims to create a culture of acceptance, inclusion and belonging, where differences are celebrated, and services reflect the needs of diverse communities.**

This Strategy takes account of the obligations placed on social housing providers through the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard, which forms part of the Consumer Standards Code of Practice through the Social Housing Regulation Act of 2024. Registered providers are expected to consider the diverse needs of their tenants (and prospective tenants, where relevant) in relation to the housing and landlord services they provide. This consideration should be integral to the culture of the organisation, through the alignment of our Values with the DIB agenda.

Engage, Empower and Evaluate the three pillars for this strategy have been developed on the back of a series of workshops. These workshops have been delivered to colleagues and customers including the Community Diversity Advocates, of which are discussed further down the strategy. During the sessions we discussed, where we are now and challenges faced by diverse groups, what we can do to improve things and where we would like to be.

## DEFINITIONS

**Diversity, inclusion, and belonging are often used interchangeably, but they do have different meaning:**



### Diversity

RBH values the range of differences within the communities we serve.

These differences include the protected characteristics stated in the Equalities Act 2010 and wider such as socio-economic status, young people leaving care and ex armed forces personnel.

RBH recognises that diverse perspectives and experiences enrich our organisation and help us better meet the needs of customers and colleagues.



### Inclusion

RBH aims to create an environment where everyone feels welcomed, respected, and empowered.

Inclusion to us means actively breaking down barriers that prevent individuals from fully participating in opportunities, services, and decision-making processes. It ensures all voices are heard and valued, regardless of background or circumstances.



### Belonging

RBH strives to cultivate a sense of belonging by fostering mutual respect and understanding among its members, customers, colleagues, and wider stakeholders.

Belonging means creating a community where people feel safe, supported, and connected, and where everyone can thrive and contribute to the shared successes.

## NATIONAL CONTEXT

**The Strategy meets and reaches further than RBH's obligations under the Equality Act 2010. The Act brought into force the Public Sector Equality Duty, which was developed to harmonise equality duties and to extend it across the protected characteristics (for the public sector). It means that RBH must, in the exercise of its functions, have regard to eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those that do not.**

A significant recent milestone is the Preventative Duty for Sexual Harassment, which came into effect on 26th October 2024. This legislation requires employers to take proactive steps to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace. It underscores the importance of fostering safe environments by implementing robust policies, training, and accountability measures.

In addition, there are ongoing developments aimed at enhancing transparency and addressing disparities in pay. The UK government is advancing plans to introduce mandatory disability and ethnicity pay gap reporting. These measures, similar to the gender pay gap reporting obligations introduced in 2017, are designed to shine a light on inequalities and prompt employers to address systemic barriers. By requiring organisations to publicly disclose data on pay disparities, these proposals aim to encourage accountability and foster meaningful action to close pay gaps affecting underrepresented groups.

## BOROUGH CONTEXT

**According to the 2021 census the population size of Rochdale was reported to be 223,773. The ethnicity of residents in the borough are reported as 74% white, 19% Asian, 4% Black, 2% mixed, with a further 2% reported as other, which make Rochdale one of the most diverse boroughs in Greater Manchester. 19% of residents are registered disabled under the Equalities Act 2010, meaning they have a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term negative impact on their ability to do normal daily activities. 9% of the population provide unpaid care. 3% of residents identify as armed forces or ex-armed forces, with 34% of these being registered disabled. Rochdale has an identified LGBTQIA+ community of 2.3%. The female population of Rochdale is 51% with the remaining 49% identifying as male. 28% of Rochdale residents identify as having no religion, 46.9% are Christian, 0.2% Buddhist, 0.3% Hindu, 0.1% Jewish, 18.8% Muslim, 0.1% Sikh, 0.3% follow other religions and 4.6% did not answer.**

69.9% of Rochdale residents aged between 16-64 years are in employment, with the unemployment rate at 4.8% for the same age range. 6.2% of the borough of Rochdale claim some sort of benefit, and 27.5% of the population are declared as economically inactive. These figures put Rochdale in the bottom quartile within Greater Manchester.

