

Dec
2013

**Tower Hamlets Housing Options Service
Network Partners Newsletter**

NETWORK

HOUSING OPTIONS SERVICE

CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR OPENING TIMES

**Tower Hamlets Housing Options Service,
Albert Jacob House, 62 Roman Road,
London E2 0PG**

**Opening hours over the New Year are;
Closed from Tuesday 24th December 2013 at
4:00pm**

Re-Open Thursday 2nd January 2014 at 9:30am

**An Emergency number over this period can be
obtained from our website,
www.towerhamlets.gov.uk**



Housing Options Service

would like to wish

all our Partners

Seasons Greetings

&

Happy New year

WELFARE REFORM

Our customers living in temporary accommodation will, like everyone else, have seen lots of news items about changes to the benefits system. One of the biggest and most drastic changes has been the introduction of the £500 Benefit Cap for unemployed people of working age.

Knowing that many of our families living in temporary accommodation would be affected by the Cap, we carried out a programme of home visits to all those families. We wanted to explain the implications of the Cap, how to avoid being capped (by getting a job) and what was likely to happen to capped families – including having to be moved to cheaper temporary accommodation.

The Cap was originally due to come into force in April of this year, but the Government delayed this until undertaking a roll-out between August and October.

We now know that a little over 300 homeless households have been capped. The good news is that over 200 families either found work or became exempt from the Cap for some other reasons. For the 300 though, the prospects were not good. The Cap meant that families have less, often much less, to pay their rent. The only option available then was to move families to cheaper accommodation and, of course, cheaper generally means further away from Tower Hamlets

The Council wanted to do something about this but the only practical help would be to bridge the difference between the rent required and any benefits received.

We knew that the Government's measures have cut over £2 million a year in housing benefits – and that's just in Tower Hamlets!

If the council was to help where the government wasn't, it would need to find that amount of money each and every year, an impossible task. However, the council wanted to give people one last chance to get a job – and it did so by making up to £2 million available for the Mayor's Temporary Accommodation Support Fund. This Fund is being used to subsidise our capped homeless families. Remember, the average amount capped is £119 a week.

The Fund will last until Spring 2014. As avoiding the Cap is all about getting a job, the Council's SkillsMatch Service will be contacting all the Capped families to support them into employment.

Those families who, for whatever reason, remain Capped after Spring 2014 will need to move to cheaper accommodation, which will almost certainly be outside Tower Hamlets. After Christmas, affected families will be visited by their Housing Officer to discuss their housing options and employment prospects.

This may not be the most seasonal message – but it is very important and that is why we chose not to delay it.

Key Changes to the Allocations Scheme

The Council introduced major changes to the Allocations Scheme, which will affect everyone currently on, or applying, to join the housing register. Some of these came into effect on 20th April 2013, but those that needed us to change our computer systems happened on 17th of October 2013. On that date, we also introduced some important service improvements for residents. These changes were only considered after a thorough consultation exercise.

There is lots of information on the Homeseekers website www.thhs.org.uk (including the full version of the Allocations Scheme) but we've summarised the main changes below.

PRIORITY BANDS

We have reduced the number of Priority bands from four to three. Band 4 has now been deleted and any applicant previously placed in that band was contacted and was either removed from the housing register (this mainly happened to those who no longer live in Tower Hamlets) or placed in Bands 1 to 3 depending on their circumstances.

Please see the Allocations Scheme itself for information about how people queue within each Band (generally, it is a length of time waiting queue).

BAND 1 - This is split into 2 groups:

Group A

- Emergency cases
- Under occupiers
- Priority Decants with less than 1 year to block clearance date
- Medical/Disability need for a ground floor or wheelchair category A or B property

Group B

- Priority Social or Priority Medical
- Decants
- Priority Target Groups and armed forces personnel in urgent housing need

BAND 2

- Overcrowded applicants
- Homeless applicants

BAND 3

- Households with no defined housing need

Continued. . . .

