

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Annual Report April 2023 - March 2024

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Welcome

Welcome to South Tyneside Homes' annual report on what we have done and are continuing to do to advance our commitment to practice fairness, value diversity and promote inclusion.

The report focusses on key data and provides examples that demonstrate how we deliver our commitment to equality of opportunity and diversity in our day-to-day work. The report is intended to fulfil our annual reporting obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

“Residents are at the heart of everything that we do and are encouraged to become actively involved to help improve services and challenge performance. Our aim is to put the needs and aspirations of residents at the centre of how we design and deliver our services.”

Paul Mains, Managing Director – South Tyneside Homes

If you want a copy of this report in large print, alternative format or have it explained in another language please let us know. We also welcome your views about this report. To do any of this please ring us on 0300 123 6633 or email us at connect2@southtynesidehomes.org.uk . Please click here to get in touch via [our website](#)

About South Tyneside Homes

Established in 2006, South Tyneside Homes (STH) operates as an Arm's Length Management Organisation. We manage and maintain approximately 16,000 properties on behalf of South Tyneside Council. STH is also a significant employer across the region, with 587 staff split across our directorates.

STH has its own Board of Directors that oversees housing services provided to Council tenants. The Board of 12 includes Council nominees, tenants, and independent members.

The Managing Director, supported by an Executive Director, is responsible for all operations and is accountable to the Board.

In March 2022, our Board agreed a new [Corporate Plan](#) with a new vision of **‘Providing excellent services and quality homes where customers feel safe and supported’**.

The vision and Corporate Plan will help us to deliver our strategic objectives. The Board also approved a revised [Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion \(EDI\) Strategy](#) in March 2022 to help ensure that the principles of fairness and inclusion sit at the heart of everything we do and builds on our achievements.

Our work provides a vital foundation for delivering safer neighbourhoods, achieving vibrant localities, and ensuring sustainable communities in South Tyneside.

If you would like to know more about STH or to see the full [Corporate Plan](#), please visit [our website](#).

Our approach to EDI in 2023-2024

EDI is fundamental to the way ‘we do things’ at STH. We positively embrace and celebrate diversity and promote an inclusive culture in our role as an employer and a provider of homes and services. We acknowledge that everyone is different, and that people have different needs and perspectives. Everyone brings their own contribution, experience, skills, and knowledge to make STH a successful organisation.

For our full approach to EDI, including our governance, what we do as a service provider, what we do as an employer and our approach to partnership working, please see our [EDI Policy 2022](#).

Below, we provide some examples of how we practice and promote equality, diversity and inclusion:

Our role as a provider of housing and support

Accessible services

0.4% of our tenants have visual impairments, 0.9% have learning disabilities and 0.2% have literacy issues. Our website is WCAG 2.0 accessible, user-friendly and can be used via PCs, tablets and mobile devices. The website offers users the facility to choose text fonts and sizes and information can be translated into different languages.

We use the 'ReciteMe' facility on our website which enables users to have webpages read to them. During 2023 a total of 11,684 pages were viewed using the software (an increase from 6,173 pages in 2022). There were 1,551 unique users of the software (an increase from 1,334 unique users in 2022). 46% of clicks were for the translation tool (up from 40% in 2022). 48% of clicks were for the styling tools (up from 10% in 2022). 3% of clicks were for reading aids (up from 2% in 2022) and 2% of clicks were for the screen reader (down from 48% in 2022).

The most used styling tools were increasing the font sizes. Most users of ReciteMe tools used desktop devices with only 2% of users accessing via mobile devices.

In terms of translation services, the most 5 translated languages were Bengali (29,953 clicks), English traditional (1,233 clicks), Panjabi/Punjabi (49 clicks), Amharic (28 clicks) and Ukranian (16 clicks).

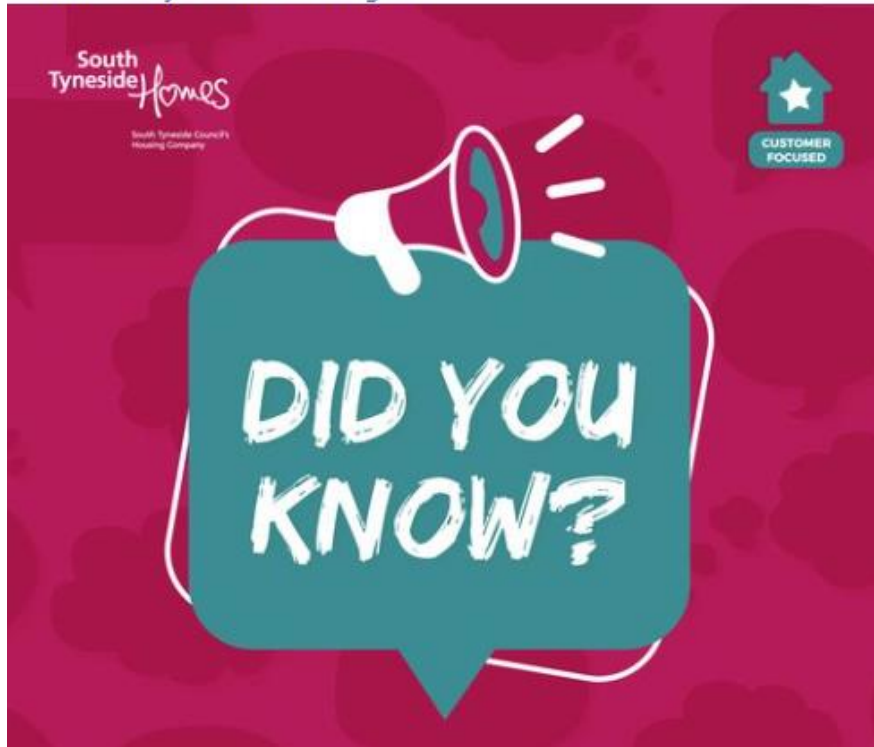
This is different to last year's most translated languages of English traditional (3,335 clicks), Arabic (26 clicks), Dutch/Flemish (25 clicks), Polish (19 clicks) and ZH-TW 6 clicks.