Rochdale Borough is ranked as the 15th most deprived area within England based on the average scores for the Local Super Output Area (LSOA's). The lowest ranked wards within Rochdale Borough include some of Lower Falinge, College Bank and the Town Centre of Rochdale. The life expectancy is an important measurement for the health of a population and for the female residents of Rochdale this is 80.9 years and males 76.7. These expectancies are below the national rates of 83.1 and 79.4 respectively. This context helps determine the priorities for RBH and the future direction within the new Corporate Strategy.

Healthy life expectancy is another important measure of population health. For male residents of Rochdale Borough, it is 57.4 and for females 58.5. Considering the current life expectancies above this means the average woman in Rochdale spends 22.4 years living in poor health and the average man 19.3 years. People from Greater Manchester and England live slightly longer and spend less time in poor health than people in Rochdale. This indicates that people in Rochdale develop long-term conditions earlier compared to many other places.

## GREATER MANCHESTER CONTEXT

**RBH is an active member of the Greater Manchester Housing Providers partnership. Working collaboratively to make a lasting and positive difference to lives and communities across the region, delivering more, together. Through this partnership several initiatives have been developed to ensure we are meeting the needs of our diverse communities. This includes the BOOST Change Programme which aims to challenge and address the under-representation of ethnically diverse colleagues at leadership level in the housing sector and remove barriers these colleagues face when advancing into senior role.**

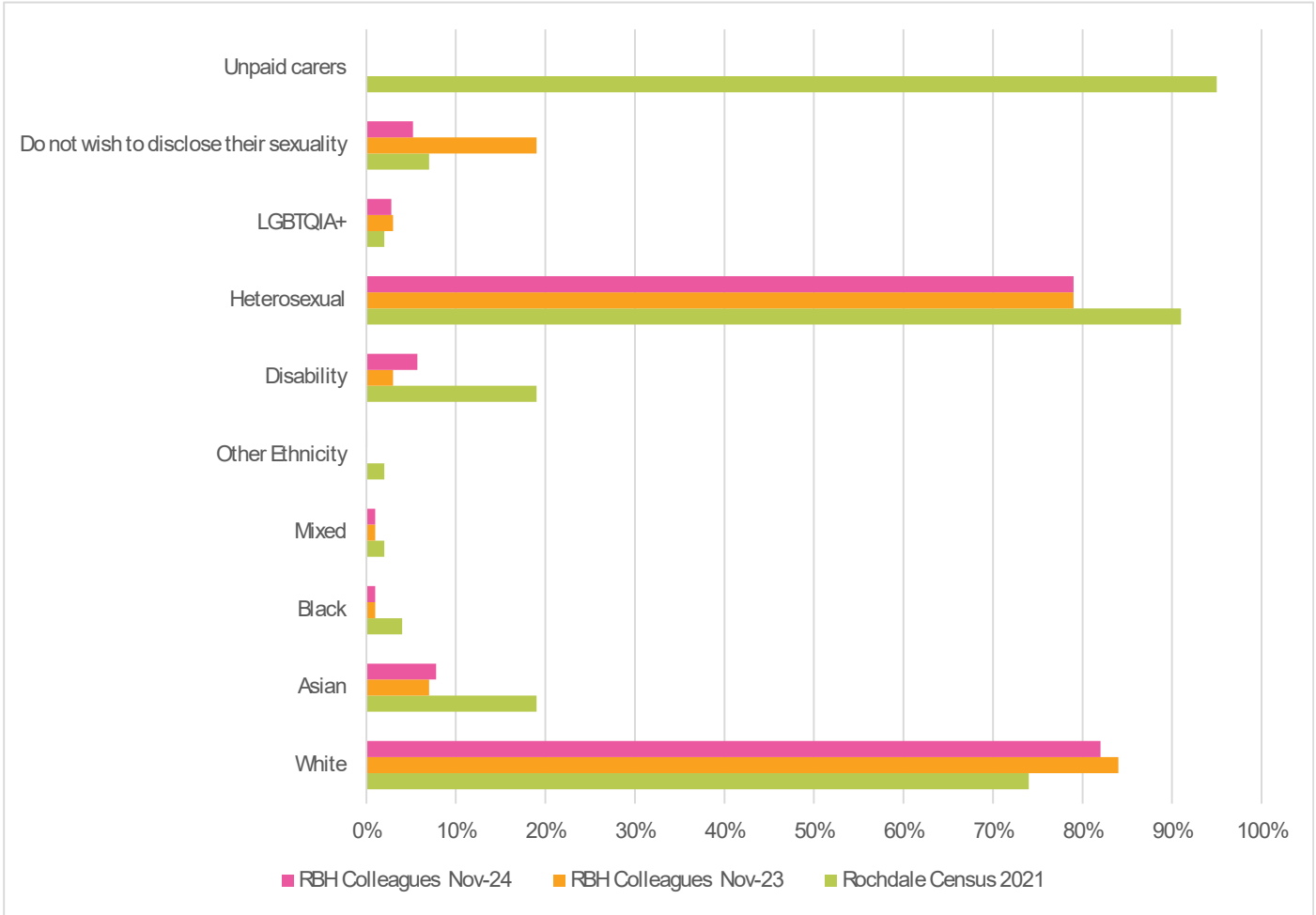
We also actively support the Care Leavers Pledge which commits each housing provider to offer quality, stable homes to care leavers, alongside employment and skills opportunities, mentoring, and wider support in the transition from care to living independently.

