

News from the Landlords Forum held on 12 October 2011.

It was encouraging to see so many landlords at the Forum to hear Clive Buckman from Housing Benefit talk about the proposed welfare reform and benefit changes which are causing deep concern for landlords.

The concerns over housing benefit changes come at the same time as the government proposes to reduce payments for single adults under 35 who rent their own self-contained flats.

Also speaking at the Forum was Nikki Cottrell from Real Lettings, a Not-for-profit lettings agency set up by Broadway.

The Next Landlord forum takes place in Wednesday 22 February 2011.

For any further information contact Geoffrey Nevett

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The next Landlords Forum takes place on:

Wednesday 22 February 2012
in Albert Jacob House,
62 Roman Road,
London E2 OPG.



We want to hear from you!

Please send us your letters and ideas – all welcome.

Housing Options Services

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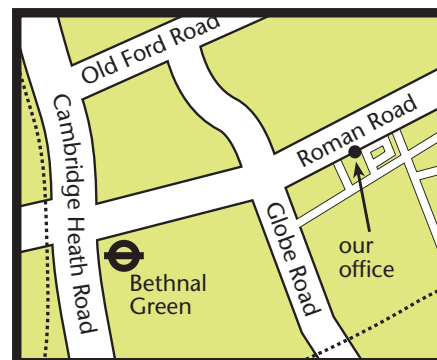
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Tower Hamlets
Housing Options
Services

NETWORK

The Partner's Newsletter

Happy Holidays

We would like to wish all our Partners happy holidays and a happy new year



Survey Feedback

A big thank you to all our Partners that took the time to complete our recent Partner Survey. The Survey has now been closed, and we are in the process of analysing the results. The Housing Options Service strives to increase customer satisfaction. The opinions you expressed in the survey will help us identify the improvements we need to make as well as those areas where you think we're doing a good job.

We will be printing the full results in our next edition of our Network newsletter.

A quick look at the Survey responses has shown us that our Partners wanted more information on the Tower Hamlets Complaints procedure. Taking this into account, you may find the following information helpful.



Complaint procedure

A complaint is when customers are not happy with the standard of service they have had from the council. We try to resolve all complaints immediately.

You can:

- Discuss the problem with the staff concerned or their manager to quickly and effectively resolve your problem.
- Make a formal complaint, in writing, by email or webform, or by phone. You can hand a written complaint in at any council reception point. If you find it difficult to fill in a form, please ask for help from your closest council office.
- If you are not happy with the written response, you can appeal to have the decision reviewed. The complaint team's details are below.
- We will acknowledge your complaint within two working days, and reply within twenty working days.
- We will advise you if we can not complete the investigation within this time and explain why.

If you are not happy with the outcome of the final stage of the

Chief Executives' review, you can contact the independent watchdog, the local government ombudsman.

Contact us:

Information about making a complaint including an online form is published on the council website.

website:

http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ignl/council_and_democracy/complaints.aspx

email:

complaints@towerhamlets.gov.uk

Phone:

020 7364 4161
English / Bengali / Sylheti

020 7364 4853 Minicom

Write to:

Corporate Complaints,
Tower Hamlets Town Hall
Mulberry Place
5 Clove Crescent
London E14 2BG

Contact the local government ombudsman:

Local Government Ombudsman
10th Floor, Millbank
London SW1P 4QP
020 7127 4620

Thames Reach win double awards

Thames Reach are a key partner of Tower Hamlets Housing Options Service. Together we aim to ensure no one needs to sleep rough on the streets of Tower Hamlets. The Council commission Thames Reach to work with new and long term entrenched rough sleepers through TH SORT (Rough Sleeping Outreach team).

In addition Thames Reach provide an assertive and supportive reconnection service for non UK nationals that are destitute and sleeping rough in Tower Hamlets.

Thames Reach was a double award winner in the prestigious Third Sector Excellence Awards held in central London.

The charity picked up the **Big Impact Award** for the work of the London Reconnection Project which has helped over 1000 Central and Eastern European rough sleepers escape destitution on the streets of the capital and return home.

Thames Reach's London Reconnection Project was launched in January 2009, at a time when there was little support available for the increasing numbers of Central and Eastern European men and women sleeping rough on the streets of London.

Thames Reach also won an award in the **Best Communications Campaign** category for its super-strength campaign, which calls on the Government to increase tax on high-alcohol drinks and for the drinks industry to behave more responsibly.

Super-strength ciders and lagers are the biggest killers of homeless people in the UK, being responsible for the deaths of more homeless men and women than either heroin or crack cocaine.

Thames Reach has been campaigning relentlessly since 2005 to get these super-strength drinks taxed more heavily as medical studies indicate that people's drinking is heavily influenced by the price of the products available.

