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## Message from the Chief Executive

### A call for potential Board Mentors in the North West!

On Saturday 14th February, Elspeth Mackenzie (Chief Executive at Thrive Homes) and I addressed around 300 delegates for the final plenary session at this year's National Federation of Housing Board Members' Conference. We had really positive feedback and in terms of having the opportunity to promote our national board mentoring programme to a wide audience, it could not have been much better!

We now have real momentum in two of the three "hubs" where we are running the 2015 programme with good numbers of board members committing as mentees and mentors in our Leeds and London & Home Counties "hubs". The area though where we need more support is in the North West where we are looking for more mentors to support the board mentees who have already signed up.

Typically, mentors will have:

- Been a board member or board chair for a few years (but do see final bullet point below!!)
- Occupied a senior position within the housing or an associated sector
- Had real knowledge and interest in governance
- Have a passion for seeing individuals develop
- You do not have to be a board member or a board chair to be a mentor. Senior executives/senior governance staff who work with board members would be fantastic board mentors as we found was the case on our pilot programme. In the words of one such mentor: "I have learned that mentoring is about unblocking blockages. You can never learn enough as an executive about how to be useful to Board members."

If you know of a colleague(s) who you think might be interested in becoming a potential board member mentor, please ask them to either email us at [boardmentoring@housingdiversitynetwork.co.uk](mailto:boardmentoring@housingdiversitynetwork.co.uk) or, even better, phone our North West Mentoring Associate, Sue Waterall on 07939 629781 for an informal chat.



### London Diversity Group (formerly G15 E&D Group)

Earlier this month, the former G15 E&D Group (now expanded to become the larger and more inclusive London Diversity Group) confirmed that they wanted HDN to support all their meetings with immediate effect. We will be

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providing them with the same level of support that we have been providing to our regional E&D Practitioner Networks in the North West, the Midlands, the North East, the South & South West and Yorkshire, Humber & East Midlands. Moreover, it's useful to remind colleagues that any member of one practitioner group can attend meetings of any other group...just contact [Carla@housingdiversitynetwork.co.uk](mailto:Carla@housingdiversitynetwork.co.uk) for more information about future meetings.

### **HCA Equality Information published**

The Homes and Communities Agency has recently published its [equality and diversity information](#) for 2014-15. These annual reports are a good example of transparency and an organisation being open about the progress they are making and the challenges they face and so are well worth taking a look at.

### **Excellence in Diversity Awards**



As recently as 19<sup>th</sup> February, I attended along with 200 other colleagues the launch event for the “Excellence in Diversity Awards” at the studios of London Weekend Television in Central London.

The strapline for these awards is “championing diversity, promoting inclusion” and I am delighted that HDN has been nominated for an award under the category “Best Diversity Resource.” Thank you to our mystery member organisation who nominated us and, if you can, come and support us at the Awards Presentation to be held at the Manchester Midland Hotel on the 14<sup>th</sup> May. Do save this date and look out for venue and timing details in next month’s e-briefing!

As well as the brilliance of many of the high profile speakers at the London Launch Event what struck me was the range of sectors represented amongst the sponsors and the even wider diversity represented amongst the delegates. To give you a flavour...amongst the speakers we had a director from the CBI who leads on their Diversity and Inclusion agenda and a senior partner from PwC who, unbelievably and unexpectedly shattering our pre-conceptions of a chartered accountant, was both hugely entertaining and brutally honest about the role of diversity and inclusion in his sector and why PwC was vigorously supporting it!

Delegates included Home Office civil servants (who I happened to be sat next to and who I hope will in future become invaluable contacts/allies), Universities UK, Financial Ombudsman Service, various banks, British Airways, ITV, Oxfam, LGBT Forum - The Army, Mind, The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association, Balfour Beattie, Action for Children, British Transport Police, Southern Health NHS Foundation, England & Wales Cricket Board, Scope, RAF LGBT Forum, various charities and theatre groups and a small number of housing providers, including Cestria Housing and Merlin Homes.

