

## Equality in Housing Live Recording at SCVO The Gathering

**Pedro:** Hello, everyone. Oh, that was loud. Welcome to the Equality in Housing podcast and our first live episode. My name is Pedro Cameron, I'm Head of Engagement for Housing Options Scotland.

Housing Options Scotland is an advice, information and support charity that provides housing advice to people with disabilities, to people over the age of 55, and to members of the Armed Forces community. And, we deliver that work across Scotland, and we try to work in partnership with housing providers, with the third sector, and to think intersectionally about housing in Scotland and the solutions to it in the current climate.

**Gareth:** I'm Gareth Young. I'm Knowledge Exchange and Impact Fellow for the UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence and we're a consortium of universities based across the UK. And our role is or has been to do research and evidence reviews around housing in the broadest sense and my role specifically is to try and sit in a space between academia, policy, practice, communities.

A lot of our research is publicly funded and therefore there's a recognition that we've got responsibility to make sure that the findings of our work is going back out to have impact economically, socially, culturally. And as part of this work I also kind of want to engage with people across, you know, outside of academia to understand what we can be doing to make our research more accessible. And, as part of this work, I've started to lead on our EDI work because it was just a recognition that there wasn't, in UK housing studies specifically, there just wasn't enough to be done. And this is kind of how we came to be here.

**Pedro:** So, for a bit of background, Gareth and myself are really passionate about equality, diversity and inclusion and how it can contribute to making the housing landscape and the third sector better for everyone.

We've got three fantastic speakers for today's live episode, who work across the housing and voluntary sector, and who are going to share some of their insights and experiences from their own networks today. And in a minute, we'll get each speaker to introduce themselves and their organisation before we get into the nitty-gritty.

For anyone who isn't familiar with the podcast, we started, Gareth and myself started Equality in Housing through a mutual colleague's introduction because we're both trying to find ways to get conversations about EDI and housing going, in our own networks and in the sector as a whole.

We both knew that there was a load of great work happening across the sectors, but we both found that in our own organisations not enough was happening, but from conversations we were having there were so many different forms of inequality and discrimination in housing in Scotland and in the UK more widely.

We were both initially a bit nervous about getting things wrong, as neither of us are truly experts, and I don't think anyone truly is an expert in equality, diversity and inclusion. But equally, we knew that we had to do something about it, and we hope that the podcast provides a platform and an opportunity for people to share insights about the different aspects of equalities in housing, and to provide thoughts and insights about what individuals, about what organisations can do, and about what the government can do, and should be doing, to improve housing for everyone and to ensure that EDI kind of runs through policy, practice and everyday experience. And also, to inspire other people to talk about these issues and to think about these issues and to try and make things better.

We're aiming to address today the many aspects of disadvantage in the Scottish housing sector and in the third sector. And this includes all the protected characteristics that are defined by the Equality Act, but also other disadvantaged groups that are not covered by that, who face individual challenges. And we're looking at not just how people who are accessing houses are affected by that, but also the impact on the workforce as well. So, we're here to shine a light on some best practice, some gaps in evidence and the links between lived experience and frontline workers and the third sector and research and academia.

So, we are delighted to be joined today by three people who are making an impact in the housing and third sectors and I'm going to get them to sort of go down the line and introduce themselves. So, I'm going to start with Gordon MacRae of Shelter Scotland.

**Gordon:** Thanks, Pedro. As Pedro said I'm Gordon MacRae, I'm the Assistant Director for Communications and Advocacy at Shelter Scotland.

I have to say, I'm feeling very self-conscious right now in terms of a debate about equality, trying to think about how this panel looks in some respects, but I think it is

important that we consider that the breadth of EDI isn't just what we see, it's also how people are engaged and what's going on.

So, for me at Shelter Scotland, we view housing as a fundamental human right, and that human right is denied for far too many people, far more than people even begin to appreciate. And that denial of rights falls more greatly on people who would fall under the banners of a protected characteristic, but fundamentally who have less voice in our society. How we change the sector that's trying to support them and how we change the responses of government who maybe aren't always open to what changes need to happen is very much where we're focused. I'll save that for later.

**Aer:** Yep. So, my name's Aer Nicholson Clasby, I use they/them pronouns. I'm a Project Manager at GCVS, which is based in Glasgow, and I run THRE, which is Third Sector Human Rights and Equalities, which is a Scotland wide project. We are also in partnership with EVOC, who are in Edinburgh and Highlands TSI, who are unsurprisingly in the Highlands. And the project's core sort of remit really, we're funded by the Scottish Government, is to support Scotland's Third Sector, to kind of learn more about and take the kind of core principles of human rights and equalities into how they run themselves as an organisation, how they think about what they do and how they deliver their services. And we do that through free training and resources.

