

November
2012

Tower Hamlets Housing Options Services Network Partners Newsletter

Congratulations to the Housing Options Services for Achieving the Customer Service

Excellence Award (CSE)

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

We had a 12 month programme of service improvements and this led to a very successful on-site inspection in September.

The CSE standard consists of 57 separate criteria grouped into five categories:

- Customer Insight
- Culture of the Organisation
- Access & Communication
- Delivery
- Timeliness & Quality

The entire Housing Options Service was judged to be fully compliant in 55 of the criteria and partially compliant in only 2 - an outstanding achievement.

The independent Inspector took the opportunity during the final feed back session of drawing to my attention to her being impressed at the commitment shown by staff to the customer.

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.



Colin Cormack
Service Head Housing Options

CUSTOMER
SERVICE
EXCELLENCE



The Government Standard

NETWORK

Lettings Allocation Policy Consultation Have your say

The Council and its Common Housing Register Partners are currently consulting with residents on proposed policy changes.

This is heavily influenced by legislation and the new Localism Act, which was brought in last year, that gives councils much greater freedom to design policies and procedures to suit local people.

Previously councils across the country were required to open their housing lists to just about anybody, regardless of their income or where they lived. This means that people living in another part of the UK are currently able to join the Tower Hamlets housing list and, depending on their circumstances, could be higher up the list than someone who currently lives in the borough. We now have greater freedom to change our housing allocation policy to ensure they reflect needs in the local community. For example, there is currently no limit on the number of bids a person can make for properties advertised, which meant that last year over 2 million bids were received for the 3,877 properties advertised. Each property was also rejected an average of four times before finally being accepted, because there are no penalties in place for people who bid for properties continuously, and then refuse them.

In addition to considering bid limits, we are also looking at introducing minimum residency in the borough, and income thresholds – to prevent people earning over a certain amount from joining the housing list, and penalties for people who continuously bid for properties and then refuse them, because this prevents people lower down the list from being re-housed quickly and will reduce unnecessary costs.

To complete the survey, please visit the Council's website;

www.towerhamlets.gov.uk or Tower Hamlets Homeseekers website at www.thhs.org.uk

Closing date for consultation is 23 of November 2012.

A series of focus groups with housing applicants will also be organised before the consultation deadline of 23 November 2012. Further details will be provided shortly.

TURN2US

Turn2us is a charitable service which helps people access the money available to them – through welfare benefits, grants and other help.

Their free, accessible website has been designed to help find appropriate sources of financial support quickly and easily, based on peoples particular needs and circumstances.

THE WEBSITE LINK IS;

<http://www.turn2us.entitledto.co.uk/entitlementcalculator.aspx>

THANK YOU

A big thank you to all our Partners who helped us achieve our CSE award.

A special thank you to;

Gaye Brown - Swan Housing Association

Andrea O'Callaghan - East End Homes

Dermot Maloney - Tower Hamlets Homes

Audrey Mitchell - Thames Reach

Andy Scott - TH

Elliot Leigh Managing Agents



Who all attended our Partners Focus group on the day of the inspection.

PREPARING FOR THE WELFARE REFORM

You may have seen recent media coverage of the work being carried out in the Housing Options Service to prepare for the impact of the Welfare Benefit cap due to be implemented next April.

The cap means that working-age single parents and couples who are not in work will not be allowed to receive any more than £500 per week in total benefits – including Housing Benefit.

These changes have been introduced by the Government and will mean big cuts in income for many of our customers living in temporary accommodation.

Some customers will be exempt from the cap – for instance if they are in receipt of some disability benefits. Also if they are working at least 16 hours a week as a lone parent or 24 hours a week as a couple and receive Working Families Tax Credit they will be exempt from the cap.

The Council, its politicians and officers, are trying really hard to limit the impact of the changes but there is only so much that can be done. This will be a very difficult time and the priority of the Council will be to help ensure families have enough money to live on once the welfare cap is implemented. This will mean some difficult decisions will need to be made about our customers' housing options.

Housing Officers will be visiting all customers in temporary accommodation who are likely to be affected by the cap by the end of this year. They will refer suitable people to the Council's Skills Match service to find employment and identify any help customers might need with money advice.

One way to avoid or limit the impact of the cap will be to move families to alternative cheaper accommodation if they are not likely to find work before April. This will mean moving them away from Tower Hamlets.