Our website is digitally inclusive! 🗨️

We provide ReciteMe accessibility and language support on the South Tyneside Homes site, which means you can use a customisable toolbar to read and understand content in a way that suits your needs.

Try out the toolbar on our website here 📄

www.southtynesidehomes.org.uk



A screenshot of some of our promotion around our website accessibility.

We use plain language in all published literature. Customers can request letters and other written information in large print, alternative formats and different languages and face-to-face translation and interpreting facilities are available. Our staff are encouraged to produce information in easy read formats and can access 'easy read' best practice guidance in our Inclusive Services Policy and on the Intranet in our 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Hub' which launched improved information for staff in 2023.

In July 2023 a focus group was ran with Apna Ghar (a minority ethnic women's centre for South Tyneside) to understand issues with language barriers for our customers. The outcome of this focus group was that several documents were translated into five different languages and were distributed at Apna Ghar for customers going forward. We translated information on Anti-Social Behaviour, debt advice, involvement opportunities and ways contact us.

When arranging meetings with customers, we use buildings with modern and fully accessible facilities for people using wheelchairs, mobility scooters and prams. Home visits are offered to people where appropriate.

STH carries out Equality Impact Assessments as required. Case law demonstrates that this is not only good practice but also helps us to ensure that fairness and inclusion are given due regard when formulating strategies and policies and making fundamental decisions.

We have begun reviewing or have developed 13 Equality Impact Assessments, mostly for high impact services. In particular, we spent a lot of time working with services to improve their service level data from an EDI perspective so that services better understand who is using their services and what their needs are.

Housing people in greatest housing need

Our Housing Solutions Service offers advice and support to people who are or may be threatened with homelessness. We work with a range of partners, including other housing associations and private sector landlords.

People wishing to apply for a home with STH apply and bid for housing. Properties are allocated in accordance with South Tyneside Council's Allocations Policy, which gives priority to house those in greatest housing need.

The profile of people who are on the Housing Register is collected for monitoring purposes. Homes are let to people who are in greatest housing needs, regardless of their background. You can see a breakdown of those on the Housing Register in the appendix.

STH has worked with the Council's Adult and Social Services team to increase the range of supported accommodation available in South Tyneside through redevelopment projects to maximise independent supported living opportunities and address pressures on adult social services.

South Tyneside has seven one-bedroomed properties for people sleeping on the street, or at risk of becoming homeless. Thanks to funding from the government's Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme, tenants can stay in the homes for up to two years.

Anthony's story

Anthony* found himself living rough after his long-term relationship broke down.

The 57-year-old said: "I slept in an abandoned garage and a shed; it was absolutely freezing and damp. I've always been a bit of a loner, so I didn't call on friends or anything. No one knew I was there.

"I went to the doctor and he put me in touch with an outreach worker from South Tyneside Homes. He started off by getting me food parcels as he knew I hadn't been eating. He then put me in touch with my support worker, who managed to get me this flat."

Anthony is visited by his support worker several times a week and is helped with finances, accessing different services and attending appointments.

"I'm so grateful for this support; I dread to think where I'd be now without it."

*name has been changed

Enabling tenants to maintain tenancies

Our Welfare Support Team comprises a specialist welfare benefits and debt advice service and houses the Council's Local Welfare Provision Scheme and the Social Navigator Project.

This financial year the Team has received over 3,700 applications so far for financial support from South Tyneside residents via the Local Welfare Provision Scheme. The final financial gains figure as of the end of January 2024 was £7,159,910. This is another record high total in a consecutive year for South Tyneside's Welfare Support Service.

The Cost-of-Living Crisis continues to see applications for financial support more than double along with increased demand for advice and guidance through these very difficult times. Despite the challenges the current climate presents the Team work tirelessly day-in, day-out to get the best outcomes for their customers.

Case study:

Client B aged 76 and her husband aged 78, were referred to Welfare Support by South Tyneside Homes Income Team in May 2023. After having a quick chat, the team made Attendance Allowance applications for both client and husband.



Both applications were successful, leading to two claims for Carer's Allowance, along with new claims for Pension Credit. The couple's housing benefit and council tax support was also increased as a result of their Attendance Allowance claims. These additional benefits meant the client's rent account was refunded by over £700.

This year the South Tyneside News newsletter (sent to all residents of South Tyneside every spring, summer and autumn) raised awareness on a multitude of important issues such as domestic abuse, anti-social behaviour, youth services and clubs, cost of living, pension credits, carers and parent carers, veteran support, elder abuse, health literacy and more.

Changes to our approach to tenancy sustainment

In late 2023, we made some major changes in our approach to helping people to sustain their tenancies. Following changes to our approach to tenancy sustainment we have seen:

- A reduction in rent arrears value of £130,112 from October to December 2023
- The number of tenants in rent arrears has reduced by 725 people
- 194 safeguarding referrals were made from quarter one to quarter three (we are still awaiting information regarding children's referrals for Q3 and Q4 data)
- 77 condition matters cases have seen an improvement in property condition following involvement from their Housing Officer
- 100% of respondents were satisfied with the service they received from their Housing Officer during their Tenancy Support Visits

Housing Plus tenants

52.3% of our tenants are aged 55 and over. Sheltered housing schemes managed under 'Housing Plus' service are warm and welcoming and provide modern facilities such as access to the internet, provision of computers and charging and storage facilities for wheelchairs and mobility scooters.

Our person-centred service continues to work with our tenants as individuals not as one generic group. We deliver personalised well-being calls, home safety checks, personalised fire safety advice and help signpost people as individuals not as one set of needs.

We have continued with a large number of partnership activities and events, working closely with Age Concern, Equal Arts, Cultural Spring and other organisations in our area. The team averages around 135 events per month.

We continue to encourage tenants to take up our Welfare Check offer provided by our colleagues and have had some great successes in increasing incomes for tenants. The Welfare team recently attend a coffee morning at Euryalus Court and offered advice to increase income to at least 15 tenants. We have also recently hosted a number of Energy roadshows to help customers reconsider their energy use and reduce their costs too.