And just sort of coming in quickly about the idea of maybe how the panel looks. I think a really important thing is also to remember that diversity isn't necessarily visible. As you've probably guessed, I am non-binary, I'm queer, I'm mixed heritage, child of a Burmese refugee mother, I have two hidden disabilities. I'm also a Buddhist. So, HR people love me because I tick so many boxes. But yeah, remembering that, yeah, you know, diversity is really something that can't be judged by what you see or what you assume. It's something that needs insight and it needs connection and it needs conversations.

**Pedro:** Thanks Aer.

**Iain:** Hi, my name's Ian Chisholm. I work for an organisation called Positive Action in Housing. You're a hard act to follow, that was beautiful. So, Positive Action in Housing is particularly interested in one strand of equality around race. We were initially conceived as an organisation back in the late 80s, early 90s, following research looking at how people from ethnic minorities were finding it really difficult to access social housing, in particular, but also owner-occupied housing and private rented housing. We started as a charity in 1995 and we're really, particularly, a campaigning organisation and helping housing associations work on their policy and

practice. From the early 2000s, following the Home Office's dispersal program in Glasgow, dispersing asylum seekers to Glasgow, we started focusing more on that particular community in Glasgow. And, in the early 2000s, we started casework projects, actually doing casework with individuals and helping people directly to access good quality permanent housing.

That has morphed over the years into other areas around welfare benefits, digital skills, money and debt advice. We provide a wide range of these, again because housing is such a fundamental right for people, the communities that we work with are excluded because of immigration law from accessing that. So, it's not so much equality and diversity in those terms. We're actually working with people who the law excludes from housing, for you know, for immigration control reasons. I'll talk more about that later on

**Gareth:** That's great, thank you for introducing yourself. I mean we were going to start by talking a little bit, kind of, you know, we won't be able to cover everything. So, we were going to just start to break down, from the very beginning, what we mean by EDI in our sort of individual roles. I know we've talked a little bit about that, but just, you know, sort of your thoughts, and I'll pass back along the panel on kind of what does EDI mean to you as an individual, your organisation, and yeah, you know, some more of the examples you were talking about around what you're doing to further the cause.

I'll start with you, I'll pass back.

**Iain:** So, we're working from a very practical point of view, having, you know, equality of access and equality of participation is really a practical issue. It's an issue of people knowing what their rights are and knowing where to go and get good quality advice so that they can actually access that.

And so, we don't deal very much in the kind of theory of EDI. I'm not fluent in that as a language. But yeah, we're trying to concentrate on really, really elemental parts of people's lives. A safe place to live. Making sure that people have got money in their pocket so that they can put food on the table, that they can build a foundation for their lives in Scotland. And trying to overcome those barriers that are put in place, particularly around immigration law. And with housing, we've got this kind of dichotomy between the Scottish housing law, which is very progressive and recognises housing as being something absolutely vital to everybody. It doesn't always provide that necessarily, but it recognises that as being supremely important, and immigration law, which uses destitution and poverty as a way of influencing

people's decisions as to whether or not they will continue to live in the UK, if they'll continue to pursue their aim of building their life here.

So, it's a really, you know, it's a kind of a daily fight to try to give people the space and the information and the knowledge that they need to try to bridge that gap and stay safe and build a life for themselves and their family in the UK.

**Aer:** Yeah, I mean, EDI it's equality, diversity, inclusion. I think it is a phrase that, you know, is a collection of words that are used a lot together. For us, actually, we talk about equality or equalities, diversity and inclusion are very much part of that, and I think sometimes it can lead to this sort of, splitting them in that way can lead to this focus, and it can also lead to a bit of a narrow focus on the Equalities Act and the nine protected characteristics, which can lead to a sort of tick box culture.

A big part of why the project is human rights and equalities is actually when you do then broaden it out and you recognise that equalities and everything that sits within that is, you know, within human rights, it's an essential part of human rights, it actually then gives you a sort of a more powerful way of looking at it.

So, when you think about housing, actually, you know, the right to a home, the right to a family life, the right to a healthy environment. These are all established human rights. Certainly, you know, in the UK at the moment, it is difficult. You need a lot of money, and it's not easy to leverage human rights as a way to affect change. It can be done and there are great models. I think, I'm trying to remember off the top of my head, I think it was Leith Housing who used like a human rights approach with the council to get change enacted, based on people being rights holders. There is upcoming changes in Scots law with incorporation of human rights legislation and the Scottish Human Rights Bill, which is one of the most progressive in the world, complicated by devolution, but still very, very ambitious. And again, that will, when it comes in in a number of years' time, that will allow people to access their rights as human rights holders, and as service providers, as duty bearers, through Scottish courts. So, it will become much easier, but it will mean a lot of the issues that you were speaking about, although there are questions about whether actually it will apply to people who are classed as migrants or refugees, you know, to gain access to that.