Housing colleagues I spoke to after the event were certainly impressed by both the energy and messages around diversity and inclusion coming out from these various sectors and all those organisations and individuals representing them in London yesterday.

***Looking forward to a repeat of that energy and those messages in Manchester on 14 May and do watch out for more details in next month’s e-briefing.***

Best wishes



**Clifton Robinson, Chief Executive HDN**

To follow the view of the HDN Chair, please [click here](#) to visit the Chair’s Blog.

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# Equality & Diversity News



[Disabled tenants to challenge bedroom tax in the Supreme Court](#)

*Inside Housing, 12<sup>th</sup> January 2015*

Five tenants with disabilities will be setting out their arguments for discrimination by the bedroom tax to the Supreme Court. In July 2013, the High Court ruled that although the bedroom tax was discriminatory, it was justified and therefore lawful. Ugo Hayter from the law firm Leigh Day, representing Jacqueline Carmichael, who has spina bifida, and her carer Jayson, said the decision was a 'positive step'.

[Council faces High Court challenge over homelessness policy](#)

*Inside Housing, 21<sup>st</sup> January 2015*

Westminster Council resident Hakima Alemi will argue at the High Court that the council's policy to bar homeless people from bidding for social housing for twelve months after their homelessness acceptance is unlawful. The High Court hearing is the consequence of a judicial review by Ms Alemi that started in October 2014. Hodge Jones and Allen, the law firm representing Ms Alemi, argues that the policy breaches the 1996 Housing Act which requires councils give 'reasonable preference' to homeless people. The Council argues that it is acting within the law because instead of striking homeless applicants off the register it is suspending bidding rights by twelve months.

[At least 100 mental health benefit claimants sanctioned a day](#)

*Inside Housing, 21<sup>st</sup> January 2015*

In March last year (the last month for which data is available) around 4,500 people with mental health problems on Employment and Support Allowance were sanctioned. The 100/day figure is an average from data stretching back to January 2009 and includes overturned decisions. The most common reason for being sanctioned was being late for or not attending a work programme appointment. Paul Morrison from the Methodist Church, which acquired the data via a Freedom of Information Request from the Department of Work and Pensions said "Sanctioning someone with a mental health problem for being late for a meeting is like sanctioning someone with a broken leg for limping. The fact that this system punishes people for the symptoms of their illness is a clear and worrying sign that it is fundamentally flawed."

['Help social tenants get online' Boris tells internet providers](#)

*Inside Housing, 26<sup>th</sup> January 2015*

The Mayor of London's digital inclusion strategy, which was published this month, claims that according to official statistics 20% of social housing tenants have never used the internet compared to 10% of private renters and 3% of homeowners with a mortgage. The report recognised the efforts of housing associations to provide their tenants with internet training, but there was a limit to what they are able to do alone. For example, tenants were in need of devices and long-term internet access. The report said that providers needed to ensure affordability and access for social tenants.

[Pickles 'breached Gypsy and Traveller human rights'](#)

*Inside Housing, 21<sup>st</sup> January 2015*

The High Court has ruled that Eric Pickles broke equality laws by calling in planning decisions regarding Gypsy and Traveller sites that fall within the green belt. The Court found that Pickles had breached both the Equality Act and Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights (the right to a fair trial). A spokesperson for the Equality and Human Rights Commission, which acted as intervener in the case, said: 'We understand the need to be sensitive about green belt development but this should not be used to single out individuals for unlawful discrimination.'

[Government commits £250,000 to boost tenant engagement](#)

*28<sup>th</sup> January 2015*

The communities minister Stephen Williams announced a £250,000 investment which will see tenants offered training opportunities so that they get involved in neighbourhood management. Williams said "People care about their neighbourhoods and want a say in how they evolve. That's why we are providing a further £250,000 in funding, so more tenants will be able to gain a range of skills, supporting them in the world of work and beyond. It is vital that tenants take up the opportunities available to them to take power back from their landlords, and take control over their own homes and to make the changes they want to see."

