



# Homes

for BME communities

Our vision for diverse and inclusive places  
where everyone can thrive



## WHY THIS MATTERS - FOREWORDS

Cym D'Souza, Chair, BME National

Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) housing associations were created in the 70s and 80s because the living situation for many BME families and their descendants was unacceptable.

Set up to address the clear and obvious disadvantages facing some communities in accessing decent housing, in reality they have achieved much more. BME housing associations have played a huge role in society, pushing issues of race and equality into the mainstream and changing the housing landscape.

But fast forward nearly 50 years and BME households are still more likely to experience overcrowding, poorer quality housing and fuel poverty. They are also more likely to live in England's most deprived neighbourhoods and are less likely to own their home.

This isn't good enough, so we're asking the Government to work with us to improve housing for BME people and deliver diverse and thriving communities.



Baroness Diana Warwick,  
Chair, National Housing Federation

BME communities have always made a huge contribution to the UK, making it more productive and prosperous. Despite this, BME people continue to face many disadvantages as a result of discrimination.

The work of BME National is invaluable to BME housing associations and communities in England. At the National Housing Federation we fully support BME National and the important work they do. From promoting the needs of specific communities to supporting regeneration and community programmes, BME National are core to the success of vibrant and integrated communities.

As we have seen a rise in racist and anti-immigration rhetoric over the past few years, now more than ever we must campaign for inclusive communities where everyone can thrive. I am delighted to be able to add my name to BME National's work to drive this campaign forward.



# WORKING TOGETHER FOR BME COMMUNITIES

## Who are BME National?

BME National is a collective of BME housing associations in England. We provide a consultative platform for BME housing issues, and continue to promote the needs of BME communities. The members of BME National are grappling with some of the most pressing social challenges of the day.

This is our mission statement, a shared ambition from BME housing associations. We are committed to delivering homes and services to BME communities, but we need policymakers, local stakeholders and our partners to join us in addressing housing inequality.

## What is a BME community?

We use the term BME to refer to people who come from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. This includes white minorities and anyone who faces discrimination based on their ethnicity, culture, or nationality.

Not all BME communities live in our housing associations, many live in the private rented sector where they face a number of challenges.

## What is a BME housing association?

BME housing associations were established to address the clear disadvantages some communities face in accessing good quality, affordable accommodation.

Today, we offer housing to residents of all backgrounds. However, as we are largely based in inner-cities, our residents tend to still be BME and we continue to offer culturally informed housing and resident services.



# OUR VISION FOR BME COMMUNITIES

We have identified four areas where the Government's attention is urgently needed and how we can work together in addressing these challenges.

## 1. Ageing well

Creating an environment where older BME people can live healthy and fulfilled lives.

Income inequality puts older BME people in a vulnerable position. They are less likely to have savings, less likely to inherit from earlier generations and less likely to have occupational pensions to support their retirement.

## 2. Ending homelessness

Ensuring people from BME backgrounds can access and sustain housing.

We're facing a homelessness crisis in England, and it's disproportionately affecting BME people.

