

<b>Title:</b> Supporting Vulnerable People - Fact Sheet	<b>Meeting:</b> Board	
<b>Report authorised by:</b> Gavin Cansfield, Chief Executive	<b>Date:</b> 9 November 2010	<b>Item No:</b> 7
<b>Report author:</b> Barbara Brownlee, Director of Housing & Customer Service	<b>Classification:</b> Open	<b>Report type:</b> Information/ Discussion/Decision
<b>Business Plan Objective</b>  1.3 Diversity - demonstrate that services are accessible, inclusive and fairly provided to all; 4.2 Partnerships - plan, procure and deliver services with public, private and third sector partners.		
<b>Financial Implications:</b>  As described within our Vulnerability strategy THH is committed to improving its service to vulnerable residents through partnership working and utilising existing funding streams and services. A 2010 /11 budget of £70,000 exists within the service to coordinate this work and everything described below has been achieved using this budget.  The only exception to this is the delegated repairs spend associated with delivering adaptations.		
<b>Risk Management</b>  This relates to a number of items on the corporate risk register, and forms part of the mitigation plan for them. They are:  3. Making a difference – Ensuring that achievements recognised internally or externally make a difference to residents. 5. Organisational Coherence – Ensuring that approved strategies, policies and procedures are adhered to in practice.		
<b>Linkages to Strategies</b>  Diversity Strategy People Strategy Value for Money Strategy Resident Engagement Strategy		
<b>Summary</b>  This report outlines an approach which demonstrates THH’s ambition, as an ethically driven organisation, to show leadership on vulnerability. We will always put the needs of residents and potential residents at the heart of what we do and aim all our housing strategies at the specific needs of vulnerable groups. It cuts across the entire organisation and a number of other strategies.		
<b>Recommendations:</b>  That the Board: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>notes</b> the progress made in our work in this area;</li> </ul>		

- **discusses** the issues raised and comment;
- **approves** the continued investment in the development of this area of work.

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Tower Hamlets Homes continues to put a strong emphasis on improving the service to all residents. As the main provider of public housing in the borough we also have a clear responsibility to ensure that we meet the needs of vulnerable residents. It is essential that THH is able to demonstrate that the properties we manage and the service we provide are tailored to meet the needs of its most vulnerable customers.

When we speak of vulnerability we are not referring to a permanent state but one that people can move in and out of as they move through life's transitions. Our approach, therefore, is based on the following principles:

- all residents can expect a good service;
- for most people, most of the time that will be enough;
- however, anyone can experience vulnerability; and
- THH need to offer targeted help for residents when they become vulnerable.

This paper outlines the progress made towards THH's ambition, as an ethically driven organisation, to show leadership on vulnerability. We will always put the needs of residents and potential residents at the heart of what we do and aim all our work at the specific needs of vulnerable groups. This will contribute to both the quality of life and quality of opportunity for all residents.

## 2 Background

- 2.1 We have known for some time that the needs of vulnerable tenants were not fully met and that as an organisation we had no systematic approach to dealing with vulnerable residents. We have set out to address these issues across all service areas and set out here in the form of a vulnerability fact sheet the progress we have made in this area.
- 2.2 This progress has been delivered through our agreed approach of using a temporary expert resource rather than build up a large internal expert team to improve the level of understanding of vulnerability across all our staff. This is in line with our neighbourhood way of working which is predicated upon Neighbourhood Housing Officers being at the centre of their patches and having an in depth knowledge of residents, the area and available services as well as being skilled enough to intervene either themselves or with their neighbourhood team in certain cases.

## 3. THH Vulnerability Fact sheet

- 3.1 THH starting point is to deliver services that meets the needs of vulnerable residents. Our Service Standard 'Extra support if you need it'

sets out that THH will:

- ‘Publish the details of what extra support is available to help you’;
- ‘Ask you directly about any extra support you need and agree with you what we can offer’.

### 3.2 THH guide to support services

A guide to support services is available on the THH website. The guide details a wide range of support services available to residents and includes:

- Advice Agencies;
- Citizens Advice Bureau;
- Domestic Violence;
- Drugs, Alcohol & Gambling;
- Learning Disabilities;
- Mental Health;
- Older People; and
- Women’s Services.

### 3.3 Getting to Know You

The Getting to Know You [GTKY] customer discussion document is a simple tool to help staff assess the needs of vulnerable residents. GTKY allows staff to:

- identify vulnerable residents and vulnerability issues;
- assess vulnerable residents needs; and
- develop an action plan to support vulnerable residents.

<b>GTKY – Number of vulnerable residents identified</b>				
Apr – June 2010	July 10	Aug 10	Sept 10	<b>Total</b>
422	109	86	72	<b>689</b>

<b>GTKY – Number referrals made to support services</b>				
Apr – June 2010	July 10	Aug 10	Sept 10	<b>Total</b>
82	22	23	9	<b>136</b>

### 3.4 Visiting vulnerable residents

THH has made a commitment to visit all residents over the age of 70. This offer will be extended to all residents who are disabled along with residents who have access needs.

