



**For residents and staff**

## Contents

### Foreword from the Chief Executive

### Introduction

### Five priority areas for improvement

#### Knowing our residents

- Priority 1: Ease overcrowding

#### Leadership, partnership and organisational commitment

- Priority 2: Promote financial inclusion

#### Resident engagement and satisfaction

- Priority 3: Improve resident scrutiny and engagement

#### Responsive services, access and customer care

- Priority 4: Accessible homes, inclusive neighbourhoods

#### Developing a diverse and progressive workforce

- Priority 5: A workforce that reflects the community

## Accessibility

## Foreword from the Chief Executive

At Tower Hamlets Homes we are for residents and here to help. That commitment - putting residents at the heart of everything we do - means providing services that are **accessible, inclusive** and **fairly delivered** for all residents. Put simply, if we don't understand and meet diverse needs we can't deliver excellent customer service. As a business, diversity is not optional, it is part of everything we do and everything we do is about diversity.

Since 2008 we've achieved a lot. In June 2011 we were awarded the "Achieving" level of the Equality Framework for Social Housing, making us the first housing provider in Tower Hamlets with this accreditation. Our work has been recognised regionally and nationally, such as the Somali Tenant Engagement Project and Bling My Hood project being nominated for a range of awards.

We're also responding to inequality amongst our staff. We're providing more opportunities for women and Black and Minority Ethnic staff to develop their skills and fulfill their potential, and have joined the Stonewall Diversity Champion and Mindful Employer networks.

We should be proud of those achievements, and our second Diversity Strategy builds on what we have done and looks at what we need to do next explaining the priorities for the next two years. We want to be the first housing provider in Tower Hamlets to be accredited at a level of "Excellence" of the Equality Framework, and our Diversity Strategy 2012-14 will help us create neighbourhoods and workplaces where residents and staff feel acknowledged as uniquely different, but equally valued.

**Gavin Cansfield**

Chief Executive

Tower Hamlets Homes

## Introduction

Since launching our first Diversity Strategy in 2009, we have developed practical ways to help us improve and deliver services which are accessible, inclusive and fair for all residents. These improvements mean that we are now better able to meet the diverse needs of our customers in terms of physical access, communication and language needs in particular.

In November 2010, Audit Commission inspectors found that there was a strong corporate commitment and clear leadership on equality and diversity, and that we were producing positive outcomes for residents, especially the most vulnerable. The inspectors were also positive about our work on overcrowding and what we had done to understand and address lower satisfaction rates amongst Black and Minority Ethnic residents.

In the last three years, we have worked to ensure that we more consistently meet the communication and access needs of residents, which has improved our ability to provide face-to-face and web based customer services. We have carried out specific engagement activities with young people, women, Black and Minority Ethnic, Somali, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender residents to reduce inequality and promote better community relations.

Meeting the diverse needs of our residents will ensure that we can provide services which are efficient, cost-effective and more likely to be right first time – as well as being central to our ability to improve performance and satisfaction. We made an early corporate commitment to use the Equality Framework to embed the importance of meeting diverse needs in the way that we plan and improve services, and as such this strategy is aligned with the five outcome areas of the Social Housing Equality Framework.

In the current economic climate, public sector providers are being asked to do more with less. Every action has been based on what we have learned about our residents and staff in the last few years and we know that delivering improved outcomes in relation to equality and diversity will be crucial to improving performance and satisfaction overall.

## Five priority areas for improvement

### Knowing our residents

#### ► Priority 1: Ease overcrowding

Many of our residents face the challenges of chronic overcrowding, which originates from the squeeze on building new council homes in the 1980s and the 1990s, and a decreasing level of supply of housing through the Right to Buy policies of successive governments.

The Council identifies overcrowding as one of the greatest inequality challenges for the Borough, because of the wide ranging, often damaging effects of chronic overcrowding on health and mental health and educational prospects. Overcrowding is disproportionately experienced by families from a BME background.

In response to this overcrowding, the Council approved its first **Overcrowding Reduction Strategy** in October 2009 which sought to tackle overcrowding by:

- reducing overcrowding in existing homes and putting in place preventative measures to reduce future overcrowding
- increasing the overall supply of housing for local people including a range of affordable housing, suitable for larger households
- providing access to the right housing options at the right time

We have worked closely with the Council to address this priority and contribute to **One Tower Hamlets** priorities.

In 2010, we identified over 1,200 properties as overcrowded - over 12% of all tenanted properties. The vast majority of overcrowded households were found to be Asian (78%), and of those households, 70% were Bangladeshi.

We identified that 77% of overcrowded households were those lacking one bedroom. A lack of supply had meant that it was unlikely that these households would have been able to secure larger accommodation in the short-term.

