



Sue Shirt, West Midlands CIH board member shares her journey in housing

My passion for housing started whilst doing voluntary work on the Buttershaw estate, you may recall the comedy “Rita Sue and Bob too” film was set on the estate. The charity, Bradford Children’s Holiday Project, took kids from the estate that otherwise would not get a holiday, away for a week to North Yorkshire. As part of the preparation I had to visit the kids and their parents at home and I saw first hand the impact of poor housing and I will be honest, I thought, I could do this better.

I fundamentally believe that having a decent, secure, affordable home is the very foundation of successful lives – whatever that success looks like. Not having it is a disadvantage that families don’t need and kids don’t deserve.

My journey in social housing began and I am as passionate and opinionated now as I was then. OK probably more so.....

As a member of CIH for over 30 years, being a housing professional has helped me maintain my passion through knowledge and networking. Back in 1994 I was chair, then treasurer, of the old North Midlands branch having joined as a student member. Having kids meant that I couldn’t do quite so much extracurricular activity so I had to take a break but as they grew I returned to join the CIH West Midlands Board in 2017.

I can honestly say I love my career, having had the privilege of working with great people in a range of organisations from the local authority to the voluntary sector and housing associations. It sounds crass but my role now is to use my experience to encourage and nurture future housing professionals and to ensure that the business I work in becomes the social business which meets the modern expectations and needs of customers.

I have worked at an executive level in a range of organisations for the last 15 years and my current role is with Stonewater, a leading social housing provider, as Executive Director for Customer Experience.

Prior to Stonewater my roles included housing consultant for a range of organisations, Managing Director and Operations Director for an LSVT and as Head of Service, leading the transformation of an underperforming district council housing service into an above average authority and the regeneration of a former coal field area.

My other soap box favourite is about equality, which should be a way of life. I am a firm believer that we need to remove stigma that surrounds social housing and allow everyone to have a place called home so much so that describing someone by their tenure should be as unacceptable as smoking in someone else's home. I did say I was opinionated!

I am married, my husband is a Saint to put up with me, with two grown up children, Joe and Lily, and now find myself an empty-nester. I love long walks with my dog Rufus (photos available if requested) playing the piano (badly) as well as hitting the gym at the weekend.

I'm a proud supporter and trustee of Women's Aid Staffordshire.

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Sue Shirt
West Midlands CIH Board Member
April 2019