

The Me Too movement and allegations of assault at this year's President's Club dinner turned the spotlight on widespread sexual harassment and discrimination within our society.

Inside Housing's feature's editor Jess McCabe led the way in investigating social housing's ongoing diversity and discrimination problems in a series of hard-hitting articles, backed up by detailed research, in 2018.

Her first piece, [Housing's Diversity Challenge](#), revealed the result of painstaking research carried out by Jess for the launch edition of Inside Housing's new campaign, Inclusive Futures. The campaign, which Jess runs, calls on the housing sector to improve its diversity, particularly in senior and executive roles. Her detailed research exposed the extent of the problem in the housing sector, and found that just 34% of chief executives are women. The picture on ethnic diversity was even more stark. Her research was quoted in a leading report into diversity in the housing sector by consultancy Altair. Jess' suggestion that housing providers should consider the 'Rooney Rule' (taken from American football, where it was used to ensure that at least one minority candidate was included on the interview list for recruiting coaches) was shortly after adopted by the UK's largest housing association, L&Q.

Jess worked tirelessly throughout 2018 to promote the campaign and use research to demonstrate why it was important. Her second piece, [Housing's #metoo Moment](#), saw scores of women open up about sexual harassment and discrimination they had faced or witnessed in their jobs with social housing providers. It saw Inside Housing provide an outlet for readers to talk about the problems they had faced at work and for the first time exposed the problems of sexual harassment simmering in a sector that prides itself of being a good employer. The investigation prompted one housing association chief executive to call for landlords to sign a sexual harassment charter in a bid to stamp out problems in the sector.

Her third piece, [Revealed: Your Stories of Discrimination in a Social Housing Workplace](#), looked at wider issues of discrimination, harassment and microaggressions in the workplace. Proving that her campaign was really connecting with readers, more than 200 people responded to Jess' survey in this area – and again it found that problems were rife. Throughout, Jess structured the pieces so that readers would get the chance to speak directly about their experiences – leading to a truly powerful and emotional piece of journalism. The president of the Chartered Institute of Housing said they should act as “a wake-up call”.

Jess' powerful pieces exposed significant problems and, most importantly, gave readers the chance to talk about their own experiences. They also helped Inside Housing push for real change. It is for this reason she deserves to win.



Housing leadership has long lacked diversity - and a new *Inside Housing* survey shows the situation isn't improving. Jess McCabe investigates

HOUSING'S DIVERSITY CHALLENGE

ILLUSTRATION: VANESSA DEL



The majority of housing's leadership is white and male - and little has changed in the past two years. This is the conclusion of *Inside Housing's* second investigation into diversity in housing associations' top jobs.

It comes as *Inside Housing* launches our Inclusive Futures campaign on diversity in housing's leadership, and after consultancy Altair published a major report calling for social landlords to take five steps to improve the representation of black and minority ethnic (BME) people in management roles (see box: Altair's five commitments).

The numbers from the survey carried out by *Inside Housing* are particularly stark when it comes to race, revealing a sector that is led overwhelmingly by one demographic: white people.

To give some perspective on what the numbers (p21) mean in reality, only three out of the 64 housing associations that responded to *Inside Housing's* survey are led by a BME chief executive. And only one of those is a woman - Geeta Nanda, chief executive of 38,000-home Metropolitan.

Male and pale

Even if you widen the scope to look at all executives across these housing associations - the most senior managers in the business - a shockingly low 15 out of 331 are BME, or 4.5%.

That means nearly three-quarters of housing associations have an executive team that is completely white, and two are led entirely by white male executives.

No association told us it had more than two BME executives. *Inside Housing* contacted the two organisations entirely led by white male

Women in housing

Women make up 39% of executives and 36% of board members, *Inside Housing's* survey revealed. This is up slightly on our 2016 survey, when we found women made up 37% of executives - albeit from a larger sample size.

Although there is still a problem of male over-representation at the top, the sector performs better than the economy at large. For example, 42 out of 64 associations - or roughly two-thirds - are led by male chief executives. Compare this

to the FTSE 100, where out of the 100 biggest companies listed on the London Stock Exchange, 94 are led by men.

Looking at the wider executive team - which is the likely pool for future housing chief executives - and 36% have executive teams made up of half or more women.

Men are still over-represented in leadership positions compared to their proportion of the workforce (53%), but housing leaders are broadly more representative of women than most

industries nationally.

Two associations are led by all-female executive teams, a sight that is extremely rare in private sector organisations.

"We get comments," says Sasha Deepwell, chief executive of 7,570-home Irwell Valley, one of these associations. She says these comments are made particularly in meetings with bankers and people in other male-dominated sectors.

"Not negative comments, but it's noticed. Nobody would say 'that's unusual' when

presented by an all-male team."

Wellingborough Homes is also led by all women executives. Jo Savage, chief executive of the association, says: "We are very proud to have an executive team who were recruited because they were the best people for the job. In this case, it has resulted in an all-female executive team. We hope this inspires young women across the housing sector and assists in increasing the trend of more female executives."

"The figures are a sobering reminder that our reality is different from our rhetoric."

executives to find out if the limited demographics of their executive teams was on their radar.

North Hertfordshire Homes is one of them - the 9,000-home association didn't offer anyone for interview, but in a statement its company secretary Molly Clark says this is partly because the team is small - made up of three executives.

The organisation is more diverse lower down the management scale, she says, and has "seven senior management roles that report directly to the executive team. Of the seven roles, there are five women, of whom two are of BME origin".

Great Places Housing Group, another association that has an all-white, all-male executive, makes a similar argument.

Its chair, Tony Davison, says that the executives are supported by a team of 10 directors.