So, I think actually broadening it out and remembering when we talk about equality, diversity and inclusion that it is much broader than the Equality Act and the nine protected characteristics. You know, we talk about a human rights and equalities first approach, that we encourage organisations to start to think about, and that is about a person-centred way of thinking which sort of prioritises people's human rights and



equalities, and by changing and looking at it like that and being an organisation that thinks in that way, you can both empower yourself as an organisation and empower the people that you work with and for.

**Gordon:** Thank you. I mean, I think, to answer the question, Gareth, I think for us, we try to think of it in two, not exclusive ways, but two key ways. One is as an employer. What does it mean to be an employer of more than twelve hundred people who work for Shelter and Shelter Scotland in England and Scotland? I'm effectively a member of the senior management team. There's a role for us there to think about how do we ensure that everyone who comes to work at our organisation is treated in a way that allows them to be their whole self, their authentic self at work, that there's opportunities for development and growth that are not, you know, the barriers, they do exist. You know, we can't just wish away some of the barriers that are so built into an economy and a system that has been designed for the benefit of the people with most. You know, we pick that up and we place that back into our systems and our processes and we have to understand that.

So, it can't be enough as a, you know, want to be progressive organisation, just to espouse the right things, we actually have to get down and do stuff. For us, that's, you know, post the sort of Black Lives Matter declaration and so on, we tried to sort of take a pause and say, what is it we actually need to do? We got a few things wrong, if I'm honest, at that point. We had to unpick some of the early decisions and attempts. They were all coming from a good place, but we didn't have the capacity really in the right place to do things. So, where we are now is, just to add to the kind of word salad, we have an Equity Inclusion Culture Directorate, that didn't exist three years ago. It's a newly formed part of the organisation with a whole new staff team there. And their job is to develop an anti-racist strategy and to ensure equity for all within the organisation. So that's the kind of first bit, and we've been doing things like being accredited as an inclusive employer, which isn't really a bauble, it's more about an audit of what we're doing to allow us to think about what we have to do next.

But then there's the other side of it, which is probably more, you know, apart from my role as a senior manager, my direct remit, which is policy and campaigns. What is the role that Shelter Scotland can make in that? And we always see our role as partly trying to bust out of the housing bubble a little bit. You know, that some of our audience isn't just people who understand housing, who know about housing, but we have the benefit of independent income through our supporters. I see our community fundraisers in the audience here, and you'll have to go out there and ask people to support us because that independent income gives us an independent voice. It allows us to be that critical friend, to be able to say to Scottish Government

and UK Government and local government, the things you're doing are making it harder for certain communities to realise their right to housing. You don't necessarily try to do it that way, but that's the outcome. So, we've been working with Aberdeen Financial Fairness Trust, who very generously financed us, we did one of those fundraising bids. I'm realising this is a recorded podcast, but I'll say it anyway. One of those fundraising bids where you kind of hum and haw, should we shave a bit off here and do sort of 80 per cent of this work just to get it over the line? But I said no, we actually need, we're going to go full bore, this is what we want to do. And credit to Aberdeen, they fully funded it. And that allowed us to work with Professor Gina Netto at Heriot-Watt University, and CRER, you know, minoritised ethnic community group, to do some qualitative work. Scotland suffers because of the kind of level of data sets that we have, so it suffers from an absence of data, but too often I think that absence of data is an excuse for not taking action. So, we did some qualitative work, interviews with minoritised ethnic groups about what direct discrimination and indirect discrimination they face when trying to access housing. And we got a control group of our white Scottish clients as well, just to allow us to understand what those differences were.

And we really see that as a route that we can take forward because one of the best things that came out of that really was relief in some parts of the housing sector because some people have been making this case for decades. And they, you know, they were able to say about how they would come back every few years and say the same thing and it maybe got a bit of media attention for a while. Then it went back on the back burner and then they come back again. So, we are committed to using, what do you call it, our convening power, if we can talk so kind of arrogantly about it. But, you know, with a little bit of resource and a little bit of voice, we could create a space to try and develop that race and housing network. It isn't about anything that Shelter Scotland will do, it's about what the participants will do and share. But we need to be committed to this for the long term. This can't just be a flash in the pan.

And then I think the last bit for me in terms of what it means is, it also means us learning, both as an organisation and as senior managers, when to step back and when to step forward. And I think we need to recognise that that's a judgement call at times. There are times we'll get it wrong, and there are times we could have acted earlier, but we have to find a way of making sure that the voice of people who are actually impacted by these things is the voice that's driving the agenda.

