NORTH STAR
Creating homes, building futures

**AGENDA ITEM 16**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Title:** Annual Update on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion 2025/ 2026 | **Date of Meeting:** 14th September 2026 |
| **Author:** Diane Smith, Katherine McGough and Sean Lawless | **Email:** Diane.Smith@northstarhg.co.uk<br>Katherine.McGough@northstarhg.co.uk<br>Sean.Lawless@northstarhg.co.uk |
| **Job Title:** Director of Housing, Director of People and Director of Customer Experience and Transformation | |
| **Strategic Heading:** Assurance | **Status:** Decision |
| **Purpose:** To update Board with an annual update and to seek Board approval of the recommendations in Section Nine. | |
| **Customer Voice & Impact:** Customers influence the approach to equality, diversity and inclusion through feedback, involvement activity, complaints, satisfaction surveys and engagement with our customer groups. This insight, alongside our analysis of customer data, helps us to understand whether different groups can access our services fairly and whether they experience equitable outcomes.<br><br>The impact for customers is that services can be adapted in response to different needs, barriers to access can be identified and addressed, and areas where groups experience different outcomes can be investigated and improved. This report demonstrates how we use customer profile, access, satisfaction, complaints and involvement data to identify significant differences and determine where further action is required. | |
| **Recommendation:** Board is requested to approve the actions included in section eight. | |

## 1. Risk and Risk Appetite

STR6 Not meeting regulatory expectations.
STR8 Failure to deliver a high level of customer satisfaction.

**Risk Appetite**

There is a low-risk appetite for operational performance and a very low risk appetite for legal and regulatory compliance.

## 2. Executive Summary

This report sets out a range of information to provide assurance to Board about the approach to EDI at North Star and the progress made in the last year. Further details are included in the report but some points to note include:

- Satisfaction among customers declaring a disability is lower at 77.5% compared with 86.5% for customers without a declared disability.

- There are no Board members under the age 45 and all current Board members identify as White British.
- Male representation in the workforce increased to 21% but remains substantially below both the customer profile (37.7%) and the Northeast Census benchmark (49%).
- Complaint levels are broadly representative of the tenant population overall, although customers aged 25–34 are over-represented.
- Lettings to customers from Asian, Black or Mixed Heritage backgrounds increased to 15.4%, above both the customer base (9.6%) and the Northeast profile.
- North Star has continued positive action through Disability Confident, the adapted Rooney Rule, Refugee Futures, apprenticeships and the Become the Bridge anti-racism commitment.
- There are number of areas (age, sex, ethnicity and disability) where there is a gap between Board and customers, staff or census data. These are also highlighted in the Board Succession document that will be used by RECC to inform the next phase of Board member recruitment.

## 3. Context

North Star's EDI Policy was reviewed during 2026 and continues the commitment to go beyond legal compliance to be a fair and inclusive landlord and employer. Leading & Growing to 2031 reinforces this ambition, including learning from diverse lived experience, preventing discrimination, and addressing under-representation.

The Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard requires registered providers to deliver fair access to and equitable outcomes from housing and landlord services; understand tenants' diverse needs; assess whether outcomes are fair and equitable; and ensure services are accessible. This report provides data and assurance that these requirements are met.

This is further supported by third party assurance provided to Board by DTP in January 2026. Its review stated:

- Overall, we found plentiful evidence in the self-assessment and document review that North Star does take action to deliver fair and equitable outcomes for tenants, and prospective tenants, in relation to the housing and landlord services it provides.
- North Star holds data on tenant demographics and protected characteristics. Our document review showed this is extensive across several key categories namely disability, age, sex, ethnicity and contact details.
- It also holds good data regarding tenant support needs and language spoken.
- We saw evidence through the Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) report to Board in September 2025 of how this data had been used to assess whether housing and landlord services were accessible which is positive.