STH offers automated daily phone calls to all vulnerable and isolated residents to ensure that residents within the Housing Plus schemes are safe and well. The automated approach has resulted in customers receiving calls much earlier, freeing up staff time to focus on residents who need more support. We do also continue to have an option for an officer to conduct the calls for those that require additional support or prefer not to use automation.

In 2023 the Click Silver programme was delivered to 108 people across 9 Housing Plus schemes last year with the view to increase digital skills for older people in the community.

Care experienced young people

Our Housing Solutions Team has works with our colleagues in Children Services to improve the life chances of care experienced individuals as they transition out of a care or foster setting by developing a joint housing protocol (commended at Ofsted Inspection).

We developed a mutually beneficial protocol, which is underpinned by the principles of the Stay Put-Stay Close Programme for young people reaching the age of 18, where they have a choice to remain in foster care or live independently.

We have 'Trainer Properties' set up under license, with support provided to furnish and decorate the property. Fortnightly meetings assess progress and once the young person can sustain and thrive in the property it will transfer to an Introductory Tenancy. So far 7 young people have been supported through the programme. All are managing well in their homes and have been prevented from crisis through the outreach support provided.

We currently have 7 properties which are all tenanted. These young people are all being supported by PAs from Integrated Looked After Children (ILAC), as well as a dedicated officer employed by South Tyneside Council but sits in between both services. This post was possible due to a joint bid from South Tyneside Council and South Tyneside Homes.

We have moved 3 young people on from this accommodation and we have a further 3 waiting for a placement. We have also been successful in allocating homes to 22 care experienced young people through the CBL process in this financial year.

I wanted to take this opportunity to again share my gratitude, specifically to yourself, and acknowledge the contributions of STH. We have created a genuine working relationship with a shared agenda, shared ethos and shared commitment to improve the offer. There is obviously more to do but I have genuine hope and faith that there is that continued commitment to explore the best ways of achieving this. Hayley you have gone above and beyond for some of our young people at real crisis points in their lives, sometimes stepping up when other services haven't been able to. I really respect that, and I know how hard you work. So, thank you Hayley and John in supporting a culture and way of working that ultimately enhances the corporate parenting approach that leads to tangible and meaningful improvements to our young people's lives. It really does mean a lot.

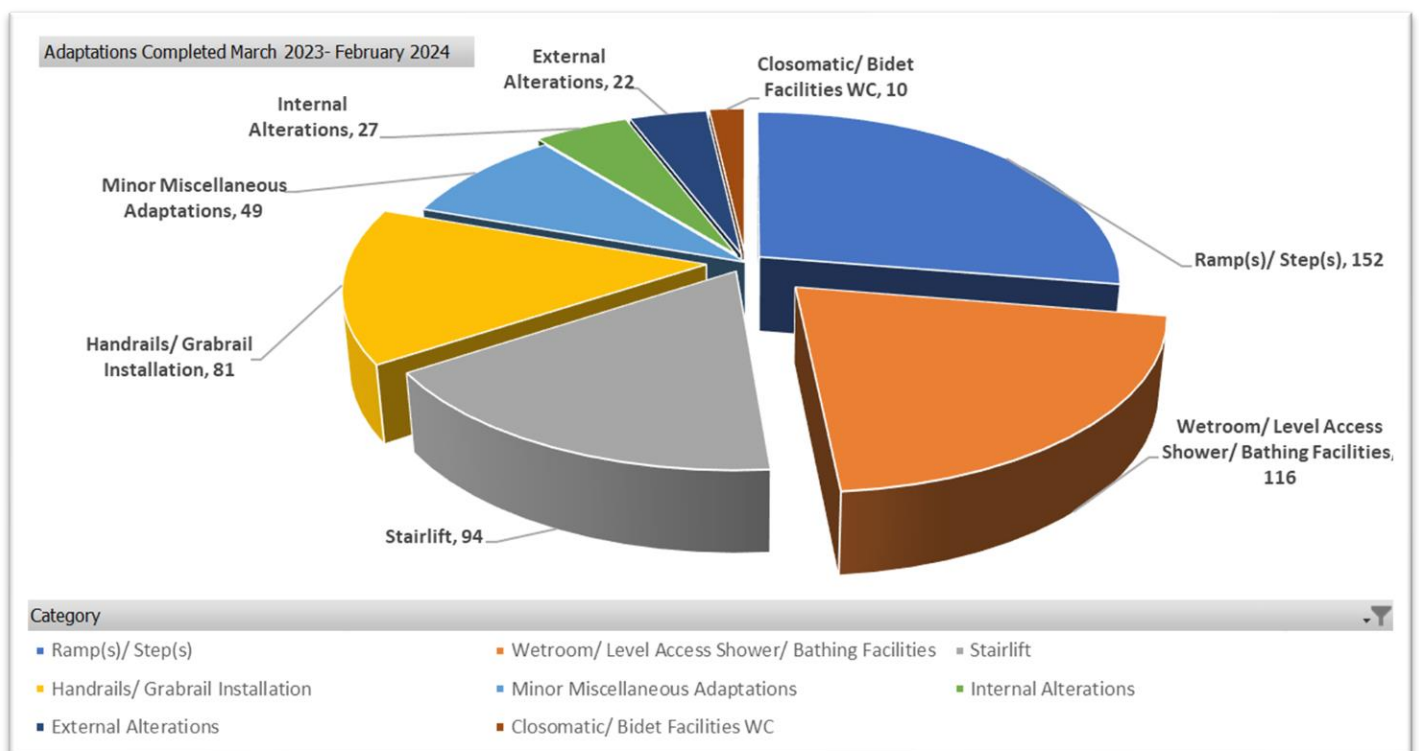
Quote from Lynn Kell, Practice Manager in Leaving Care

Mobility disabilities

9.7% of our tenants have mobility disabilities. Services for older, frailer and disabled residents include a twice-yearly grass-cutting service.