[Out at Work: The top 50 list of LGBT executives](#)

*16th January 2015*

The Telegraph's Out At Work top 50 LGBT executives list includes Robert Kerse, Executive Director at Circle Housing (number 12 on the list).

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[Off balance: parents of disabled children and paid work](#)

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[Practical implications of bedroom tax appeals](#)

[Delayed until further notice](#)

[Hard edge: mapping severe and multiple disadvantage in England](#)

## Publications

[Are housing associations ready for an ageing population?](#)

*Smith Institute and Genesis Housing, January 2015*

The percentage of the U.K. population made of over 65s is growing by 2.5% a year, and over 85s is growing by 3% a year. Older age is associated with poor health for a large proportion of the population. This is a particular concern for social housing providers as the ageing social housing population is likely to experience poorer health than the general population. The report concludes that housing associations need to: understand and listen to their existing customer base; understand implications of ageing population for their capital programmes, existing stock and new builds; develop service offers that emphasise personal, social and economic wellbeing and working partnership with healthcare and local councils. Nation policy changes required include: providing sufficient funds to meet the housing needs of older people; strengthen the emphasis of national planning policy on development for meeting the needs of older people; promoting and enabling strong, concerted local responses to bring together health, councils and housing associations.

[Off balance: parents of disabled children and paid work](#)

*Working Families, January 2015*

The report presents findings from the survey of 900 parents of disabled children. The report found that 98% of unemployed parents of disabled children are limited to the patterns of work their able to undertake. However, eighty-eight percent of unemployed parents had a strong desire to return to work. Of those in work two thirds has refrained from seeking promotion, declined promotion or accepted demotion in order to be able to care for their child. The three policy recommendations made by the report are a new statutory period of 'adjustment leave', a 'flexible by default' approach to job design in the public sector, and a new



Minister for Disability Childcare. The report findings have clear implications for housing providers that offer employment support to their tenants.

[Stonewall Top 100 Employers 2015](#)

*Stonewall, January 2015*

The equality index measures equality for lesbian, gay and bisexual staff in the workplace. A total of 397 organisations entered the index which looks at employment policies, training, network groups, career development and so on. A staff questionnaire was completed by 50,000 people as part of the research. Eleven of the top 100 were social landlords: Tower Hamlets Homes (2<sup>nd</sup>), Circle Housing (32<sup>nd</sup>), Metropolitan (joint 37<sup>th</sup>), Riverside (joint 37<sup>th</sup>), South Tyneside Homes (43<sup>rd</sup>), B3 Living (48<sup>th</sup>), Genesis (54<sup>th</sup>), Incommunities (59<sup>th</sup>), L&Q (69<sup>th</sup>), Affinity Sutton (85<sup>th</sup>) and Your Homes Newcastle (98<sup>th</sup>).

[Women and flexible working: Improving female employment outcomes in Europe](#)

*IPPR, December 2014*

The report explores how flexible working options could improve female employment rates, reduce the number of under-employed women and increase the number of women that are working at their 'qualification grade'. Findings of the report are (i) part-time work and increased employee control over working hours are associated with increased female employment rate (ii) part-time work is concentrated outside high-level jobs which contributes to the tendency for women to work below their skill level (iii) part-time work being the main flexible working option means that the hours of working among mothers in early parenthood and may mean that average working hours remain low in subsequent life phases (iv) there is demand from women for a larger range of flexible working options.

[The effect of the coalition's tax and benefit changes on household incomes and work incentives](#)

[Households below a minimum income standard: 2008/9 to 2012/13](#)

### [Practical implications of bedroom tax appeals](#)

*Chartered Institute of Housing, January 2015*

The guide covers the ground on which an appeal against the bedroom tax can be made and the implications of making an appeal. The guide can be used by tenants or organisations who wish to support a tenant in an appeal. Content includes the basis for making an appeal; bedroom tax exemption criteria; how to calculate number of bedrooms entitled to; and how a bedroom is defined.

