

Diversity Strategy 2009 – 2012

Working Towards Inclusion

The logo for Tower Hamlets Homes is a black arrow pointing to the right. The text "Tower Hamlets Homes" is written in white, bold, sans-serif font inside the arrow.

**Tower
Hamlets
Homes**

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Foreword – Message from the Chief Executive

Tower Hamlets is one of the most diverse places in the UK – something that is a source of challenge and celebration. Of course, this diversity is also reflected amongst the people who live in the homes and neighbourhoods that we manage and care for.

As the largest provider of housing services in Tower Hamlets we are committed to putting residents at the heart of everything we do. This means providing services that are accessible, inclusive and fairly delivered - especially for our most vulnerable residents.

Our work to improve what we do starts with gaining a more complete and sophisticated understanding of the diversity amongst our customer groups, as well as better information about individuals' needs. This will allow us to individualise what we do so that we can offer great customer services as well as be truly accessible. We can find out who is and is not accessing our services and what we can do to tackle inequality. It also gives us the evidence to test out how what we do matches the needs of those we deliver to, and make changes to our policy and practice where we need to.

At the same time, we know that if we don't understand the needs, aspirations and expectations of residents, we cannot deliver the great services that residents want and expect to see.

This Diversity Strategy sets out our commitment to achieving Level 3 of the nationally recognised Equalities Framework by March 2011. We will use the Framework to challenge ourselves, improve and to measure our progress in mainstreaming diversity and equality within our business. Importantly, the Diversity Strategy also sets out how we will equip our staff to deliver on diversity. Without everyone's involvement and commitment – from Board to frontline - we cannot meet our aspirations in this challenging agenda.

Gavin Cansfield
Chief Executive

Tower Hamlets Homes – Equality and Diversity Statement

We are committed to putting residents at the heart of everything we do and we will achieve level 2 of the Equality Framework by March 2010, and Level 3 by March 2011

These three principles support our vision for equality and diversity:

- **Accessible:** We will provide services that are appropriate but flexible enough to meet our residents' needs and preferences so that all our residents can access the services they need and want.
- **Inclusive:** We will tackle poverty and inequality and help our residents fulfil their individual potential, to be part of communities and able to participate in wider Tower Hamlets life.
- **Fair and seen to be fair:** We are a fair and ethical organisation and place to work. Decisions we make are fair, and everyone can see and understand why we made them.

We recognise that we work in a very diverse part of London, and that our tenants and leaseholders are a diverse group of people, and that they will have differing needs, requirements and preferences in the ways that they access and receive our services. Residents shape our services: only by listening to them, understanding them and reacting to changes can we ensure that our services are appropriate. Tower Hamlets is one of the most culturally rich and diverse boroughs in the United Kingdom. By ensuring that we embrace this diversity, we can help to create an environment in which everyone in the borough can take a full part in its social, cultural and economic wealth.

We recognise that our staff are as diverse as our residents, and that their varying talents, skills and experiences are a rich asset that can help us meet our aims. We also understand that to best make use of this asset we need to support and train our staff so that they are confident in working with and alongside our diverse communities, and to make sure that we provide a workplace that is free from discrimination of any kind.

We understand the importance of the One Tower Hamlets ambition and we believe that working effectively with our partners and contractors, communicating clearly and widely and being transparent in our work helps our communities come close together. We understand the role of housing in reducing poverty and inequality, and our role in providing good local leadership.

We believe that pursuing equality and diversity goals opens up new ideas, attracts new people and creates new networks. It also serves to improve services as well as improving relations with the wider community. We want to see a strong spirit of community and good relations across the areas we manage and to achieve this we will put in place a range of actions to ensure equity and accessibility of service provision and promote good community relations, social inclusion, cohesion and wellbeing. Our commitment to equalities and diversity is intrinsic to the way we think and act and influences everything we do.

The strategic approach we take, supported by our performance management framework, will help us to focus our energies, and evidence the actions we are taking to deliver on our promise. We believe that our work with the Council, our tenants and leaseholders, and our partners, sets out a strong account of how Tower Hamlets Homes will continuously develop a culture that welcomes, values and celebrates diversity, and builds on common values towards an integrated and cohesive community.

Our Diversity Roadmap sets out our ambition and the ways we will achieve excellence in understanding diversity and responding appropriately.

Appendix 1 of this document explores some case studies around how understanding diversity can make a positive difference to the service we deliver to our customers.