Our website provides good quality information about changes that can be made to properties to support tenants to live independently in their current homes.

An annual budget is available for property adaptations. Minor adaptations are completed by STH without the need for formal assessments by Occupational Therapists. From March 2023 to end of February 2024 we completed 551 minor adaptations to properties (an increase of 212 on last year).



There is a partnership approach with the Council to deliver major adaptations and lending disability-related equipment to tenants. This year we have completed six property extensions/loft conversions to allow residents with disabilities to be able to stay in their homes.

Adaptations needed to improve access to communal areas are identified through stock condition surveys.

In 2023 South Tyneside Council worked with disability groups and began rolling out fully accessible play equipment across the Borough's parks.

In March 2024 a new 'Changing Place Facility' with enhanced accessible toilet was introduced for residents and visitors at the South Shields Town Hall.

Community safety

At the end of January 2024, the Community Safety and Tenancy Enforcement Team the rate of successfully resolved cases was at 99.8% which is an increase of 1.99% from last year.

The Team have been trained in providing trauma responsive services, which has been applied to their practice and they have seen real success working with repeat perpetrators to address underlying cause of behaviours, link them in with our partner services as appropriate and create supportive action plans that have resulted in successes not seen before with these people.

Outcomes have included:

- Getting support packages in place to help someone manage their tenancy and maintain property condition.
- Advocating for people with a history of addiction who have previously not been assessed as meeting homeless duty. Then being able to support them into their own tenancy for the first time which provided them with stability and safe space.
- Also taking the time to build trust and rapport with a long-term, high-risk victim of domestic abuse to an adult child, which other professionals had not achieved. Then using this new relationship to support the customer with reporting abuse and violence to police, preparing her for the criminal justice process and accompanying her through the court hearing.

Hate crime

We recently ran a communications campaign to raise awareness of hate crime reporting procedures amongst our staff. We classify hate crime as urgent, and it is acknowledged within 1 working day by our Anti-Social Behaviour Team with information shared with the police/other agencies as necessary. Since the last report, the team has dealt with 10 hate crime related cases.

We work in partnership with the police and other agencies through the Community Safety Partnership Tasking Group. The Group discuss operational community safety issues including hot spots of anti-social behaviour, specific cases which take up a lot of multi-agency resources and arrange actions for early intervention, prevention and reaction to anti-social behaviour and disorder.

The Team attended a Hate Crime Conference in October 2023 aimed at raising awareness and recruiting anti hate crime champions. The conference was very informative and well attended and will inform our future work in this area.

Our Community Safety and Tenancy Enforcement Team works with multi-disciplinary partnership working (that includes representatives from the police, Probation Service, and other local and statutory agencies) to support, and where necessary, re-house victims of domestic violence in line with our Domestic Abuse Policy.

Nominated staff within South Tyneside Council are trained and supported to become Domestic Violence Champions.

High Rise and Housing Plus building safety

We have an excellent working relationship with the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service (TWFRS). We collaborate on carrying out home safety checks for residents who live in High Rise and Housing Plus buildings and by exception where there has been a safeguarding concern or condition matters referral.

In addition, we carry out personal emergency evacuation assessments to residents in High Rise and Housing Plus buildings. If someone is deemed to have an impairment or disability that may prevent them evacuating the building safely during an emergency situation, they are referred to the TWFRS who will record this so that they can address it efficiently if a situation occurs.

In response to the Building Safety Act 2022, all our high-rise buildings have been registered with the Building Safety Regulator and key building information has been submitted for consideration. We have conducted structural and flood surveys to aid the production of the safety case reports required when requested by the Building Safety Regulator. South Tyneside Homes have set a joint inspection process with residents which is called the Building Safety Champion Group. The group identifies areas of concern in our high-rise buildings and put actions in place to remedy any issues.

Fast tracking repairs

We have a Repairs and Maintenance Policy and fast track or upgrade repairs where customers have known medical issues or vulnerabilities or where families have young children.

Reducing poverty

We provide extra budgeting advice and visits to make sure customers are settling in well in their homes. We have an ongoing stock condition and Energy Performance Certificate Programme. We are updating all the information we hold on our properties to help us direct resources to those homes that require it most.

From April 2023 to 13 March 2024, we installed 1057 boilers, replaced 412 windows and 210 roofs.

South Tyneside Homes Home Energy Support work

Last year we were successful in obtaining funding from Northern Gas Networks to employ a Home Energy Support Officer for 2 years. The officer now works within the community hosting energy advice sessions across the Borough, spreading awareness regarding the dangers of carbon monoxide and as a point of contact for residents with queries regarding planned works and new energy technologies.

Our Home Energy Support Officer organised four Fuel Poverty Roadshow events in November 2023 across venues in the Borough and also four Energy Roadshow events in our Housing Plus schemes in January 2024. Attendees were able to speak to our Home Energy Support Officer for advice regarding energy bills and to the Citizens Advice Bureau for debt advice and support applying for Government grants.

Seven residents received individual benefit checks from the Citizens Advice Bureau. The events were also attended by the Local Energy Advice Partnership, the LEAP service, an organisation that advises on simple home energy saving measures. LEAP can also refer customers for free energy efficiency improvements. Just short of 100 customers attended these two events.

In addition to hosting events our Home Energy Support Officer has been out in the Borough attending community organised events. This includes the 'Better U Health and Wellbeing' drop-in at Cleadon Park Library, an Adult Carers Service coffee morning and the 'One for All Homeless' drop-in session at St Hilda's Church. In total our new officer has engaged with 166 people since their appointment in November 2023 with more Energy Roadshows already booked in for March 2024.

Involving customers

From April 2023 up to the end of December 2023, a total of 1212 customers were engaged with STH:

- On panels: 21
- Via surveys: 144
- Via Tenant Talk Facebook group: 277
- Via Customer Journey Mapping projects* (10 projects): 74
- Via Local engagement (Housing Area mgmt.): 696

*Customer Journey Mapping projects explore how service delivery can be improved including access to services. Projects this year included: letting empty properties; electrical periodics; homelessness service; accessing temporary accommodation; housing options triage and relief; allocations; welfare support; delivery of solar panels, Green Homes Grant installations; and the ASB service.