Many of our customers may be getting close to qualifying for a permanent offer of accommodation. If so, then because rents are cheaper in Local Authority and Housing Association properties and a move to a permanent home might take somebody out of being affected by the cap, officers will also discuss placing customers onto the Autobid system.

We are also now making contact with local private sector tenants who DWP has identified as being affected by the cap. We are inviting the people who will see the biggest reductions in income to come and talk to our Welfare Benefit Changes Team about securing employment or finding alternative cheaper accommodation. Those who are affected by less than £20 per week are being invited to talk to our Money Advisors about managing their finances so they can still pay their rent.

If you have a customer who you think is affected by the benefit cap and will struggle to pay their rent please contact our Welfare Benefit Changes Team on 020 7364 1413 for further advice.

Localism Act 2011

A change to homeless legislation

The present duty to households who are eligible, in priority need, unintentionally homeless and have a local connection is to provide temporary accommodation until one of the following applies:

- The applicant becomes ineligible
- The applicant becomes intentionally homeless from the temporary accommodation (e.g. he is evicted for rent arrears or anti-social behaviour)
- A part 6 offer is accepted
- A suitable part 6 offer is rejected provided the applicant was made aware of the consequences of refusal
- The applicant accepts a qualifying offer of a private sector assured shorthold tenancy (where the applicant was happy to be offered a private sector tenancy)

The Localism Act brings in changes which affects all homeless applications made on or after Friday 09 November 2012.

The first 5 in the above list will remain in place but the concept of qualifying offers will be ended and will be replaced by a council's ability to end the duty by providing a suitable 12 month assured shorthold tenancy regardless of the applicant's preference.

Housing Options Management Team is considering the potential impacts of this amendment and how we might best implement them; we are concerned about affordability issues in light of the impending welfare benefit caps. A further article will appear in the next newsletter.

Housing Options Service Customer Satisfaction Survey 2012 Results

In July 2012 we ran our Housing Options Services Customer satisfaction Survey. We received nearly 101 responses, equalling a response rate of just over 16% - our best yet.

Communication

- This survey showed that 80% of respondents preferred to be contacted via letter, which is a marked increase from our last CSS which indicated that only 51% preferred this method of contact
- Overall 74.2% of our customers were satisfied or very satisfied with the way their telephone call was dealt with.

Complaints

- 56% of our customers stated they were aware of the complaints procedure and 14% of respondents had made complaints about the service. Of these 63% were satisfied with the outcome.
- We used the opportunity of the survey to raise awareness of the complaints procedure.

InTouch Temporary Accommodation Newsletter

- 76% of our customers found our InTouch customer newsletter useful.



TOWER HAMLETS
London Borough of Tower Hamlets
Housing Options Services

For a chance to win £250 fill in and return by August 31st 2012

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY 2012

In February 2011 the Homeless & Housing Advice Service combined with the Council's Lettings Team to form the **HOUSING OPTIONS SERVICE**. Since then we have successfully continued to prevent homelessness and offer alternatives to making a homeless application. These alternatives are critical to addressing wider housing need because, despite this Council's tremendous success in building so many new homes, the stark fact is we are unlikely to be able to build ourselves out of housing need. The Housing Options Service has grown into a service of advice and assistance for all in housing need, not just those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

We want to hear from our customers living in temporary accommodation what you think about the service we offer. To help us improve our services to you please take a few minutes to complete this survey. Please return it to us in the prepaid envelope enclosed. All forms, with completed contact details and the appropriate box ticked, will be entered into a prize draw and you could win £250! If you need help in completing this survey, or have any questions or translation requirements, please contact the Business Support team on 020 7364 7262.

FOR YOUR CHANCE TO WIN £250 PLEASE COMPLETE THE SLIP BELOW. ALL INFORMATION PROVIDED IS PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL.

Name: _____
Address: _____
Contact number: _____

Housing Management



- 84% of our customers stated they knew their housing officer.
- 44% of customers in temporary accommodation had been visited at least once by their housing officer in the previous 12 months. The target this year is for 90% of all customers to be visited twice.
- 71% of our customers in temporary accommodation knew who their Managing agent was and a further 42% of these customers had been visited by their managing agent at least once within the last year.
- 72% of customers said they were satisfied or very satisfied with the location of the temporary accommodation. This is a slight reduction on the results for 2009 & 2008, reflecting the need to place more customers out of the borough due to a reduced supply of in-borough accommodation.
- 61% of customers were satisfied or very satisfied with the condition of their property, against 55% in 2009 and 41.5% in 2008. This reflects the success of work undertaken to set minimum property standards in all temporary accommodation, improved training for staff.
- Satisfaction with the Managing Agent, at 60% was on a par with the 2008 & 2009 results.