Appendix 2 sets out the headline action plan for diversity.

Diversity Roadmap

THH AMBITIONS

MISSION: We will work with the council, our other strategic partners and our diverse communities to improve the quality of life for all our residents through providing excellent housing services and decent homes in decent neighbourhoods.

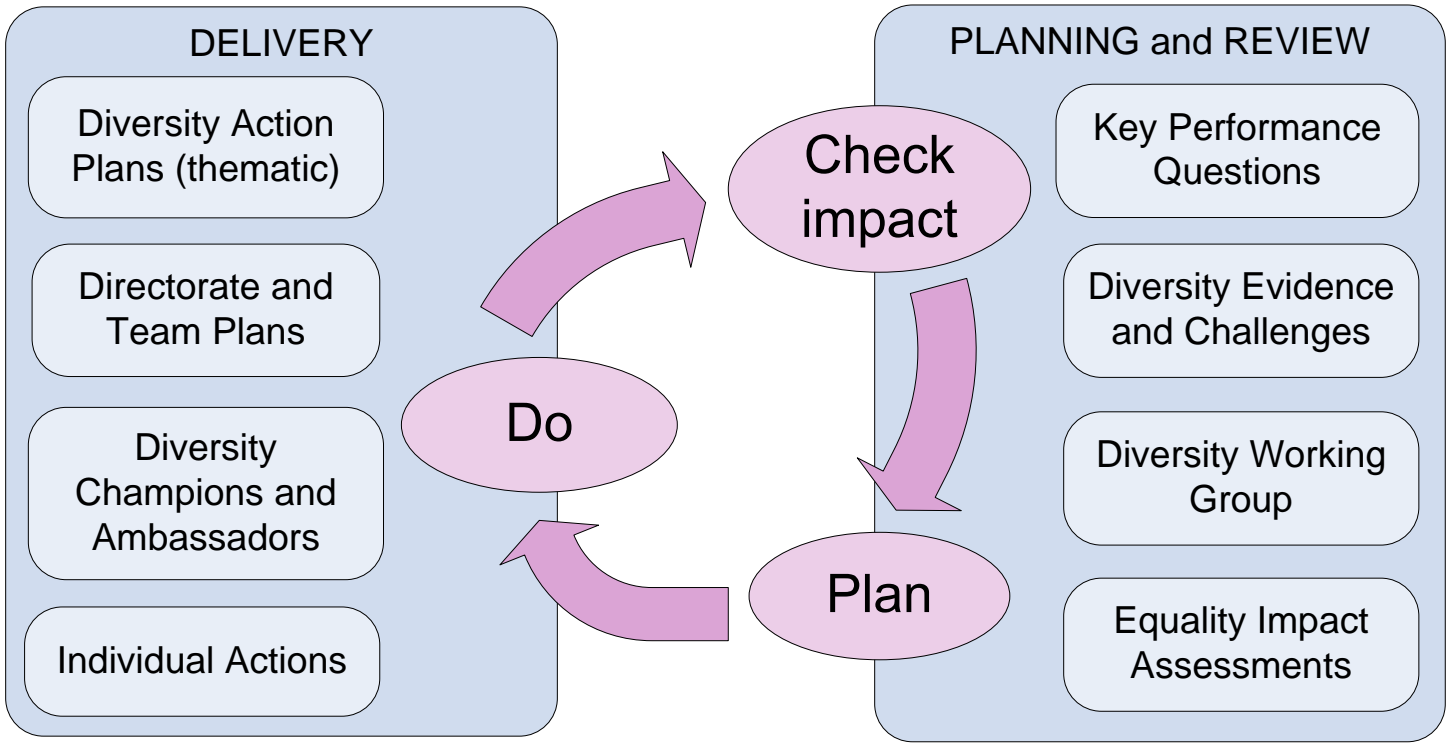
VISION FOR DIVERSITY: We are committed to putting residents at the heart of everything we do and we will achieve level 2 of the Equality Framework by March 2010, and Level 3 by March 2011.

STRATEGIC AIMS FOR DIVERSITY:

Accessible: We will provide services that are appropriate but flexible enough to meet our residents' needs and preferences so that all our residents can access the services they need and want.

Inclusive: We will tackle poverty and inequality and help our residents fulfil their individual potential, to be part of communities and able to participate in wider Tower Hamlets life.