"Although the executive team is entirely male, the director... team is comprised of a majority of women," he says. "We are confident, therefore, that our governance and senior leadership teams promote equality and diversity in our decision-making."

"The board has recently adopted a new equality and diversity strategy and is committed to ensuring our succession planning for the board and senior leadership team recognise the need to make sure we promote opportunities in the right places to ensure we attract a diverse range of candidates."

While some parts of the country are more white than others, the local demographics were not mentioned

by any of the associations *Inside Housing* contacted for comment. In its report, Altair suggests using the demographics of an organisation's tenants as a benchmark.

Little change

Boards - which are typically drawn from a wider pool of talent outside the housing sector - are slightly more representative than executive teams in terms of race, gender, disability, sexuality, and tenant representation (tenants make up just over one in 10 board members).

For example, 50 board members identify as BME out of 735 in total (or 6.8%). However, 18 associations told us they have all-white boards, and a further 10 associations were not able to say because they did not hold this information on all or some of their board.

These results show negligible change since the start of 2016, when *Inside Housing* first carried out

this survey. At that time, 4% of executives were BME, alongside 7% of board members, compared to 4.5% and 6.8% respectively today.

Steve Douglas, co-chief executive of Altair, says: "The figures are a sobering reminder that our reality is different from our rhetoric. The talent is there - if it's not getting through, we should recognise it's our sector's problem and address it urgently."

Some associations are already taking action. Optivo, recently formed from the merger of Amicus Horizon and Viridian, has decided to set "aspirational targets" for appointments to the board in future, says its executive director of people and communications, Kate Dodsworth.

The aim is for half of new board members to come from "protected groups" - such as BME people, women, disabled people or the LGBT community.

"The world is awash with talented

people from these groups," says Ms Dodsworth. "First of all you've got to acknowledge there's a problem," she adds, but says that it is time "to move to action - we've been lamenting [the problem] for years now".

When it comes to taking further steps, one idea is the 'Rooney rule' taken from American football, where it was used to ensure that at least one minority candidate was included on the interview list for recruiting coaches. "For the future, it's something I would consider," says Ms Dodsworth.

Altair's report sets out the five steps that landlords should be taking on race, and this week *Inside Housing's* Inclusive Futures campaign is calling for the sector to champion diversity more widely (see aims on page 12) - and sign up to the concrete steps we set out. The blueprint for action exists - now it is down to the sector to respond. ■

Altair's five commitments

1. Report annually on key diversity statistics
Altair argues this should include pay gap calculations based on race or ethnicity "at the very least".

2. Set boards and committees aspirational targets to recruit from under-represented groups
This should not only be reported internally but also monitored and publicised.

3. Interview a more diverse pool of candidates
Altair recommends that organisations should commit to interviewing at least one BME candidate for any senior leadership position, wherever possible. If not possible, they should explain why in their annual report.

4. Develop the leadership pipeline
This includes placing a greater focus on

developing the talents of junior BME individuals.

5. Lead by example
Chief executives and boards should take a proactive and visible role in monitoring the implementation recommendations 1-4. Organisations should commit to diversity pledges, eg the principle of not participating in non-diverse panels and encouraging staff from diverse backgrounds to speak at events.

In numbers: housing association leadership diversity

3

BME chief executives

4.5%

Percentage of members of executive teams who are BME

50

BME board members

10

Executives who identify as LGBT

4.5%

Percentage of board members with a disability (33)

10.7%

Percentage of board members who are tenants

Source: *Inside Housing* survey

Three BME chiefs speak

"If you'd have said 10 years ago that there'd be so few of us now I wouldn't have believed you! We're an ostensibly inclusive sector - at least we talk the talk. There's no lack of ability among BME people in housing associations, so there's a complex array of other factors in play. I've no doubt one of them is that when boards come to make the key appointment decision, too often they're reluctant to move away from what they've always done. I'm optimistic that things will change. I'm just surprised it's taking so long. I suspect we can now learn from other sectors, whereas I hoped we'd be the exemplars."

Alan Brunt, chief executive, Bron Afon

"Given the society we live in, the proportion of BME leaders in housing is unacceptably low. The sector needs to ensure that our leadership is reflective of the diverse communities we serve. This is an issue that needs to feature more highly in discussions at board level."

Chan Kataria, group chief executive, EMH Group

"This survey is a wake-up call for the sector - it shows it has a long way to go to achieve diverse leadership. We need to make this a priority. Visible, diverse leadership encourages others to achieve their own leadership potential. This is especially important at a time when the sector is seeing little movement at the top and mergers are resulting in fewer opportunities for progression."

Geeta Nanda, chief executive, Metropolitan



Sexual orientation and disability: the datagap

The figures for representation of LGBT people and disabled people in housing's top jobs are also worryingly low. For example, only 12 out of 735 board members identify as LGBT, along with 10 executives out of 331. Responses to our survey suggest only two disabled executives.

However, it is difficult to draw conclusions because the vast majority of the 64 housing associations said they were not able to answer questions on sexual orientation or disability, as they did not hold the

data. The most common response was "not known". It is hard to draw conclusions on how much leadership is tapping into the talent pool of LGBT people or disabled people.

A large number of associations are not routinely collecting this information when they ask staff about their demographics - and it may be that people do not feel comfortable enough in their work environment to disclose it.

When it comes to asking staff about sexuality and gender identity, Sasha Deepwell,

chief executive of Irwell Valley, says that some organisations may feel discomfort asking the question, but notes this is now common in the private sector.

In a report titled *Do Ask, Do Tell*, campaign group Stonewall points out that data gathering can show hidden barriers faced by LGBT staff.

"Monitoring exercises can also send powerful signals of alliance with your LGBT employees. It lets them know that you are thinking of them. It lets them know that they are not alone," the report says.