**Pedro:** Thanks very much, Gordon. And there's a few things that you touched on there, and that Aer, you touched on as well, that sort of lead me on to sort of the next question, which is, so who is responsible for ensuring that housing is accessible to all, or that housing advice or housing support is accessible to all, and sort of, I

guess, how do we go about that, and sort of who needs to make the, you know, you're talking there about, for example, we have all this data, we've got research, we've got qualitative data, we know where the gaps are etc, so whose job is it now to sort of to push that work forward I guess.

**Gordon:** Could we just go on?

**Pedro:** Whoever's got something to say about it.

**Gordon:** I've always got something to say, that's not a problem, that's usually the issue. I mean, ultimately, it's everyone's responsibility, but not everyone has the same influence. I mean, I just have to be honest about that. So, I think the challenge has to come for, you know, where are the chief execs of our housing associations who tell us that they can't, and that's the word they use, can't capture the data. Because we've got data, but is it, you know, just because, you know, data is one of those amorphous words that covers everything. But, do they know the actual differences in experiences of people seeking access to their services? Do they understand the correlation between people's life chances and their failure to access housing? And do they recognise what that means for the ways that some minoritised ethnic groups, but other groups especially, those who require an adapted home due to disability or impairment, it is one of the biggest life constraining elements? Not being able to leave your home, not being able to get to a place of employment because the home you have is too far away from transport links.

The fundamental nature of this has to be confronting the people with decisions. And I'm sure anyone in this room has tried to speak to a decision-maker. In the last couple of years, we'll hear the same message, there's no money. There's no money, we can't make a choice, we can't do anything, really, and it's up to you to identify what needs to change. I think we can't accept that, and I think if there's one role we can all play, it's just not accepting the excuses. But the people who will make the ultimate decisions are the people in executive power, be that in the housing association movement, be that in local government, or be that in national government.

So, I would say, be an activist and actually get your voice heard. I think, I would, if I was critical of the housing movement as a whole, it's quite insular at times. We like to talk to ourselves. We like to, you know, we don't want to talk to those other bits of the public sector because we've got our own revenue streams and we can do our own things. We need to get out, we need to get that message out and beyond the housing and show the benefit it makes to health, the benefit it makes to education, the real benefit it makes to communities when we get the housing offer right.



**Aer:** Yeah, I mean, it's that. It is that classic. The phrases that get spoken a lot like integrated, multi-agency, you know, approach that's about decision makers across all the key influencing areas of government, local government, as you said, local authority planners, developers, housing associations, campaigning organisations.

I guess it's the perennial kind of like cycle of conversation as well. I think there's an element of sort of sometimes, can the right people be brought together to say, how can we break the cycle of this conversation, that, I don't currently, but I did work in housing many years ago, gosh, well over a decade ago, or maybe more, but very much the same conversations being had then comparatively to now. There was more money around, but the responses were still the same around certain issues and topics, that it's kind of we can't afford to, or we have a particular age housing stock, and, you know, we can't make that accessible, we can't do. Yeah, and looking for innovation, looking for best practice and not just highlighting it in, you know, in an article in a well-known magazine in the sector, but actually, strategically looking at how that learning can then be implemented.

I know that yet again, that is a statement and a conversation that's been going around in circles. I, you know, I don't have an answer. It'd be amazing if I did. But I think for me, there is a real thing about kind of, you know, we are having the same conversations. We are often undertaking pieces of research or pieces of consultation, and then someone says, often the participants, we'll then say, oh yeah, you came out and you talked to us about that four years ago. And you go back to the organisation and you say, apparently, we looked into this four years ago. Oh yeah, that was so and so. They left. We don't know where the files are. Nothing really got taken ahead by that. Yeah. And I won't even get into then how that creates the cynicism and the disbelief within the actual people for whom this matters to, the people for whom the services are being provided for. They then disengage. So, you know, yeah, it's this tangle of kind of like...

**Pedro:** Yeah. There's a real sort of, it's the what next. And I think we've talked about that in previous episodes with people, particularly around research and around data. It's about, okay, what data? We've got data. And I think the word data is a loaded one in itself where it sort of implies statistics when actually qualitative data is more powerful than, say, percentages, or sort of lived experience. But, and then it's when we're gathering that data, then people want to know, okay, well, what are you going to do with it? If I'm going to tell you this story, or I'm going to tell you about my disadvantage, or I'm going to tell you about my experiences. What are you going to do with it next? Or is it just going to sit in a report?