## 4. Demographic Data

### 4.1 Customer data

Customer demographic information is collected at the start of a tenancy through The Governments Continuous Recording of lettings and sales England (CORE) and recorded on the

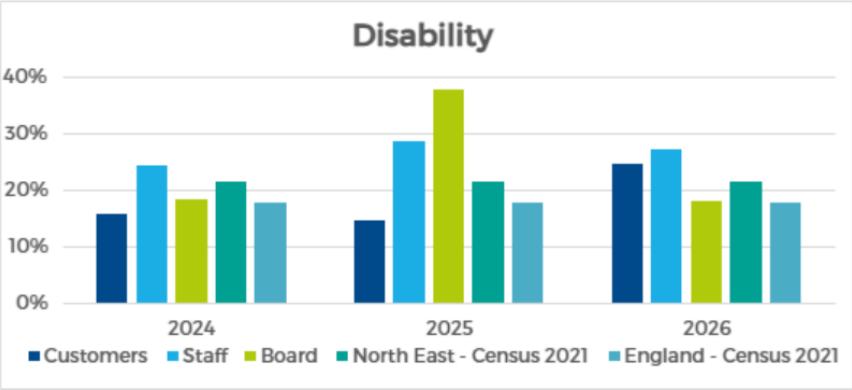
housing system. Data completeness has improved during the year, and customers can now use North Star Online to update their own data. The current position is:

| Data item | % data held |
|---|---|
| Disability | 100% |
| Age | 99.5% |
| Sex | 100% |
| Ethnicity | 96.1% |
| Contact details | 97.4% |
| Support needs | Partial – as applicable |
| Language | 79.7% |

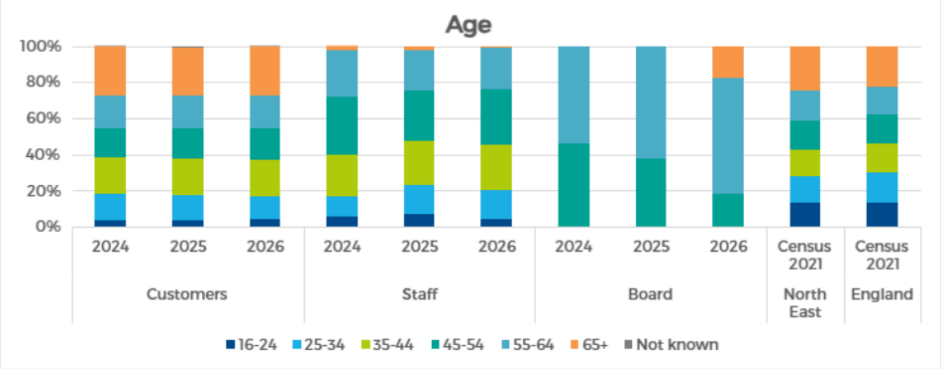
The remaining data gap is language, where information is held for 79.7% of tenants. Work to improve data completeness will continue so that service accessibility and outcomes can be assessed reliably.

## 4.2 Staff and Board Data

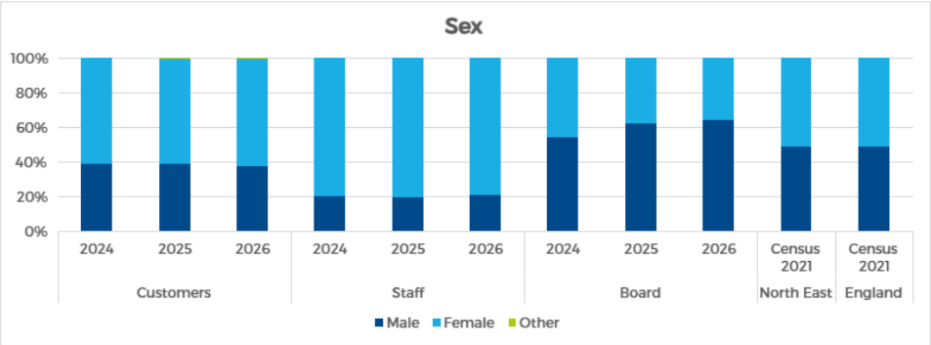
Board and staff demographic data was collected in April 2026. Response rates were 82% for Board and 85% for staff. Percentages in this report are therefore based on responses received. Only material differences are supported with comments.