Fair and seen to be fair: We are a fair and ethical organisation and place to work. Decisions we make are fair and everyone can see and understand why we made them.



What we want to achieve: Providing the best possible service to all residents

We have an ambition to achieve a three star housing management service by 2012. Key to achieving this will be putting residents at the heart of everything we do, understanding our residents' needs and operating in ways that ensures our service is accessible and non-discriminatory. This Strategy sets out how we will go about achieving this.

This Strategy provides a framework for delivery, setting out our overall approach. In summary we will ensure the provision of high quality, accessible and equitable services appropriate to meet the needs of all residents by:

- Engaging with all our residents – in the design and delivery of our services
- Strengthening our knowledge about our residents – to understand their needs
- Identifying potential barriers to access services - both at an individual and community level
- Taking action – to remove any barriers we find

How we will do it

There are several different tools that we will use to achieve the ambition of our vision for Diversity and the principles with our Equality and Diversity Statement. These include:

Diversity Profiling

We have worked hard to better understand who our residents are. We now have ethnicity data on over 80% of our tenants. Whilst this is better than it has ever been, it still means that we don't know about the ethnicity of nearly 1 in 5 of our tenants.

For some of the other equality strands, the picture is not as good. For Sexual Orientation and Religion and Belief we are missing large amounts of data. We know that these are particularly sensitive areas for many people, and so we will continue to work sensitively in acquiring this information.

We can only improve the way we make our services available to our residents if we understand who they are and what their needs are. This is why we will continue to ask our residents for information about themselves and those they live with. We will also work to improve the profiling information that we have about our leaseholders.

We will use this data in a variety of ways. Broad aggregated data allows us to look at how a service is being accessed, or not accessed, by different groups and how this compares to what we expect or hope for and is important so that we can complete robust and meaningful Equality Impact Assessments.

More personal data will allow us to better tailor individual services; for example disabled residents who may need adaptations to their home.

Better data will mean that our understanding of our residents can become more sophisticated and will drive our strategies for improving customer care, responding to vulnerability and delivering excellent customer service.

Equality Impact Assessments

Equality Impact Assessments (EqIA) allow us to look at the services we provide and assess whether these affect different groups of residents differently, and if it does, whether this difference is fair. We have developed a timetable to carry out EqIAs on our existing policies. We will prioritise EqIAs for new strategies and policies, or where there are substantial policy changes and will ensure that assessments are completed at an appropriate time, ideally when the strategy or policy is being developed. Our prioritisation is based on a rapid 'predictive' assessment of likely impact of the policy area and key equality questions. This means we can target our effort and resources where it is likely to have the most beneficial effect in highlighting adverse impact and designing remedial measures.

We will consider the seven equality 'strands' when conducting impact assessments, and we will look at other issues such as low-income and health status where we have useful data available.

Equality Schemes

The Council's Equality Schemes set out what it will do to address key priorities of local people and staff over the next three years relating to Race, Gender and Disability, Sexual Orientation, Age and Religion and Belief. We will work with Tower Hamlets Council to implement relevant actions identified in these schemes.

Equality Framework for Local Government

The Equality Framework for Local Government is a national equality and diversity standard for local government. We are committed to reaching Level 2 ("Achieving") by March 2010 and will set out an action plan to achieve this. We will also work closely with Tower Hamlets Council and the Tower Hamlets Partnership where we can contribute to shared goals and commitments, particularly those around the 'One Tower Hamlets' commitments. These cover reducing poverty and inequality, bringing local communities closed together, strong local leadership and personal responsibility.

Legislation

There are many pieces of equalities legislation, covering both service delivery and employment. We will ensure that we comply with all relevant pieces of legislation, including the new Equality Bill when it is enacted. The Bill plans to introduce a duty on public bodies to consider socio-economic disadvantage in the planning and monitoring of the services they provide. We will update this strategy and policies to incorporate this and other requirements as necessary.

Diversity Champions

Our Board Diversity Champion will have the overall lead for the implementation of this Strategy. One of the Champion's main tasks will be to lead our Diversity Working Group. We also have Diversity Champions from each service area within THH. We will widen this approach to a larger group of staff to help us further embed Diversity within THH.

Diversity Working Group

We have set up a working group, made up of the Diversity Champions and with representation from residents and the Board. The Group will act as custodian for equality and diversity throughout THH, and provide challenge to improve and do better, and act as a catalyst for change.