**Aer:** It's the classic, yeah.

**Pedro:** Nothing happens, so it's, yeah.

**Aer:** You said, we did report, and it's the, you said, we did... nothing.

**Pedro:** There's no follow-on from that.

**Aer:** And that's, yeah, and that I think is so often the key part of it.

**Iain:** Yeah. I think one of the kind of elephant in the room with housing is always that good quality housing in Scotland simply isn't available enough. The investment decisions around housing are not made in order to provide good quality homes to everybody. The investment decisions on the whole in Scotland with housing, particularly for private rented and for owner occupier housing, is about maximising profit, and that somehow, like maximising investment portfolios. And that's, it can be a personal thing, it can be a business decision by banks and developers and so on.

There's lots of housing associations doing brilliant work around their investments in housing and in their communities and building lots of new excellent quality accommodation. But, I think there's a level where a decision needs to be made that housing is provided as a human right. And good quality housing should be seen as a human right that's accessible to people. Not something that is a way of somebody becoming a millionaire or a multimillionaire or a billionaire or whatever. And until that shifts, I think we're always going to be returning to this.

Twenty years I've been working in housing in different ways and there's still an issue around houses being built for large families. This is something that we found in the research that started Positive Action in Housing back in the late eighties. It's, there aren't enough houses for people who've got four, five or six children. Just aren't. Forty years later. You will hear that all the time. That hasn't changed because, presumably, even knowing this for forty years, that investment hasn't been made sufficiently. This is a real structural kind of barrier to it. Sorry to be negative about it, there's lots of good work that can be done, but this is, like, you know, a fundamental issue, I think.

**Pedro:** It's, like, the sort of basic things that just aren't moving forward. Yeah, I mean, that is a very basic thing, like the size of large families. It's the same with, you could say the same about sort of accessibility standards as well. They haven't really moved on much. The minimum standard for accessibility in a property is still pretty low, as it goes. So, there's, even at that, it's sort of quite a base level before you start to look at more societal things. It's like, it's things as basic as numbers and physicality, but

before you get into the societal or cultural sort of impacts that this kind of housing that, the availability or lack thereof of housing can cause.

**Gordon:** Can I pick that point up, because I think, I'm very conscious about a gathering, literally The Gathering, of Scotland's voluntary sector, and, because I think there's a lesson in that point that Iain was making for us, as in, as people trying to influence at times, because, part of the reason why that happened is because the housing sector got very focused, quite rightly, on the rights of single homeless people. You know, the 2003 Act that equalised rights, you know, no longer were housing services accessible only to those in priority need it was anyone who was homeless, and really that was about opening up services to single homeless people.

And then the housing sector leadership had to get on with, well how do we do that, you know, move to the 2012, they had from 2003 to 2012 to make those changes. And then since 2014, you know, so those changes have come in. We saw, until now, we've seen the number of children in temporary accommodation, so that's ultimately children, households that should have access to settled permanent accommodation. They've increased, the number in temporary accommodation has gone from about 4,000 to now nearly 10,000. You know, 120 per cent increase, because they need larger properties.

Correlation between those households with children and households with either multigenerational households or minoritised ethnic households is massive. And yet, when the Ending Homelessness Together strategy was passed by a majority, not a consensus, of stakeholders just a few years ago, and in fact reaffirmed during the COVID crisis. There was no gendered analysis, there was no equality impact assessment done and lots of the stakeholders, and I would say Shelter had one foot in and one foot out on this, if I'm honest, we just went, yep, oh well, never mind. That's where these decisions have long-term impact. That's the inability, when we're doing the big flashy things, when we're round the table with government and we're all made to feel nice and warm and cuddly about having influence. It's the bits, it's the boring bits, it's the paperwork that needs to be done that actually identifies what's the impact going to be, what's the projection going to be over the next wee while, what're the unintended consequences of this.

And we are now, that's, you know, we're coming into this Christmas, there'll be 10,000 kids waking up on Christmas Day in homelessness accommodation. And it is in no small part due to decisions that should have been made in about 2010, 2011, when we were preparing for the ending of priority need. And that's on us as well as it's on the public sector. There's not a them and us when it comes to the public

sector. We have a big voice and we can influence it and we need to be, I think, more open to that self-reflection and acknowledging the role that we've played in that.

**Pedro:** Absolutely, yeah.

**Aer:** I was just, you heard me mention earlier, the sort of, the concept of the project has an equality and human rights first approach. And it's exactly what you just said. It's about hopefully changing the way that organisations think and work so that those considerations, that way of thinking is central to all of the way that they do things and that it is part of all of their processes so that, you know, equality impact assessments, you know, almost in some ways perhaps, are no longer a separate thing.