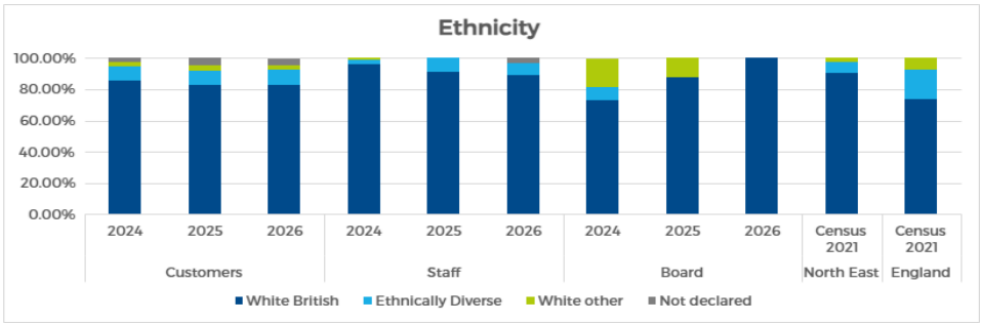

Board members identifying as having a disability decreased by 19.5% following changes in Board composition. This may be an area that Board wishes to consider in future recruitment.




There have been no Board members under the age of 45 for the past three years. This may be an area that Board wishes to consider in future recruitment.



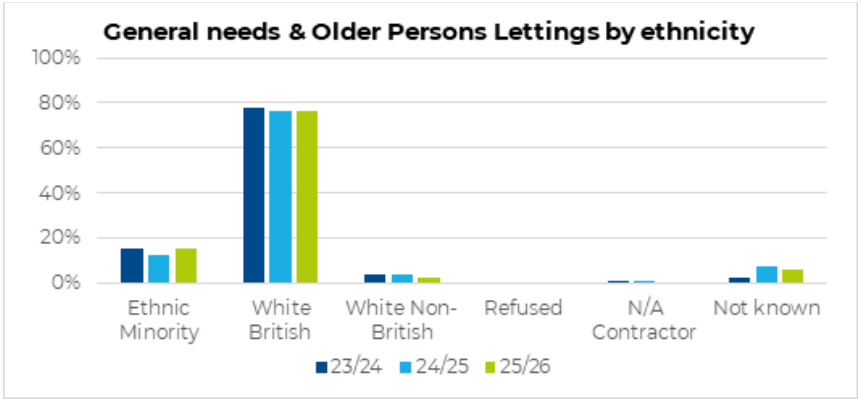

Male workforce representation increased to 21% but remains below the customer profile (37.7%) and Northeast Census benchmark (49%). Previous analysis showed that most Housing Associations employ a higher % of females unless they have a Direct Labour Organisation. The Board has a 64/36% Male/Female split. This may be an area that Board wishes to consider in future recruitment.

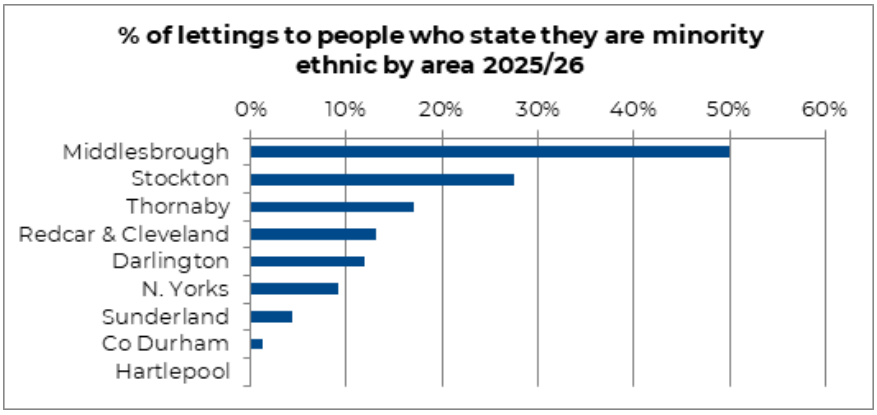



All current Board members identify as White British. This may be an area that Board wishes to consider in future recruitment.