Last year our customer 'Check and Challenge' group reviewed tenancy information on both South Tyneside Council and South Tyneside Homes' websites and made recommendations to improve accessibility. They also reviewed the Customer Service Strategy and made a number of recommendations which are now being explored by staff.

Engaging with communities across our diverse Borough

Resident engagement events are regularly held with community and third sector organisations across the Borough about access to South Tyneside Homes services, to ensure engagement with communities reflected the diversity of communities in the Borough. This includes the Apna Ghar Women's Centre, STARCH - an asylum seekers and refugee support group and CREST a user-led charity working to promote race equality in the Borough.

Training opportunities for customers

Over the last year we have been helping tenants building their skills and empowerment. Over the year, a total of 92 involved customers have taken part in 26 hours of training from May 2023 to January 2024.

Training has included working in partnership with South Tyneside Council, charities across the Borough, and TPAS (Tenant Engagement Experts).

Tenants have attended workshops on the following topics:

- Promoting equality and anti-racism delivered by charity “Show Racism the Red Card”
- Understanding disability equality with “Disability North East”
- Complaints Handling TPAS

Working in partnership with South Tyneside Council Employment and Skills, the tenants attended a series of training sessions, covering “Assertiveness, Change Management, Conflict Management and Budgeting and Money Management”.

STH have also provided in house training on GDPR and safeguarding. Tenants learned to importance of keeping data safe online and how to recognise if adults or children could be at risk of harm.

Armed Forces Outreach Service

South Tyneside Council was revalidated as a Gold Award Holder by the Ministry of Defence in its Employer Recognition Scheme for work as an advocate for the Armed Forces.

Our Armed Forces Outreach Service employs a dedicated Armed Forces Support Officer and provides a range of outreach support to ex-service men and women. This includes supporting individuals in dispersed accommodation with assistance in the community.

The Armed Forces Support Officer works in partnership with NAAFI Break South Tyneside and many other local and national veteran support organisations (such as NHS Armed Forces Healthcare Lead, Op Courage, Op Restore, Op Fortitude, Bede’s Helping Hands, Op Nova, VICS, Resource NE, Operation veteran, WWTW, Northern Learning Trust, SAFBC, Launch Pad, STARS, The Red Bench Project and Anxious Minds) to ensure the best support for the veterans of South Tyneside.

Collaboration with SSAFA (the Armed Forces Charity) has raised £20,448 since April 2023 (that is 11 cases) and there are 2 cases open currently.

Various activities are held for veterans including a monthly veteran’s bush craft shooting club and free weekly boxing classes in South Shields.

There is also a veteran’s hot desk at the South Tyneside Town Hall that runs alongside the NAAFI Break drop-in sessions which are held twice a month.

Reduced water rates project with Northumbrian Water

In recent years, STH has worked with Northumbrian Water on a project to reduce water rates for identified vulnerable customers (certain medical conditions and low incomes). For 2023 (to January 2024) there was £516,948 total net receipts for this project representing significant savings for these 'in need' customers.

Our role as an employer

STH has 587 employees. 89.95% of employees are full time and 10.05% are part time.

We amended our [Flexible Working Policy](#), to give staff the right to access this from day 1 of employment and to make 2 applications per year. We have also encouraged managers to approve requests, where possible.

We changed the wording of the Flexi Policy to make it clear that South Tyneside Homes management team recognises the benefits of flexible working to support staff to achieve a work life balance. We have changed the wording of the policy to say that managers will endeavour to support staff with flexibility in their working hours. We have made it clear in the policy that staff can make multiple logins and logouts on a single day.

Our Hybrid Working Policy sets out options over where staff can work from, based on the needs of the business and their personal circumstances and needs.

Our Modern Workplace Project considers equality implications and makes it easier for staff to work remotely and dynamically in ways that suit them and that supports flexible and hybrid working.

5.26% of our staff have stated that they have a disability. Reasonable adjustments are made for prospective and current employees. STH is accredited as a 'Disabled Confident Employer'. This is publicised via the website to help potential job applicants. We make reasonable adjustments for those needing job packs in alternative formats and people who need support during the interview process. In line with good practice, the shortlisting panel does not have job applicant's personal information at the shortlisting stage of the recruitment process to avoid potential bias.

Reasonable adjustments are made for prospective and current employees. Examples of reasonable adjustments for staff include providing adjustable desks and chairs and arranging alternative working patterns.

9% of STH staff said they have responsibility for caring for an adult¹. As such, we do a lot of work and promotion to support our staff with caring responsibilities. We have a Carers Staff Network and a 'supporting carers at work' community on Viva Engage. We have recently updated our Carers Policy which gives staff the right to one week of caring leave a year.

We are members of Employers for Carers which gives managers, staff and residents access to digital resources. We are applying for level one of the Carer Confident Scheme.

64.01% of our staff are male and 34.80% are female.² 42% of our staff who responded to our Staff Survey in 2023 stated that they have responsibility for caring for a child. STH publishes its [Gender Pay Gap Report](#) each year on the website.

89.94% of our Property Services and Asset Management Directorate is male. There is an underrepresentation of female amongst our trades teams. We pro-actively encourage women to consider this area of work as a career option. An example of how we do this is through social media. See our '[Introduce a girl to engineering day](#)' video and also the next section about our apprentice and work with schools.

7% of respondents of the staff satisfaction survey had taken maternity or paternity leave within the last 12 months. Risk assessments are undertaken for pregnant women and adjustments made accordingly. Breastfeeding women are provided with appropriate rooms to express breastmilk if required and there are fridges/freezers for storing expressed milk.

Some policies that support staff with protected characteristics include Flexi time, Stuck not Sick, Compassionate Leave, Flexible Working, Hybrid Working, Career Break and Job Share, Maternity Leave, Adoption Leave, Parental Leave, Home Working, Carers, Health and Safety, Domestic Abuse, Childcare Salary Sacrifice, Menopause Guidance, and the Volunteer Policy.

