



# TOWER HAMLETS HOUSING FORUM

News from the Tower Hamlets Housing Forum anti-social behaviour sub-group | June 2014

Tower Hamlets Housing Forum (THHF) is a partnership comprising the Council and social landlords with homes in Tower Hamlets.

THHF Members work together to deliver the Council's community plan, tackle the challenges of social housing provision in Tower Hamlets, help regenerate communities and improve the lives of local residents.



THHF has a range of expert sub-groups working in specialist operational areas. One of these focuses on improving how we jointly manage and respond to anti-social behaviour in and around our estates.

This bulletin highlights some of the work of the sub group members during 2013-14. It has a particular focus on joint working and sharing new ideas and successful approaches to tackling ASB.

This year the sub-group is working together on a range of shared priority issues. These include:

- improving partnership working with the police
- linking more closely with the Council's 'No Place for Hate' initiative
- a conference in October to share good practise and current issues

If you want to know more about these or the issues we've covered in the bulletin, please do get in touch with me or the people referenced alongside the articles.

All the best

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## A Safer Poplar

By Poplar HARCA

### Improving resident satisfaction

In 5 years, Poplar HARCA has improved resident satisfaction with its ASB services from 58% to 95%. The number of residents feeling safe has increased from 68% to 98%.

Residents have helped design a service they can have confidence in and now report ASB more often, share more intelligence, and attend court more frequently.



Poplar HARCA's approach has been recognised by a number of national awards and is currently the focus for a study by a European Union funded best practice research project. Organisations from all over the country and abroad, visit to find out more, and most recently its work supporting those exposed to domestic abuse was showcased on the Guardian website: <http://www.theguardian.com/housing-network/2014/apr/01/domestic-violence-support-worker-day-in-life>

### Family Intervention

**"The best thing that happened was the police and HARCA bashing my door in - because I don't know where I would have been now."**

This is a quote from a young mum found in the middle of a cannabis factory with her six-year old daughter when Poplar HARCA's Team joined the police on a drugs raid. Rather than evict the young mum, Poplar HARCA's Team referred her to its Family Intervention Project. Mum signed a contract allowing the Team to enter her home whenever they wanted, and in return she would get support with parenting and skills and wouldn't lose her home. And, as they say, the rest is history.

Mum's progress was inspiring: she attended parenting classes, got back on good terms with her daughter's school and her neighbours, started to speak to others in similar situations as an advocate for FIP, started a catering social enterprise and is now a wonderful mum.

## Organised Gangs

Organised gangs are linked with territory, drugs and crime. They are criminals who use violence and intimidation, often making it difficult for landlord's to find witnesses who will testify against them for fear of reprisals. Faced with growing organised gang crime, Poplar HARCA's Team struggled to get rigorous evidence that could be tested in court - even though they knew what was going on and where. This is where strong partnership working came into its own. Overt mobile CCTV targeted joint patrols with the police in areas where young men were congregating, while incidents of drug dealing were captured on covert CCTV. Two young men, less than a day after being identified using CCTV and patrol evidence, were in court. Without notice, the court granted injunctions excluding the men from the estate.

For one gang member, the injunction did not stop his behaviour. His gang sprayed 'Grass' and 'Snitch' across the home of a witness brave enough to give evidence. Poplar HARCA's Team, with the police, went back to court the same day for breach of the injunction. After a two-day trial, the young man ended up pleading guilty and the judge sentenced him to a six-month suspended sentence and two-year injunction.

Poplar HARCA isn't only about enforcement. We commissioned a specialist mediator to engage with the young man. He ended up enrolled in college and is now doing well – away from his usual haunts and usual pals.

## Hate Crime

An elderly tenant was pulling veils off women shopping locally. He would shout racial abuse and stroll off as if he had not a care in the world. The victims could not identify him, and Poplar HARCA's Team was not able to use CCTV images to find out who he was.

After canvassing for witnesses, one resident stepped forward. She knew him; had been a victim herself, and had had enough. She gave his name and address, and said she'd come to court to give evidence. Poplar HARCA was in court the next day and obtained an interim injunction. In some of the most powerful evidence we've heard, the witness explained to the court the significance of her niqab to her faith and the impact of having it forcibly removed in public.

With an injunction granted the perpetrator accepted a Suspended Possession Order. He has never repeated this behaviour. And the brave witness? She said that her faith had given her strength and Poplar HARCA had given her support. She has gone on to advocate to others about standing-up and giving evidence.



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## Mediation works!

By Peabody



**Mediation is a way of helping neighbours to discuss problems and reach a solution that is acceptable to everyone involved.**

Peabody offers a free mediation service to residents to help sort out disputes. Trained mediators work in pairs and help both sides find a solution to their problem - usually at the first meeting.

Mediators are impartial – they don't take sides – and the two parties decide for themselves how their differences can be resolved. Because both parties are in control of the process, mediation tends to be a very effective way to sort out disputes.