Key Changes to the Allocations Scheme

We introduced some new **ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA** as well, criteria that say who can, and who can't typically join the housing register. These include:-

- The need to have a minimum 3 years' continuous residence in Tower Hamlets at the point of application
- Setting a maximum income level of £85,000 for single or joint applications
- People who already own their own home

Persons found guilty of anti-social behaviour

The council does however recognise that there might be exceptional circumstances and will therefore always consider if these criteria should be waived.

One set of important changes was around the **BIDDING** for advertised properties.

- Generally, a maximum of 3 bids will be allowed during any bidding cycle
- Bids can be withdrawn and put on another property as long as it happens within the bidding cycle
- 'Real time' bid positions will be available at the time of bidding (whether on line at www.thhs.org.uk or by phone)
- Knowing those positions will allow you to think about putting your bid on another property – it is about making an informed choice
- A Browse Aloud option will be available for partially sighted applicants bidding on the web

The option to bid by mobile phone has been introduced, please go to <https://m.thhs.org.uk>

The final changes are about **OFFERS OF ACCOMMODATION**. However, those changes do not impact on any household who has been accepted as homeless – the one offer rule still applies. To help with your bidding efforts though, the results of offers will be published and updated regularly on the Homeseekers website. This will allow you to see what Priority Band and Preference Date the successful bidders had to give you an indication of your own prospects.

IMPROVED CASH PAYMENTS FOR LANDLORDS*

Tower Hamlets Homefinder has a special offer for landlords signing up to its financial incentive scheme.

This scheme provides one-off, non-refundable cash payments for council-vetted nominations for Assured Shorthold Tenancies – and this incentive payment is just that – it doesn't need to be paid back!

The council has just increased its incentive payments for properties in Tower Hamlets. For 2-year Assured Shorthold Tenancies landlords will receive a £4000 lump sum for properties with two or more bedrooms; and £2,500 for 1-bedroom properties.

But hurry! This offer is only available while funds last.

The council also needs properties of all sizes under its rent guarantee scheme for homeless households

This scheme offers the reassurance that the rent is collected by us whatever the circumstances of the tenant and you will receive a guaranteed competitive monthly income backed by the council.

The advantages of this scheme are:

- No more letting agency fees
- No lengthy contract tie-ins
- Higher rents and rent guarantees
- Hassle-free lettings

*conditions apply



To find out more contact
020 7364 7298 or email
accommodation.procurement@towerhamlets.gov.uk



Free Boiler Grants



Free boiler Scheme is funded by the UK's major energy providers including British Gas, Scottish Power & NPower.

Some of our residents may qualify for a boiler grant. Provided the tenant is eligible and willing to apply for the grant, the Housing Options Service will be willing to discuss this with our tenants in temporary accommodation and encourage them to participate, so if a boiler needs to be replaced please contact;

accommodation.procurement@towerhamlets.gov.uk

For further details on this scheme please go to web page;

www.free-boilers.com



Free Boilers



TOWER HAMLETS

London Borough of Tower Hamlets Housing Options Service

NO WRONG DOOR PROJECT

September Update 1

WHAT IS IT?

The concept of No Wrong Door grew from a growing appreciation of the complexities of homelessness and housing need and the merit of working with clients of the Housing Options Service holistically to make available comprehensive services. The idea that someone presents with housing issues, but that the underlying cause of those issues are not housing – and remain un-tackled – provided the basis for the wish to change.

From the earliest scoping work, it was quickly appreciated that, fundamentally, this is about unemployment, lack of training, qualifications or basic life skills, debt and / or money issues and being able to access child care. We see this project as transforming the Housing Options Service and the Council's offering to customers facing homelessness.

No Wrong Door is led within the Housing Options service, based at Roman Road. One of the early pieces of work carried out by the project team was to test whether what we thought about the underlying, non housing issues was correct, and whether clients would welcome some of the ideas we had around change. We talked to 160 people in the Housing Options reception area – there is a separate paper summarizing the results of this work – and overall the findings were absolutely supportive of the concept for change.