The campaign is not anti-alcohol but focuses on the fact that super-strength drinks are a breed apart from regular and premium strength drinks and aimed at people with drink problems. The charity is aware of over 50 deaths directly attributable to super-strength drinks among the homeless people we help in the past three years alone.

Thames Reach's director of street and hostel services Audrey Mitchell said:

"We are thrilled that the impact of the London Reconnection Project has been recognised. We are grateful to our many partners including the Department for Communities and Local Government, the Greater London Authority and European embassies for their support of this vital service, and the website www.routeshome.org.uk

The service helps those spiralling into destitution to have a supported reconnection home to family, friends or a support agency. Our dedicated team work tirelessly, with their inspirational manager, to respond efficiently and sensitively to those marginalised and without hope on our streets."

Thames Reach's communications manager Mike Nicholas said:

"We are delighted to have been recognised in these prestigious awards. We have had some major successes with our super super-strength campaign, but the issues associated with these deadly drinks continue. There are huge health and social problems facing people that drink them."

Find out more about the London Reconnection Project

<http://www.thamesreach.org.uk/what-we-do/routes-home/>

Read more about Thames Reach's super-strength campaign

<http://www.thamesreach.org.uk/news-and-views/campaigns/super-strength-drinks/>

Tower Hamlets Homeseekers Open Day Events 2011



The Housing Options Services along with our 20 RSL Partner Landlords ran two events this year. The first was at **The Centre, Merchant Street, Bow, London E3**. The event was held on Thursday 8th September. We were hosted by **East End Homes** who provided their community centre for the day. We registered a total of **158** visitors who signed our visitor book during the day although the actual number who visited the event was over 250. This was our first midweek event for a few years and we had extended opening hours from midday to 7.30pm. Of the 158 visitors who registered with us, 131 gave us their feedback on the event by completing our exit survey.

Our second event took place at **Tarling East Community Centre, 63 Martha Street, London E1**. This time we were hosted by **Tower Hamlets Community Housing** in their community centre. The event was held on Saturday 24th September. We registered a total of **200** people who signed our visitor book

during the day, with the actual numbers who visited the event exceeding 300. This event was back to our traditional weekend Saturday slot and was open to the public from 11am to 3pm. Of the 200 visitors who registered with us, 147 gave us feedback on the event by completing our survey.



Lettings Services CSE Presentation

Lettings Services had their **Customer Service Excellence (CSE)** Award Presentation on Tuesday 18th October at Albert Jacobs House, 62 Roman Road, London E2 0PG in Room 101.

It was attended by Tower Hamlets Services Interim Chief Executive Aman Dalvi and the Housing Options Services own Service Head Colin Cormack.

It was a fitting end to a great achievement from our Lettings Services in achieving **Great to Excellence (G2E)** and picking up their CSE Award.

Colin Cormack said on the achievements of the Lettings Services:

"I am proud to share with you the success of the Lettings Service in achieving the Customer Service Excellence (CSE) accreditation.

I trust you will be as delighted as I am to see that yet again this Council, through its diverse teams, has demonstrated its commitment to the very highest standards of customer service."



The Lettings Services presented with their CSE Award, having achieved Great to Excellent (G2E)



England Illegal Money Lending Team

Background Information and Stats

The England Illegal Money Lending Team is funded by the Department of Business Innovation and Skills, and works in partnership with local Trading Standards Authorities across the country.

They will investigate and prosecute illegal lending and any related activity- in the past this has included threatening behaviour, violence, intimidation, drugs offences, kidnap and even rape.

They run a 24 hour confidential hotline for people to report illegal lending to trained investigators on **0300 555 2222**.

People can also text **'loan shark + a message'** to 60003

or email reportaloanshark@stoploansharks.gov.uk

The Team operate on a parachute in model from a centralised base in Birmingham, with up to 30 specialist investigators moving to the area once a suspected illegal lender is identified.

A local presence is maintained with LIAISE officers, (Leads In Awareness, Intelligence, Support and Education) in every region. These officers work in communities supporting victims, raising awareness and working with various partnership agencies including housing associations, credit unions, the CAB, police and debt advice services to ensure front line staff know how to spot an illegal lender in order to help their clients.

As loan sharks operate illegally, their debts aren't enforceable in law,

therefore they can only resort to other methods such as intimidation to enforce repayment.