Since launching the service in June 2012, Peabody has received 55 referrals - 75% of which have gone through the process successfully. Because both parties are in control of the process, mediation tends to be a very effective way to sort out disputes.



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## Cracking down on anti-social behaviour

By Tower Hamlets Homes

Tower Hamlets Homes, working in partnership with PC Kennedy (pictured left), has secured a Closure Order against a resident suspected of drug dealing in one of its properties.

The TRA and residents from the Ocean Estate, complained to Tower Hamlets Homes about drug paraphernalia in the block and a number of strangers visiting the suspected drug dealer's home day and night.



Working with intelligence passed to them by Tower Hamlets Homes, the police executed a warrant to search the home of the man suspected to be dealing drugs from the property and found fifty wraps of Class A drugs.

A judge granted a Closure Order for three months after the police were able to satisfy the court that the premises were associated with the supply of Class A drugs as well as serious anti-social behaviour.

Michaela French, ASB Officer (pictured right) said, "The order means that the tenant is not allowed to return to his property for three months - giving residents precious respite from the anti-social behaviour and allowing us time to serve a NOSP and get full possession of the property before the Order ends."

David Lingard, Tower Hamlets Homes Anti-Social Behaviour Manager, added, "This is a classic example of what partnership working with the police and other agencies is all about. It also sends a strong message that this type of behaviour will not be tolerated and we will take tough action to those that commit acts of anti-social and use our properties for criminal activity."



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## Partnership working key to success

By Tower Hamlets Homes



Local residents, fed up with an individual intent on causing misery on the Cleveland Estate, Bethnal Green, worked closely with Tower Hamlets Homes ASB Team to gather evidence and report incidents.

In March 2013, residents gathered enough evidence to enable Tower Hamlets Homes and its partners to secure a two-year anti-social behaviour injunction against the individual.

This is where the story begins not ends. David Lingard, Tower Hamlets Homes ASB Manager, explains, "When responsible landlords such as Tower Hamlets Homes secure injunctions it is crucial we work with partners and residents to monitor them.

"It is not enough that we get an injunction - we need to ensure it is effective."

Over the course of a year, residents and Tower Hamlets Homes Officers continued to monitor the injunction. Despite breaching the court order several times, the perpetrator eventually paid the price.

"He was sentenced to six weeks custody, suspended for the remaining term of the injunction because we were able to produce strong evidence in court that the injunction had been breached," David added.

"It demonstrates that when Tower Hamlets Homes, residents and the police work together, we can improve communities and help residents feel safer."



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## **Resident receives injunction for abusing neighbours**

By Swan Housing

Swan has obtained an Anti-Social Behaviour Injunction (ASBI) in Bow County Court against a resident who verbally threatened and was abusive to residents.

The perpetrator has since breached the order and Swan is in the process of taking the resident back to court. As the injunction is effectively an order made by the courts, a breach may mean a committal to prison.

Swan supported the witnesses throughout the court process. They were offered practical help to claim expenses such as taxi fares and childcare costs, as well as emotional support. Swan also gave the witnesses the opportunity to talk through the case when it had ended and get further help or information if needed.

One of the witnesses who provided evidence against the perpetrator said, "It was difficult going to court as I had never had to do anything like that before, but thank you to the ASB Officer for her help and support throughout, it made the process more bearable".

Bernadette Brennan, ASB Officer for Swan said, "This case is a great example of how seriously we take our role in tackling and preventing anti-social behaviour."

Swan is also seeking an injunction against a drug dealer and prolific perpetrator of ASB using a multi-agency approach. We are working with the police and the local authority to gather evidence and support the victim and witnesses. The ASB Officer and Housing Officer recently attended the Stepney and Dunstan Ward panel meeting, where it was agreed Swan Officers would accompany the police on late night patrols around the estate. This will help us to identify and tackle any issues that residents may have particularly with young people congregating on stairwells.



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## **Bow nuisance neighbour receives final warning**

By Circle Housing Old Ford

Circle Housing Old Ford has given a tenant from Bow with a history of using abusive language towards their neighbours a final warning before criminal action is taken.

The courts evicted the resident from her home following 50 complaints by neighbours for drunken and nuisance behaviour spanning several years.

Since losing her home, she has continued to harass local housing officers and residents living at Redwood Close – her former address. Circle Housing Old Ford has now secured an 'Injunction and Power of Arrest' notice against the resident forbidding her from visiting her former address or causing further annoyance. If the resident breaches the terms of the injunction, she will face criminal charges.

Working closely with the police and other local partners, Circle Housing Old Ford last year successfully dealt with 60 incidents of anti-social behaviour, including two evictions.

Marvelle Dublin, Neighbourhood Manager for Circle Housing Old Ford said, "Anti-social behaviour can have a real impact on people's lives and causes great misery to those affected by it.