Another initiative, called the 20% Movement, is a pledge that by 2034, 20% of colleague in each housing provider will be from a social renting household.

RBH CONTEXT

Understanding the diversity of our colleagues and customers is an important thread throughout this strategy to ensure we reflect the communities we serve and tailor our services to the needs of our customers. Table One below highlights the demographics and where we need to be more representative.

Table 1: Demographics of the residents of Rochdale compared to RBH employees.



We acknowledge we have gaps in data within both customer and colleague communities that need improving. As you can see from the table below gender reassignment and disability are the lowest data collection areas for colleagues and with gender reassignment and religion being the lowest for customers.

Table 2: Percentage of data held on customers and colleagues

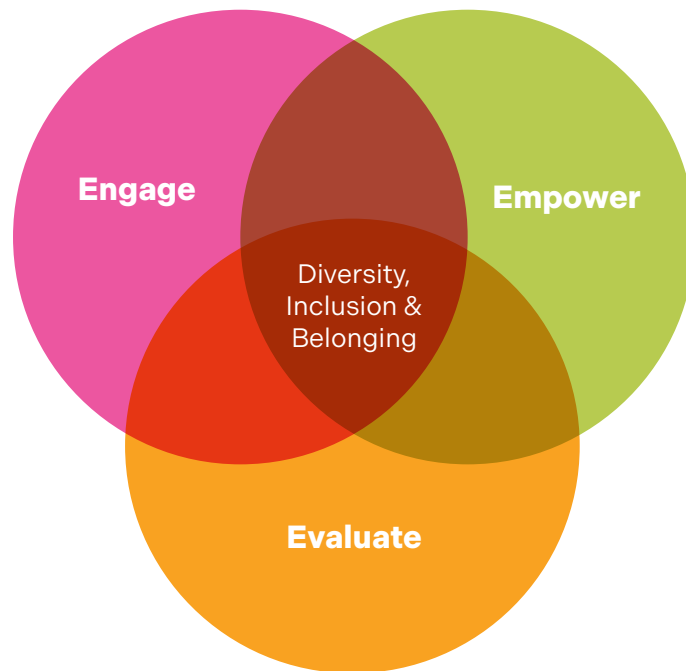


## OUR VISION

We will foster an environment where every individual is seen, heard, and empowered. Creating a culture where diversity is valued and used as an asset to underpin all that we do to support people to thrive.

