

Ethnic Minority Voices in Tenant Engagement Case Study

Building Trust Through Community-Led Engagement
Belgrave Neighbourhood Co-operative Housing
Association (BNCHA)

Overview

BNCHA is a small, community-based housing co-operative managing just under 400 homes in one of Leicester's most culturally diverse neighbourhoods. Prior to 2021, the co-op faced significant challenges, including weak governance, low tenant trust, and limited engagement from ethnic minority tenants despite them forming the majority of the local population.

Feedback from tenant conversations and informal engagement highlighted that many residents felt engagement activities were inaccessible, overly formal, or did not reflect their lived experiences.

The cost-of-living crisis further exacerbated inequalities, revealing the need for engagement models that met people where they were... practically, culturally, and emotionally.

“I can't thank you enough for just listening and for trying to understand my point of view.”

Tenant member

Participation in traditional meetings and panels was low, particularly among tenants from minoritised ethnic backgrounds, women, and older residents.

“For the first time, I feel like more than just a tenant - I feel like I belong and am getting involved in so many things at BNCHA.”

Tenant member



Purpose

This case study explores how BNCHA has strengthened inclusive engagement with ethnically diverse tenants by adopting community-led, culturally responsive approaches that build trust, increase participation, and create sustainable relationships.

Initiative developed progressively from 2021 to present, with key milestones including:

- 2021–2022: Governance reform and renewed focus on tenant voice
- 2023: Development of the Belgrave Community Food Hub
- 2023–2024: Expansion of EKTA sessions and Warm Welcome activities

Objectives

- To increase engagement and participation from ethnically diverse tenants.
- To rebuild trust between tenants and the housing provider through visible, consistent presence.
- To improve cultural competence and awareness across staff and governance.
- To embed tenant voice into service delivery, not just consultation.
- To create inclusive spaces where tenants feel safe, valued, and heard.

BNCHA adopted a relationship-led, community-based approach which strongly aligns with the T.A.B.L.E. principles.

"While this work was not originally designed around a formal framework, it reflects best practice later articulated through the T.A.B.L.E. principles".



T - Tailored Training

- Board and staff development focused on equality, cultural awareness, and listening skills.
- Learning shaped by lived experience shared directly by tenants rather than generic training.

A - Actively Engaging Communities

Establishment of the Belgrave Community Food Hub (weekly), providing affordable food alongside advice, signposting, and informal engagement.

- Participation in the Warm Welcome-campaign, offering a welcoming, non-judgemental space for residents.

B - Bringing Everyone into the Conversation

- Development of EKTA sessions, EKTA means unity - culturally inclusive, community-led discussion and activity sessions designed to encourage connection, confidence, and dialogue.
- Engagement delivered in familiar, trusted community settings rather than formal offices.

"I joined the group more than two years ago. I was feeling depressed and didn't know what to do with myself. But EKTA gave me confidence, motivation and happiness. I learned sewing, knitting, art and crafts, and even attended courses on AI, apps and the NHS. Even my grandson loves coming!"

EKTA participant

"I live on my own and joined EKTA to keep myself busy. I've made friends and learned so much. The staff are always welcoming and never judge."

EKTA participant



L - Listening to Voices

- Ongoing informal conversations used to shape services and priorities.
- Tenant feedback directly influenced decisions around services, and activities.



E - Ethnic Minorities

- Use of culturally sensitive communication styles and word-of-mouth engagement.
- Working with trusted local partners and community leaders.
- Recognition that engagement is not one-size-fits-all.

Outcomes and Impact

Quantitative outcomes:

- Significant increase in engagement from ethnically diverse tenants, particularly through the Food Hub and EKTA sessions.
- Weekly engagement with dozens of tenants who had never previously participated in formal housing engagement.

Qualitative impact:

- Improved trust and openness between tenants and BNCHA staff and board members.
- Greater confidence among tenants to raise issues, share ideas, and participate in wider co-op activities.
- Shift in organisational culture from transactional engagement to relational engagement.

Tenant Voice

“For the first time, I feel like I belong. It feels like a family.”

EKTA participant

“This was my first time picking up a paintbrush, and I didn’t even know I could paint! I definitely want to do more of this!”

EKTA participant

“I came to EKTA during a very difficult time, when I was struggling with my husband’s health. The group gave me comfort and reminded me I wasn’t alone. EKTA helps us stay connected, active, and mentally strong and we each bring something unique to share.”

EKTA participant

“We love these sessions so much, we’ve made new friends and learned new skills. Please, can we have more than one session a week?”

EKTA participant

“Do I have to come in to shop or can I just come in for a drink and chat to everyone? I love the atmosphere and all the information you provide.”

Local resident

“I feel truly blessed to be part of this wonderful group.”

EKTA participant

Lessons Learned

- Trust takes time and consistency; visibility matters more than formal structures.
- Informal engagement can be more inclusive and effective than traditional panels.
- Lived experience is a powerful driver of learning for staff and governance.
- Small organisations can achieve meaningful impact by working creatively and collaboratively.

Challenges included limited staff capacity, constrained financial resources, and the need to balance operational demands with meaningful engagement work. However, strong partnerships, community goodwill, and a shared commitment to inclusion acted as key enablers.

Next Steps

- Continue and strengthen the Food Hub and EKTA sessions as long-term engagement routes.
- Develop clearer pathways from informal engagement into governance and scrutiny opportunities.
- Capture engagement data more systematically to evidence impact.
- Share learning with other housing providers and through peer networks.

Evidence and Data

- Engagement metrics from Food Hub attendance and EKTA sessions.
- Informal feedback captured through conversations and follow-up actions.
- Supporting materials including flyers, photographs, and partner feedback, social media engagement.



Contact

Name: Jaimini Bharakhada

Role: Chair and CEO

Organisation: Belgrave Neighbourhood Co-operative Housing Association (BNCHA)

Email/Phone:

Jaimini.B@belgravecoop.org.uk

M: 07817 643492