No Wrong Door

There is a project team in place to drive this programme forward, made up of staff at all levels from within the Housing Options Service. There is a timeline for change, which looks to deliver a number of service improvements by Spring 2014. The project has 3 distinct phases:

PHASE 1 Understanding and scoping the project <i>March – September</i>	Exploring any existing best practice. Understanding the current customer journey. Talking to our customers about what changes to services would make a positive impact on them. Developing a vision.
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PHASE 2 Mapping and researching activity <i>September – January</i>	Mapping agencies and talking to them. Mapping our own in house services and talking to them. Testing the new ideas with service users.
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PHASE 3 Implementing, reshaping and delivering <i>Spring 2014</i>	Developing service changes and implementing them. Communicating the transformation to all.
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We believe our services will be transformed. We will engage customers with employment advisors, or money advisors or hook them directly into the Family Information Service, all starting from the first housing options interview. We are working to get this in place and develop the best approaches – it may be achieved through effective referral, weekly surgeries, co-location of services but, likely as not, will require no small measure of retraining staff and redefining job roles to deliver the complete package. This will emerge as the programme moves forward.



TOWER HAMLETS

London Borough of Tower Hamlets Housing Options Service

NO WRONG DOOR PROJECT

September Update 2

THE STORY SO FAR...

The project has been called No Wrong Door because this reflects the desired outcome – that for customers who approach the service, they will never be told they are in the wrong place and sent on to another agency. We plan to be able to get them into other services who can help with a range of other issues and problems they face – such as unemployment, lack of skills, qualification, training, debt or money problems, lack of knowledge or access to child care.

A project team was set up within Housing Options in February of this year and the team developed a project plan that was inclusive, far reaching and fully engaging with others, looking forward to delivering change in spring 2014.

Much work has been done since then and this short paper summarises where we have reached.

Testing the concept

We talked to 160 clients in reception, about their experiences of services in housing options, and about what else they would like to see provided. Results of this are available in a separate information sheet, but overall they were very much in favour of providing more holistic and comprehensive services – or access to them – in one place. This was our green light to proceed.

Employment & training

As this is one of the most prominent issues, as welfare reform is rolled out, we started with this. We've met the service manager at Skills Match – the Council's own employment service. We have understood who they are and what they can do, and how their work differs from Job Centre Plus. We have arranged for two managers from Skills Match to do a day's shadowing, to initially understand the Housing Options Service and to use this as a springboard for developing joint working practices. We are aiming for initial surgeries within reception at Roman Road, and using this to develop excellent referral mechanisms between the two agencies.

We have also arranged to meet with Job Centre Plus colleagues, and this is scheduled in for 5th September. We anticipate similar outcomes.

Child care

Clients told us they could not work because of child care issues. We believe this to have a number of facets – knowing about child care options, accessing those options and funding. We have met with colleagues from the Council's own Family Information Service – partly as a fact finding mission, but partly also to try & gauge opportunities for joint working. Outcomes were very positive and the first step in moving forward is to do some briefing of our own housing



No Wrong Door

options on existing provision, so that this information can be shared with clients at interviews. This has been booked for early October. After this, we will explore regular surgeries and joint working based at Roman Road.

Health

We have also had discussions with colleagues promoting health. In the first instance they are going to set up a Healthy Lifestyles stall for a day at the front entrance to gauge interest. Staff training opportunities are being explored as well as information resources to be used during housing options interviews.

Talking to other agencies

Having developed some plans from the above, we are keen to meet with other agencies providing housing advice, employment advice and welfare and benefits advice. A series of sessions has been booked in for September – visits to the offices of colleagues within these agencies, to see how they can become involved in No Wrong Door. Those scheduled in so far are:

- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Account 3
- Limehouse Project
- Island Advice Centre
- Bromley by Bow Centre



TOWER HAMLETS

London Borough of Tower Hamlets Housing Options Service

NO WRONG DOOR PROJECT

September Update 3



No Wrong Door

THE VIEWS OF CUSTOMERS

The concept of No Wrong Door grew from a growing appreciation of the complexities of homelessness and housing need and the merit of working with clients of the Housing Options Service holistically to make available comprehensive services. The idea that someone presents with housing issues, but that the underlying cause of those issues are not housing – and remain un-tackled – provided the basis for the wish to change.

