

We Speak Your Language

Tackling communication and cultural barriers to improve access to housing services

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Introduction

**Hello! Jain dobre! Salaam
alaikum! Soo dhawoow!**

This session will cover **three** areas:

- 1. Why** equality and diversity is relevant to tenants and landlords
- 2. Understanding the impact** of communication and cultural barriers for different community groups - and **improving outcomes**
- 3. Workshop: Delivering** accessible and inclusive housing services

Tower Hamlets Homes: An introduction



Tower Hamlets Homes: An introduction



- Launched in July 2008 to improve the quality of housing and housing services
- Manage 21,500 homes – around 1 in 5 of all homes in the borough
- 59% tenanted, 41% leasehold
- Huge socio-economic inequality in the borough – despite Canary Wharf



Tower Hamlets Homes: Our resident profile

- ▶ Over 75% of tenants are **BME**
- ▶ Almost 1 in 5 tenants are **aged over 70**
- ▶ Almost 1 in 5 tenants are **disabled**
- ▶ 1 in 10 residents **cannot speak or read English**

Tower Hamlets Homes: Key equalities challenges

- ▶ **Overcrowding** Tower Hamlets is the second most overcrowded borough in the UK
- ▶ **Rent arrears** Around 60% of tenants under 29 are in rent arrears
- ▶ **Welfare reform** Over 70% of our tenants are in receipt of housing benefit
- ▶ **Decent Homes** Around 60% of all homes are non-Decent
- ▶ **Employment** Around 70% of BME women in Tower Hamlets are not in work

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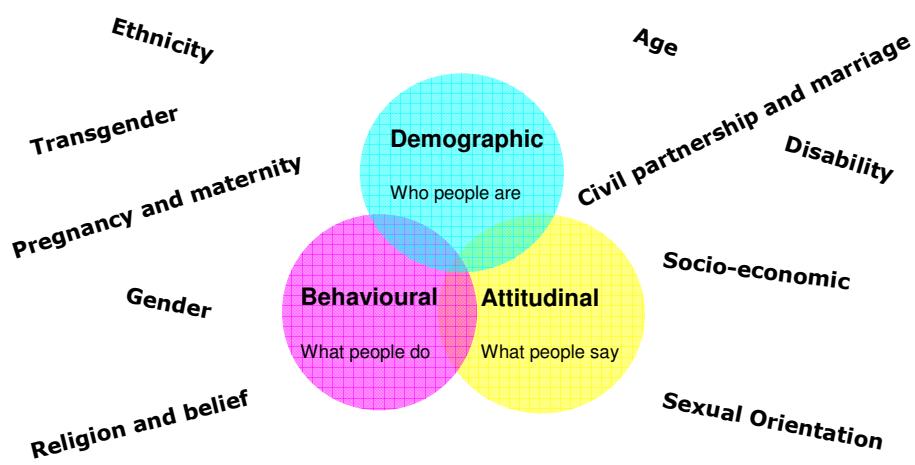
Why equality and diversity is relevant



The differences in average earnings and life expectancy between areas of the UK are now **wider than they were in 1937** (when this photograph was taken).

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Equality and diversity It's about everyone



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Equality and diversity

Meeting customer needs

Do our services meet diverse customer needs?

Example: Disability covers a wide range of needs.

Not just:



But:

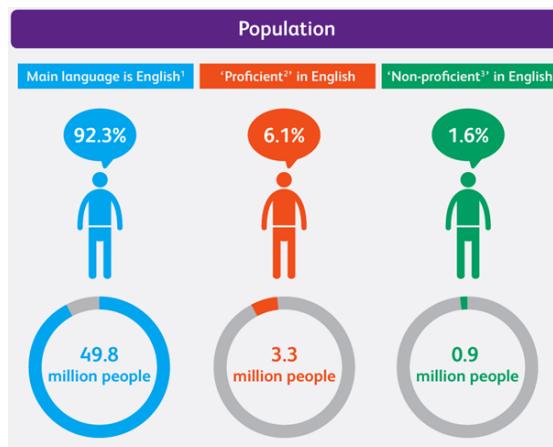


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Equality and diversity

Language diversity

What does the 2011 census tell us about language diversity in the UK?



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Equality and diversity

Language diversity

- There were **88 main spoken languages in the UK** other than English classified in the 2011 Census
- **The largest main language other than English was Polish, used by 546,000 residents**
 1. English (or Welsh if in Wales) 49,808,000 or 92.3% of the population
 2. **Polish 546,000 or 1% of the UK population**
 3. **Punjabi 273,000 or 0.5% of the UK population**
 4. **Urdu 269,000 or 0.5% of the UK population**
 5. **Bengali (with Sylheti) 221,000 or 0.4% of the UK population**
- **22,000** residents reported a **sign language** as their main language; of these 70 per cent (**15,000**) used **British Sign Language**.