Staff

We believe that our staff members are our most important asset; they are the link between the organisation and our residents. We are committed to attracting and retaining a workforce that reflects both our residents and the wider Tower Hamlets community. We will work hard to ensure that all our employees can do their jobs without fear of discrimination and harassment, either from other members of staff or residents.

We will also continue to monitor the make-up of our staff and those applying for jobs, in line with legislation and the Equality Framework.

It is essential that all our staff are fully trained, not just in how to do their particular job, but in equality and diversity issues as well. It is important that we foster and encourage staff behaviours that understand and value our residents' diverse needs and experiences. These behaviours will help enhance our customer-focused services. To help achieve this, we have identified four key training areas: induction, general equality and diversity training as part of our overall approach to customer care, disability awareness training for front line staff and Equality Impact Assessment training for those carrying out EqIAs.

Contracted Services

For this Strategy to be effective, it is essential that we actively promote it to our contractors and external service providers and that our diversity values flow down to those working with our residents on our behalf. These companies and people provide many of our services on our behalf directly to our residents, and we will make sure that they provide these services in an appropriate way. As our contractors meet our residents and learn about their needs, it is also essential that we listen to what our contractors tell us so that we can improve our knowledge and insight of our residents.

Communication

It is important that we make sure that our residents are able to contact us and that we are able to contact them, as well as making sure that we make our services accessible. We have developed a Communications Strategy and an Accessible Information Policy which set out how we will communicate with our residents, and how and when we will translate and interpret information, and how we will go about making our information available in alternative formats, such as audio and large print.

Partnerships

We will not be able to achieve many of our aims if we do not work with the community. There are a number of groups that we already work with, both regional and national, housing specific and across public services. We will continue to work with as wide a range of groups as possible to help us reach the views and experiences of as many residents as possible.

We will work with our partner organisations across Tower Hamlets to improve the quality of life for our residents. The Tower Hamlets Partnership's *'One Tower Hamlets'* Community Plan is the "plan of plans" for the borough. It is based on three core principles; reducing poverty and inequality, bringing local communities closed together, strong local leadership and personal responsibility. Housing provision and

management plays an important part in this by helping residents feel safe, secure and confident about where they live.

We will work with the third sector to ensure that we are improving quality of life of vulnerable groups, such as those on low incomes or in poor health, and those who we may not otherwise reach. Our Community Engagement and Development Officers will work with individuals and communities on estates, particularly those that are hard to reach.

We will learn from and share with other ALMOs, housing departments and Councils across London and other areas of the country to ensure that approach to diversity both leads and adapts from good practice and latest trends.

How we will measure how we are doing

Equalities Framework for Local Government

We will use the Equalities Framework as one source of best practice on developing a strong approach to diversity, linked with action and improvement. Reaching 'achieving' on the Framework by March 2010 and 'excellent' by 2011 is an important ambition and will be a key catalyst for making improvements in diversity.

Audit Commission Key Lines of Enquiry

The Audit Commission's Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOEs) are used by the Audit Commission to assess the quality of an organisation. Diversity has been identified as a 'cross-cutting' KLOE, meaning that it should be considered as part of every service area that we deliver. As such, we will use the Diversity KLOE alongside the Equality Framework to help us improve our approach as we work towards our aim of being a two-star organisation at our first inspection, and our ambition of being a three-star organisation by 2012.

Performance Management

We will develop a comprehensive set of equality and diversity related targets across our most important services. These will help the Diversity Working Group identify where action taken is successful, and equally important, where it isn't, so we can revise our plans.

These targets will be reported to the Senior Management Team (SMT) and the Board via its sub-committees, and where targets are missed, officers will be challenged for an explanation and their plans to redress shortfalls.

Appendix 1 – Case Studies

Our recent Equality Impact Assessment of our Rent Arrears process highlighted some areas for future action. One of the things we found was that younger Asian tenants were more likely to be in arrears. As such we have agreed to a number of measures to help tackle this, including:

- Targeted advice for Asian tenants needs to be developed and rolled out. This needs to consider how best to provide advice and support for Asian tenants, including, but not limited to, language concerns
- Commission survey of sample of tenants in arrears to find out reasons for being in arrears and compare across equality strands.
- Undertake regular monitoring at each stage of process to see whether there are differences by diversity strand
- More / better use of translation and interpretation services and clarifying how to access translated information.
- To work with younger tenants, especially young Asian tenants to ensure that the importance of paying rent is explained.
- Consider link-up work with TH College on budgeting training.
- Work to improve information given at sign-up, especially to younger tenants.