Overall Satisfaction

- 69% of customers were satisfied or very satisfied with the overall service they received.

A big thank you to all our Customers who took part in this survey, we value your opinion and comments and we are always looking at way to improve the Housing Options Service.

skillsLondon 2012

skillslondon2012.co.uk

London's biggest careers and skills event
ExCeL London, 23 - 24 November 2012

Spread the good news

To help make Skills London 2012 a fantastic experience for young people, exhibitors and London we need your support. We want every young person across the Capital to have the opportunity to attend and learn from top employers and expert skills professionals.



Bursting with careers
From maritime to finance

Working together to make it happen

Skills London 2012 offers opportunities for young people to discover higher and further education courses; skills, training and Apprenticeships; jobs, work placements and careers; and meet expert, impartial advisers with a view to inspiring them for their future and the future success of London and the UK.

Skills London 2012 will offer all this in one place at one time.



How can you help?

As a supporter of the event you can help us to spread the word and get over 30,000 young people, teachers and families to the event.

Hundreds of schools and colleges have already booked to attend, but we want everyone to have an opportunity to take part.

Make sure you tell your school, college and community group contacts about Skills London 2012. Groups registering before 1 September can qualify for a travel bursary (for full details visit www.skillslondon2012.co.uk).

Tell all your staff and contacts about Skills London 2012. Many will have children, relatives or friends aged 15-24 who would benefit from visiting the event and taking part. It's free to visit and letting your staff know about your involvement is a great way to increase internal awareness of your commitment to training and recruitment, motivating your current and future workforces.

Groups, families and individuals can book their places at www.skillslondon2012.co.uk



To help you to help us

To help you promote the event, there's a dedicated resource hub on website www.skillslondon2012.co.uk.

Visit www.skillslondon2012.co.uk. If you require any further information, please feel free to call 01823 362800 or email mark.mitchell@prospects.co.uk who will be happy to answer any queries.

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Apprenticeships

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Tower Hamlets Landlord Forum

Tuesday 9th October 2012

The Tower Hamlets Landlord Forum took place on Tuesday 9th October 2012 at Albert Jacobs House, 62 Roman Road, London E2 0PG. It was a huge success with over 30 landlords attending.

We had a wide range of speakers at the Forum.

- Once again Clive Buckman succeeded in raising the temperature when he addressed the Forum about the Impact of the Welfare Reform.
- Gary Norris from the Fire Authority had an important message for all 'Fire kills'. From 2011/12 - 554 Fires in the home (69% kitchen) 1 Fatality, 32 Injuries and 1 rescue, this year.
- David Gingell informed the Forum of the Welfare Benefit Project.



- Followed by Nikki Cottrell who told the Forum of the good work Real Lettings a BroadWay and Homelessness Charity organisation is doing in securing decent homes for the homeless.
- Lastly Richard Blanco from National Landlord Association gave an overview of recent changes in the law that are important for all landlords to know so as to avoid penalties and prosecution. He also touched on campaigns NLA are currently involved.

DEPAUL UK – DRIVE AHEAD

FREE WORKSHOPS

Depaul UK runs a selection of **FREE** workshops for homeless young people aged 16-25, and can travel to you anywhere in London.

Please choose from the workshops below:

SEXUAL HEALTH - To educate trainees about STI's, HIV & AIDS and general sexual health encouraging positive self-esteem and safer sexual health decisions and positive relationships. A free Chlamydia and Gonorrhoea screening kit is also available through this workshop.

ALCOHOL & DRUG AWARENESS - To demonstrate the short and long term effects of illicit drug misuse, and for trainees to make informed choices about alcohol & drug related issues.

HOUSING - Involve and empower young people with their housing needs; addressing legal rights, bidding information, tenancy information, local connection/priority needs, signposting, etc.

FOOD & MOOD - Encourage healthy eating and reduce risks associated with an unhealthy lifestyle, supporting trainees in having better control of their mental health and develop self-management methods in their diets.