Employees can access a free eyesight tests, free flu jabs, a free gym, a car allowance and car lease scheme.

Several staff have been trained as Mental Health First Aiders. They are a point of contact for an employee who is experiencing a mental health issue or emotional distress. Staff receive regular communications with mental health advice. We have in place a counselling service for staff which offers quick, free and confidential access. The service has many positive outcomes, including supporting staff to remain at work or to support a faster return to work for staff who are absent. We are currently

¹ November 2023 Staff Survey

² Staff Profile report, February 2024.

pursuing the bronze level of the prestigious Better Health at Work Award corporate accreditation.

Employment opportunities across the Borough

South Tyneside Home is large employer offering career opportunities to many residents of the Borough. In addition, in our unique housing environment we create many training and work experience opportunities.

In 2023 STH opened up its doors again to work experience students, this has seen 40 students shadowing our staff from one day to one week.

We held a unique work experience event during February half term aimed at attracting under-represented groups into the organisation, we approached colleges and various organisations in the Borough. 16 individuals signed up for the three-day event and 8 attended. We hope that events like this will encourage underrepresented groups to apply for future work opportunities within the company.

In addition to this, our Apprentice Ambassadors often attend school/college events when requested to promote our work opportunities.

We also have a very successful apprenticeship programme, offering a range of opportunities to support young people into training and employment. We offer a guaranteed interview for any children who are looked after by South Tyneside Council who apply for either a trainee or apprentice opportunity. We recently added an apprenticeship guide for Disabled people created by Disability Rights UK to our intranet and website.

As of March 2024, we have 37 apprentices and 5 trainee employees. We are currently in the process of recruiting a further 10. We have recruited 1 female apprentice and 1 female trainee this financial year. Further details of our approach to apprentice recruitment are included in [this video](#). Engagement with ethnic minority groups within the Borough has continued with visits to Apna Ghar and CREST in regard to apprentice recruitment to help drive the recruitment of underrepresented ethnic groups.

We have an established a Social Enterprise that offers traineeships to local people using our unique housing environment to create training and employment opportunities outside of our core business. Our programme delivers external contracts, supports internal teams and offers a chargeable garden tidy service to South Tyneside Homes Tenants allowing the Enterprise to be self-funded and contribute towards the organisation's strategic goals.

This year 6 people were trained, upskilled and employed through our Social Enterprise. This scheme offers the young, the long term unemployed and ex-military the opportunity to carry out valuable paid work experience while gaining some qualifications. Individuals on this scheme get involved with ground maintenances, painting work, street cleansing and project work. The individuals are also given the opportunities to shadow or work alongside our trade teams. The Enterprise is self-funded and contributes to the organisation's strategic goals.

In addition, South Tyneside Council launched the [South Tyneside Works](#) service to support South Tyneside residents with health conditions and disabilities to access education, employment and training.

Employer EDI outcomes and achievements in 2023-2024

- Published an annual Gender Pay Gap report, setting out the actions we will take to reduce our gender pay gap. The 2023 report is available [here](#) and we will shortly begin work on our report for 2024. We also have plans to analyse whether we have any other pay gaps by diversity strands in 2024.
- 89% of staff agree that **'South Tyneside Homes is dedicated to equality, diversity and inclusion'**, (with over a third of staff strongly agreeing with this statement). This is a 3% increase compared to the staff survey results from 2022, with the number of those that agreed similar, however a 4% increase in those that strongly agreed with the statement has mainly impacted the increase in the score.
- 82% of staff agree **'South Tyneside Homes takes mental health seriously and I would be comfortable in seeking help'** and this has increased from last year and shows that the majority of staff are happy with the approach of South Tyneside Homes to mental health.
- This year was the first year we asked staff about our corporate values in our staff survey. **84% of staff believe South Tyneside Homes is ethical and 83% believe South Tyneside Homes is an inclusive organisation.**
- We amended our [Flexible Working Policy](#) and our Flexi Policy to give staff more flexibility. As a result, there was a **21% increase in staff satisfaction with the opportunity for flexible working in 2023** (79% from 58% in 2022). The most widely held view around work life balance in the 2023 staff survey was the culture of flexible working practises working well, with many respondents mentioning how beneficial the current working arrangements are, with several comments mentioning that South Tyneside Homes enables a good work life balance. There were two comments where the respondent defined themselves as a new starter with the organisation, with one mentioning without the offer they would have not joined the organisation.
- Following last year's downward trend another 1% fewer staff responded with 'prefer not to say' when asked about their sexuality which may indicate that

LGBTQ+ staff feel more comfortable with STH as an organisation in doing so. When in 2021 this rate was 15.64% and an area of concern, we are now broadly in line with the community comparator of 5.40% (we are presently at 5.60%).

- 0.18% increase in lesbian, gay, bisexual or other staff putting us closer to the community comparison of 2.40%. We currently stand at 2.04%.
- 0.98% fewer staff responded with 'prefer not to say' when asked about their disabilities which may indicate that disabled staff feel more comfortable with STH as an organisation in doing so. We have 0.77% more staff with a disability though are still about half of the community comparator.
- Black/African/Caribbean/Black British and 'other ethnic group' staffing levels are now slightly higher than the community comparator percentage.
- We promoted World Mental Health Day with the theme 'mental health in an unequal world' where we promoted the work we do around mental health and our mental health First Aiders and other available support that we offer. For Mental Health Awareness Week, we held a mental health and wellbeing event where staff could speak to professionals from local businesses offering reiki, hypnotherapy and massage. At the event staff could get a mini health check from a Personal trainer, take part in yoga taster sessions, access Nordic inspired calm coaching and more.
- We promoted World Suicide Day with the theme 'creating hope through action' and offered 'A Life Worth Living Suicide Prevention Training'. We also promoted Samaritans Awareness Day and their 'Talk to Us' campaign.
- The staff groups (including the Women's Group Network, LGBTQIA+ Network, Neurodiversity and Disability Network, Carer's Network and Health and Wellbeing Group) have been active on both Viva Engage, email and in real life meetings and events. The Women's Network held crochet and chat events.
- There has been extensive promotion of the support that is available for staff with caring responsibilities to all managers and staff. The Carers network recently held an event where Carers UK led a session on developing a Carer Passport for the Local Authority. Carer employees have a unique access code to use resources from Carers UK such as support with Carers Allowance, employment support, equipment and practical support. During Carers Week pop up events were held, including a number of wellbeing events throughout the week to give carers the opportunity to connect, chat with others and take part in some physical activity. South Tyneside Adult Carers Service (STACS) Adult Carers Service organised a day trip to Whitby, a coastal walk, Ten-Pin bowling, and coffee mornings. South Tyneside Council also promoted and celebrated Young Carers Action Day.
- Other campaigns we promoted to staff included: Alcohol Awareness Week, Men's Health Week, Global Accessibility Awareness Day, Bowel Cancer Awareness Month, Emotional Health Week, World Autism Acceptance Week, Neurodiversity Celebration Week and Stress Awareness Month.