## 3. Equality of opportunity

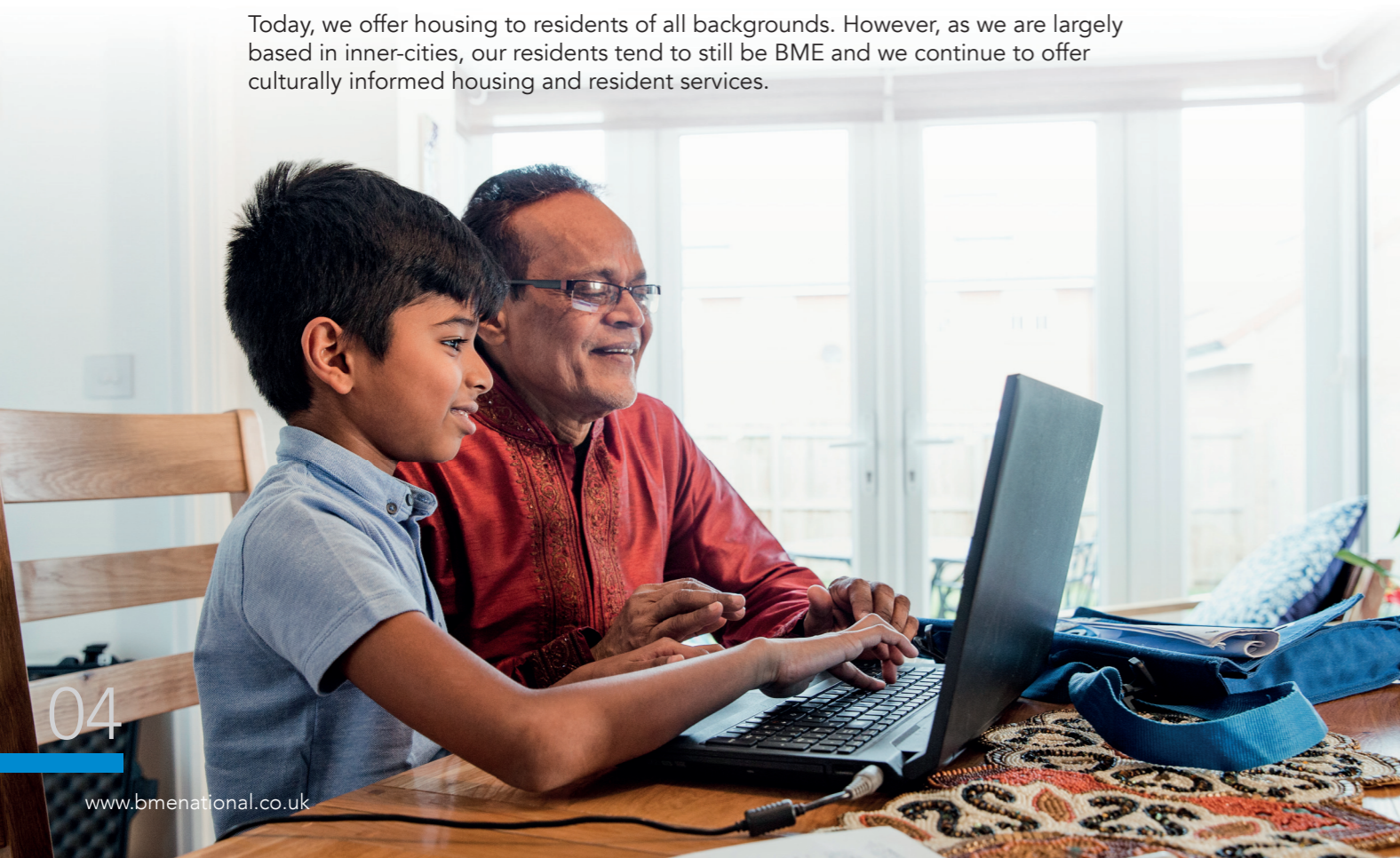
Enabling routes into employment.

Discrimination, unconscious bias and exclusion have held back the potential of BME communities for too long.

## 4. Diverse and thriving cities

Investing in inner city areas to facilitate social cohesion and create vibrant places to live in.

There are stark divisions in prosperity and opportunity in many inner cities across the country, often where BME communities are more likely to live.



# 1. AGEING WELL

Creating an environment where older BME people can live healthy and fulfilled lives.

The over-65 BME population is set to grow to roughly 2.7 million in the next 30 years.<sup>1</sup> Decades of income inequality means older BME are people less likely to have savings. They are less likely to inherit wealth from earlier generations and less likely to have occupational pensions to support their retirement.<sup>2</sup>

There's little research about the state of housing for older BME people and this must change. We need to fully understand how older BME people's experiences compare with others, so we can make sure that they have equal access to the safe, good quality homes they deserve.

## What we need from the Government:

- Conduct a review of older BME people's experiences of housing, including research into the impact that living in low quality homes has on health in the older BME population. This research should acknowledge cultural sensitivity and recognise the needs of different demographics in housing and health policy.
- Commit to delivering higher numbers of accessible homes, as explored in the accessible homes consultation.
- Develop new solutions that ensure all older BME people have access to safe, affordable and good quality housing, considering routes into homeownership for older people such as the offer on older people's shared ownership.