Workshops are on a 1st come, 1st served basis with a limited number of spaces
(Minimum of 4, maximum of 15 young people per workshop).

For more information or to book a workshop please contact Dave Pattison on

0207 939 1248

or at david.pattison@depauluk.org

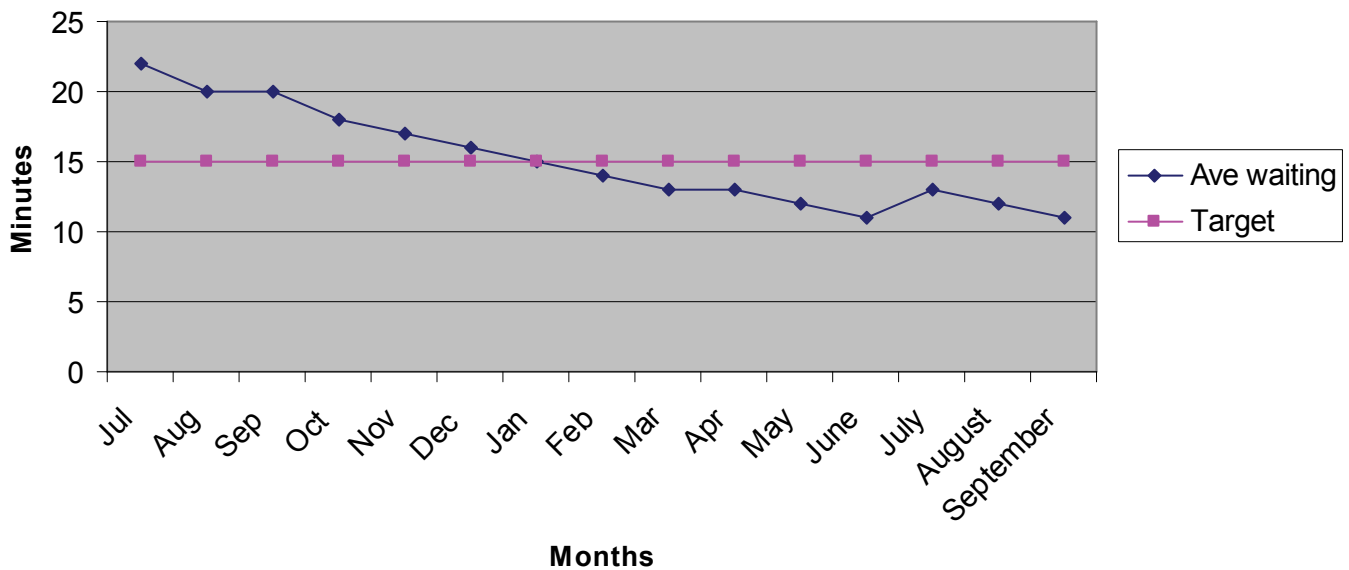


The Housing Options Services are still improving their waiting times.

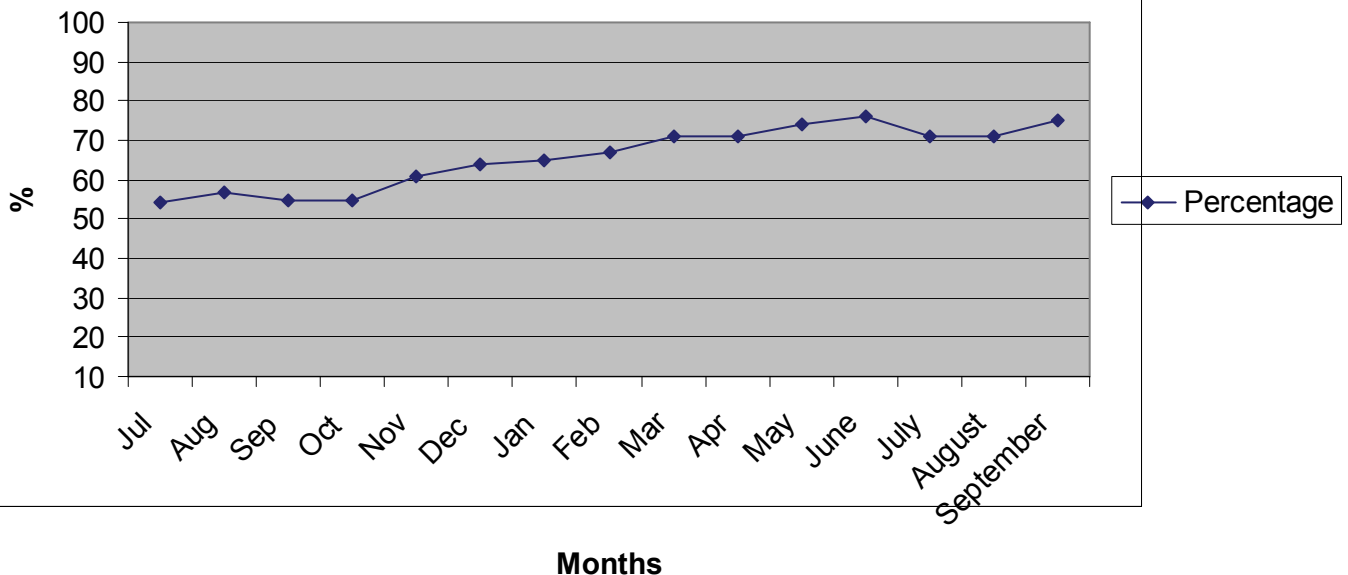
Our target is to keep our customers waiting for no more than 15 minutes, within the last 12 months the Housing Options Services waiting time Stats are now on target, we are now reaching our 15 minutes target levels.