However, before exploring how services can be transformed, we were keen to test our ideas for change with our customers. Were we right about their needs beyond housing and would they welcome a more holistic approach based at 62 Roman Road?

We talked to 160 of our service users, all who were visiting the office at Roman Road. Interviews were carried out in the reception area by staff who were fully briefed on the No Wrong Door Project. This paper summarises what we learnt.

Note – the percentages set out below will not add up to 100 because customers were able to select more than one option.

General Information

Initially we wanted to find out a bit about how customers were accessing services and which other services they were using:

- 70% of our Customers used the internet, with 65% of them using the internet at home. Mobile internet use was also featured highly, with 45% of customers accessing internet in this way. Some used libraries and internet cafes.
- The Job Centre was the main other Agency that our customers visited.
- We gave customers the option to tell us about the issues they faced in addition to their housing issue. They said:
 - Don't have a job – 73%
 - Insufficient income – 39%
 - Language barriers – 22%
 - Child care issues – 21%
 - Lack of support networks – 19%

Employment

Given the implications of welfare reform and our belief that we needed to help get our clients into agencies that can assist with employment opportunities, we wanted to ask customers about their employment status and experiences. We learnt that:

- 75% of the customers we talked to were unemployed.
- From the 25% of the customers who were **employed**, 73% of them were employed full time, with 81% of their hourly rate of pay being less than £10 an hour.
- Of the 75% who were **unemployed**, 41% of them had been unemployed for more than 3 years.
- Most of the customers we talked to used the Internet and the Job Centre to look for work.
- When asking 'what do you need help' with, 73% said job searching, 58% said they needed help with filling out forms and 57% said they needed help with interview skills.
- We asked customers who was helping them in these areas at the moment; 70% said "nobody".
- We asked the question "would it be useful if we offered help here?" and 89% of our survey said yes.
- Interestingly, over 50% of our customers said they would be interested in voluntary work.

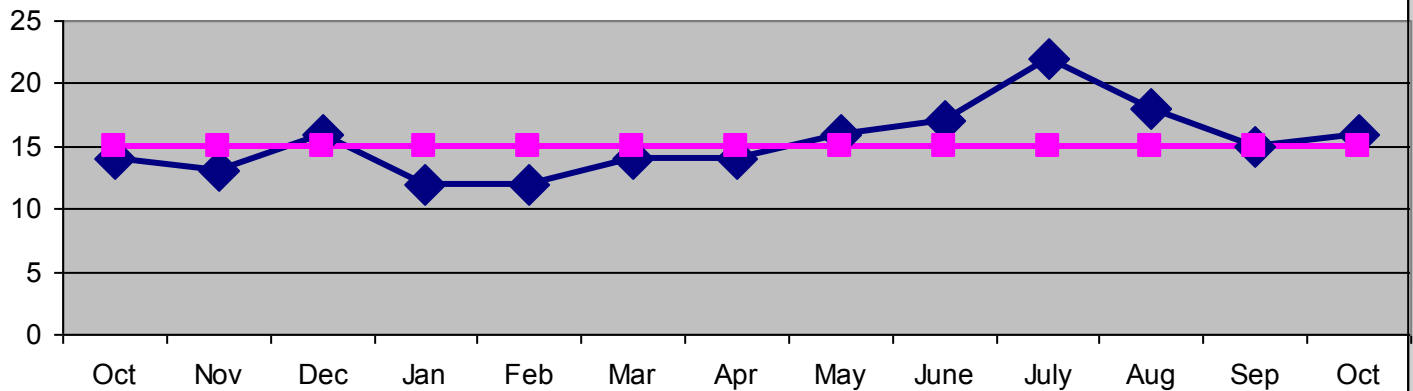
The Housing Options Service

Waiting time Stats for 2013.

Our target is to keep our customers waiting for no more than 15 minutes within our reception area. The average waiting time is now 15 minutes, however we are only achieving this in around 70% of cases. Our aim for 2014 will be to achieve the 15 minute target for all our customers.