- For International Women’s Day 2024 staff were encouraged to take a 30-minute paid ‘coffee’ break with their colleagues and discuss changes they’d like to see at STH with regards to female talent progressing to leadership at STH. We also asked staff to discuss ways that STH can increase the number of female operatives we have working in our construction roles in our Property Services division. Feedback will be compiled and followed up. In addition, South Tyneside Council held an event for all staff to celebrate one year of the Women's Network and International Women's Day. A buffet lunch was provided alongside an Inspirational event aimed at young women with a focus on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) with guests sharing information about their services.
- We also held an event for International Men’s Day, attended by c.40 people. The theme was ‘Zero Male Suicide’. Guest speakers, Danny Halpin (counsellor) and Emmalene Charlton (Training Manager from Tyneside and Northumberland Mind), discussed the importance of male mental health. There was an informational session with some light-hearted activities like quizzes and ‘walk the wall’ activities, with plenty of opportunity to just sit and have a chat too.
- On Tuesdays staff receive a ‘Training Tuesday’ email where they can book from a host of EDI training sessions, such as nutrition for a healthy and happy menopause, Discrimination – how can we challenge prejudice, Disability Awareness and Etiquette, Creating an LGBT+ Inclusive Environment, Physiology of Stress, safeguarding courses, How to be a Good Trans Ally, Making Every Contact Count: Mental Health and more.
- From January to July 2023 267 employees completed training on disability awareness with a further 8 employees refreshing their general equality and diversity training.
- The Tenant Talk Facebook group now has 276 members. The age profile of the group is younger than our usual ‘involved tenant’ groups giving us a broader balance of ages when involving customers.
- Every Wednesday is ‘Wellbeing Wednesday’ where an email is sent to all staff about a particular wellbeing issue and health and wellbeing tips. Our Modern Workplace Programme has recent been promoting ways to use Teams and Microsoft Viva Insights to practice mindfulness and use focus time and music, breathing exercises and guided meditations to reduce stress at work. The Wellbeing Tab on Viva Insight also enables staff to reflect on their emotions by selecting emojis to represent how they are feeling.
- Our White Ribbon accreditation work continues. This year we promoted White Ribbon Day on 25th November with information and advice on how to get involved and #ChangeTheStory. South Tyneside currently has 18 staff signed up as White Ribbon ambassadors and champions. We also lit up the South Tyneside Town Hall orange to mark the beginning and end of the ‘16 days of activism’, it was lit up white on White Ribbon Day itself and we flew the White Ribbon Flag at the Town Hall from 24th November to 10th December. White

ribbons were available for all staff and an image of a burning candle was shown in all council buildings from 25th November to 10th December in memory of the women who have lost their lives to male violence. We also shared the image with a social media post to raise awareness.

- In 2023 we held our first Health and Wellbeing festival for our staff. For a whole week events and activities were held. At our Middlefields base we had an exercise hub with free options for staff to enjoy from Barre to Bootcamp. A group of staff took part in a sea swim at 6.30am. Free fruit smoothies were offered to staff from So Smooth Co with a fantastic turnout. There were also Time to Talk events, Resilience training, scrapbooking and Cancer Awareness sessions and colin in murals. The festival was really well received by staff who said it made them look forward to coming into work and that they mixed with colleagues that they didn't normally get the opportunity to.





Health and Wellbeing Festival

5th - 9th June 2023

Monday

Time to Talk

Session 1:
When? 8:15AM-9:15AM
Where? Unit 3 Boardroom
What? Start your week with a cuppa and a chat with our Mental Health First Aiders

Session 2:
When? 2PM-3PM
Where? Teams/Town Hall Compertz Room
What? Get-together activity with our Mental Health First Aiders

Bootcamp
When? 5PM
Where? Middlefields
What? Gary Kirso's famous bootcamps are back! All abilities welcome.



Tuesday

Resilience Coaching

Session 1:
When? 8:15-9:15AM
Where? Unit 3 Meeting Room
What? Learn about different thinking styles, putting things into perspective, problem solving, and more!

Session 2:
When? 2PM - 3PM
Where? Teams/Town Hall Compertz Room
What? Learn about different thinking styles, putting things into perspective, problem solving, and more! Join remotely or attend in person.

Make sure to take part in our 'colour by numbers' staff murals at the Town Hall and Middlefields!

Wednesday

Sea Swim

When? 6AM-7:30AM
Where? Little Haven car park
What? Do you dare? Meet up with your bravest colleagues to take part in a sea swim! *experienced staff attending

Staff Challenge
When? All day
Where? Everywhere!
What? Get in the Health and Wellbeing spirit. Where possible, we're asking staff to have walking meetings instead of Teams/sit down meeting rooms.

Bootcamp
When? 5PM
Where? Middlefields
What? Exercise bootcamp. All abilities welcome. Remember your water!

Thursday

Cancer Awareness Session

Session 1:
When? 8:15AM-9:15AM
Where? Unit 4 Training Room
What? Meet a supportive group of colleagues, learn about cancer, and listen to staff stories.