In 2010-11, THH alongside the Council worked through a programme to visit all overcrowded households. An **Overcrowding Toolkit** was developed for all Neighbourhood Housing Officers, to systematically visit to discuss housing options and how we can support overcrowded households. Bidding advice was offered and re-housing was considered where necessary and possible.

We developed the Overcrowding Toolkit in consultation with residents, through our **Diversity Working Group**, to ensure that the needs of individuals and community groups were met.

Neighbourhood Housing Officers targeted the families who lacked one bedroom;

the Council visited households lacking two or more bedrooms. Nearly 800 households were referred for professional advice and support, including repairs, providing external storage, providing a fire brigade visit or tailored housing advice.

After their inspection in 2010, the Audit Commission were positive about our work on overcrowding and what we had done to understand and address lower satisfaction rates amongst Black and Minority Ethnic residents.

Building on our early work, we have also provided other types of support specifically for BME groups who are significantly more likely to be overcrowded, in response to this inequality.

For instance, THH has worked in partnership with the Ocean Somali Community Association and Somali Integration Team to **understand and meet the specific needs of Somali residents who we overcrowded**. Focus groups revealed that there was a significant lack of knowledge of services available, for example the Somali language Bidding telephone line, and the impact that rent arrears could have on the success of any bid. In 2011-12, we provided overcrowding assistance on a case-by-case basis, providing tailored support through a Somali Engagement Officer.

Moving forward, THH has **incorporated tackling overcrowding in our corporate vision** to become the best housing provider in Tower Hamlets by 2014, by aiming to ease overcrowding through reducing under-occupation and illegal sub-letting by a third. By learning more about our customers and the specific needs they have, we can ensure that we provide services that address unequal outcomes and will in time improve resident satisfaction further.

## Leadership, partnership and organisational commitment

### ► Priority 2: Promote financial inclusion

Residents of Tower Hamlets experience significant socio-economic disadvantage and the borough is ranked as having the highest level of child poverty in the UK. **Over 70% of Tower Hamlets Homes' tenants receive full or part housing benefit.**

Since 2008, a range of effective **financial inclusion partnerships** have been developed to bring in external and professional support with tenants and leaseholders supported through Money Help and Advice services. Some of the partnerships that have been developed in response are **East End Energy Fit & HomeServe**, providing help for residents to assist them with their financial planning, grants applications and purchase of household goods at cost price and **Limehouse Project and Account 3**, providing help for residents on a wide range of money, housing and benefit issues.

The **Welfare Reform Act 2012** legislates the biggest change to the welfare system for over 50 years and is likely to have a substantial impact on residents

of Tower Hamlets Homes.

Firstly, the **Welfare Reform Act limits the total amount of benefits a household can receive**. The Government is proposing to introduce a £26,000 cap on the total amount of benefits that working-age (16-60) people in the UK can receive. Although exemptions apply, this change is likely to impact THH households who are in receipt of state benefits of some sort.

Secondly, the Welfare Reform also introduces a new size criteria or '**bedroom tax**' in the social rented sector. From the 1st April 2013 those who are of working age (16- 60) and "under-occupying" will no longer receive full Housing Benefit for their home, with a reduction of benefits determined by the size criteria. Figures from July 2012 show that at least **1028 tenants have been identified as being impacted by the reform, based on information from the Housing Register**.

In the lead up to the introduction of the Welfare Reform Act 2012, the Rents Team has been preparing for the anticipated impact of the Welfare Reform Act. **Interactive briefing sessions** have been organised with THH residents to work in collaboration with residents to manage the challenges ahead. Communication with residents has taken place with **sign-posting to relevant community organisations** where possible.

**Under-occupation** has been identified as a key issue in Tower Hamlets; older residents who do are not beyond the state pensionable age but are under-occupying as result of their children leaving home, are likely to be substantially affected by welfare benefit reforms. One solution to this issue has been promoted through LBTH by property swapping. A monetary incentive is in place to encourage property swaps amongst under-occupier and overcrowded household which will partly reduce the impact of the Welfare Reform.

We know that certain community groups will benefit from tailored support around financial inclusion, such as that which we have provided to the Somali community and younger tenants. We will continue to tackle poverty and inequality and help our residents and staff to fulfil their individual potential, to be part of communities and able to participate in wider Tower Hamlets life.

## Resident engagement and satisfaction

### ► Priority 3: Improve resident scrutiny and engagement

In the current climate of wide-spread deregulation, our vision to be the best housing provider in Tower Hamlets by 2014 is dependent on improving resident scrutiny and engagement. Understanding and meeting the diverse needs of our residents will ensure that we can provide services which are efficient, cost-effective and more likely to be right first time – as well as being **central to our ability to improve performance and satisfaction**.

