

Reporting Back 2004-2005

Tower Hamlets Annual Report to tenants



Foreword by Cllr David Edgar

Welcome to the Housing Annual Report for 2004-2005, our report back to you on your housing service for last year.

As you can see, a priority has been to deliver real improvement to the estates. We spent over £5 million on projects to make your estates more attractive, safer places to live, from upgrading the street lighting to making sure children have somewhere safe to play.



Cllr. David Edgar, Lead Councillor for Housing

As the Lead Councillor for Housing, I have been keen to ensure that the housing service meets the needs of tenants. We have introduced new ways of working to ensure that your housing service responds to your needs and is efficient. You can see the results in the performance section. Many of you have been involved in setting priorities for work on your estates through the estate improvement days and I would like to thank everybody who contributed.

Residents continue to be involved in deciding the level of investment they want in their homes through Housing Choice. The council spent £32 million on major repairs last year but that is nowhere near the amount that is needed to bring homes up to a decent standard. To date, tenants on 13 estates have voted for transfer to housing associations and are looking forward to £285 million improvements in the next five to six years. I believe that this is a really exciting opportunity for residents to decide on the improvements to homes and estates that they want and to see changes, such as better community facilities, that will benefit the whole borough.

A voice for tenants

The Boroughwide Compact Group (BCG) is the council's forum for residents' views on housing. It has a new chair and vice chair following the previous Chair, Bernie Cameron, taking up his new role as tenant representative on the board of East End Homes.



George Hutchison

George Hutchison, who lives on Brownfield Estate, has been elected chair and Chicksand resident Nick Gopaul is vice chair. Nick was born and raised in Mile End, and went to school there and George is a long-term Poplar resident. His uncle, Fred Baldock was a mayor of Poplar.

MAKING YOUR ESTATES A BETTER PLACE TO LIVE

The council ear-marked over £5 million in 2004-05 for projects designed to improve our estates. From planting and pruning to spruce up the look of estates to cleaner, tidier bin chambers, the money was spent to make estates more attractive places to live.

Different estates have different priorities – and who better to tell us what those priorities should be than the residents who live there? The council held a series of estate improvement days to hear directly from tenants what they wanted to see.

The projects brought together colleagues from different sections of the council, as well as councillors, police and the fire brigade.

Improvements include:

- ◆ horticultural works, such as replanting of rose beds, pruning of shrubs and hedges
- ◆ tree pruning and cutting down dangerous trees
- ◆ a borough-wide CCTV drain condition survey to over 140 estates, with drains cleaned where needed

- ◆ a specialist graffiti-removal team removed over 7000 square metres of graffiti in the six months to the end of March 2005.

In addition, the council carried out an extra £1.5 million of communal repairs to homes across the borough in 2004/05, including redecorating the outside of four blocks.

Eight estates in Stepney, Wapping, South Poplar and Globe Town benefited from the installation of CCTV cameras and 13 estates had their street lighting upgraded to deter crime, tackle anti-social behaviour and help make residents feel safer.

Find out more about some of the projects that are really making a difference to our estates and the people who live there on page 3.

The BCG draws its members from four area panels, each representing one area of the borough. Its job is to represent residents and make sure the council is aware of their views.

"If something comes up at the area residents panel that they can't solve, it comes to the BCG," says George. "We can ask the director or managers to attend a meeting and if we ask them to do something they can't sidestep because it goes into the minutes."

Residents should always raise any estate problems with their local housing office first. They can however let the BCG know if any general issues need raising with the council on ☎ 020 7364 0721.



Nick Gopaul

How we did in 2004-2005

On 1 April 2004 Tower Hamlets was responsible for 23,490 rented homes. By 31 March 2005 the number was 22,296 - mainly because 866 tenants bought their home under the Right to Buy.

Empty homes

With high demand for our homes, it is important that we let properties as quickly as possible. Last year we re-let our empty homes within an average of 5.3 weeks. We have introduced measures to improve this figure, and our average re-let time is now just under four weeks.

It is also vital that we stop illegal occupation of our properties, and we have introduced a programme of tenancy audits, which enable us to check that the right people are living in our homes. The number of homes where we took action against unlawful occupation last year was 36. If you suspect a council home is not occupied by the legal tenant contact your Local Housing Office so that we can investigate.