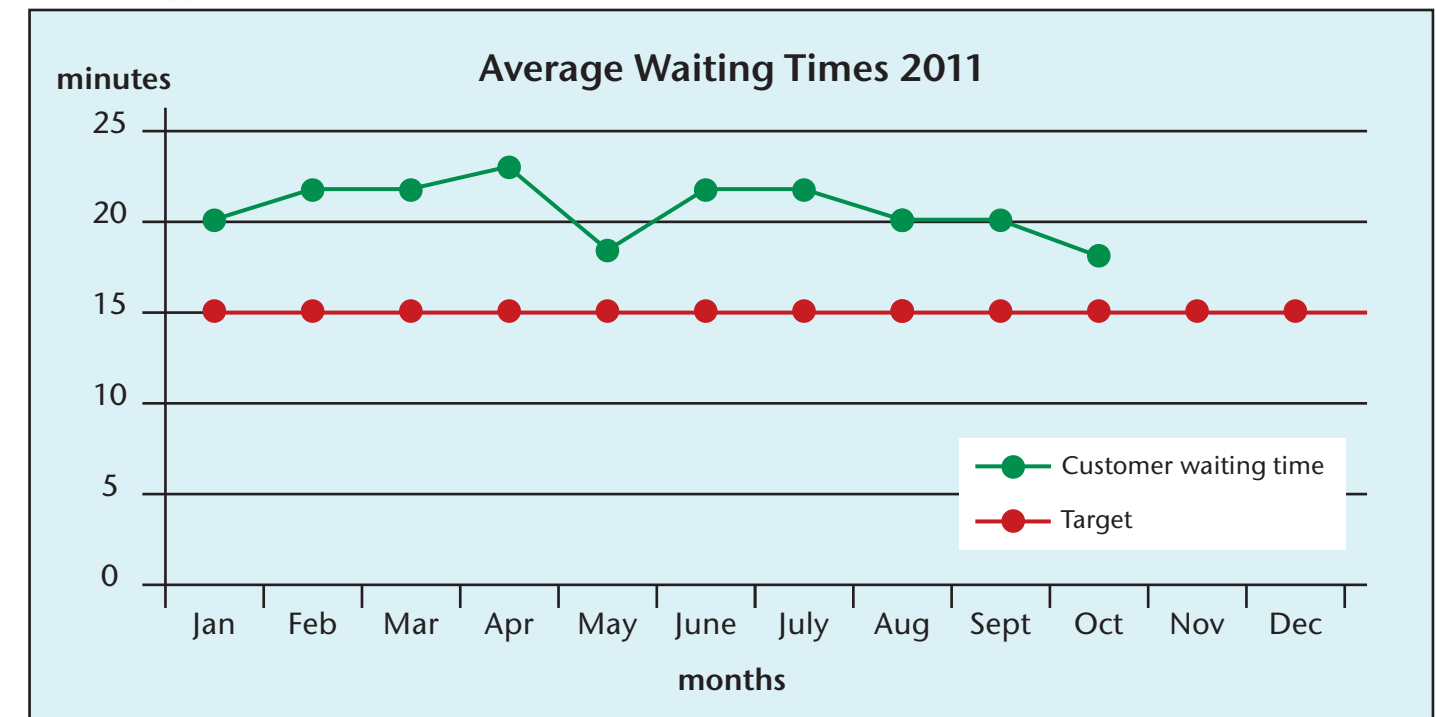
- The Teams have written off almost £40 million of illegal debts (money victims would have paid back to illegal lenders if the Department had not acted).
- Secured over 190 prosecutions, resulting in prison sentencing totalling over 107 years plus one indefinite sentence for public protection.
- Helped over 16,000 victims of loan sharks including the most hard to reach individuals.
- Over £27 million worth of assets are being investigated (under POCA) with the intention of removing these from illegal lenders.
- An estimated 310,000 households are borrowing from illegal money lenders.



CUSTOMER WAITING TIMES

As a result of our recent Customer Service Excellence (CSE) review, it was agreed that we will start putting the Contact Manager monthly statistics in each Network edition.

These figures represent how long visitors wait, from being seen at reception to being called for an interview with a member of staff. They are recorded using our computer software, Contact Manager. Our target is to keep the customer waiting for no more than 15 minutes, and we are making progress towards keeping that promise to the customer.



FRAUDSTER FOUND OUT

A Wapping homeowner who claimed he had no where to live in order to access accommodation and benefits was found guilty.

Abu Bakkar of Maddocks House, Shadwell, owns a property at Solander Gardens which he rents out to tenants. He attended Thames Magistrates' Court on Friday 7th October and was found guilty of making fraudulent claims on homelessness, housing list and council tax benefit application forms.

The fraudulent applications were made in February 2011.

Tower Hamlets Council was alerted to the crime by the routine checks it carries out and brought charges against Bakkar.

The Justices sentenced Bakkar to a fine of £400 and he was ordered to pay prosecution costs of £1,105

To report housing cheats call the council free on:

0800 528 0294

or email anti-fraud@towerhamlets.gov.uk

[@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:anti-fraud@towerhamlets.gov.uk)