## What BME housing associations will do:

- Facilitate connections into communities for research into the challenges facing BME older people. We will work with the Government and partners to develop and test new solutions in older BME people's housing and communities.
- Maintain and continue to build quality housing for older people, including sheltered housing.
- Continue to deliver high quality social programmes that enable older communities to thrive, such as befriending schemes, festivals, and digital inclusion projects.

<sup>1</sup> Runnymede Trust, 2012. <sup>2</sup> Runnymede Trust, 2012.



## CASE STUDY: BRENDAN'S STORY ARAWAK WALTON HOUSING ASSOCIATION

Brendan moved into Sycamore Court, Arawak Walton in April 2019 and it has transformed his life.

A council tenant for 19 years, Brendan became homeless after he lost his job through ill health and could no longer afford to pay his rent. He was evicted in April 2014 and initially stayed with friends and then moved to a hostel for the homeless, before he began his journey with Arawak Walton.

Brendan likes spending time in the communal lounge and using the shared computer facilities to check his emails. He also likes helping in the community, using his skills to help repair and build bikes.

“It's a beautiful place to live and I've already settled in here”



## 2. ENDING HOMELESSNESS

Ensuring people from BME backgrounds can access and sustain housing.

The homelessness crisis disproportionately affects BME people, with over a third of homeless people in England from BME backgrounds. This is a higher representation of BME people than the wider population and we need a better understanding of what causes so many BME people to become homeless. We urgently need to develop tailored interventions to prevent this from happening.

### What we need from the Government:

- Conduct research to understand routes into, and experiences of homelessness for BME people, including the impact of changes to the welfare system on BME communities. This research should officially acknowledge cultural sensitivity and the needs of different demographics when developing homelessness policy.
- Invest in BME housing associations so that they can build more social housing and provide access to long term support funding so that BME people with a history of homelessness receive the support they need.
- Analyse allocations and choice based lettings schemes to understand if and how BME people are disadvantaged by these processes.

### What BME housing associations will do:

- Work with the Government, Homes England and the Greater London Authority to identify opportunities for building more quality homes in inner city areas, where BME communities are more likely to live.
- Continue to provide essential culturally informed services to support BME people experiencing homelessness and contribute to local homelessness strategies, working closely with local stakeholders.
- Support vital research into BME homelessness, connecting policymakers to residents and work with the Government to develop and test new solutions to end homelessness.

## CASE STUDY: SELINA'S STORY EKAYA HOUSING ASSOCIATION

When I first came to Ekaya I was 17 years old, I had been homeless for almost two years and I was three months pregnant. I was young, scared and alone with nowhere to go.

I heard about Ekaya from one of the hostels I stayed at, I was so grateful they were able to support me.

During my time at Ekaya I had the most caring and supportive keyworker. Her name was Allison and she's someone I'll never forget. She worked so hard to prepare me for motherhood and to start thinking about my future. She was always there if I needed to talk and she supported with anything, from filling out forms to bathing my baby.

Most of my experiences after leaving home were not very positive, but living at Ekaya reassured me that were people in the world that did not judge you and genuinely had your best interests at heart.

During my time at Ekaya, Allison introduced me to another young mum who I would be sharing living facilities with, she was my age and we were at the same point in our pregnancy. Little did I know that she would become one of my best friends and our daughters would still be friends to this day. While we were staying there, Allison found us a course at a local college. Every morning she would make sure we were up and ready to go to college and we would walk down the road with our big bellies. As well as finding us something



practical to do, we were encouraged to attend Mothers groups and workshops to support independent living.

Almost 18 years on, looking back, I feel that Ekaya, along with other organisations they worked with had a major impact on helping me reach my full potential. I have continued with my education, I am now a teacher and an excellent parent. Thank you Ekaya.

"It was the first time since leaving home I felt I had a space that was safe that I could call my own."

# 3. EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

## Enabling routes into employment.

We need to understand why there is such a gap between employment and living standards for BME communities. Discrimination, unconscious bias and exclusion have held back the potential of BME communities for too long. For example, in a recent study, twice the amount of BME NHS staff said they had experienced discrimination at work in the last 12 months, compared with their non-BME colleagues.

Ensuring access training and jobs is crucial and BME housing associations will work with our partners and communities to open up opportunities.