Session 2:
When? 1PM-2PM
Where? Teams/Town Hall Level 1 Meeting Room 1
What? Meet a supportive group of colleagues, learn about cancer, and listen to staff stories.

Scrapbooking
When? 11:30AM-12:30AM
Where? Middlefields Unit 4 Training Room
What? Get crafty! Bring a selection of your own photos along and make a scrapbook whilst chatting to colleagues.

Friday

Smoothies

When? From 8:30AM
Where? Outside Middlefields
What? So Smooth Co. are bringing their smoothie van to Middlefields! Grab a healthy, refreshing treat.

Mindful Minutes
When? All day
Where? Everywhere!
What? Take 30 minutes to do a mindful activity. Go for a walk, read a book, listen to a podcast - whatever you like!

Bootcamp
When? 5PM
Where? Middlefields
What? Exercise bootcamp. All abilities welcome. Remember your water!



Week long step challenge - the team who walks most wins!



Women's Network

A SAFE AND INCLUSIVE SPACE FOR ANY EMPLOYEE WHO IDENTIFIES AS A WOMAN

This is **YOUR** network!

and we encourage you to get involved. The network is run by and for employees

WE WANT TO:

- Raise and share information on issues that are important to you
- Promote change and influence policies
- Hold regular meetings with guest speakers
 - Link with other networks
 - Encourage meeting new people
- Offer a friendly, supportive and welcoming group

GET INVOLVED

- Q | Join The Women's Network on VIVA Engage
- Q | Speak to your Line Manager

TO JOIN ANY EDI NETWORK



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EDI: Strategic objectives 2022-2026

In 2022 we developed an EDI Policy and Strategy for STH.

The vision for our EDI Strategy is:

“Achieve and embed equality of opportunity, diversity and inclusion in everything South Tyneside Homes does.”

Our EDI objectives for 2022-2026 are:

- Deliver inclusive and accessible services to customers.
- Provide inclusive opportunities for resident involvement, with diverse views shaping decision making.
- Be an inclusive employer that can recruit and retain a diverse workforce.
- Have a diverse Board that demonstrates a strong commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.

These are the objectives outlined in our EDI Strategy. To see the full strategy, complete with the actions that we will deliver to enable us to meet these objectives [see here](#).

We will report progress towards these objectives in detail in each EDI Annual Report and will develop new objectives in 2026 (unless there is a material need to amend them prior to this).

Progress against objective ‘deliver inclusive and accessible services to customers’ in 2023-24:

- Analysed and reported on new census and implications for service delivery.
- Reviewed the use of interpreting services for speakers of other languages and developed supportive documents to ensure staff are confident in using these. We have developed an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Hub on the intranet where staff can easily access this information.
- Ensured that accessibility tools on the website and other arrangements for reducing communications barriers are effectively promoted.
- Carried out an accessibility audit of offices.
- Carried out accessibility audit of communal buildings.

Progress against objective ‘provide inclusive opportunities for resident involvement, with diverse views shaping decision making in 2023-24:

- Developed comprehensive mechanisms to measure the impact of resident engagement; The 2022-23 Involvement Impact Assessment detailing the impact of involvement activity was presented to Board in May 2023.

- Provided EDI briefings to involvement groups; All EDI training is now offered to Involved tenants as standard now. Recently Involved Tenants have undertaken Show Racism the Red Card and Disability Awareness Training.
- Trained staff to recognise the benefits of resident engagement and the importance of listening to a diverse range of views, to develop and improve service delivery. The Involvement Team maintains regular contact with the service delivery teams.
- Communicated with customers by accessing existing Borough-wide networks including 3rd sector organisations. This year relationships were re-established with Apnar Ghar, Crest, Whist and Naafi break (veterans).
- Delivered new opportunities and empowerment programmes for residents.
- Explored best practice and identified opportunities to improve the way we engage with customers; We are members of the National Federation of ALMOs involvement network, TPAS and we lead the North East Regional Involvement Network. This provides us with opportunities to identify good practice and benchmark ourselves with peers. We consult with our customers on an ongoing basis to identify ways to enhance what we do and are currently involved in the Energy Roadshows touring the Borough to meet with customers and are carrying out a survey about they would like to be involved in.

Progress against objective ‘be an inclusive employer that can recruit and retain a diverse workforce’ in 2023-24:

- Revised the carers policy that recognises the needs of people with diverse responsibilities such as caring for parents, children and people with disabilities.
- Developed a strong training offer for employees around EDI to ensure that they have the necessary knowledge and have opportunities to build skills; Disability Awareness training took place between January 2023 and July 2023, feedback on the sessions has been positive, with 457 employees completing this training. The next training focus will be on gender. Staff also have access to South Tyneside Council’s training on an ongoing basis and this is promoted to staff to access ‘as and when’.
- Established whether more jobs could be advertised as open to flexible/part time/job share; The Recruitment Policy has been amended to encourage roles to be advertised as suitable for job share. Working groups have taken place with managers to consider how additional flexibility can be offered to staff across the business.
- Carried out annual staff satisfaction survey broken down by protected characteristics.

- Developed practical guidance and decision-making framework for managers on reasonable adjustments to support their staff; A new Reasonable Adjustments Policy was approved in November 2023.
- Improved marketing of South Tyneside Homes as an employer of choice and to reach a higher number of potential employees, including those from diverse backgrounds. You can see our recruitment application data broken down by protected characteristics in the appendix.
- Targeted apprentice recruitment to address underrepresentation in our staff profile.
- Promoted staff benefits to attract wide range of candidates; All adverts now have our staff benefits on them.

Progress against objective ‘have a diverse Board that demonstrates a strong commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion’ in 2023-24:

We successfully achieved all our objectives under this action last year and continue to build upon them.

For our EDI data in full please see the data appendix.

Report authored by Nyomi Winter (Policy, Research and Inclusion Officer), March 2024. For further details please contact stncorpbus@southtyneside.gov.uk