What your housing management service costs

In 2004/05 the average cost of the housing management service per property per week was £ 30.03. This covers caretaking, concierge and communal heating as well as Local Housing Offices, ordering and inspecting repairs, lettings, rents and tenant consultation. The money to pay for this service, and for repairs comes principally from rents and government subsidy.

2004/05 Income	(£ 000s)
Rents - dwellings	85,520
Rents - shops & garages	5,340
Service charges	10,006
Other receipts	2,589
Subsidy	47,923
Use of balances	2,122
Other	35,327
Total Income	188,827
2004/5 Expenditure	(£ 000s)
Repairs & maintenance	36,418
Housing services	30,998
Housing Benefit	6,299
Interest	88,862
Other payments	26,250
Total Expenditure	188,827

Housing Benefit

On average it took us 52 days to deal with a new claim for housing benefit in 2004/05. This is not as quickly as in previous years because we changed our computer system during the year. We have worked hard to get back on track and it is now taking us 36 days to deal with a new claim

Repairs

We aim to complete all repairs to a good standard within a set number of days, according to their type and urgency. Last year:

- ◆ we carried out over 108,000 repairs
- ◆ more than 9 out of 10 urgent repairs were completed in government targets
- ◆ the average time taken to complete non-urgent repairs was 4.6 days.
- ◆ 92% of all completed repairs were carried out using the appointment system and 87% of appointments made were kept
- ◆ we inspected more than 1 in 10 repairs after they had been completed to make sure they were up to standard.

Our most recent survey found 85% of people using our repairs service were satisfied with the service.

24 hour Repairs Help Centre

☎ 0800 376 1637

☎ 0800 376 1638

Bengali/Sylheti line

Minicom: ☎ 0800 376 1636

for those with impaired hearing

You will find it quicker to avoid ringing during the busiest hours of 9am to midday.

Help with decorating

Last year 629 residents, either over 70 years old or disabled and over 60, have had up to two rooms decorated. 98% of those surveyed were happy with the scheme and the quality of the decorating.

To find out more about the scheme contact ☎ 020 7364 7046.

Dealing with arrears

Following a review of the rents service a new team has been set up specifically to recover arrears from former council tenants who ended their tenancies owing rent. The review showed that specialist officers would be able to increase recovery rates.

The Former Tenants Arrears (FTA) team's responsibilities include recovery work, tracing forwarding addresses, making and monitoring agreements to clear arrears by instalments and overseeing legal action to recover rent arrears. The team uses new technology and resources, such as the Court Services Money Judgement Online service, for online legal action to recover debts.

Rent collection is extremely important. Unpaid rent deprives all council tenants of services. Most tenants made - and kept - agreements to pay their arrears. Nevertheless we were forced to evict 40 tenants who didn't keep to agreements made. We will continue to take tough enforcement action against those who won't pay their rent.

If you are having problems paying your rent, we can help: talk to our benefits section or our rents team as we can arrange flexible payments.

Last year:

- ◆ The average weekly Council rent in Tower Hamlets was £66.72 (This excludes charges for horticulture, estate and block cleaning.
- ◆ The total amount of rent due was over £87 million and we collected £83.5 million.

HOUSING CHOICE

Residents of 9,700 council homes across Tower Hamlets are looking forward to £285 million worth of improvements following their vote to transfer to new not-for-profit landlords.

The ballots on transfer were held as part of the council's Housing Choice programme, which is giving tenants the opportunity to move to a new landlord who can bring in the money needed to bring their estates up to a decent standard. The council is doing this

Somewhere to play

The needs of children and young people were not forgotten in the estate improvement programme:

- ◆ 19 kickabouts were upgraded or made safe
- ◆ 62 playgrounds were upgraded or made safe
- ◆ the council installed one new playground for under-fives in Turin St, Bethnal Green.

TACKLING ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

The fight against anti-social behaviour, which can make life a misery for residents, is a key priority for the council. The Anti-Social Behaviour Control Unit works in partnership with the police, the Safer Neighbourhood Teams, local residents and Local Area Partnerships, the London Fire Brigade and other local agencies to take action against perpetrators.