### What we need from the Government:

- Work with housing associations to identify opportunities to invest in routes into employment for young BME people.
- Build on the work of the Race Disparity Unit to identify where BME people face discrimination, extending this research beyond the public sector and recognising multiple disadvantages through intersectional research.
- Invest in BME housing associations so that we can provide the secure homes that enable individuals to thrive and pursue their ambitions.

### What BME housing associations will do:

- Give access and information to support our partners and the Government to research how we can understand and improve the life chances of BME people.
- Maintain our high impact services such as interview training and job applications support, which can help tenants into employment and training.
- Continue to provide safe and stable tenure for families, so children have freedom to achieve their potential and act as a role model for others in their community.



# CASE STUDY: DOM'S STORY UNITY HOUSING ASSOCIATION

Dom joined Unity Employment Services in 2018. The employment support scheme helps Unity Homes and Enterprise residents and their surrounding communities to access employment, training and volunteering opportunities.

When Dom came to the scheme, she was on a Level 3 Business Administration apprenticeship, after working in customer services and a call centre. The staff at Unity Employment Services supported her through her exams by providing one to one support on Excel spreadsheets and mathematical equations. She passed with flying colours and began seeking other roles.

Dom was successful with an application to a fuel card company where, she was appointed as an administration assistant. Looking to the future, Dom would like to become a housing officer.

To date, Unity Employment Services has supported more than 1,400 people into employment, training or volunteering, with each individual given a plan tailored to their specific needs. Based in one of the bottom 3% of the most deprived areas in the country, the client base is particularly diverse, with 60% of residents coming from BME backgrounds, including emerging communities new to the country.



# 4. DIVERSE AND THRIVING CITIES

## Investing in inner city areas to facilitate social cohesion and create vibrant places to live in

There are stark divisions in prosperity and opportunity in many inner cities across the country. BME communities are much more likely to live in areas of deprivation, which affects a range of life outcomes. BME communities also face a number of challenges around housing conditions and are much more likely to face issues of overcrowding and damp problems in their home.

Inner city areas need regeneration and investment, so that everyone living there has equal opportunities, a quality home, and can participate in an inclusive community.

### What we need from the Government:

- Prioritise investment in regenerating inner city areas through creating a Great Places Fund. The Government should develop an ambitious national regeneration strategy backed by £10bn additional investment over a decade.
- Explicitly prioritise areas and groups of greatest need and support housing investment, including BME communities in inner city areas, alongside related economic, social and physical activity.
- Provide additional support to BME housing associations to improve the quality of housing stock across inner city areas by investing in the purchase and repair of poor quality homes from the open market.

### What BME housing associations will do:

- Provide expertise to enable culturally sensitive regeneration delivered through the Great Places Fund. Invest in improving local housing stock and facilitate the creation of mixed communities, leading to better life outcomes for local people.
- Work with the Government to provide community based social cohesion programmes in inner cities.
- Continue to celebrate BME heritage and bring communities together through events such as festivals and carnivals.

# CASE STUDY: REVIVING NOTTINGHAM CARNIVAL TUNTUM HOUSING ASSOCIATION

Nottingham Carnival began in 1970. A group of West Indians, mainly from the island of St Kitts, held a carnival parade in the Meadows and it became the main annual event for Nottingham's black community.

In 1998, when the council withdrew funding and Nottingham Carnival was cancelled, Tuntum housing association decided it was too important to their community and they would take it over and do it themselves.

Tuntum delivers a successful event each year with the support of staff, partners and other volunteers. Funding now comes from a variety of sources including Arts Council England. The carnival brings together over 15,000 people from all backgrounds including Tuntums tenants to celebrate the cultural diversity of Nottingham City.

"I have been involved in the Nottingham Carnival for over 13 years and each year we provide opportunities in costume making and dance choreography for over 100 young people from our community. Without the support of Tuntum we would not have a carnival in Nottingham."

Ginger Grocock, Leader of the carnival troupe Zodiac All Stars



# GET IN TOUCH:

If you want to hear more about the work that BME National is doing then please visit our website:

[www.bmenational.co.uk](http://www.bmenational.co.uk)  
[info@bmenational.co.uk](mailto:info@bmenational.co.uk)





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Our vision for diverse and inclusive places  
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This report was produced  
in partnership with

**BME**  
national

**NATIONAL  
HOUSING  
FEDERATION**