HOUSING'S

23%

HAD BEEN ON THE RECEIVING END OF AN UNWANTED SEXUAL ADVANCE AT WORK

AN EXCLUSIVE INSIDE

HOUSING SURVEY

#MEMENTO

HAS UNCOVERED A

SIGNIFICANT NUMBER

OF STORIES ABOUT

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

IN THE WORKPLACE.

JESS MCCABE REPORTS

57%

HAD HEARD INAPPROPRIATE SEXUAL COMMENTS AT WORK, WHETHER DIRECTED AT THEMSELVES OR SOMEONE ELSE

MOMENT

WHAT IS SEXUAL HARASSMENT?

Sexual harassment is defined in the Equality Act 2010 as: "Unwanted conduct of a sexual nature which has the purpose or effect of violating someone's dignity, or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them."

Examples of this include indecent or suggestive remarks, unwanted touching, requests or demands for sex and the dissemination of pornography.

THE SECTOR'S REACTION

Senior sector leaders told *Inside Housing* that the results of our survey were shocking – and yet not shocking.

As Sasha Deepwell, chief executive of Irwell Valley, said, it is easy to get the impression that this is a non-issue as it is not widely talked about and "because of the years of having equality awareness training, action plans, and because of the reputation of the sector for being such good employers". But, she added, the survey results showed that "clearly we've got as much of an issue as many sectors have".

Alison Inman, president of the Chartered Institute of Housing, also said the sector needs to do more to challenge the culture – and that it should start at the top. "I've known chief executives who walk through the organisation and talk to every pretty girl along the way," she noted. "I don't think organisations are really clear on what to do if something happens to you," she added – particularly if the incident involves senior managers.

"I've dismissed chief executives for sexual harassment and dealt with a number of senior managers for sexual harassment and racial discrimination," said one former housing association chair, adding that perhaps "I've not gone as public with these cases as I should have done".

Simon Nunn, executive director of member services at the National Housing Federation, said: "No one should experience sexual harassment, and especially not at work. These findings show that more needs to be done in the housing sector to tackle this issue and ensure people feel empowered to make a complaint if it does. I am sure housing associations will be very concerned by these findings and will want to take action, as they are committed to being the best possible employers.

"The National Housing Federation will facilitate conversations across the sector to discuss these results and what concrete action could be taken to address the problem at upcoming meetings and forums for housing association chief executives, senior staff and HR teams."

Tom Murtha, founder member of Social Housing Under Threat and a former housing association chief executive, said: "This issue has been ignored; it's been brushed under the carpet. It's time the sector came out and the sector said 'no more'. We've got to be very clear about our whistle-blowing policies. If someone blows the whistle and no action is taken, they won't blow the whistle again."

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"[A] line manager pressed himself up against me from behind."

"I have had a younger colleague tell me an older man touched her chest at a work event. [This was in] 2015."

"Since I joined the company in 2016, I have endured constant sexual comments from female colleagues. I have been whistled at, told I'll get to the top because of my looks, when I have been praised 'it's because she fancies you', she likes your type (black men) and many more comments. As a young man it is difficult to raise issues like this as we are expected to laugh it off. It is abnormal for a man to make these kinds of complaints as they are commonly the opposite way round."

"I was told that a board presentation that I delivered was well received because I wore a 'short skirt and heels', implying that the content was rubbish. I have had my hair pulled at a work social

event and when I challenged the person, was told I had 'nice hair'. Both incidents involved the same senior manager, who was also implicated in a rather nasty sexual harassment and bullying case brought by a very junior member of staff. All incidents [happened] within [the] past two years."

"A few years ago a colleague asked me if I 'swallow' in front of the whole office. He was around 20 years older than me – this was not followed up by management."

"Three years ago, [a] colleague told me on a number of occasions he was a male sexual predator and we should sleep together, [and] I was asked to protect a very attractive young employee from [a] senior manager."

"There are so many incidents over time and you become desensitised to them. A CEO rearranging himself in front of me. Being taken out for lunch for what I thought

[were] professional reasons and then being hit on. Being asked if I wanted to go to bed with someone. Dealing with a number of senior male managers having affairs with younger, more junior colleagues – an open secret. Sexualised workplaces where sleeping with colleagues was the norm."

"A couple of years ago, [a] male housing officer made sexually inappropriate comments about a temp. When I challenged him I was accused of being prude and colleagues around laughed at me. Afterwards they thanked me privately but none were brave enough to challenge him or support me."

"Sexual harassment including inappropriate, invasive touching and sexual comments from [a] manager, colleagues and from contractors from more than two years ago through to six months ago."

BY THE NUMBERS

23%

of 134 respondents who answered the question had experienced unwanted sexual advances at work.

More than half of these advances were made by a colleague, but a significant percentage came from a line manager, senior management, a resident, or someone from an external organisation.

57%

of 129 respondents who answered the question told us they had heard inappropriate sexual comments at work, whether directed at them or not.

Again, colleagues were overwhelmingly cited as the ones making such comments (72%), but 36% said they had heard such comments from a line manager, and the same percentage from senior management of their organisation.

(The percentages do not add up to 100% because individuals often reported comments made by multiple people.)

The #MeToo movement reverberated around the world. It gained momentum last year as a Twitter hashtag taken up by Hollywood actors to talk about rape and sexual abuse and harassment in the film industry, and quickly spread.

People all over the world – especially women – started sharing their own experiences, or just the hashtag 'MeToo' to indicate: yes, it had happened to them. No longer was this something covered up or excused; instead, people were speaking up.

In housing's corner of the planet, though, it could easily seem as though #MeToo never happened.