An Equality Impact Assessment carried out on Strategic Engagement in April 2012 established a **positive link between satisfaction with engagement and the satisfaction rating with the overall services** provided by THH. Of those who gave an "excellent" rating for satisfaction with the overall services provided by THH, 79% gave a rating of "excellent" and "good" for opportunities to get involved. We also found that those community groups who we have engaged with are more likely to be satisfied with their ability to shape and improve our services.

In recent years, we have established and developed a **Residents' Panel** to scrutinise services. By taking a **targeted engagement** approach, THH has been able to address some of the inequality that is present within our services, improving them and in turn increasing satisfaction.

Examples include the **Somali Tenants Engagement Project**, **Bling My Hood** projects and the **Youth Panel**, set up in 2011 resulting in other engagement activities for younger residents.

Going forwards, our engagement will be **increasingly evidence driven**, to **improve the reflectiveness of corporate engagement structures**, and learn **and respond to the specific needs of seldom heard various community groups**, such as LGBT residents and new and migrant residents such as the East European residents.

Work has already begun and the more emphasis has been placed on promoting the **LGBT drop in sessions** organised by THH, as a first point of contact to help LGBT residents to integrate into mainstream engagement activities. However, for almost all services provided by THH, the **satisfaction levels recorded for East European residents are likely to be below the THH average** e.g. 18% less likely to be satisfied with opportunities to get involved. **Residents of working age** have been identified to be relatively dissatisfied with various services, particularly in relation to customer services.

There is a need not only to deliver more inclusive and accessible engagement activities, but to **focus on how we enable residents to scrutinise our services**, and **ensure that lessons learned from all types of engagement can be shared within the organisation and with community and statutory partners that provide support to residents**.

## Responsive services, access and customer care

### ► Priority 4: Accessible homes, inclusive neighbourhoods

THH knows that accessibility doesn't stop at someone's front door and aims to make its properties and neighbourhoods feel **accessible, safe and enjoyable** for all residents.

Our own resident profile data shows that over **200 residents are wheelchair**

**users, more than 300 are blind or have low vision and over 400 residents are deaf or hard of hearing. 20% of Tower Hamlets Homes' tenants are over 70 - many of whom have age and disability related needs.**

In order to meet the needs of this specific group of residents, we have talked with residents at our **Diversity Working Group** in 2011/12 about what makes neighbourhoods accessible and have asked **older residents** participating in our **Inquiry into Ageing** to tell us about accessibility issues in their homes, blocks and neighbourhoods.

The feedback from residents included:

- ▶ maintaining the focus on **providing housing which supports independent living** was important – including existing offer of providing adaptations and extending this to making sure we introduce residents to wider support;
- ▶ In particular, **lifts, corridors and door entry systems** were cited as being problematic – for frail people, for people with disabilities and people with children;
- ▶ the **Decent Homes programme** was seen as a big opportunity to improve the accessibility of neighbourhoods;
- ▶ we should explore simple things in blocks and **neighbourhoods to support independence** – such as more handrails, signage and colour coding which helps people with visual impairments to navigate their surroundings;
- ▶ **isolation** was an issue for many older residents and was often related to confidence and lack of **local social or leisure opportunities**, not just physical accessibility.

In response to how we can meet the needs of this specific group, we are supporting these residents through our **aids and adaptations** service and our approach to delivering Decent Homes.

In Year 1 of Decent Homes programme, we had delivered **44 new adaptations** with a further 124 recorded as work in progress. Every home going through Decent Homes refurbishment receives a visit to ensure that THH knows about residents' needs before work commences so as to **tailor accessibility needs**. THH currently works with the Council's **Occupational Therapy** service to ensure that residents can obtain professional assessments of their needs and those properties can be adapted when needed to support independent living.

A new **Asset Management Strategy** (the strategy which sets out how buildings are managed and what investment should be made to ensure homes are safe places to live and are well maintained) is being developed and written. This strategy will examine and identify **opportunities to make blocks and neighbourhoods more accessible**. This could include making communal areas (foyers, corridors) more accessible and attractive and improving access into

blocks. We will also continue to work with the Council on **improving estate capacity**, through infills and new builds.

As requested by residents, THH has placed a particular emphasis on providing vulnerable people with extra support. **Residents are receiving additional support** as a result of a Getting to Know You visit, and over 100 residents are contacted on a regular basis through the **Safe and Secure** scheme aimed specifically at vulnerable residents.

## Developing a diverse and progressive workforce

### ► Priority 5: A workforce that reflects the community

Since July 2008, we have comprehensively profile our workforce, in comparison with the community we work in and the diverse needs of our residents. Two key areas of inequality which we have identified are as follows:

- **BME (particularly Asian) and female staff are under-represented in the workforce** compared to the resident profile of the borough and within our properties, especially at senior management grades.
- There are **significant average salary gaps** between BME and White staff, and between men and women staff.

