

Responding to Crises



BETTER PRACTICE ON THE SUMMER 2024 RACIST RIOTS

As part of BOOST's Cohort 2 Launch Event in September 2024, John Bowker (CEO of Southway and the Project Lead of BOOST) opened the session with some very powerful stats to bust the myths around who does and doesn't get allocated Social Housing in the UK.

We then heard from our Mentees about the impact the events had on our ethnically diverse colleagues and communities and from our Mentors about how GMHP organisations responded as employers.

Group discussion resulted in important learning on how we could respond better to future situations as organisations and collectively as GMHP.

REFLECTIONS FROM THE GROUP

SOME OF OUR MENTEES FROM COHORT 1 SHARED HOW THEY WERE IMPACTED, BOTH PERSONALLY AND IN THEIR ROLES. THE REST OF THE GROUP REFLECTED ON WHAT THEY HEARD:

- Our Mentees were brave; in talking about the situation - how we can we foster truth-telling and make it safe and empowering?
- The events impacted on ethnically diverse people and communities in a very profound way – they were triggering and undermined a sense of belonging, even for those who were born here. Hearing them talk about it was very powerful.
- Several people in the room became quite tearful when hearing about a mentee's experience of feeling unsafe in Britain for the first time (and how this feeling of unsafety was difficult to fight off in the days after the riots).
- It was concerning to hear that mentees wondered if their colleagues thought the same things as the rioters; who are their passive supporters and who can they trust?
- Most leaders and managers in the room felt their response was inadequate; they wanted to do the right thing but were not sure what it was
- The people making the decisions about how to respond, were not those that were impacted – most of us were slow to respond
- Some organisations closed offices but faced a backlash as they were deserting tenants/front line providers. Some chose not to close due to this conflict of interest

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE EVENTS AND OUR RESPONSE?

- Reach out to ethnically diverse staff to speak to them about how they are feeling, not wait for them to come to us or put out passive messaging about coming to us with any concerns. Do we really understand how they feel when events such as these happen? Not all will be impacted in the same way – it will depend on previous experiences.
- Some organisations did group listening sessions; which were well received and enabled learning and growth for all.
- Ensure that those experiencing the trauma are involved in response planning. We need to ensure that we don't exaggerate the physical and psychological threat by dwelling on the negative side; one mentee reported that they only started to be fearful when others started to talk about it; as with violence against women, we need to avoid making people feel even more afraid about risk than is necessary.
- Promote multi-culturalism. This is an important counter-weight for ethnically diverse colleagues who appreciated colleagues and tenants going out of their way to make it clear they did not agree with the riots or to actively work against them by attending marches/protests etc.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE EVENTS AND OUR RESPONSE?

- Actively foster good multi-cultural relationships on an ongoing basis and have a means of bringing these to the foreground in times of crisis; the anti- racist movement needs to swell as the racist movement swells. Highlight positive responses as they happen to help people feel safer and to encourage more positive actions.
- Invest in people management so that line managers are better equipped to respond. Use the riots as an example of a challenge in people management training, thereby embedding anti- racist thinking in people management skills.
- Acknowledge how these moments may trigger other trauma, memories and fears. Match that with active and sensitive support. Ensure that employee assistance programmes include racist trauma counselling.



WHAT CAN WE DO BETTER AND MORE OF?

- Plan better, in the expectation of future unrest or crises around race relations.
- Integrate this into business continuity planning.
- Align and share this planning across GMHP and co-ordinate better. There may be physical resource on the ground that can be shared across HPs to respond in crises, as well as learning and shared comms etc.
- Counter harmful messages via myth busting. It is vital that we do that among our own staff as well as externally. If we are successful in doing it with tenants, they can be greater advocates of information to fight the disinformation in communities than we can be directly.
- Be more overtly anti-racist; Be more overt allies to our ethnically diverse communities
- Have clear policies to deal with racism from customers and be robust in our response



HOW SHOULD WE PLAN FOR A FUTURE CRISIS & WHAT CAN GMHP DO COLLECTIVELY?

- Align our approaches and support each other. It was noted that one of the positives was the sharing of internal comms by the HR teams.
- Wider our contingency planning to events of this nature – it should not have been a surprise given the voting levels for right leaning groups in the election.
- Collectively we need to foster good, trusted relationships in our communities; We are not neutral. We are anti racist organisations and we should work together to campaign on this message. We have an obligation to counter the negatives and publicise the positives.
- Educate our colleagues and customers about the allocation of housing; give them the knowledge and information to be influencers.
- Lobby the NHF regarding communicating housing policy.
- Learn together about what works and where.



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