## OUR PLAN FOR 2025-2028

Three strategic pillars have been created that will underpin the work taking place over the next three years, which will ensure we achieve our vision. They are our DIB Strategic Aims. The strategic pillars of **engage**, **empower**, and **evaluate** are interconnected and can be navigated in any direction and at any point in the strategy because they reinforce each other.



## ENGAGE

### Strategic Aim: Get to know our communities to inform decision making

Engagement is crucial in getting to know our communities because it fosters open communication, mutual understanding, and trust. Through active participation, individuals can share their diverse perspectives, experiences, and concerns, which allows for deeper comprehension of the community's needs, values, and aspirations. Engaging with our customer and colleague communities helps to build relationships, encourages collaboration, and promotes inclusivity, ensuring that all voices are heard and considered.

#### Progress so far:

We have worked on increasing engagement within the community ensuring we capture insights from a diverse range of customers. One specific group named the Community Diversity Advocates, made up from individuals who had been identified through the complaint's procedure or areas of engagement from the neighbourhood's team, have had a positive impact on several initiatives. These include the review of a rent increase letter, attending communications and customer complaints panels and taking part in our value for money consultation and customer complaints procedures. Allowing for mutual learning for us as an organisation, by listening and acting upon the lived experiences of our customers and for the customers to gain insights to the policies and practices of RBH.

An Ageing in Place Pathfinder secured £200,000 grant funding through a Canadian philanthropist. Our data showed that we had the highest number of customers aged 50+ living in Kirkholt (1,462) and Smallbridge (244) so the focus was on those two estates based on these findings. The project focuses on eight domains and has quarterly partnership board meetings made up of stakeholders and residents from each estate. The domains are Community Health and Support, Housing, Transport, Respect and Social Inclusion, Civic Participation and Employment, Communication and Information, Outdoor Space and Buildings and Social Participation.

To date the project has reached over 200 customers. This has happened through activity sessions, partnership board meetings, door knocking exercises, community audits and drop-in events. Examples of projects/events set up because of the pathfinder include a new Walk and Talk group in Kirkholt, development of a Community Garden at the Strand and an allotment site in Smallbridge, installation of new street furniture across Kirkholt and the set up a new intergenerational focus group aimed at tackling youth nuisance.

Actions that have been taken to support the increase in diversity at recruitment is the implementation of anonymised recruitment. This means that recruiting managers are unable to see any defining characteristics of individuals prior to shortlisting. With the aim of reducing any unconscious bias. To support this, we have also delivered training to all colleagues supporting an inclusive way of thinking. This will be monitored regularly to ensure the process is delivering the desired outcome.

#### What we will do:

- Understand the demographics of our customers and colleagues through increasing the quality of our data.
- Develop initiatives that support RBH to become and inclusive employer. These will include:
  1. Adopting an innovative approach to encourage diversity within apprenticeship recruitment.
  2. Work with recruitment partner to supportive inclusive recruitment.
- Widening our engagement offer to customers ensuring inclusivity and response to needs.
- Recruitment of a diverse group of apprentices including those from ethnic minorities, leaving care and with disabilities.
- Exploring the benefits of recognised and effective accreditations.
- Engaging with diverse seldom heard groups through a variety of panels, Roadshows, ILS gatherings, neighbourhood drop ins, neighbourhood walk abouts, customers workshops, community consultations, and customer census. With the aim of 20 varied engagement sessions over each twelve-month period.
- Use qualitative and quantitative data to inform decision making.