We wanted to find out if this was the whole story – was housing really immune? Given the scale of revelations from around the world, it seemed unlikely. Even our own staff had experienced incidents at

industry events, and we had heard occasional stories told off the record.

So we set out to investigate, conducting a major survey of people working in the sector about their experiences not just with sexual harassment, but with other types of discrimination and harassment – be that racist, homophobic or sexist.

Shocking response

The results of that broader piece of research will be published in two weeks. However, of the 225 housing professionals to fill out our survey, a significant number came to tell us about sexual harassment and inappropriate sexual behaviour that they had experienced or witnessed in their housing jobs.

You can look at the results in terms of numbers (see box: By the numbers). And they are shocking – 23% had been on the receiving end of an

unwanted sexual advance at work; and 57% had heard inappropriate sexual comments at work, whether directed at themselves or someone else.

But the real story here is in the individual truth-telling, and what it means for the sector. There were so many stories, we couldn't possibly include them all here.

This selection will give a sense of what is happening in the offices of housing associations, councils, charities and other housing bodies all over the country.

In response to our question about inappropriate sexual comments at work, one typical response was: "Too numerous to mention and despite raising with individuals, still continues today."

Another respondent said: "I have been subject to unwanted sexual advances from my manager who is a

director. I didn't feel I could say anything because of his position and given the redundancies we've had I was worried for my job as complaining would make me a target."

Another told of "regular inappropriate comments about how 'fit and sexy' I apparently look and 'what I would do to you', from a line manager or a senior manager".

The vast majority of respondents to tell us about their experiences were women, and in many cases directly linked to archaic sexist attitudes in the workplace culture.

A respondent who reported inappropriate sexual conduct told us: "My organisation increasingly has a 'macho' culture where women's voices are not heard and our contribution is dismissed."

A small number of men did report an issue – which they often linked to racist attitudes towards them from

colleagues or managers. Housing professionals who had directly experienced other forms of discrimination tended to say that their race or sexuality was a factor in why they had been targeted.

One person explained, after she was verbally harassed by a colleague: "I was shocked and found it hard to respond. I brushed it off... because I didn't want to draw attention to myself, nor do I have the energy to fight the many battles I fight in work as a black woman."

But she added: "I feel all these comments and actions would probably not be so frequent if I wasn't black."

Many people told us they did not report incidents due to the culture of the workplace – or because senior managers were responsible.

"A camera was found under my team's desk. We reported this but the police were not involved. We were

not happy with the response to the incident so it's put us off reporting anything else," one respondent told us.

Respondents also told us about the toll these experiences took on them personally, and their careers.

One female housing professional told us that she had been sexually assaulted by a much older man at work, about 10 years ago. "I reported this to my line manager who clearly didn't believe me. He did keep more of an eye on me though, and without my knowledge was watching me on CCTV when the man tried to do it again, and intervened.

"As far as I know, nothing was reported to HR, and the perpetrator was taken out for lunch by the line manager. I was urged not to take it further as the man was 'going through a tough time with his wife'. I was young and unassertive so didn't –

but I've never forgotten how angry this made me, and how unimportant this made me feel."

As one respondent put it, she was "not given any responsibility. Not listened to. All ideas put down. Treated as an idiot. My experiences not taken into consideration, and continually asked out for candlelit dinners, stroked from the back, inappropriate questions... comments on what I was wearing etc".

Stories involving tenants

The person responsible was in most cases a man and most often a colleague or manager, but a small number of cases did involve residents behaving inappropriately to staff.

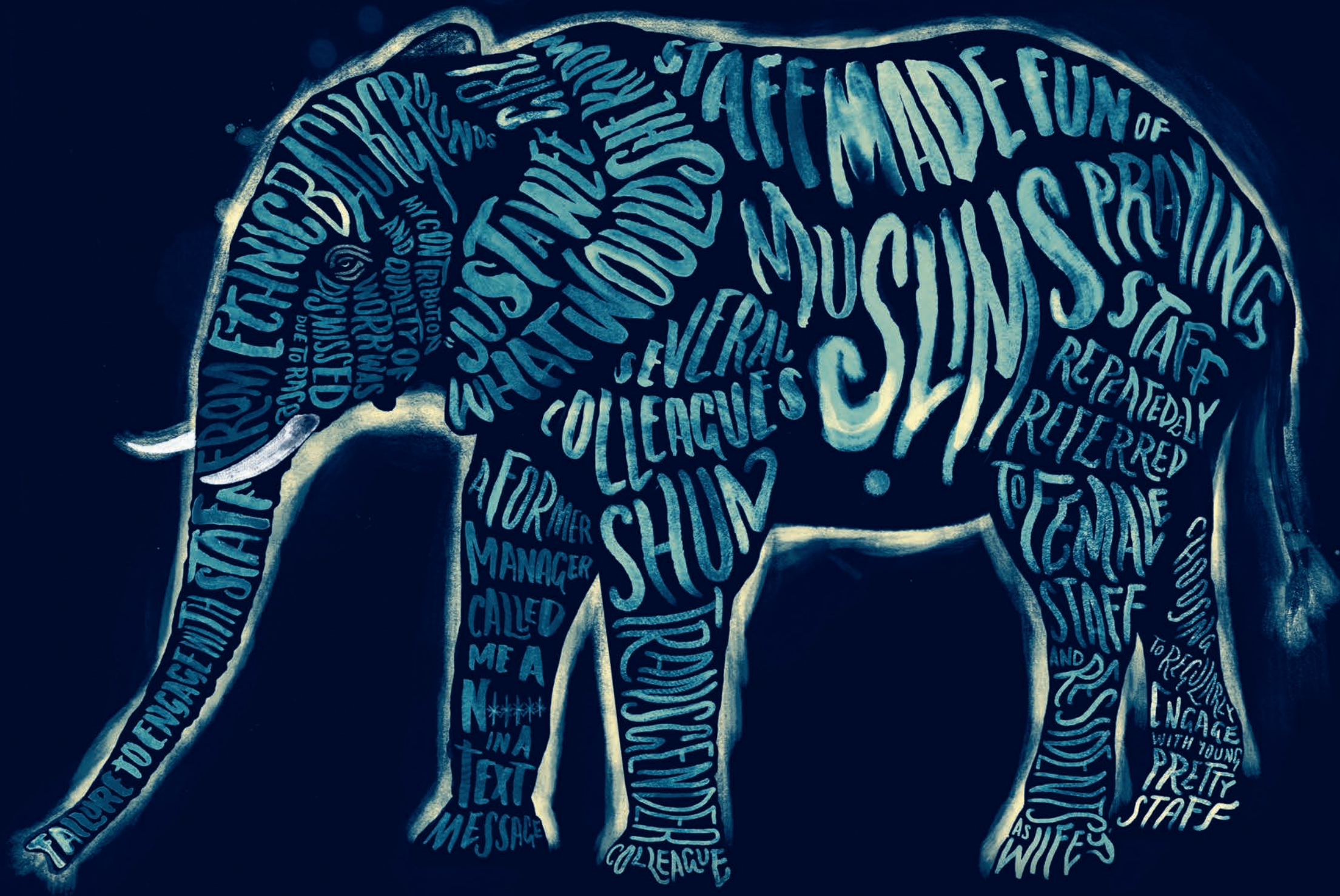
Although our survey was focused on the experiences of people working in housing, a number of respondents also brought up worrying issues with how housing staff behave around