That consideration that is part of your business planning, it's part of your development of new services, it's part of your decision, any of your decision making, it's built into those processes because exactly, it's, for too long, these have been seen as considerations that are done either to tick a box or because they are a funding requirement, often, you know, like with government funding, that's most often when people come across equality impact assessments, it's seen as a kind of, 'urgh okay, we've got to do this'. Or very sadly, they happen because somebody then challenges and it's done after. And I suspect this will probably link perhaps to your next question about like, meaningful consultation, meaningful processes that actually occur at a point, pre-decision making so that they can influence rather than shield the organisation from further criticism.

**Pedro:** Yes, it needs to be, it needs to be not an afterthought. It needs to be not a sort of a firefighting exercise, it needs to be embedded in everything and you need to think about beyond the average or the mean. Like, in order to actually deliver sort of person-centred services and effective services, if you're going to exclude people from it, or only include the average person, none of us are the average person. So, everyone is going to have some exclusion from a service if it's designed to meet the average because nobody is the average, so there's always going to be a reason to, you know, you're always going to be left out in some way.

**Gareth:** Yeah, but I do think, as you say, that that leads on to the next question quite nicely and we can start to put a positive spin on what we can do now as well. Because, you know, we've talked about the sort of structural issues within housing and the challenges, the recognition that we need to be doing more, and a lot of the conversations we have through the podcast is around putting people at the centre of this and understanding it.

So, I guess, what can we all be doing as individuals across housing voluntary sectors in organisations at all levels? What can we be doing, I guess, to better understand the different requirements of people when trying to access housing and services? And, Aer, I don't know whether you want to kick off with that, because it kind of links to what you were saying.

**Aer:** I mean, yeah, I guess it would. For me the heart of it is, it's by listening, it's by engaging, and it's by having meaningful conversations. And that consultation, if it is consultation or even just kind of listening processes, have to happen at the beginning or even pre to the beginning in order to inform everything.

But the meaningful element comes with ensuring that it is a process where there is actually the ability to influence decisions and influence change. Many people will have had the experience, certainly, if you work in the sector of consultation or engagement processes, or inclusion processes, that actually, when you pick away a bit at it, when you pull out a few threads, you realise there was no real way that it was going to have any significant or meaningful ability to affect a decision or affect a change. It was done as part of a process. For me, that means it's not meaningful. And again, as I mentioned earlier, all it does is create a culture of kind of, well, why should we bother? Because you've asked us to give up our time, our thoughts, our insights, share our lived experience. But actually, it's, you know, it's the equivalent of being like, well, you don't get to choose anything about your house, but we'll let you choose the colour of the cupboards in the kitchen. Yeah, that's great. That's not the point. And yeah, I think it's also about looking at what there is already there.

I mean, my experience in housing was social housing, most housing associations have amazing community engagement teams and sort of the equivalent. These are people who often have huge insight, work closely with their residents, with the people that the organisation works with. Where are they positioned within the organisation? How much is their work actually directly feeding into change and decision-making? How strong is their line to senior management? How much can they influence by saying we do know what people want and what people need and what the thoughts and the feelings of our residents are?

So, I think it's not always about necessarily looking outwith and kind of trying to create new things or being like, we're going to create a new structure or a new project. I think a lot of organisations are doing a lot of these things already. But it's about taking them out of the bubble or out of the side room that they've been put in and bringing them into the centre of the decision-making process.



**Iain:** Yeah, I think that feels like it's a cost, it's an additional thing that you just have to kind of do. But the value of that, the actual investment that that is and that represents, isn't valued highly enough. And if those conversations are given that value, are given that space, given, you know, the connections you talk about, there'll be much more powerful and you'll end up with much stronger housing, develop much stronger communities, because those conversations have been like built-in right at the heart of it rather than tacked on at the edge, and that box ticked and then moved on.

**Gordon:** I think the big thing for me is money and money in two respects. One, I appreciate this quite privileged position for an organisation with independent income, but not allowing the threat of withdrawal of money to be a reason to stay at the table when you know it's not going to work. So, if you are involved in a working group or a consultation exercise, your presenteeism offers cover for those decision-makers. Even if you disagree with the final verdict, if you turn up and you know it's going to fail, they consulted. You don't agree, but they consulted.

I think the other bit for me around money, is more on the public sector, but there's a role for the voluntary sector here too, is about if we're serious about human rights, then we need to move to participatory budgeting. We need to actually have budgets built around the idea of this intervention by the state or this intervention, this service is designed to maximise people's human rights. Therefore, how do we have to design that service differently? How do we budget for that differently? We'll all have the experience, no doubt, of speaking to, I don't know, justice colleagues about, you know, if you invest in this housing service, you're going to save that money. I mean, the classic one's the NHS, isn't it, you can save the NHS loads of money by having housing advisors in A&E. You'll never see that money again. That money goes into new jobs. That money's not going to resolve the housing emergency. So, having a kind of broader perspective on how do we make that transformational change. The change that was talked about in the Christie Commission more than ten years ago about moving to preventative spend. We need a new, we do need to repackage it. We need to recognise, I think, that change comes about when people, you know when you get the opportunity and a moment in time kind of come together.