Translation and interpretation

Providing translation and interpretation services mean we can provide services that meet the needs of residents with specific communications requirements. In addition to English, over 36 languages are spoken by our residents. The tenant profile indicates around 500 tenants need or would prefer information in large print because they are blind or visually impaired, have learning disabilities or low literacy.

In response to this understanding of needs, we:

- Ask residents who have asked for large print what size type they need because we know that there are variations in visual impairment meaning we can provide the specific size they need.
- Collect and keep information about communication requirements, to help us provide materials in the most appropriate format.
- Display access requirements as an 'alert' on the IT and manual systems so that staff know to arrange an interpreter or translation.

- Promote the availability of translation and interpretation services by:
 - Displaying posters advising service users that they can request translation and interpretation services.
 - Providing language pointer cards in front facing offices to help visitors identify their required language.
 - Providing induction hearing loops in all reception areas and interview rooms, and ensure availability of mobile hearing loops for visits, meetings and events.
 - Promoting accessibility options via the website.

Appendix 2 – Action Plan for Achieving Excellence in Diversity

Performance Area (Equality Framework for Local Government)		Activity	Completion Date
Equality Framework	Level II	Achieve Level 2	Mar-10
	Level III	Achieve Level 3	Mar-11
Knowing residents and equality mapping	Level II	Agree and implement Customer Profiling Strategy: establish system and tools and identify opportunities for gathering data on residents	Jan-Mar 2010 and into 2010/11
		Implement Customer Profiling Strategy to get significant improvement in data on leaseholders	Ongoing; starting with market research in Oct-Dec 2009
		Agree whole THH approach for collection and inputting of customer data plus vulnerability screening questions	Jan 2010
		Encourage better sharing and use of customer data amongst staff and business units – develop standard profiles and facilitating access to data/systems	Jan/Feb 2010
		Disseminate understanding gathered through previous EQIAs and establish a method to track THH response	Jan/Feb 2010
		Continue to undertake EqIAs as per agreed programme	Mar-10
		Ensure significant new strategies and policies are assessed during development, according to priority and in line with forward plan	Ongoing

Diversity Strategy

	Level III	Mature use of diversity data in designing policies and writing strategies across all areas of THH business	2010/11
		Operational methods for ensuring customer information is kept up to date and is requested if missing or unclear (eg collection is integrated into CRM systems)	2011
Responsive services and customer care	Level II	Input from a diversity perspective into arrangements for neighbourhood working and new customer services model	Dec 2009 – Feb 2010
		Sophisticated use of resident data to better target services and uncover patterns of service take up by diversity strand	2010/11
	Level III	Evidence of use of diversity data across all service areas and a clear picture of how an understanding of diversity is shaping THH service	2010/11
Community engagement and satisfaction	Level II	Discovery activity with BME residents to better understand satisfaction drivers	September 2009 – February 2010
		Embedding findings from completed EQIAs as a driver to improving satisfaction	2010
	Level III	More work on diversity dimension to repairs satisfaction and customer complaints	Spring 2010
Leadership, partnership and organisational commitment	Level II	Develop and report against Diversity Performance Indicators	Feb 2010
		Develop two action plans that improve our approach in key themes (1) responding to overcrowding (2) better serving disabled customers	Jan 2010
	Level II and III	Develop and refine mechanisms to embed diversity throughout THH including training programme and staff engagement	Ongoing

Diversity Strategy

		Diversity Working Group and Diversity Champions – continue to develop and embed approach, track impact and successes	Feb 2010 and ongoing	
		Continue to work with partner organisations on key priorities	Ongoing	
		Work with LBTH to action existing plans	Ongoing	
		Develop robust monitoring systems for major contractors	Early 2010/11	
	Level III	Review all contracts to include E&D requirements	2010/11	
		Develop new links with partner organisations	2010/11	
	A modern and diverse workforce	Level II	Develop and programme comprehensive diversity staff and Board training programme	Mar 2010
			Develop effective staff equalities monitoring process	Mar 2010
Level III		Work with contractors and partners to provide opportunities for local people and underrepresented groups to access THH apprenticeships and work-focused training programmes	2010/11	