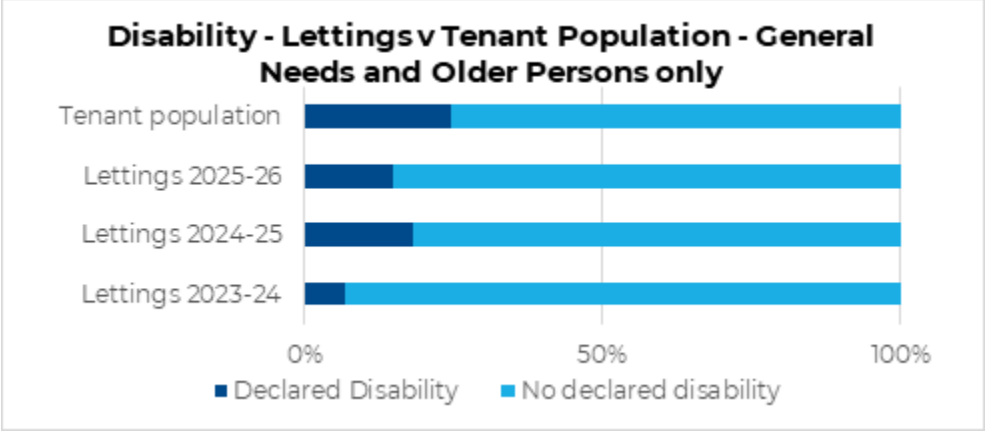
## 5. Customers and Housing – Equitable Access and Outcomes

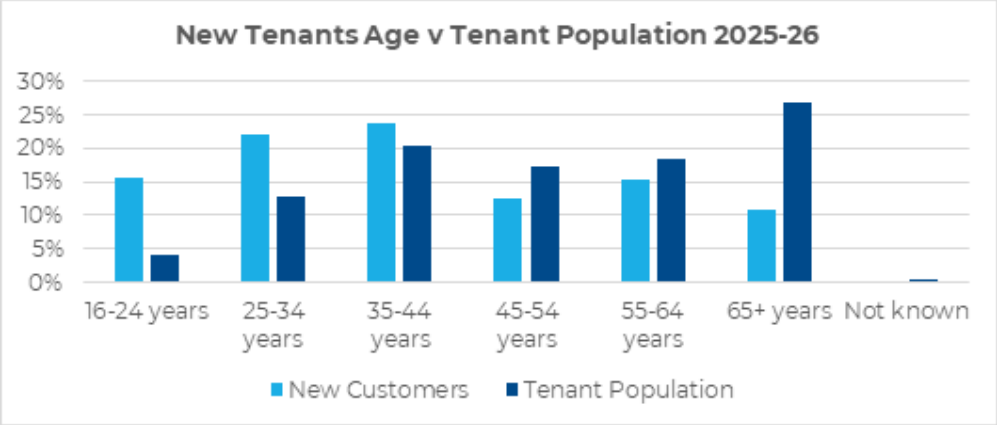
### 5.1 Access to Housing





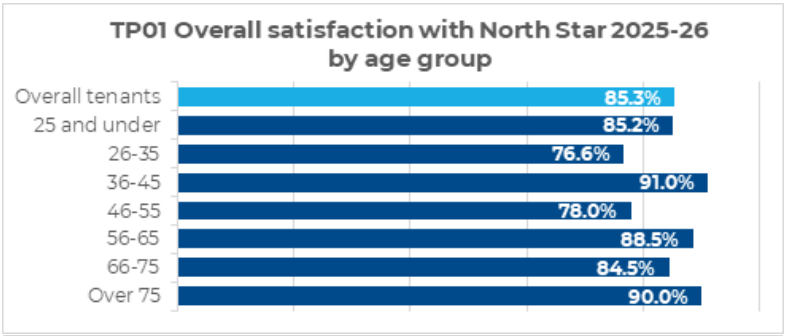

Lettings to Asian, Black or Mixed Heritage customers increased to 15.4% in 2025/26, returning to 2023/24 levels and exceeding both the tenant profile of 9.6% and the Northeast profile. Middlesbrough continues to have the highest proportion of lettings, consistent with local population patterns. Thornaby increased from 3% to 17%, linked to an increase in applicants granted asylum/refugee leave to remain and are awarded priority need for rehousing.