The need to address these inequalities have been **emphasised in the Business Plan 2012-2014**, making a high-level strategic commitment to develop a workforce that reflects the community we serve, through creating opportunities for BME staff and women staff to progress into more senior positions.

To help develop BME and female staff to progress into more senior positions and to help develop leadership skills and knowledge, we have provided a targeted **leadership and management training programme**. 93% of participants are either BME and/or women. We have also **trained all line managers in coaching skills**, in order to improve performance and unleash potential of all staff to progress within the organisations.

We have responded to adverse trends identified in the workforce profile and to help us progress further, we plan to participate in the Government's **Think, Act, Report** initiative, which helps organisations think about gender equality in their workforces, on key issues such as recruitment, retention, promotion and pay.

We have also put in place **positive action recruitment** initiatives to encourage women, BME candidates and local residents to apply for jobs by **advertising jobs locally**, the use of **BME press** and by promoting benefits on offers such as **child care vouchers and job sharing opportunities, which are particularly beneficial to women job seekers**.

This approach was taken in the recruitment of apprentices in November 2011. **Of the apprentices recruited, 88% were BME and 50% were female.** The proposed apprenticeship scheme for the coming year will apply a similar approach, and in addition will take into consideration local employment based on poverty and unemployment within THH neighbourhoods.

THH has become effective in recording and monitoring equality and diversity amongst the workforce and will **continue to identify inequalities at the application, selection and appointment stages of the recruitment process.** Many of the steps required and proposed to develop a workforce that reflects the community are in place and will in time deliver further positive steps to reduce inequality.

## Accessibility

This is a strategy by Tower Hamlets Homes. If you need help to understand it or if you have any questions, please contact us by phone or email or visit one of our offices. We can also provide accessible options that meet your needs including Large Print, audio or electronic formats, and we can provide written information in another language. We can also offer a meeting with a member of staff and an interpreter.

Waa fariin ka socota shirkadda guriga iska leh ee Tower Hamlets Homes. Haddii aad u baahan tahay in lagaa caawiyo inaad fahamtid ama su'aalo qabtid fadlan naga soo wac telefoonka, ama iimayl soo dir, haddii kalena booqo mid ka mid ah xafiisyadeenna. Haddii aad codsatid waxaa laga caawin doonaa fahamka sida iyadoo qoraallada lagugu siinayo far waaweyn iyo qoraallo ku diyaarsan luqaddaada. Waxa kaloon kuu diyaarin kamaa kulan aad la yeelatid xubin ka tirsan shaqaalaha iyo turjumaan.

এটা আপনার ল্যান্ডলর্ড টাওয়ার হ্যামলেটস হোমস্‌ এর কাছ থেকে একটি মেসেজ বা বার্তা। আপনার যদি এটা বোঝার ব্যাপারে সাহায্য দরকার হয় অথবা আপনার কোন কিছু জানার থাকে, তাহলে অনুগ্রহ করে টেলিফোন বা ইমেইলে আমাদের সাথে যোগাযোগ করুন অথবা আমাদের কোন একটি অফিসে আসুন। আপনার যে ফরম্যাট সুবিধা, অনুরোধ জানালে সেরকম কোন কিছুতে তার ব্যবস্থা আমরা করতে পারবো, যার মধ্যে বড় অক্ষর ও আপনার ভাষায় লিখিত কপি থাকবে। আমরা একজন স্টাফ এবং ইন্টারপ্রিটারের সাথে আপনার ইন্টারভিউ'এর (সাক্ষাৎকার) ব্যবস্থাও করতে পারি।

هذه هي رسالة من صاحبة العقار مؤسسة تاور هاملتس هومز. إذا أنت بحاجة إلى مساعدة لفهم محتوى هذه الرسالة، أو كان لديك استفسار حولها فيرجى الاتصال بواسطة الهاتف أو بواسطة البريد الإلكتروني أو بزيارة مكتبنا. ويمكننا عند الطلب تزويدك بنسخة منها بشكل مناسب لك أي تفهمها، بما في ذلك تقديمها مطبوعة بحروف كبيرة أو مترجمة إلى لغتك الأم. كما يمكننا عرض مقابلة مع أحد موظفينا بحضور مترجم.

這是你的業主塔橋房屋發給你的信息。如果你需要協助以了解其內容或如有任何疑問，請致電、發電子郵件，或親臨我們其中一個辦事處與我們聯絡。我們可以應要求以適合你的需要的通訊形式提供資料，包括大字體版，及提供中文譯本。我們亦可以為你安排在傳譯員協助下與一位職員會面。