tenants. One person mentioned that a young tenant had shown her WhatsApp messages from a male staff member asking for dates. "She was too scared to complain," the survey respondent told us.

Numerous stories raise questions about how social landlords are handling issues reported by their own staff but involving other organisations. One respondent was sexually assaulted by a contractor at their work leaving party. Others reported being inappropriately touched by contractors.

Some stories date back decades – but still have an impact on those people today. And others happened as recently as two weeks prior to the individual filling in *Inside Housing's* survey. In the section above we let the housing professionals who responded to our survey tell their stories in their own words. ■

ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM



Housing professionals have responded to *Inside Housing's* survey on discrimination at work, and the results are shocking. *Jess McCabe* reports

This year, *Inside Housing* has spent a long time looking at the lack of diversity among the sector's leaders - we've got a whole campaign on it, called Inclusive Futures. We've talked about mentoring, and raising up talented people.

An elephant has been wandering about the room the entire time: discrimination and prejudicial attitudes.

If you pay attention to *The Sunday Times*' list of the best employers, or the rows of awards lining the shelves of many a social landlord, you might be under the impression the housing sector is a modern workplace utopia. But we know, of course, it is not.

Still, until now we've not really known how deep a problem discrimination is in housing, or what impact it has on the over-representation of white, straight men in the sector's top jobs.

But for the first time, *Inside Housing* has carried out a major survey which casts fresh light on the issue, and the findings are very worrying indeed.

Ageism, sexism, racism

A total of 225 people responded to our survey on discrimination, harassment and microaggressions in the workplace, and we found that problems are rife.

The most common problems are ageism and sexism, with racism not far behind. (It is worth noting that as the whole workforce could potentially experience ageism and roughly half are women, this is perhaps not surprising.)

But problems were reported across all the forms of discrimination covered in the Equality Act 2010, and additional factors not covered by the legislation - for example economic background, for which 18% of respondents had experienced or witnessed negative comments or abusive behaviour.

We asked about problems the survey respondents had experienced themselves - but also what they'd witnessed towards other people. Most reported behaviour both towards themselves (71%) and someone else - perhaps a colleague (67%) or a resident (36%).

Others cited incidents towards

interview applicants and the public, and general comments made about an entire group of people.

We also asked who the person responsible for the behaviour was, and the answers show that colleagues at the same level are the biggest problem - but worryingly, line managers and senior managers in organisations are far from excluded.

Converging problems

The severity of some of the racist incidents described by housing professionals in our survey does stand out, especially in light of *Inside Housing*'s survey findings earlier this year showing that black and minority ethnic (BME) people are particularly under-represented in housing's top jobs.

Details of some of these incidents are included below (see box: In their own words, pages 28 and 30), and include several separate cases of the use of the N-word by colleagues, managers and residents.

One thing worth noting is the 'intersectionality' of many of these problems. The term was coined by American legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw to particularly pinpoint the discrimination experienced by African-American women. It's not just sexism, it's not just racism - it's an ugly combination of the two.

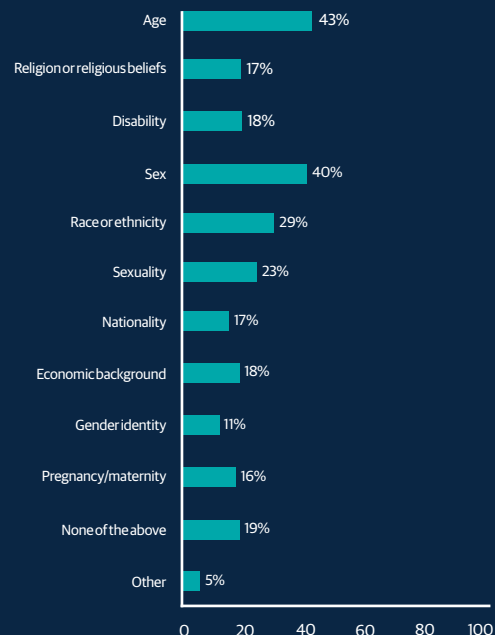
Intersectional discrimination is at work in very many of the individual stories told to *Inside Housing* in this survey, both for black women working in housing and others. Take the example of one woman who had to reapply for her job last winter during a restructure, which involved taking a psychometric test.