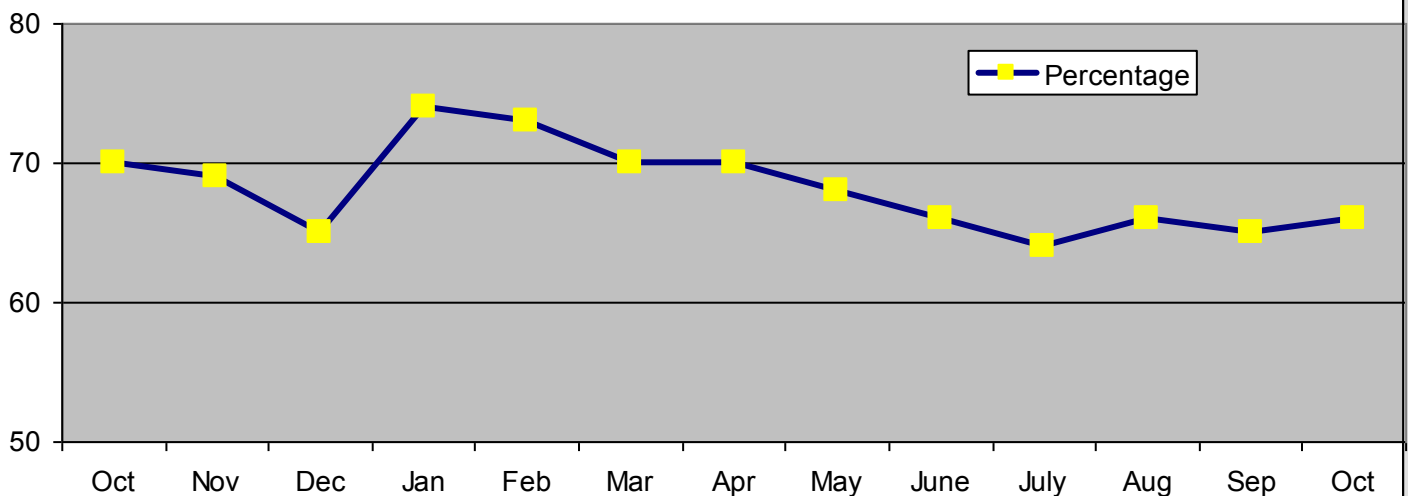
October 2012 - October 2013
Average Waiting Time

◆ Ave waiting
■ Target



October 2012 - October 2013
Percentage of Clients seen within 15 Minutes

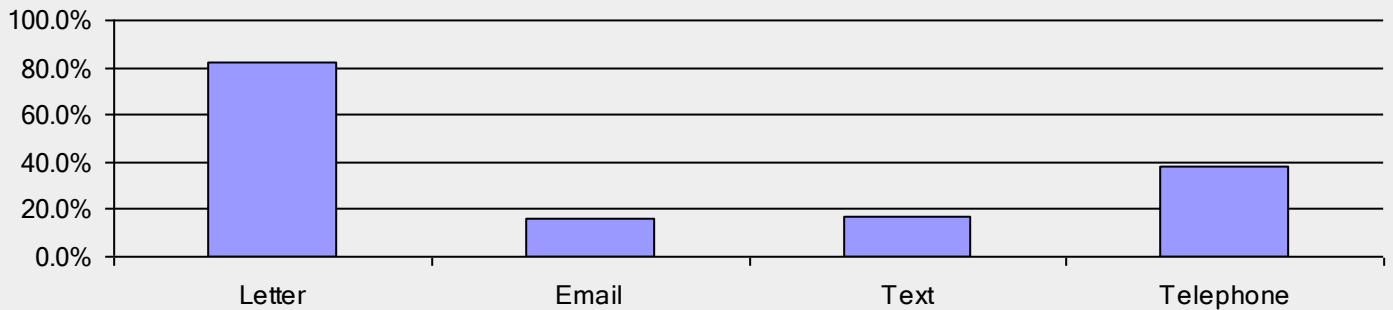
■ Percentage



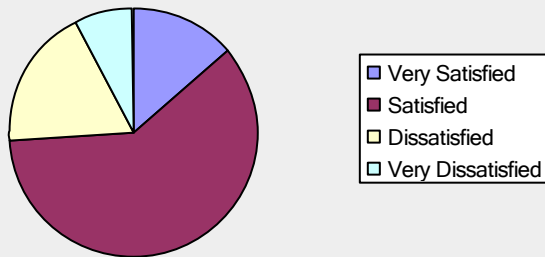
Customer Satisfaction Survey 2013

We had a very positive response to our 2013 Customer Satisfaction Survey. We had an increased number of responses compared to previous Surveys sent out. Below are some Graphs that summarise your responses;

