

## Press Release

For Immediate Release  
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### **Business leaders must do more to create a “level playing field” on diversity**

London, 14<sup>th</sup> December 2012: Chris Hyman CEO of FTSE 100 services company Serco Plc said that business leaders must do more to create a “level playing field” on diversity within their own organisations. Speaking at the launch of Diversity UK - a think tank to research, advocate and promote new ideas for improving diversity and inclusion in Britain - he spoke about growing up in South Africa under apartheid and the values of a strong faith, high standards and hard work that his family instilled in him. The Diversity UK event, held at Bloomsbury House in London on Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> December 2012, was attended by a cross section of business professionals. Mr Hyman also spoke of the need for individuals to conduct a self-assessment and develop a deep set of values and intellectual humility. A hands-on leader, Chris Hyman has seen Serco increase turnover to £5 billion and lift profits by 450% to £238 million since becoming CEO in 2002. The past decade has also seen the company grow from 23,000 employees to over 110,000 employees across 40 countries.

Although not a proponent of positive discrimination or affirmative action, Mr Hyman spoke of the need for companies to reflect the communities that they operated in to ensure the longevity of their organisation. He emphasised that business leaders must do more to create a “level playing field” on diversity. Quoting Nelson Mandela, “to be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others”, Mr Hyman spoke of the need for business leaders to remember that diversity brings innovation. He emphasized that there is currently a “war for talent” so for businesses to attract and retain the best employees, understanding and implementing diversity and inclusion strategies not only make business sense but could also give companies a competitive advantage. “Put systems in place so that great people can do good things for your business”, he added. He advised those from under-represented communities to outperform their competitors and to “seek no favours”.

A view echoed by Bala Mahendran, CEO of Basildon Council who shared his career path from the other side of the public sector fence. Mr Mahendran spoke of a tragic industrial accident at the age of 22 which became for him a pivotal moment in his life. Born in Sri Lanka in a comfortable middle-class family, Mr Mahendran said that he could have chosen to return back home after the accident, but, instead selected to recover in the UK and seek opportunities in a new field. When appointed CEO of Basildon Council in 2004, after a lengthy assessment process, he spoke of the satisfaction; “no favours were asked, none were given. I don’t want to be anyone’s token”. Echoing Chris Hyman’s view of the need to create a “level playing field”, Mr Mahendran highlighted the accelerated pace of change in the public sector which is facing increasing demands and decreasing budgets. He spoke of the need for management leadership in creating shareholder value in the form of “social capital” for local communities. He emphasized the need for the public sector to embed diversity at the heart of their organisations to reflect the changing demographics of the country, likening it to a business imperative.

Current research shows that ethnic minorities are underrepresented in the workplace. Although ethnic minorities make up 12% of the working-age population, only 1 in 16 of current FTSE 100 board members is from a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) background.



Even in the public arena, only 0.8% of local councillors in England are Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic; only 4.1% of MPs are Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (as of 2010) and only 6.9% of public appointments are held by BAME individuals. “Clearly there is still some way to go before there is a representative number of ethnic minorities in public appointments, politics or the corporate world commensurate with their numbers in the general population” said Lopa Patel, Founder & CEO of Diversity UK.

“There has been a lot of focus on gender diversity, particularly in corporate boardrooms and in the effort to close the pay gap between men and women, said Lopa Patel MBE, Founder & CEO of Diversity UK, “but diversity is not only about gender. Diversity is about access, fairness and equality for everyone - regardless of what characteristics they have. Ethnicity, age, disability, gender reassignment and sexual orientation are also issues pertinent to making Britain a fairer society. Progress on those has slowed in the present economic climate. A lack of representation also has an effect on governance. A growing number of studies suggest diverse boards have the potential to improve the financial performance of companies so it is important to remove barriers that may be preventing diverse leaders reaching the very top of the ladder in their sector”.

The Rt Hon Baroness Verma Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy & Climate Change neatly summed up debate with a statement saying that “we must speed up the progress on issues that really should have been solved in the 20<sup>th</sup> century”. She urged public institutions to assess whether they allow access on an equal basis regardless of gender, ethnicity or faith and asked individuals not to be “passive observers” but to actively challenge the status quo in their own companies wherever they found a barrier.

Notes for Editors:

### **About Diversity UK**

Diversity UK is a think tank to research, advocate and promote new ideas for improving diversity and inclusion in Britain. It is a not-for-profit, collaborative organisation that works with a wide range of partners, bodies and key opinion formers to engage in a healthy debate about issues of age, race, gender, sexual orientation and disability discrimination. Diversity UK is an evidence-based initiative that seeks to influence policy, enhance civic engagement and improve the perception of the minority ethnic community in Britain.

Visit [www.diversityuk.org](http://www.diversityuk.org) for further information

High-resolution images from the event are available here: <http://goo.gl/IY3tO>

Ends.

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