#### What success will look like:

- Improving customer data to 80% across the protected characteristics and colleague data to 95% by 2027.
- To reduce the number of colleagues and customers who don't want to disclose to 5%.
- Improvement in satisfaction for TSMs, against the protected characteristics (with no difference to the main cohort of respondents). In particular:
  - TP01 Overall satisfaction
  - TP06 Satisfaction that the landlord listens to tenant views and acts upon them
  - TP07 Satisfaction that the landlord keeps tenants informed about things that matter to them
  - TP08 Agreement that the landlord treats tenants fairly and with respect
  - TP09 Satisfaction with landlords' approach to handling complaints. (Targets will be set for these at March 2025 Board as part of the new Corporate Strategy and Performance Targets reports).
- Improvement in RBH culture evidenced through the quarterly Net Promoter Score from a negative to positive score.
- Increase in workplace diversity mirroring the community of Rochdale. A target for repairs was set for 6% (March 2025) and for the rest of the organisation at 11%. Targets will be set for the next three years, once the year end data is known.
- The increased opportunities for customer feedback will lead to improvements in service provision. The annual report on DIB will evidence these improvements and the long-term impact they have.

## EMPOWER

### Strategic Aim: Taking this journey together to live our inclusive culture

By empowering our communities, we can ensure that everyone can actively participate and contribute to the journey of our growth and development. Helping individuals to gain the confidence, skills, and resources they need to voice their idea, address local issues, and take ownership of solutions. This shared responsibility strengthens collaboration and creates a sense of collective purpose, allowing the journey to be more inclusive and reflective of the community's real needs and aspirations. When communities are empowered, they become partners in progress, fostering long term sustainability and mutual success.

#### Progress So Far:

A volunteering programme for refugees has been established. One of the Diversity Advocates highlighted difficulties faced by the refugee community when first gaining asylum as they often find it difficult to gain meaningful employment due to lack of UK experience. Working with the Refugee Action, RBH established a volunteering programme, whose aim is to ready people for work giving UK experience and the provision of a reference. The pilot of this programme has enabled four refugees to volunteer with RBH or organisations within our supply chain. It is anticipated this programme will be expanded in the coming months.

Several special interest groups have been established internally. These include our Race Equality Network which has previously won awards for its contribution to supporting diversity. Our RBH HouseProud group, established to create a safe space for our LGBTQIA+ colleagues and link with the wider HouseProud Northwest initiatives has also gained recognitions are part of the wider group through winning a prize at Manchester Pride for our participation in the parade. We have newly created a special interest group working with our colleague who have a disability or long-term health condition. This group is group has had an attendance of just under 50% of those with a disclosed disability.

#### What we will do:

- By listening to the lived experiences of our colleagues and customers we can develop numerous context driven initiatives.
- Creating a space to hold the stories of our customers, colleagues, and wider stakeholders by developing a human library available for internal learning and improving culture through bringing your authentic self to the resource.
- Embed RBH as an anchor institution within Rochdale & wider Greater Manchester by prioritising initiatives that boost the local economy, demonstrating a commitment to our communities. These include prioritising underrepresented groups in our decision-making process. Supporting Social mobility, by providing employment opportunities and creating cultural awareness campaigns.
- Create one internal diversity advocates group and one community diversity advocate group. Ensuring that all protected characteristics are included as a minimum.
- Raising awareness of support services within Rochdale to support both colleagues and customers.
- Use qualitative and quantitative data to inform decision making.
- Understand the digital barriers and exclusion of our diverse communities and develop plans and projects to reduce and tackle the problem.
- Provide training and development opportunities for our diverse communities.

#### What will success look like:

- A catalogue of resources, events and initiatives produced for both customers and colleagues.
- Production a minimum of 12 lived experience stories per year, continually being refreshed and increased.
- Improvement in satisfaction for TSMs, against the protected characteristics, (with no difference to the main cohort of respondents). In particular:
  - TP01 Overall satisfaction
  - TP06 Satisfaction that the landlord listens to tenant views and acts upon them
  - TP07 Satisfaction that the landlord keeps tenants informed about things that matter to them
  - TP08 Agreement that the landlord treats tenants fairly and with respect
  - TP09 Satisfaction with landlords' approach to handling complaints. (Targets will be set for these at March 2025 Board as part of the new Corporate Strategy and Performance Targets reports).
- Increased numbers of engaged customers in our engagement work (figures to be inserted as part of development of the Corporate Strategy).
- Increased representation in our Membership (figures to be inserted as part of development of Corporate Strategy).
- The increased opportunities for customer feedback will lead to improvements in service provision. The annual report on DIB will evidence these improvements and the long-term impact they have.
- An increase in digital inclusion and how our customers from diverse background access our services.
- Customers from diverse backgrounds accessing our services including training and develop.