As you can see from the graphs below we have been steadily improving each month, we aim to keep these high standards and continue to keep waiting times to a minimum.

Average Waiting Times



Percentage of clients seen within 15 minutes waiting time



November is Money Matters Month



The government
may be cutting your
benefits
So we're here
to help

Your questions answered, in your local area

- **What is changing?**
- **How much could I lose?**
- **What are my options?**

All events take place 11am – 4pm

Saturday 3 November
Whitechapel Idea Store
321 Whitechapel Road,
E1 1BU

Saturday 10 November
Bow Idea Store
1 Gladstone Place, Roman Road,
E3 5ES

Saturday 17 November
Tarling East Community Centre
63 Martha Street,
E1 2PA

Saturday 24 November
Chrisp Street Idea Store
1 Vesey Path, East India Dock Road,
E14 6BT

For more information visit
www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/welfarereform
Or call our Benefits Service on 020 7364 5001



LUTFUR RAHMAN | MAYOR OF
TOWER HAMLETS



GOLD PERFORMANCE BY STAFF **The Olympic Games were a great success for Britain and for East London in particular.**



In particular staff across the council put so much effort and time into ensuring that services ran seamlessly without a hitch during the Games period.

Whilst the sportsmen and women had trained and worked so hard in the preparation for their events, our staff were planning so that essential services ran as normal. Our waste collection service began work in the very early hours; you walked instead of driving, you worked from home, you shared information and plans.

Following the pre-Olympic downpours our parks department worked hard to get Victoria Park in perfect shape. The park took centre stage as a BT Live Site; although event organisers have to return the park to the excellent condition it was in before the event took place, our parks team have been taking good care of our green spaces right across the borough.

Our street cleaners kept our streets clean; meals on wheels set off earlier than usual to make certain that our elderly and vulnerable residents received their main meal of the day; many staff successfully worked from home using the Virtual Desktop.

Despite the drop in visitors across London the communications team embarked on a huge campaign to keep visitors informed about a range of attractions in the borough. East End Life produced three supplements for residents and visitors: a cultural supplement to promote Brick Lane as the Curry Capital and Tower Hamlets as a borough with an array of arts and culture; an A to Z of services supplement to inform residents about any changes to services during the Games period; Go East in London, designed to raise the profile of the borough as a place for quality shopping and markets.

Many of our staff volunteered at the Olympics in a wide variety of roles, unselfishly using up their own annual leave to take part. We also saw the first outing for the Mayor's Community Champions who were out in force to help visitors find their way. All the while of course our core work as a council continued and the Council's safeguarding role was given a positive review by Ofsted, in itself, a magnificent achievement.

We would like to thank everyone for all the work that has gone into ensuring the borough has been such a fascinating and safe place for visitors.

London 2012 opened with a ceremony that recorded our history, our future and multicultural identity in an extravagant, but intelligent, ceremony and we saw Team GB win a total of 65 medals, 29 of which were gold.

Tower Hamlets staff can congratulate themselves on their own 'gold' performance.

Mayor - Lutfur Rahman