So, I think, for me, human rights-based budgeting, packaging that in a way that is meaningful and that can truly be transformational in the public sector. And I think there's a real opportunity just now with incorporation coming soon of the economic and social rights. The Scottish public sector and other duty-holders are going to have to start thinking critically about what that means for them. Let's use that opportunity to have a real conversation about not how you include people, but how you change

the way your services are designed and you change the way your money is distributed.

**Aer:** And just on that as well, just the thing for me is always that the confidence to undertake change because change always involves risk and I think the, you know, you see it sometimes with funding as well where they say, right, we want to make funding more available to small local groups or to key projects. But then they'd still keep the kind of the essentially covering their backs, risk criteria the same that these groups can't meet. And so, it's, I think, yeah, there's often change can be stymied by the fact that people aren't actually recognising that change takes risk. And you can't, you know, be that the government, be that local government, be that a funding body or be that a consortium of organisations.

Yeah, you have to take a risk and it might, bits of it might fail. The whole thing might fail, but something will come out of it. But when it comes, risk involves money. Then again, we get back into this circular conversation where we can't do that. It stops in the end, there's a pause and then six months, a year, two years, three years later, the same proposal and conversation starts.

**Gordon:** And can I just say risk also involves some people losing. And I think we've got ourselves into a position just now where no change happens if there are losers, and I would just point to the short term lets kind of psychodrama that took place across Scotland a few weeks ago, a few months ago now, and I think there are opponents to change, and we have to, if you believe in something and you want it to happen, you have to be prepared to get out there and argue for it because the people that oppose you are going to argue for it, and they've probably got more money than you. And they're going to do something about it. So, you have to be prepared to stand up for what you think.

**Pedro:** That actually sort of brings me on. I was going to ask, this wasn't sort of pre-agreed, but we'll go with it. That thing about confidence and that thing about risk is something that we've talked about a lot in the course of the podcast, is this fear of it's not just, you're talking about that at a very high level about money, about sort of, you know, systemic change, but actually on an individual level, people, we found, particularly when we're talking about equality, is that people are frightened to get it wrong, and frightened to make the mistakes, and so that is actually, that's what's preventing people from even making, you know, smaller sort of change.

And this is just in terms of sort of in the current political social climate around, you know, about this. Basically, people are frightened about getting cancelled essentially, which is sort of a reductive way to think, but it's what can we do to sort of, to change

that? What can we do to sort of make people realise that the thing to do is to, you know, is to try and to try and make change and you're not always, you know, you can't get everything right all the time. You can't, as you say, you're going to lose sometimes or you're going to get it wrong sometimes. But I guess that's a sort of a more micro sort of question rather than thinking about it economically.

**Gordon:** It's a behavioural one though isn't it? I think persuade, don't police would be my sort of sense of it. I think where, I think you can exercise a bit of judgement as to whether you think someone who gets it wrong, gets it wrong with good intention and therefore persuade them to do better and hopefully they'll do better next time.

I think sometimes we rush to police behaviour. I mean I think there's some behaviours we do need to police, don't get me wrong. And I think the, but I think it's being weaponised by people. I mean, just look at Suella Braverman's comments, you know, about lifestyle choices and foreigners coming over here and getting free tents from charities and, you know, fining the charities. Why is she doing that? It's because she will be rewarded in some quarters for saying that. And that's the bit we always need to remember, you know, there are opponents, there are people who oppose this, and oppose equality and are actively opposing equality and I think if we want to get the majority more willing and more open to taking the changes that are needed, then I think we have to find that balance between persuasion and policing.

**Iain:** I think it's a very skilled facilitation of conversations. You can have really, really good quality conversation with people with really opposing views. This is possible. And if it's facilitated intelligently and sensitively and in an environment where people feel like, you know, that they can make those mistakes, then, you know, you can have those necessary conversations and everybody comes out more knowledgeable, a little bit wiser than they went in. Those conversations really are possible. They happen. On all sorts of subjects and a move towards that can be really helpful, I think. And a good investment.

**Aer:** I think for me, absolutely, conversation is a really key word. Certainly, I think, putting aside maybe words like debate or certainly argument, because it's conversation for me, holds that openness. It's about having a dialogue with someone, in the project we talk a lot about, you know, being confident to have a conversation about diversity or about equality. And the other word is, sort of what Gordon mentioned, is intention and really be thinking about what is the intention behind this.