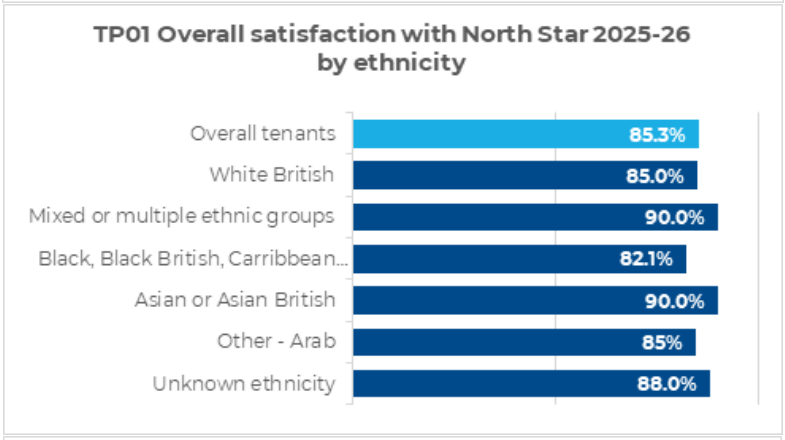


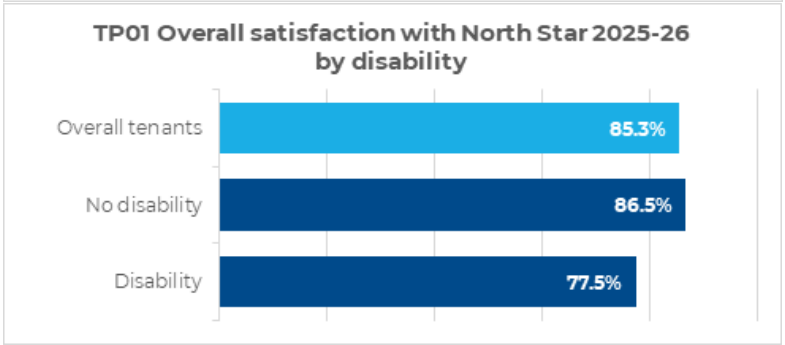



Customers declaring disability accounted for 14.8% of general needs and older persons lettings in 2025/26. Lettings will be determined by the availability of suitable accommodation. This is evidenced in the fluctuations above.