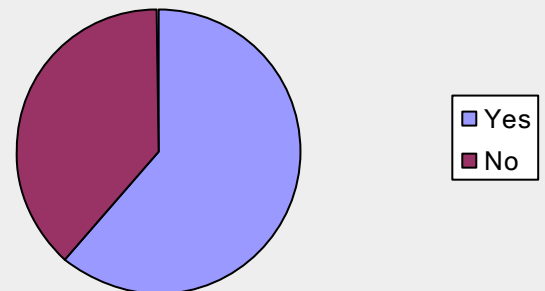
How would you prefer to be contacted?



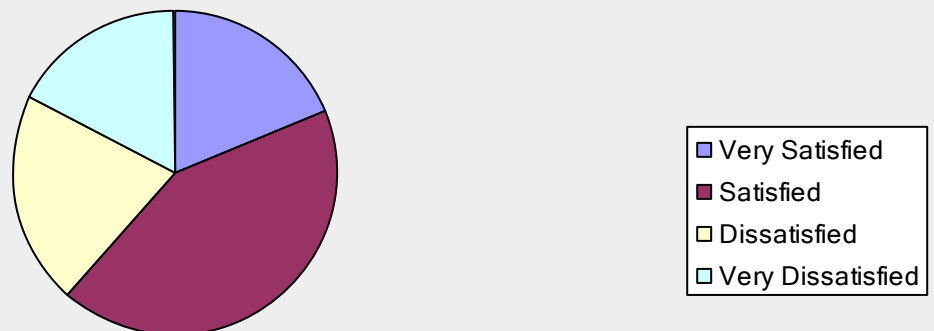
Overall, how well do we deal with your calls?



Do you know how to contact your Managing agent?



Overall, how satisfied are you with the Housing Options Services?



A full report of the findings from the Customer Satisfaction Survey will be available on our website (www.towerhamlets.gov.uk) over the next coming weeks.

**Left in
the dark?**



**Out in
the cold?**

**Caught
high and dry?**



East End Energy Fit is here to help you

If you are finding it difficult to pay your gas, electricity and water bills, the Bromley by Bow Centre can help. We can reduce your bills, set up payment plans and even apply to clear your debt.

We also help people get support to purchase essential household items (e.g. washing machine, cooker, beds).

We work with you and your family, whether you are working or unemployed, or whoever your energy provider is.

We are open:

Monday-Friday 9.30am-5pm

For more information:

Contact us on 020 8709 9745
or email eastendenergyfit@bbbc.org.uk

Address:

Bromley by Bow Centre
St Leonard's Street
London E3 3BT

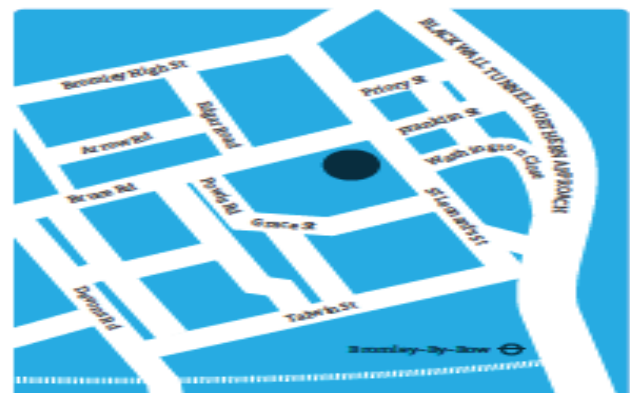
Website: www.bbbc.org.uk

This project is funded by
British Gas and EDF.



bromley by bow centre

The Bromley by Bow Centre
is a Registered Charity -
number 104 1653





Tower Hamlets
Sure Start Children's Centres

Collingwood Children's Centre Under 5's Activity Timetable for September – December 2013



Collingwood Children's Centre aims to help give your child the best start in life. If you are expecting a baby or are a parent or carer with a child under five, we can provide family support, early education, child and family health services, childcare advice, employment, volunteering and training support.