"The feedback was that I was probably menopausal! A senior manager then tried to justify what had been said by saying that once you get to 50 you tend to forget things," she said.

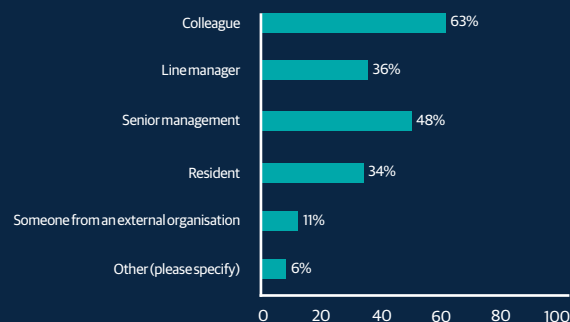
Whether this is sexism, ageism or ageist sexism is hard to pin down - and perhaps naming the problem is beside the point.

Ageist comments were often reported by older and younger women. One anecdote told to *Inside Housing* by a board member was particularly telling. This board member was a younger woman, and in a board meeting she was challenging the business plan being put forward. ▶

I HAVE OBSERVED NEGATIVE COMMENTS OR ABUSIVE BEHAVIOUR AT WORK RELATING TO MY OWN OR SOMEONE ELSE'S:



THE COMMENTS/BEHAVIOUR WERE MADE/CARRIED OUT BY:



Source: *Inside Housing*

Note: respondents were asked to tick all that apply

NOT A SINGLE PERSON IN THE ROOM STOOD UP FOR ME

Who responded?

Our survey asked about incidents that housing professionals had witnessed - not just experienced. But the breakdown of who responded is still telling. Not all respondents answered all questions, but no question got less than 100 responses.

- 65% of respondents were women; 35% were men

- 79% of respondents work for a housing association, with the remainder smattered across other housing bodies such as councils, ALMOs and charities
- The average age of a respondent was 44
- 13% identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual
- 18% were disabled

The financial advisor, who was an older man, got increasingly irritated by her questions, and suddenly turned to her and said: “Would you just shut up, you stupid little girl.”

The survey respondent said: “Not a single person in the room stood up for me. I fought my corner [but] I left the meeting really angry.” Ultimately this board member did have to resign over the incident.

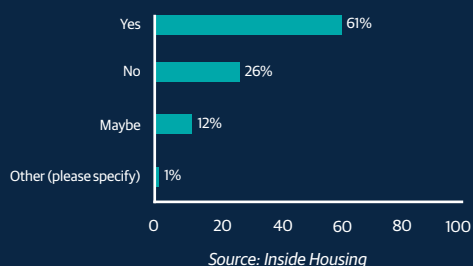
Many more stories in our survey did not end so well. Forty-eight per

cent told us they had not made an official complaint (although only 85 out of 225 respondents chose to answer this question). Of those who did make a report, only 10% were happy with the outcome - compared to 39% who were not.

The survey results throw down a challenge to the sector: will social landlords take action to show that their credentials as good employers amount to more than HR awards and certificates? ■

I HAVE
20 YEARS
LEFT IN WORK
+
FEEL CONSIGNED
TO THE
SCRAP
HEAP

DO YOU FEEL LIKE YOU HAVE BEEN TALKED DOWN TO OR IGNORED AT WORK AS A RESULT OF YOUR SEX, RACE, ETHNICITY, GENDER IDENTITY, SEXUALITY, RELIGION, NATIONALITY, DISABILITY OR ECONOMIC BACKGROUND?



Career impact

Our survey found that not only do discriminatory attitudes exist, but housing professionals believe they are a factor holding back their careers.

A total of 61% of respondents said they felt they had been talked down to or ignored at work as a result of their sex, race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexuality, religion, nationality, disability or economic background. A further 12% said this had “maybe” happened.

A total of 41% believe their progress at work has been held back.

“I have not been shortlisted for interviews although [I am] better qualified than white candidates who were.”

“I have been made aware of what a conscientious worker I am. All my work reviews over the years are nothing short of excellent and have been consistently so for close to 10 years. I am assertive and innovative, possess all the skills they need, and yet time and time again I don’t seem to be good enough for any position higher than where I am.”

“Not copied into emails, [not] invited to conferences, and not invited to meetings with other managers. I am the only female manager.”

“There is an assumption women should stick with low-paid, part-time, flexible working - and this obviously harms their career chances. There are few, if any, career development opportunities for those working part time. I think this can mean that my council can miss out on expertise and skills as part-time working does not mean less committed employees. In contrast, male colleagues are not penalised at all for starting families - quite the opposite, as they take prime positions in the gap that women have essentially vacated.”

“[My] line manager constantly talked down to me. In [my] annual appraisal [the] only positive thing he said I did was still attend work while my father was critically ill in hospital. At a presentation for a tender, on leaving my line manager said

we had lost the tender due to one of my answers. Two days later we heard we had won the tender. I was the only female involved.”

“[During a] merger with [an] organisation with [a] male-dominated, aggressive culture, female directors missed out on top jobs. [This is] now happening at management levels.”

“Having taken on additional staff and workloads, I applied for a regrade of my post. My director agreed that yes, my current work looked as if it should be graded higher. However, he also said that he didn’t want me to be graded higher and so would take some of the work away from me and give it to my (male) line manager. Very kindly, he also added that there was no problem with my performance!”

“Once colleagues knew I lived in social housing they no longer spoke to me in the same way. I was no longer asked for opinions in team meetings. [This was] within the last year.”