In the year to April 2005, the council:

- ◆ secured 25 anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs)
- ◆ made 62 Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs), voluntary agreements whereby a person agrees to stop anti-social acts
- ◆ increased CCTV coverage, with 15 additional cameras, and a further seven on public transport
- ◆ introduced a Drinking Control Zone around Whitechapel Underground Station and the London Hospital.

If you are having problems with anti-social behaviour in your area you can report it on the Anti-Social Behaviour Reporting Line ☎0800 917 5918.

Spring cleaning our estates

Money from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund paid for an intensive clean-up of many estates. Caretakers were given

extra resources including special 'valeting teams' and extra equipment such as jet washers to really get to grips with grime.

Sue Thompson, the council's estate services co-ordinator, said:

"The spring clean is an opportunity to make a visible difference to the lives of Tower Hamlets' residents."



Before, above, and after, below.



Tidier, cleaner bins

The condition of the bin chambers on our estates was an issue identified by many residents. As a result the council carried out extensive work to improve the bin chambers, including:

- ◆ buying new bins
- ◆ improvements to 11 bin chambers in the Bethnal Green and Bow areas
- ◆ minor repairs to a further 100 bin chambers
- ◆ installation of 9 remote storage areas in Bethnal Green to stop the illegal dumping of rubbish.

Cleaning of the bin areas is now an easier task for our caretakers thanks to the installation of 235 water points where access to water was limited. We also installed 72 new electrical points where needed so caretakers can use electrical equipment such as jet washers. On the recommendation of the Fire Brigade, we also installed 46 sprinkler systems in bin chutes across the borough.

because it does not have the money to make the improvements itself.

The decision is taken on an estate-by-estate basis – or sometimes on a group of smaller estates. This means that local people can decide what they want for their estate. They can choose what housing association they would like to consider and what are the priorities that the new landlord should deal with if the transfer goes ahead.

Work on the estates is decided in consultation with local residents, but it can include new kitchens and bathrooms as well as better

community facilities and measures to improve security.

So far there have been 15 ballots, 13 in favour of transfer. Four estates, or



Galleon House recently voted to change landlords

groups of estates, have now transferred and are already beginning to see a difference to where they live.

Have your say

Transfer can only go ahead if tenants vote in favour. Nothing can change unless residents agree. If you would like to get involved, or want to find out more about Housing Choice contact the council's Consultation and Participation Team at: Block D, 3 Millharbour, London E14 9XP. Tel: ☎020 7364 0721. Or contact your independent residents' advisor, appointed by tenants to give impartial advice on Housing Choice, on Freephone ☎0800 317066.

Improving housing

We provided 2,195 households with a home in 2004/05: 1,282 were rehoused by the council, 913 by housing associations.

A third of the families came from the Council's own waiting list, a third were tenants transferring to a new home; and the remainder (883) were homeless families.

Homeseekers

On 1st April 2005 we had 21,183 households seeking a new home:

- ◆ almost six in ten were people on the waiting list
- ◆ just over a quarter (28%) were tenants registered for a transfer
- ◆ just over one in ten (13%) were homeless families.

A mutual exchange can improve your chances of moving. Last year we helped 84 families swap homes. Find out more on ☎020 7364 2834

Reducing overcrowding

The council is committed to reducing overcrowding and we have a number of ways to tackling this including giving priority to families on our housing list lacking one or more bedrooms and knocking through smaller properties to increase the number of larger homes.

We also offer cash incentives for people who have more rooms than they need and are happy to move to a smaller home. Tenants are

awarded £500 for each room given up and an extra £1000 if the property has four-bedrooms or more. Last year 96 people moved into smaller properties, freeing a home for a larger family.

Altogether we helped 312 families out of overcrowding last year. That means that 1,800 adults and children are no longer living in overcrowded conditions.

Homelessness

Following a review of homelessness in the borough the council launched a homelessness strategy, with an action plan that sets out the ways we will tackle homelessness, which includes reducing overcrowding and targeting resources towards people at risk.

Last year the Service:

- ◆ received over 4,000 applications from households for assistance
- ◆ accepted a duty to house 1,151 households.

Building for the Future

The council's Local Labour in Construction (LLiC) apprentice scheme provides training and employment guidance in the construction industry for local people. LLiC offers a range of services from its Poplar base with facilities for hands-on practical training.