## EVALUATE

### Strategic Aim: Evaluate our initiatives, delivering continuous improvement

Evaluation is essential to learn what works and what doesn't. This will allow for the assessment of strengths, identify areas of improvement, and ensure continuous growth. By regularly evaluating processes, feedback, and performance, we can tailor support, resources, and opportunities to better meet the needs of both customers and colleagues. This commitment to improvement fosters a culture of excellence, encourages innovation, and enhances overall satisfaction.

#### Progress so far:

For the past 18 months we have been reviewing what is currently taking place across RBH, what is working well and areas for improvement. For example, we had REN (Race) special interest group internally, but numbers of participants began to decline. This led to development of a "How To" guide, focussing on how to create your own group and how to keep participants engaged. This can be found on Connect, RBH's intranet site for any colleague to access. We now have three strong groups, with roles and responsibilities and excellent engagement levels. REN has built momentum again and is back to its previous successes.

The Community Engagement Team have listened to feedback and reviewed how they deliver sessions. Ensuring that individuals with disabilities feel included in engagement sessions from the offset and not as an afterthought. For example, several community diversity advocates with a variety of disabilities, find it difficult to attend in person sessions. Previously online sessions have been offered but this is separate from the in person. Now the engagement team offer a hybrid model to meetings as and when possible, supporting inclusivity.

#### What we will do:

- Demonstrate progress by tracking initiatives ensuring progress is visible and measurable.
- Build trust, by openly sharing our results with all stakeholders reinforcing accountability.
- Identify what is working and areas for change to create greatest impact.
- Adapt our delivery models to remain responsive to the needs of our ever-changing communities.
- Through robust data metrics create data informed decisions grounded in evidence.
- Highlight success through our various communication channels.
- Provide the PNR Committee with an annual report on DIB, highlighting successes, improvements and areas for further development.

#### What success will look like:

- Production of evaluation reports that informs decision making and changes services.
- Improvement in satisfaction for TSMs, against the protected characteristics, (with no difference to the main cohort of respondents). In particular:
  - TP01 Overall satisfaction
  - TP06 Satisfaction that the landlord listens to tenant views and acts upon them
  - TP07 Satisfaction that the landlord keeps tenants informed about things that matter to them
  - TP08 Agreement that the landlord treats tenants fairly and with respect
  - TP09 Satisfaction with landlords' approach to handling complaints. (Targets will be set for these at March 2025 Board as part of the new Corporate Strategy and Performance Targets reports).
- Increased number of customer compliments evidenced satisfaction for the engagement that has taken place.
- Creating of strategies and policies through the input of customers and colleagues.
- An annual report, that documents significant improvements that can be promoted and published, improving further our reputation and inclusivity as an employer and landlord.

## Conclusion

**Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging Strategy is built on the foundational pillars of Engage, Empower and Evaluate, reflecting our commitment to creating an inclusive environment for both customers, colleagues, and wider stakeholders. These pillars guide us in fostering the communities we strive to achieve.**

This strategy is not a static document but a living framework that evolves with the needs of those we serve. By embedding Engage, Empower and Evaluate in everything we do, RBH strengthens its role as a trusted partner building a culture where everyone-whether colleague or customer feels they truly belong. Together we can create a future defined by opportunity, equality, and shared success.

## Monitoring & Review

An action plan will be developed once the strategy is approved to ensure the actions within this strategy are monitored and reviewed. The Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging Strategy will be reviewed annually for performance against objectives and links to RBH priorities and reported to PNR Committee.

## Links to other policies and strategies

This Strategy links with:

- Corporate Strategy
- People Strategy
- Communications and Marketing Strategy
- Facilities Strategy (under development)
- IT Strategy