## 5.2 Satisfaction



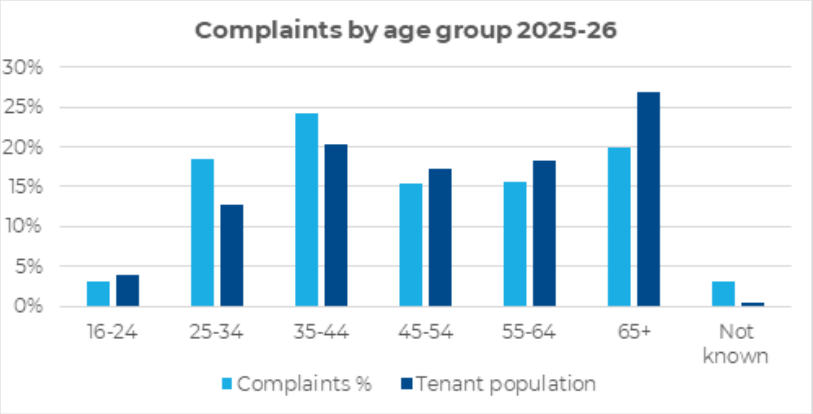



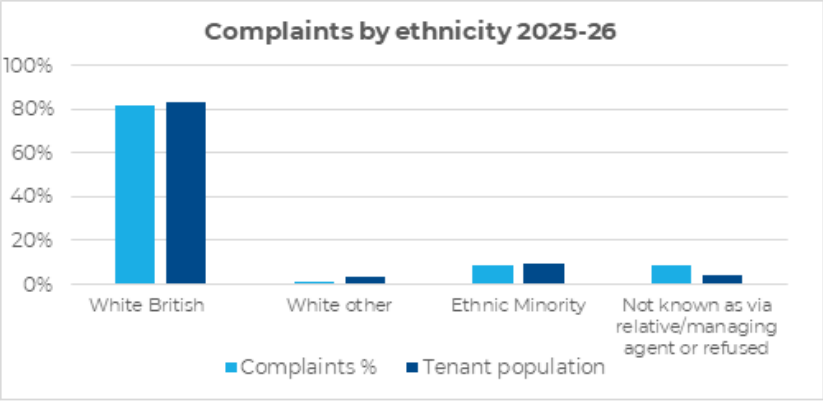
Overall tenant satisfaction (TP01) was 85.3%. Exceptions are:

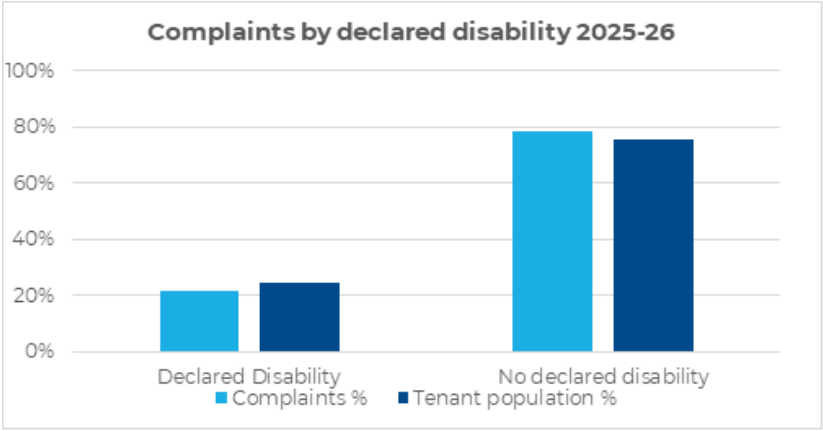
- Customers declaring a disability reported 77.5% overall satisfaction compared with 86.5% for customers without a declared disability and are less satisfied with the repairs and maintenance of communal areas. This emerged during the year, and improvement work was carried out in relation to standards within communal areas. No further trend has been identified; monitoring will continue during 2026/27. The Customer Consumer Standards Group is to carry out further work to understand more.

- Customers aged 26–35 reported 76.6% satisfaction, and those aged 46–55 reported 78.0%, below the overall result. Analysis to date has not identified a single service area or other characteristics that explain this difference. Satisfaction by age will continue to be monitored during 2026/27, with further analysis of individual TSM measures undertaken to identify whether there are consistent areas of lower satisfaction or emerging trends requiring action.

## 5.3 Complaints



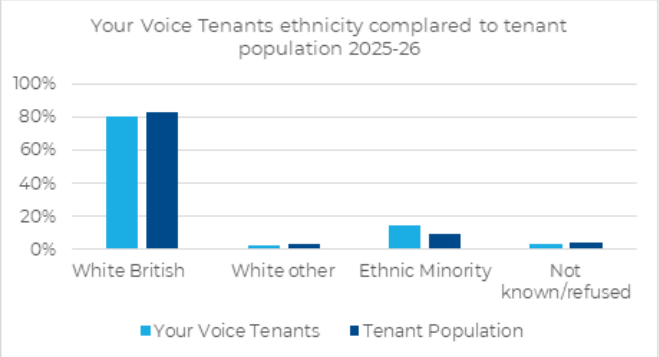


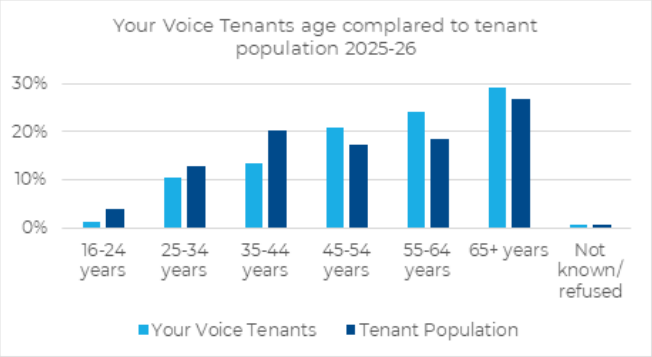

Complaint levels are broadly representative of the tenant population by ethnicity and disability, with no material disproportionality identified for these characteristics.