Pathway to Employment and Volunteering

Come and see our friendly staff for help and assistance for:

- One-to-one appointments • Volunteering opportunities
- Access/support into training and employment • CV writing
- Job searches • Interviewing techniques • Career advice
- Nursery Education Grant for 2 year olds.

Educational Psychology & Adult Psychology Support

We work closely with the Team in supporting families who find it difficult to set boundaries in managing child behaviours, potty training, parenting strategies and support parents to understand of child disability diagnose.

Parents get one to one counselling service from the Adult Psychologist

**You are welcome to breastfeed anywhere in the children's centre.
If you prefer privacy, please ask a member of staff.**

Family Information Service (FIS),

Monday to Friday (8.00am to 6.00pm)

Tel. 020 7364 6495 or e-mail fis@towerhamlets.gov.uk

Contact FIS for free advice and information on local services for children, young people and families, e.g. childcare, childminders, tax credits, and childcare vouchers.

Healthy Families

We work closely with other services to provide advice on breastfeeding, counselling, emotional support, speech and language and child development. If you have any question or queries about your child's speech, eating or sleeping habits, general behaviour or social skills please speak to your health visitor who will refer you to the right service at your local children's centre.

Family Support

Our family support team provide an: • Outreach and signposting to community resources • Developing positive Parenting skills • Building self-esteem and empowering parents. We work closely with Social Care, local schools, health and educational professionals, day-care, libraries and other local organisations.

For further information, please call Collingwood on 020 7364 0539.

Useful Telephone Numbers:

Tower Hamlets Asian Women's Aid:	020 7517 1420
Book a midwife:	020 7791 8235
Breastfeeding Network Support:	0300 100 0210
Early Years Dieticians:	020 8223 8738
Find a Doctor/ Dentist:	020 7364 5016
Mind in Tower Hamlets/ Newham:	020 7510 1081
Tax Credit Helpline:	0845 300 3900
Tower Hamlets Domestic Violence Team:	0800 2795 434

Current Sure Start termly leaflets can be found on Tower Hamlets website: www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/childrenscentres

Feedback Welcome

We value your feedback and suggestions to help us learn, adapt and improve our services to meet your needs. Please let us know what we did well and what we could change.

Please speak to a staff member or drop you suggestion in our Suggestion box

Our children's centre is committed to delivering policies and practices which promote inclusion for all our children, families, staff and visitors. We believe that all children and their families have a right to a high quality provision in the area where they live. In celebrating diversity and difference in our community, we aim to welcome all children and their families.

Challenges & Growth in the Private Rented Sector Conference and Award Ceremony Friday 28 March 2014



Conference and Award Ceremony 2014

The London Landlord Accreditation Scheme (LLAS) together with the UK Landlord Accreditation Partnership will be hosting Challenges and Growth in the Private Rented Housing Sector Conference and Award Ceremony

On: Friday 28th March 2014

Time: 6pm

At: The Thistle Hotel Marble Arch, Bryanston Street, London W1H 7EH,

This prestigious event will be held to celebrate the success of the accreditation scheme which supports and trains landlords and agents to high standards of professionalism and to acknowledge and reward the excellence of its members who comply with those high standards. The LLAS & UKLAP has been running for over 9 years and has over 12000 accredited landlords and Over 1000 accredited letting and managing agents. This event is therefore being marketed to accredited landlords and agents in London and the South East and will be reported to a distribution list of over 26,000 members via the UKLAP communication channels, and to the wider media including London and national trade press.

The event will bring together a blend of speakers and presentations that will deliver the following points and learning outcomes: Meeting the challenges and growing within the private rented sector, the Green Deal, the changes that will affect you in 2016 and 2018, Future regulation in the Private Rented Sector (PRS) and the Mayor's London Rental Standard.