“At a senior meeting... a colleague handed out pens to everyone in the room - except to me and the only other woman there. He handed us crayons. [This was] three years ago.”

“I feel that being an Asian woman is the reason why I have been overlooked for promotion. I had to leave the organisation in order to progress even though I was perfectly qualified for some of the positions I have applied for.”

Sector comment



"*Inside Housing* earns its name through this research by outing the extent of abusive and stereotypical behaviour. Survey respondents give clear evidence of unacceptable behaviours on the grounds of each of the nine protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 – as well as others, such as economic background, that we at Housing Diversity Network regularly hear about. I kissed my teeth at some of the comments: using the N-word openly in the office, black and white colleagues not being equally recognised, male board members blanking female ones, some not seen as young being consigned to the scrapheap, pregnant women having to win their removed rights, derogatory comments about gay staff, and resident/staff conflict due to different nationalities."

Raj Patel, chief executive, Housing Diversity Network



"This is disappointing but no surprise. It reinforces the difficulties minorities are facing. This is a sector

reputation issue as well as an organisational failure issue. The sector needs to rise to the key challenges beyond denial and commit to making a difference. We have a strategic problem, and leaders must take responsibility to sort it out. We must bring about the culture shift, to live up to our stated values of inclusion and diversity."

Gina Amoh, chief executive, Inquilab, and chair, BME London Landlords



"The results make incredibly difficult reading and appear to confirm that no area of public life is free

from a whole range of discriminatory, offensive and abusive behaviour. This should act as a wake-up call to all who hoped or assumed that these behaviours had been confined to 'the past'. We need the same high expectations from the frontline to the board and our starting point has to be that we take seriously any reports of behaviour that falls short. There can be no excuses and no hiding places."

Alison Inman, president, Chartered Institute of Housing

In their own words

Some of the comments included may be distressing

"Within [the] past year [a] 23-year-old housing officer [was] dismissed or ignored and described as 'just a wee girl, what would she know'. Her senior can also be quite condescending but thinks she is being caring and protective."

"Age discrimination is something I see regularly – people over 55 (access to pension) are leant upon, making life difficult for them through micromanagement or unreasonable requests so that they take early retirement. Race discrimination is made regularly by people who make mistakes about your name and call you another BME colleague's name. When you challenge them they say 'well, you look like him/her'. This happened [in] late 2017 last time."

*"A former manager called me a n***** in a text message*

after he left the organisation. A former manager tore and binned a letter I had handed her for approval on a training course right in front of me, while also telling me I could not attend the training. I felt this was to dehumanise, humiliate and make me feel insignificant because of my ethnicity and background. The list is endless."

"[A] colleague often commented on my hair type, for example saying as a black woman going swimming my hair would 'go poof'. He drew diagrams illustrating this. He would also shout out that he didn't eat foreign muck in an open office. Many colleagues would laugh."

"Hey up, there's one of your mates,' [was said] in reference to a black person visiting the office. [The person who made the

comment] also referred to a gay colleague in a derogatory manner."

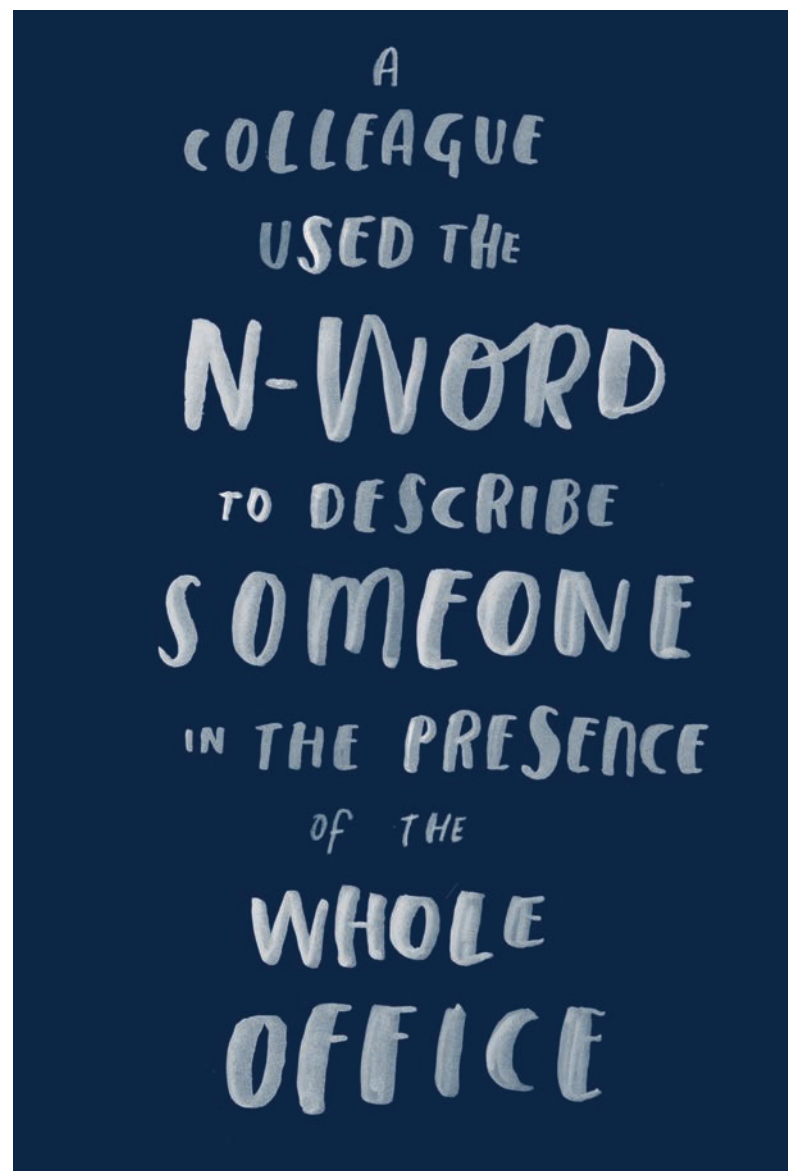
"During an interview last week my line manager made comments about a person's age, ie being too young to take on the role. [Another time], a subordinate has referred to my skin tone as being the darkest in a negative way – this refers to colourism (this was a few months ago). A colleague used the N-word to describe someone – this was in the presence of the whole office."