Last year:

- ◆ 360 school students attended the two-day construction challenge project to help them consider a

The main reasons for homelessness were the breakdown of arrangements with partner, friends and relatives (55%) and domestic violence (13%).

On 1st April 2005:

- ◆ there were 2,948 households in temporary accommodation – three quarters of them in Tower Hamlets
- ◆ the proportion of homeless families in B&B hotels was 1.5%
- ◆ the average stay in B&B hotels was 11.23 weeks.

Homeless Services are at Block B, 3 Millharbour, London E14 9XP.

For advice contact: assessment duty team on ☎020 7364 7474

Tackling poor housing

Last year, we spent over £32 million repairing and improving homes as part of our capital programme. This included over £23 million on new equipment, replacing lifts and carrying out major repairs.

career in construction.

- ◆ 480 students attended the pathway to skilled employment scheme.
- ◆ some 27 students wanting an apprenticeship in painting and decorating, carpentry, bricklaying and plastering achieved their Foundation Construction Award from Laings training. A further 40 achieved NVQ Level 1, 32 achieved NVQ Level 2 and 17 NVQ Level 3.

To find out more contact the LLiC team on ☎020 7364 1126

PRIVATE SECTOR

Home Ownership Service

Approximately 13,100 council tenants have now exercised their Right to Buy and become homeowners. Last year we sold 866 homes under the Right to Buy.

Our service for homeowners is not funded through rent but through service charges that leaseholders pay. Last year we collected over £7.5million in service charges.

The Council now has an agreement with the Citizens Advice Bureau to provide advice and support for leaseholders. Telephone CAB on ☎0870 1264014 from 1-3pm, Mondays-Thursdays. Or visit their offices in Whitechapel (32 Grotorex St, E1) and Bow (86 Bow Rd, E3) from 10am-3pm, Monday-Wednesday.

Cash Incentive Scheme

Last year we spent £1,042,000 in grants of up to £29,000 helping 62 Council and housing association tenants buy a home privately. This freed up homes to let for people on our housing lists.

For more information, contact the marketing and development team ☎020 7364 2927

Housing Advice

For private sector tenancy advice contact:

Housing Advice, 255 Cambridge Heath Road, E2. ☎020 7364 3558
Housing Advice, Block B, 3 Millharbour, E14. ☎020 7364 7151

Private housing improvements

Grants and loans are available to enable homes to be repaired, improved or

adapted. We have also introduced a grant to help vulnerable people move to a more suitable home. Grants are also available to owners of empty properties to encourage them to bring the properties back into use.

Contact: Private Housing Improvement Team, Block C, 3 Millharbour, London E14 9XP.

☎020 7364 0821.

আপনি এই চিঠির বিষয়বস্তু বুঝতে পারা খুবই গুরুত্বপূর্ণ। যদি আপনার আরা ব্যাখ্যার প্রয়োজন হয়, এবং/অথবা অনুবাদ সুবিধার প্রয়োজন হয়, তাহলে অনুগ্রহ করে অপর পৃষ্ঠায় উল্লেখিত অফিসে যতো তাড়াতাড়ি সম্ভব যোগাযোগ করুন।

WAA MUHIIM IN AAD FAHAMTO WAXYAABAHA WARQADAN KU QORAN. HADDII AAD SHARAXAAD DHEERAAD AH IYO/AMA HAWL AFKALIN AH U BAAHAN TAHAY. FADLAN SIDA UGU DEGDEGSIMAHA LEH EE SUURTOGALKA AH U LA XIRIIR (XIDHIDH) XAFIISKA WARQADAN DHABARKEEDA KU QORAN.

這信的內容對你是非常重要的，如果你需要進一步解釋，或翻譯的要尤，請儘早與下頁提供的辦事處聯絡。

ĐIỀU QUAN TRỌNG LÀ QUÍ VỊ HIỂU NỘI DUNG CỦA LÁ THƯ NÀY. NẾU QUÍ VỊ CẦN ĐƯỢC GIẢI THÍCH THÊM, VÀ/HOẶC MỘT PHƯƠNG TIỆN THÔNG DỊCH, XIN LIÊN LẠC NGAY VỚI VĂN PHÒNG GHI Ở PHÍA SAU.