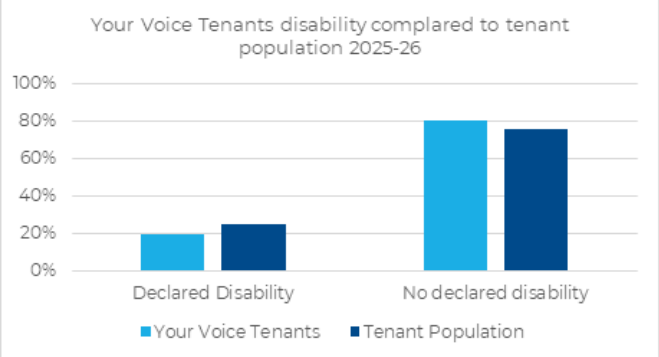
The exception is age. Customers aged 25–34 accounted for 18.5% of complaints compared with 12.8% of the tenant population, indicating that this age group is disproportionately represented among complainants. This will also be considered alongside satisfaction data, where customers aged 26–35 report lower overall satisfaction, to understand whether there is a consistent age-related pattern across customer experience measures.

### 5.4 Customer involvement

The “Your Voice” group includes 389 people who have advised that they want to be involved with us and expressed an interest in various opportunities. For example, people who are interested in policy development, people who want to engage by e mail, text, virtually or people who want to meet.




The Your Voice group is broadly diverse, with ethnic minority customers representing 14.1% of members compared with 9.6% of the tenant population. The material gaps are lower representation among 35–44-year-olds and among customers declaring a disability (19.5% of Your Voice compared with 24.6% of tenants). We can use demographic information to target recruitment campaigns.

Demographic information is gathered at each involvement meeting (The Tenant Voice, Consumer standards, Performance monitoring, Communication Group) and is recorded in the meeting notes. The notes are shared at Board meetings and available on Convene.

## 6. People and Culture

### 6.1 Anti-racism

North Star remains a member of the Northeast Anti Racism Coalition and became an early signatory to Become the Bridge. The commitment includes practical action planning, peer learning and progress reporting. A cross-organisation staff group has developed principles, and the next step is an organisation-wide anti-racism action plan. Details of Become the Bridge can be found here.

### 6.2 Recruitment, progression and positive action

There were 29 vacancies in 2025/26. Eleven staff were appointed through internal recruitment. Across internal, external and agency appointments, six recruits declared a disability and three recruits were from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Last year, we committed to providing the Board with attrition rates in relation to recruitment. However, our external recruitment provider, Networx, has been unable to provide this data accurately. They retain records for only six months and, due to the nature of managed recruitment campaigns and the way the information has historically been stored, the available data does not provide a sufficiently reliable picture.

From September 2026, with the introduction of People First for recruitment, we will ensure that this information is captured and recorded in a consistent and meaningful way. This will enable us to provide the Board with accurate and meaningful recruitment-related attrition data next year.

North Star remains a Disability Confident Employer, accredited to April 2028, and continues to use its adapted Rooney Rule so that an ethnic minority candidate who meets all essential criteria is guaranteed an interview.

6.3 **Employment pathways and apprenticeships**

Working with Refugee Futures, two individuals completed short-term paid placements and moved into permanent employment with North Star. North Star also maintained its commitment to employ up to three apprentices at any one time; one apprentice completed during the year and two commenced.

**6.4 Tees Valley Move Forward**

The partnership supported over 450 people to search for work and over 150 to sustain employment. North Star contributed welfare benefits support which enabled over 40 people to access benefits to which they were entitled.