2

Understanding inequality

Knowing our residents



- **Over 75%** of tenants are Black or Minority Ethnic (inducing White Minority e.g. Irish, East Europeans)
- **Over 9%** of customers talk to us in a language other than English.
- The most prominent community languages spoken other than English are **Bengali/Sylheti, Somali, Polish, Arabic, Turkish, Chinese and Vietnamese**
- **Over 800** households have asked us to write to them in Bengali. **54 households** have asked us to communicate to them in Somali

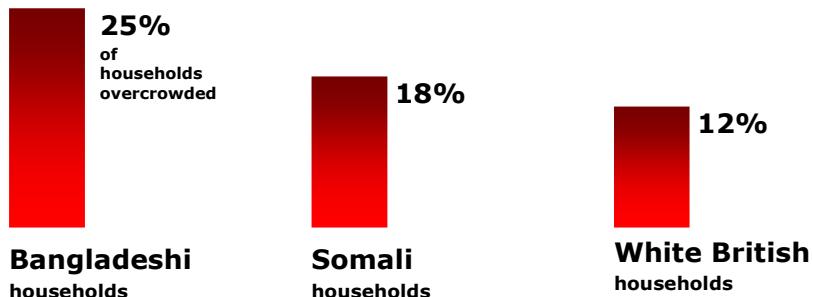
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Understanding inequality

Example: Overcrowding

Inequality affects access to and outcomes of a range of housing services

Example: Overcrowding in THH tenanted households

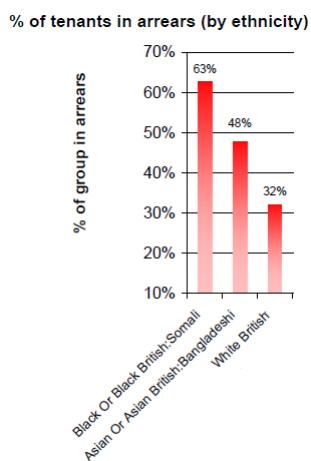


Source: London Borough of Tower Hamlets Housing Register 2012

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Understanding inequality

Rent arrears, engagement and overcrowding



- In August 2010 THH found that **Somali tenants were twice as likely to be in rent arrears** compared to White British tenants.
- Somalis were also **not participating in existing engagement structures**.
- Over half of Somalis felt that their **property size did not meet their household needs** (compared to an average of 28% for all tenants).

2

Understanding inequality

Engaging with Somali residents

► Personal interviews

- Revealed that illiteracy (in both Somali and English) was a significant barrier to communication with Somali tenants

► Partnership with community organisations

- Ocean Somali Community Organisation (OSCA)
- Somali Integration Team (SIT)

► Focus groups x 2 for Somali women

- Overcrowding
- Rent arrears

► Worked with mosques to engage Somali men

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Understanding inequality

Language and cultural barriers



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Improving outcomes For Somali residents

- Recruited dedicated Somali Engagement Officers (helping three Somali women find **employment**)
 - ✓ Reduced Somali **rent arrears** by 30 per cent
 - ✓ Developed more **Somali translations** than any other landlord in the UK - plus "talking leaflets"
 - ✓ Helped at least three households move into **larger properties** - including one family that had been on waiting list for 18 years)
 - ✓ Recruited a Somali tenant onto **Scrutiny Panel**

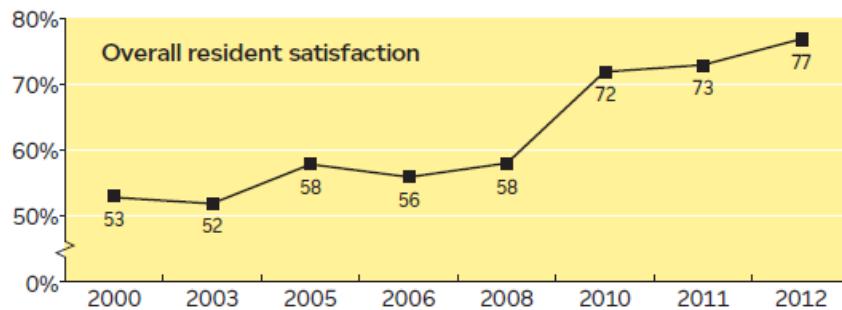
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Improving outcomes For all residents

- ✓ Significant improvement in collection of **customer profile data – over 80%** for tenants and leaseholders
- ✓ **Targeted engagement with linguistic groups** – Somali, Bengali and Polish speakers. Plus BSL and Braille users.
- ✓ **Tailored the way we meet communication needs** for different groups
- ✓ **57% of staff are BME**, up from 52% in Nov 2010
- ✓ Developed a **Community Language Honorarium** – regarding staff who save time and money by providing in-house translation services

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Improving outcomes Record satisfaction...