I mean, as a diverse person, I can feel the intention quite instinctively. It's very different from someone who, for example, you know, uh, uses the pronouns that I

prefer, and then someone who doesn't use them, but there's no intention, there's no bad intention behind that, it's just that they don't know. I get my own pronouns wrong, you know. It's fine and actually, we can have a little bit of a conversation. I can feel that, I can definitely feel when someone is doing it with the intention to make a point, to be abusive.

And so actually I think really for both people and organisations being really clear on kind of what are your intentions behind this? What is the conversation that you want to have? How is the approach, you know, what is the appropriate way to have that conversation? Does it need to be facilitated because it is a difficult conversation to have? And then to come back to this word, to have the confidence, you know, to know your position, to believe in what you are wanting to say and what are you wanting to stand up for.

And also, to know that yes, social media in the current world amplifies and it amplifies the extreme, but actually, that's often what it is. It's the extreme and it's a minority view. It might be loud, but there will be other people who will support you. And, I'm still to sort of truly find an example, I think, really, maybe this is a controversial thing to say, of someone who genuinely has been cancelled, whatever that word means. They often seem to end up with a louder voice than they had before.

And I think, again, it's a narrative. And it's something that has become like a fear. And almost like a threat, you'll be cancelled if you stand up and say something. Actually, yeah, if your intention is good, you've thought through it carefully, you understand how you want to have that conversation, you've thought about how you're going to have that conversation and you are confident in what you want to say and why you're saying it and why you're standing up for that issue, then do it. You know, that is enough.

**Pedro:** Well said.

**Gareth:** Yeah, that's great. And I think it's that confidence, that's what we need to hear to just go, you know, we're right to do this. I think that was where this podcast took a long time to start was because we didn't know, you know, we were kind of worried about making those mistakes, and actually, as we've got going, people have been really supportive, and it's kind of building as a result of that, isn't it?

I'm just really conscious of time. So, I was just thinking if we do a quick kind of final question back down the group and just, I guess, we tend to finish the podcast with just that kind of inspiring note about like what could we go away and do today in our

roles that will help kind of just make a change. So, if you each want to just finish off with a quick example, maybe?

**Iain:** I think organisations getting training in equality and diversity and inclusion. Invest in that, you can get really, really good quality training. Positive Action in Housing does sell it, but there are lots of excellent providers out there.

People often start off feeling quite uncomfortable, again because of this confidence, feeling like they're going to be in a situation where they'll say the wrong thing and make a mistake. But, it is a really, really good investment and it makes, you know, it makes organisations stronger and better able to interact with their customers. Well worth the money.

**Aer:** I mean, I'm going to say the obvious thing which is come on one of THRE's courses. If you are a third sector organisation in Scotland, perhaps even if you're a little bit outside of Scotland, we don't track it too much, but yeah, it's free, you know, we do everything from our basics, one-day basics course, which is all about getting everyone in an organisation potentially to understand these core concepts and principles. We do ones on, you know, looking at governance, fundraising, all sorts of things.

But I think also I would say that just by listening to this podcast, being here in the audience, you know, you've already done something, you know. Be curious, take some time, educate yourself, you know, take that curiosity and speak to people you might not normally speak to. Go to an open doors day, to somewhere that you've not been before.

And yeah, I think, you know, you've already started because you've been interested enough to listen to this episode.

**Gordon:** I mean, I would build on be curious, I really agree with that. I think, going back to the way I kind of started my contribution. I think there's one bit for the organisation and one bit for individuals. I think being better organisations does require work and dedication and just stick with a path. I think anyone who's been on that journey, I think you'll find it's a far better working environment once you start there.

And then, it'd be remiss of me as a housing campaigner to fail to say, be engaged in the debate. Because this is urgent. This is a, I mean, we talk about housing emergency. This is the worst level of homelessness Scotland has ever seen. And it is



# EQUALITY IN HOUSING

WINNER  
The Marion Gibbs  
Award for Equality in  
Housing 2023



UK COLLABORATIVE  
CENTRE FOR  
HOUSING EVIDENCE

housing options  
scotland

impacting on people in ways that are not equal, that do exacerbate existing differences in society. So now is the time to be engaged and be vocal.

So, I'll leave it there.

**Pedro:** Thanks very much. And, yeah, I mean, on that note, just to say a big thank you to our panellists, to all of you guys here in the room, and to Gareth and to SCVO for having us today as well, and yeah, if you haven't listened to the podcast before, please go and listen to our previous episodes. We've got a whole host of really interesting and sort of quite sobering and informative speakers and guests on previous episodes. And we plan to have many more over the coming months. So yeah, thank you all for being here. Thank you for listening and see you later.