### 3.5 Vulnerability awareness cards

All THH staff have been issued with a Vulnerability Awareness Card. The card details the telephone number of the Customer Service Team and

reminds staff to report concerns about residents who may be in need of extra support.

#### 4 **Safe and Secure**

4.1 The Safe and Secure scheme is a regular structured contact arrangement between a resident and Tower Hamlets Homes. The scheme allows THH to:

- check on the well-being of vulnerable residents; and
- provide peace of mind for residents on the scheme.

4.2 The Safe and Secure scheme is now offered to all victims of ASB and Crime. A total of 54 residents are currently registered with the Safe and Secure scheme.

#### 5 **Financial Inclusion**

##### 5.1 **Leasehold Services**

Leasehold services have developed a call script to identify vulnerability and home visits are offered to vulnerable leaseholders.

The service has an in-house debt advisor and advice is not limited to service charges. Referrals can be made to third party support services.

<b>Debt Casework Statistics</b>	
Total number of leaseholders referred	36
Number of L/H referred to Account 3	3
Number of home visits made	5
Number of backdated claims and applications made	13
Number of other grants obtained	3

##### 5.2 **Rents**

Checks are made with all residents to identify vulnerability and an offer is made to refer tenants to partner agencies. All staff have attended welfare benefits training allowing them to understand the remit and eligibility of money advice agencies, allowing tenants to maximise their income by ensuring they are claiming their full benefit entitlements.

If there has been no contact with a tenant a visit is always made to the property prior to the issue of a Notice of Seeking Possession/Notice of Possession Proceedings (NOSP/ NOPP). Checks are also made with social services and Supporting People agencies. These checks are made again prior to applying for an eviction warrant.

<b>Debt Casework Statistics – April – Sept 10</b>	
Total number of tenants referred to advice/ support agencies	31
Number of tenants referred to Housing Link	14
Number of tenants referred to THFSS	3

## 6 Overcrowding

- 6.1 THH has produced an overcrowding toolkit for Neighbourhood Housing Officers to visit overcrowding families lacking one bedroom. The Council currently visit families lacking 2 bedrooms or more. Neighbourhood Housing Officers complete Getting to Know You interviews and check any rent and repair queries at the same time.

Overcrowding Visits 2010/11		
Number of visits scheduled	Number of visits completed	%
1150	669	58%

Overcrowding Visits 2010/11 - Outcomes						
Technical	External Storage	Evaluation Panel	LFB	Debt Advice	Floating Support	Housing Advice
55	36	28	20	11	5	337

## 7 Repairs-Redecoration-Aids and Adaptations

For tenants, we will prioritise some kind of repairs if they are disabled or frail, or if they live with someone who is disabled or frail. There are some extra types of repairs that we will carry out for tenants who are disabled or frail.

## 8 Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 8.1 The Vulnerability Strategy provides both opportunities and risks in meeting our diversity aims of 'accessible', 'inclusive' and 'fair'.
- 8.2 We have consistently developed our knowledge of residents and their ability to sustain tenancies throughout the year. Since September 2009 we have gathered profile information from 3,900 residents, primarily through telephone satisfaction surveys. The percentages of tenant profiles held are: age 80%, gender 99%, ethnicity 82%, disability 20%, faith 50%, and sexual orientation 49%. We have also begun to collect information for those residents who have changed gender identity. Leasehold profiles are being collected using a similar strategy but starting from a lower baseline. Profiling information needs to be supplemented by the development of our neighbourhood approach to housing which will ensure that THH reshapes as an organisation which knows its customers and particularly its vulnerable customers better.

## 9 Implications

### 9.1 Legal Implications

THH is managing homes on behalf of London Borough of Tower Hamlets and therefore ensuring that their legal duties under the Housing Act 1985, the Tenant and Leasehold Act 2001, Local Government Act 2000 are met. This work underpins these duties by developing methods to create more

sustainable tenancies, and increased customer satisfaction.

## 9.2 Value for Money

Offering appropriate support to people when they require it is a base for good service delivery. While this report sets out the increased focus THH has given to this element of housing management, it is not predicated upon developing a large and specialist staff group to deliver it. All THH staff have been trained to recognise and respond to vulnerability including all our contractors. Our customer hub will continue to develop into a central base of excellence gathering customer information and maintaining an up to date directory of all services offered across the area. In this way we will develop an excellent value for money service.

## 10 Conclusion

People may be vulnerable in different ways, for example, disability, age, illness or financial circumstances, and for short or long periods. In most cases people who are vulnerable will need some extra support to make sure that they are not at any disadvantage or to sustain their tenancy or lease. We understand that people may have care and support needs or may need advice and support over and above our standard housing management services and are determined to provide this support.