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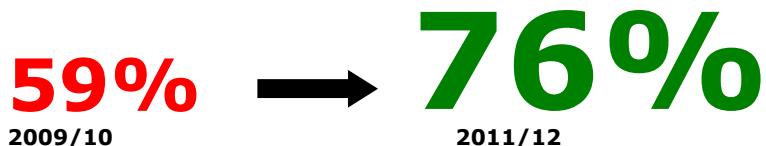
Improving outcomes ...for all community groups

| Characteristic | 2009/10 | 2012/13 | Trend | Difference |
|---------------------------|---------|---------|-------|------------|
| Ethnicity | | | | |
| BME (incl White Minority) | 49% | 61% | ⬆️ | 12% |
| Bangladeshi | 52% | 64% | ⬆️ | 12% |
| Disability | | | | |
| Disabled | 57% | 61% | ⬆️ | 4% |
| Age | | | | |
| 65-74 | 55% | 66% | ⬆️ | 11% |
| 75-84 | 60% | 64% | ⬆️ | 4% |

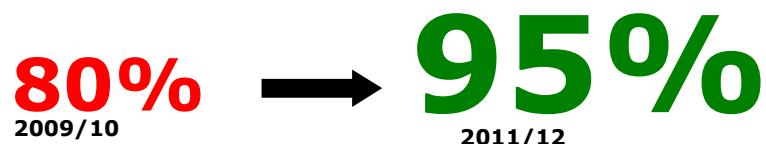
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Improving outcomes ...for all community groups

Satisfaction of Bengali-speaking residents with THH keeping the informed rose from



Bengali-speaking residents accessing our services increased



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Improving outcomes ...for all community groups

Somali residents moved from being the least satisfied community group with our services, to the **most satisfied**.



3

Ten tips to making housing services more accessible

1. Collect resident profile information – and use it!



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Ten tips to making housing services more accessible

2. Develop a workforce to reflect your community

Use positive action initiatives



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Ten tips to making housing services more accessible

3. Develop a Staff Language Network

Are you making use of language skills that staff have across the organisation?



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Delivering accessible and inclusive housing services.

4. Work with community organisations



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Ten tips to making housing services more accessible

5. How reflective is your resident engagement?

Target engagement where necessary



Ethnicity



Religion and belief



Gender



Disability



Age



Sexual Orientation

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Ten tips to making housing services more accessible

6. Translate documents – when effective

THH have produced leaflets in

- Bengali
- Somali
- Turkish
- Polish
- Arabic
- Vietnamese

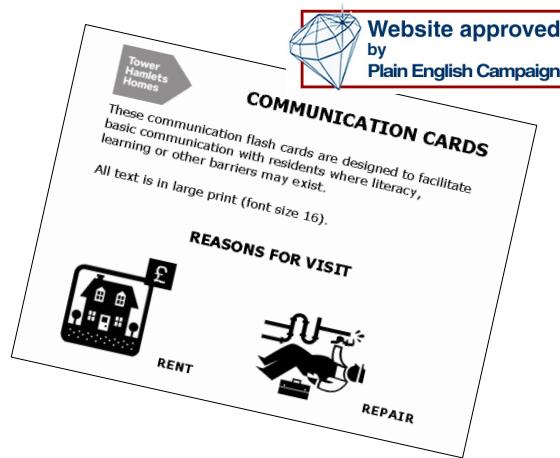


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7. Use pictorial, Plain English and Easy Read methods

Ensure communications are effective for residents where literacy, learning or other barriers may exist.

Ten tips to making housing services more accessible



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8. Embrace technology

- Talking leaflets
- Automated letters
- Automated translation
- Hearing induction loops

Ten tips to making housing services more accessible



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9. Help staff to learn basic phrases in community languages

Ten tips to making housing services more accessible



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10. Third-party Translation

Language pointer cards help officers to arrange telephone translation ordered if necessary when carrying out home or estate visits.

Ten tips to making housing services more accessible





Meeting language and cultural needs

Accessible

Inclusive

Fair

Your turn!

**For more information or advice,
contact us:**

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