To sponsor, book your tickets or nominate yourself for an award please visit www.llas-conference.org.uk

You can also book your tickets/sponsor by completing the form below and return together with your sponsorship and/or ticket fees

This Must attend event will also comprise of:

- ✦ Champagne reception and chance to meet with fellow professional landlords and agents
- ✦ Opportunity to network with sponsors of the event,
- ✦ Three course dinner,
- ✦ VIP speeches by leading experts,

- ✦ Landlords & agents earn 10 CPD points by attending,
- ✦ Celebrate and share good practice,
- ✦ Relax and enjoy the company of other like-minded professional property investors from all over the UK in the splendour of the fabulous surroundings of Edinburgh Suite,
- ✦ Pre and after dinner entertainment

AWARDS AVAILABLE FOR SPONSORSHIP

- ✦ Best landlord Services ((Local Authorities and Not for Profit organisations)
- ✦ LA- highest number of accredited landlords from Jan. 2013 to Jan 2014
- ✦ Best Service Provider (not local authorities)
- ✦ Best small landlord (1 to 20 properties)
- ✦ Best Portfolio Landlord with (20 plus properties)
- ✦ Best Letting Agent of the year
- ✦ Best landlord of the Year for Student housing
- ✦ Green Landlord of the Year
- ✦ Green Agent of the Year
- ✦ Overall Best Landlord of the Year
- ✦ Empowering Tenants Award
- ✦ Making a Difference Award

Event and Sponsorship Booking Form

I would like to reserve (say how many) -----tickets

I would like to reserve a table for ----- people

I would like to sponsor the following *(Please tick all that apply)*

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> In Association with
UKLAP Platinum Package: GBP £5000.00 SOLD | <input type="checkbox"/> Award Sponsorship Package: GBP £1000.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gold Package: GBP £4000.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> Keynote Speaker Sponsor: GBP £950.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Silver Package: GBP £3000.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment: GBP £850.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Champagne Drinks Reception: GBP £1500.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> Table Sponsor: GBP £850.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Event Brochure: GBP £1500.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> Table Gifts: GBP £850.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Award Ceremony Dinner: GBP £2250.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> Conference and Award Ceremony post event
Highlights Newsletter: GBP £950.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Award Dinner Wine: GBP £1950.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> USB/Memory Sticks: GBP £650 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Delegate Pens: GBP £1150.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> £80 for a regular ticket for the event |
| <input type="checkbox"/> General Event Sponsor: GBP £200.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> £55.00 for accredited landlords and agents |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Event Promotional weekly updates to landlords
and agents: GBP £400.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> £45 for local authority staff members |

CONTACT DETAILS

.....
Contact Name: _____

Position: _____

Company: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Fax: _____

Email: _____

Authorised Signature: _____

Print Name _____

All cheques to be made payable to the London Borough of Camden

Send to-----

By Email: llas@camden.gov.uk By Fax: 020 7974 6707

By Post: Jessica Alomankeh (LLAS/UKLAP Projects Coordinator)

LLAS, London Borough of Camden, Private

Sector Housing Team, 2nd Floor

38-50 Bidborough Street, London WC1H 9DB

Please refer to Terms & Conditions www.llas-conference.org.uk



NOTICE BOARD



We would love our
Partner Organisations to
get involved in
future editions of this
newsletter, so if you have
any ideas or
suggestions for
content
please contact us.

All previous editions of the
Network Newsletter can be
found on our website
click on the link below to
view.

[http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/
ignl/housing.aspx](http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ignl/housing.aspx)

CONTACT ME

If you have any stories or
information you wish to have
published in the
Network Newsletter
please contact me

Jamie Jackson

**Business Support Team
Housing Options Service**

Albert Jacob House

62 Roman Road

London E2 0PG

Tel: 0207 3647262

Jamie.jackson@towerhamlets.gov.uk

The best way to contact the
Housing Options Service
is via our generic email box at
homeless@towerhamlets.gov.uk