### [Delayed until further notice](#)

*YMCA, January 2015*

The report finds that many young people are finding themselves trapped in social housing and unable to move onto independent living. Three hundred young people were surveyed for the report. Around half felt ready to move on but were unable to because there was no suitable housing. 80% said that they were worried about finding somewhere to live when they moved on. More than three quarters said they would not be able to find the deposit, and this would prevent them from moving on. Over half said that they would still be in need of extra support after leaving supported accommodation. Common requests for additional support included accessing benefits, managing money and dealing with loneliness and isolation.

### [Hard edge: mapping severe and multiple disadvantage in England](#)

*LankellyChase Foundation and Heriot-Watt University, January 2015*

The report draws together previously separate datasets from the homelessness, offending and substance misuse treatment systems. The report also considers data on mental health and poverty. Key findings include: (i) evidence of massive overlaps between the offender, substance misuse and homeless populations; (ii) The highest rates of multiple disadvantage are in the north of

England, seaside towns and some London boroughs; (iii) The majority of those in contact with services for multiple need are between 25 and 44 years old (iv) many of those with multiple disadvantage experienced neglect, poverty, family breakdown and disrupted education. As adults many suffered from loneliness, isolation, unemployment, poverty and mental ill health (v) the majority of individuals are in contact with or living with children.

### [The effect of the coalition's tax and benefit changes on household incomes and work incentives](#)

*Institute for Fiscal Studies, January 2015*

Tax and benefit changes introduced by the coalition have reduced household income by 3.3% a year, or £1,127 on average. However there is considerable variation across households at different income levels and different household types. Low-income working-age households have lost the greatest percentage of their income. Middle-income working-age households without children have gained the most in terms of large increases in income tax personal allowance and due to being less affected by benefit cuts.

### [Households below a minimum income standard: 2008/9 to 2012/13](#)

*The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, January 2015*

The report shows that 11.8 million of the 43.2 million covered by the research were below the minimum income standard (MIS) in 2012/13. This was 27% of individuals compared to 21% of individuals in 2008/2009. People in the rental sector have a greater and growing risk of living below the MIS compared to homeowners. Those in deepest poverty (living on less than half the MIS) tend to live in social housing.



## HDN Website - Careers Page

Check out our website for the latest jobs with Orbit Housing Group, London & Quadrant Housing Trust, Curo, Horton Housing Association and many more.

<http://www.housingdiversitynetwork.co.uk/jobs>

## Practitioner Group Updates

If you or any of your colleagues are interested in joining any of the groups, please contact [carla@housingdiversitynetwork.co.uk](mailto:carla@housingdiversitynetwork.co.uk). As a practitioner you are welcome to attend any of the meetings and be added to all 5 email groups.

Dates for the next meetings are:

### North West Equality & Diversity Network for Housing Practitioners

The next meeting will be held on the **25th February 2015**, Great Places Housing Group, Manchester

### Yorkshire and East Midlands Diversity Discussion Forum

The next meeting will be held on the **22nd April 2015**, Sheffield City Council, Sheffield

### North East Equality & Diversity Network for Housing Practitioners

The next meeting will be held on the **19th March 2015**, Gentoo

### South & South West Equality & Diversity Forum

The next Forum meeting will be held on the **25th March 2015**, venue to be confirmed.

### Midlands Equalities Forum

The next Forum meeting will be held on the **5th March 2015**, Black Country Housing Group, Blackheath

### London Diversity Group

The next Forum meeting will be held on the **20th May 2015**, Notting Hill Housing, London

## Upcoming Events

- [Train the E&D Trainer](#)  
15<sup>th</sup> April 2015 — Ongo, North Lincolnshire
- [HR in Housing Conference and Exhibition 2015](#)  
16<sup>th</sup> April 2015 — Inmarsat Conference Centre, London

For further information on the above events please visit the HDN website or contact [carla@housingdiversitynetwork.co.uk](mailto:carla@housingdiversitynetwork.co.uk).



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