**6.5 Board recruitment**

Five Board members and four Board trainees were appointed during 2025/26. The substantive Board remains without a member under 45, has now got less people who identify as having a disability and all current Board members identify as White British. This remains an area for consideration in future succession and recruitment.

The campaign attracted some diversity across ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity. However, the overall pool was predominantly male (63.0%), White (89.1%) and older: 55.6% of applicants with a valid age were 55 or over, while only eight were under 45. Female applicants made up just over one third of the pool.

There were 46 diversity monitoring forms returned for the Board recruitment campaign. The table below describes the applicant's pool represented in the forms.

| Measure | Headline | Comment |
|---|---|---|
| Forms analysed | 46 | The compilation contained 46 separate monitoring forms. |
| Sex | 29 male; 16 female; 1 non-binary | Female applicants accounted for 34.8% of the pool. |
| Age | 24 of 45 aged 55-64 | 53.3% of applicants with a valid date of birth were in this band. |
| Ethnicity | 5 ethnic minority applicants | 10.9% of the pool; 41 applicants identified as White. |
| Disability | 6 applicants | 13.0% identified as disabled; one preferred not to say. |
| Sexual orientation | 4 non-heterosexual applicants | Two gay men, one bisexual applicant and one queer applicant. |
| Guaranteed-interview groups | 10 applicants | 21.7% identified as disabled and/or from an ethnic minority background; eligibility still depends on meeting the essential criteria. |

*Percentages are rounded to one decimal place. Characteristics overlap and should not be added together.*

## 7. Progress Against 2025/26 Objectives

| 2025/26 objective | Outcome / exception |
|---|---|
| Enable customers to update their own data | Fully available and over 600 transactions have been conducted through North Star Online |
| Implement recommendations from the tenant mystery shop of accessibility standards | All actions have been added to the Customer Recommendation Tracker and implemented. Oversight of the tracker is provided by The Tenants Voice (TTV). |
| Implement recommendations from the external review of the website | Completed with further assurance sought from DTP, who carried out a full assessment of the website in 2025. All suggested improvements have been implemented. |
| Investigate disability representation in the customer base and identify action required | Representation has increased over the last two years. |
| Target at least three apprenticeship opportunities per year to underrepresented groups | Three apprentices during 2025/26; all female and White British; one declared neurodiversity. |
| Promote and support anti-racism practice | Become the Bridge group established; principles developed; pledge signed; training/action planning continues into 2026/27. |

## 8. Proposed Objectives for 2026/27

The proposed objectives focus on the areas where further action can materially strengthen inclusion and representation:

| Action | Completion / Lead |
|---|---|
| Strengthen the employment offer using staff feedback, external research, critical-friend review and EDI data to identify and implement measurable improvements to benefits, working arrangements and workplace policies. | March 2027 – Director of People |
| Increase workforce and board diversity | March 2027 – Director of People |

| Action | Completion / Lead |
|---|---|
| across underrepresented demographic groups through targeted recruitment, inclusive progression and improved retention, with measurable year-on-year improvement against agreed representation measures. | |
| Strengthen the approach to EDI and anti-racism through Become the Bridge and NEARC collaboration, delivering an organisation-wide anti-racism strategy and SMART action plan with clear measures, accountabilities and timescales. | March 2027 – Director of People / Become the Bridge Group |
| Reduce inequalities in customer experience by using TSM, complaints and service data to identify and address differences in satisfaction and outcomes between demographic groups, with an initial focus on customers with disabilities and younger customers. Analysis to be carried out by looking at TSM data for 2026/27. | March 2027 – Director of Customer Experience & Transformation |
| Improve accessibility and reasonable adjustments by strengthening how customer communication needs, vulnerabilities and reasonable adjustments are identified, recorded and acted upon across services, and test customer experience with customers who have disabilities. To be tested by Customer Consumer Standards Group. | March 2027 – Director of Customer Experience & Transformation |

**9. Recommendation**

Board to note the actions implemented in 2025/2026 and approve the 2026/27 objectives in Section Eight.