

What does Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) mean for a Housing Association

Amy Causley, Director of People for Plus Dane, talks about the ambitions for EDI at Plus Dane...

It seems perfect timing and really appropriate, on International Women's Day (IWD), to talk about equality and diversity, why it means so much to me and the exciting plans we've got at Plus Dane to progress EDI.

The theme for IWD23 is **#EmbraceEquity** and this is what we are doing at Plus Dane. We are embracing inclusion and moving forwards with our ambitions. The day asks businesses to imagine a gender equal world. A world free of bias, stereotypes, and discrimination. A world that's diverse, equitable, and inclusive. A world where difference is valued and celebrated. This is exactly what I hope our EDI action plan will help us to do.

One of the things I love most about working in the social housing sector and specifically here at Plus Dane is the unwavering commitment to doing the right thing for everyone, our social purpose to make our contribution one that helps to give more people the best chances to live well, to make our society fairer.

From where I sit in the People Team, the best way I can contribute to that is through thinking about the way we work, making our offer inclusive and fair, and how we can create an environment where everyone can reach their potential.

I've been involved in EDI professionally for many years. One of my first roles was an EDI Officer in social housing, working with colleagues and customers. And that's been at the core of what I've taken forward professionally ever since.

Personally it also means a lot to me. As a single parent of 2 young boys, a few years ago I never imagined I'd be able to do the job I'm doing now and manage childcare, I certainly never thought I'd be able to drop-off or pick-up from the school gates a few days a week. The ability to work a bit more flexibly has helped me feel like I can be Mum and Director of People (most days anyway.....!). So for me, identifying what barriers different people might experience and what we can do to address those to allow people to contribute and develop in their working lives is a personal as well as professional motivation.

So how are we doing that in practice at Plus Dane? Over the last few months we've done a lot of consultation with colleagues and customers and our Board to find out what's working and where we need to improve. The research told us that we've got a really good foundation, a culture where issues can be raised with confidence that people will be supported, and practical support such as individual flexible working arrangements and agile working where it fits the role.

For example, we've been working on making it easier for people to grow their careers and we have seen lots of people move into new roles in the business in the last year and support their development through things like our Catherine Meredith Bursary. Catherine was an inspirational leader at Plus Dane, focused on helping people across all walks of life to develop, and unleash their potential. In a fitting tribute to Catherine, we launched an annual staff bursary to fund and support colleagues to unlock their potential and it is starting to deliver some great results.

Also, I am very proud of the work we do on wellbeing and mental health. I know it is really appreciated across the business. Evidence of our fair work practices can be seen in things like our very healthy Gender Pay Gap position, a great story for another day, and I hope this will all be recognised through our recent submission to secure Liverpool City Region, Fair Employment Charter status, in Spring this year.

But there are still lots of ways we can push forward with making our organisation more inclusive. Following the consultation we developed, and are now launching, our new EDI action plan. We'll be inviting colleagues to get involved and support us in this work. This plan includes lots of good practices, some of which are in place and some of which we are still developing. These are just some of the plans and process we have included in our EDI action plan for 2023-25:

- Continue work to create an inclusive environment, giving all colleagues a chance to have a voice and making sure that it's included in decision making
- Targeted recruitment activity to attract applicants from under-represented groups
- Explore the potential for EDI champions and/or support networks for diverse groups
- Remaining a real living wage employer – encouraging our partner/supplier network to match us in this area
- Make sure access to training and development opportunities is equitable and helps build adverse talent pool

- Working with our communities to build confidence and create opportunities to develop transferrable skills
- Build on our links with diverse community networks to promote opportunities for employment and apprenticeship opportunities, for all minority groups

Our EDI action plan will lead us to be a more welcoming, inclusive employer, and a social landlord who works with our communities so everyone can thrive. Our positive action might look different depending on the type of barrier it is hoping to address and we will work with our communities and partners to build upon activity and identify opportunities. By 2025 I want Plus Dane to be an inclusive business that clearly **#EmbracesEquity!**