*"Unacceptable behaviour from residents to staff, for example a tenant calling a colleague a 'house n*****'. I have also witnessed it and been called a stupid woman, been called a bitch where a*

man would have been called ambitious, had rumours spread about my relationships with men as a way to discredit me and experienced overtly sexual behaviour from male colleagues."

"[My] contribution and quality of work [was] dismissed due to race and when the same things were done [by] others who were white it was accepted."

"1) Making fun of Muslims praying. 2) Saying things like 'why do you wear a scarf?' 3) I feel out of place because people do not understand why I wear a scarf. 4) When Ramadan comes [it's] not respected. Instead [people make] remarks like 'how can you starve yourself?'"



In their own words

Some of the comments included may be distressing

“Being paid less than a male colleague. Being the only female in a team of five managers [and] not getting a training opportunity. When questioned why, being told it’s not because you’re female – I didn’t question because of that, but [it was] interesting that was the reason given. Comments about women managers being bossy, emotional, time of the month.”

“Board members directing questions at a male colleague instead of the responsible female. Board members stating having one female on the board demonstrates diversity. Residents refusing to deal with staff that are of [a] different nationality.”

“Failure to engage with staff from ethnic backgrounds and choosing to regularly engage with young, pretty staff; jokes around the appearance of staff; overly assertive behaviour towards women and remarks such as ‘feisty’ used to describe [a] new senior female exec.”

“Several years ago myself and three colleagues became pregnant at the same time. Our manager was not happy and he planned to advertise our posts internally to other staff from different offices. This would have meant on our return we would have been based at different offices away from our childcare. We were being disadvantaged because we were pregnant. Our union got involved – we had to fight to stop this happening. We were successful and received [an] apology from senior management.”

“Currently our organisation is obsessed with youth and disregards age/experience. The best person for the job

gets overlooked in favour of the youngest. I have 20 years left in the work environment and feel consigned to the scrap heap.”

“Director advising [a] junior member of staff not to get pregnant as it will affect her opportunities in the workplace. This happened in January 2018.”

“I work full time and am often (by males and females) asked: ‘So what do you do with the children when you are at work?’”

“Gender [is] used as a dividing characteristic within the office by male staff frequently, and as recently as last week. Repeatedly referring to females (staff and residents) as ‘wifey’. Trying to defer admin tasks to women in the office, excluding the exclusively female team from organisational meetings and discussions.”

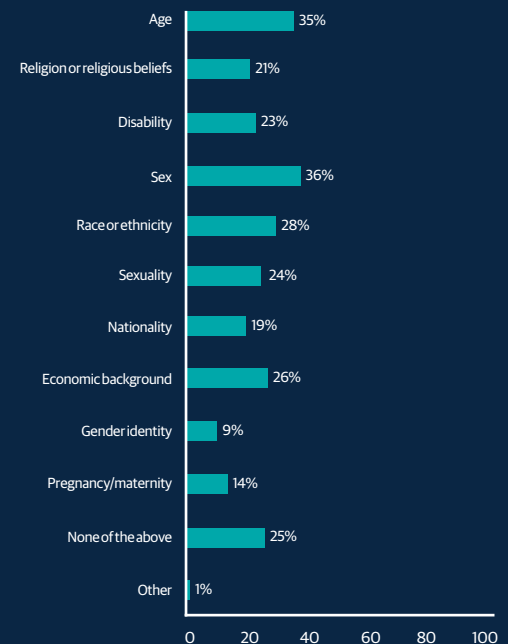
“A colleague was promoted to a management position and a senior manager was furious and vocalised this when he found out she was pregnant.”

“Six months ago while in the office a colleague was vocal about gay people, saying it was disgusting and if gay people come on the TV he switches it off.”

“Two colleagues regularly make heterosexist ‘jokes’. Several colleagues shun a transgender colleague.”

“I have a physical disability. My role allowed me flexibility to work from home to enable me to manage my condition and the demands of my role. Following a merger my role was re-designated to be based at an office in London.

I HAVE EXPERIENCED MICROAGGRESSIONS AT WORK RELATING TO MY OWN OR SOMEONE ELSE’S:



Source: Inside Housing

Note: a microaggression is “a comment or action that subtly and often unconsciously or unintentionally expresses a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalised group”

A TENANT SENT A TEXT MESSAGE CALLING ME HOMOPHOBIC NAMES. I AM THAT TENANT'S HOUSING OFFICER

This meant that I could not accept the substantive post because due to my disability I was unable to travel to London every day. No flexibility was allowed, despite me explaining how my disability meant that I could no longer continue with my role. I felt I had no choice but to leave the organisation. This happened last year.”

“[When an anti-Semitic incident happened] I was so shocked I virtually cried as

the person was my line manager who knew I was Jewish. In hindsight and on reflection I regret not taking it further but I just knew that if I did at the time I would have been managed out as the person had a reputation for bullying behaviour. In the same organisation something crude was scribbled on the toilet wall about my sexuality and referred to me engaging in lewd acts. No action could be taken as nobody would own up to it.” ■