"This case demonstrates that Circle Housing Old Ford is committed to providing a safe community to residents and will not tolerate unacceptable behaviour."



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## Two cannabis factories uncovered in two weeks by One Housing Group



One Housing Group estate services staff received complaints about the possible cultivation of cannabis on one of the estates they own.

Residents complained about a pungent smell, which they believed could be the illegal class B drug cannabis. The local housing officer visited the property to investigate the complaints and witness the smell for them self. At the visit, the housing officer carried out an inspection of the building and noted two silver ventilation tubes visible from the rear window.

The housing officer promptly reported their observations to the local Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT). Within two days,

the SNT obtained a search warrant from the local Magistrates Court.

The findings of the search were astonishing and highlighted a sophisticated set up. A large cannabis factory was uncovered in one of the bedrooms. The factory was cultivating 80 adult plants valued at approximately £1000 and equipment worth approximately £5000.

The owner of the leasehold property was alerted and told that the police had searched the premises and secured evidence that the unit had been used for the cultivation of illegal drugs. The owner advised that they had sub-let the property and had no knowledge of the illegal activity. No police charges were brought against the owner.



Since it was searched and secured, the tenants of the leasehold property have

not returned to the premises. Police action against the individuals is still on going. One Housing Group's leasehold team took pro-active action in order to prevent the recurrence of this problem and advised the leaseholder to vet future tenants more stringently and to carry out regular inspections.

A week later, the same team also uncovered a second cannabis factory within close proximity to One Housing Group's office. The factory set-up indicated that there had been over 100 plants in cultivation at any one time. The police seized six plants upon execution of the warrant. One Housing Group provided details of the legal owners to the police and investigations are ongoing. Again, another cannabis factory operation closed down, helping to prevent residents and the local community from acts of ASB caused by nuisance visitors, smells, noise and drugs.



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## Case studies: From mediation to eviction

By Swan Housing

The majority of cases Swan receive about anti-social behaviour are low level nuisance involving noise, rubbish dumping and parking and generally are resolved by Swan Officers visiting or writing to perpetrators to bring the problem to their attention as well as remind them of their tenancy conditions. On occasions, we will recommend that neighbours talking to each other can resolve the issues, and we provide specialist mediation services to help with this process.

### Case A – Mediation

Mrs B contacted Swan to complain about her neighbour who was making loud noises when visitors were at the property and her neighbour's dog, which barked and whined when left alone. The Neighbourhood Officer investigated and spoke to the neighbour and it was agreed that mediation could be a way to resolve the situation. Both parties agreed and an independent Mediator was appointed to work with Mrs B and her neighbour.

### Customer Satisfaction almost 70%

In the last twelve months, customer satisfaction with Swan's ASB service has more than doubled – up from 30% to almost 70%. Swan has achieved this through identifying those most at risk of ASB and responding appropriately - this is at the heart of the Swan's ASB Policy.

Swan's ASB and Housing Officers have developed better ways to handle and share information and to use that information to ensure the right response is provided to individuals. The Officers also found better ways for different organisations to work together to deal with cases.

Both parties reached and signed a mediation agreement. Mrs B said “We had finally moved into our house and were so excited, however we soon learnt that we would be living a nightmare, we felt we weren’t getting anywhere with the constant phoning and completing diary sheets, we were ready to move. Our housing officer suggested mediation. We were sceptical about this, but gave this a go and we were surprised with the results. We did shuttle mediation, which involved no contact with the neighbour, which was better for us, we agreed on terms and the mediation team were very professional and were on hand to make sure these terms were upheld. We are now happy in our home and would encourage anyone in the same situation to give mediation a go.”

Very occasionally, we do have to deal with serious cases of anti-social behaviour. Where we can work with neighbours to prove the level of unreasonable behaviour, we will take legal action to repossess the property.

### **Case B - Eviction**

We successfully evicted a tenant for causing serious levels of noise nuisance and intimidating other residents. Neighbours in nearby properties had suffered sleepless nights and were frightened to go out of their home due to the tenant’s behaviour. The Neighbourhood Officer worked and supported four neighbours who eventually agreed to attend court to act as witnesses in this case.

Neighbour Mr C said, “We were going through hell, every night when we got home from work at 5pm, the loud music and shouting would start, sometimes this would go on until 5am in the morning. I have to drive sometimes for my job and the lack of sleep was really affecting me at work. When we eventually contacted Swan, we found them to be very helpful; the Officer working on this case kept in regular contact with us and explained everything at each step of the way. We knew it would be a long drawn out process but it has been worth it. Now he no longer lives here we finally have peace and are no longer frightened to return home each evening.”

## **CCTV on our Estates**

By Tower Hamlets Community Housing

We have a number of CCTV cameras across our Estates to help us reduce levels of crime and anti-social behaviour.



There has been a drop in offences - such as drug dealing and vandalism - in some of our blocks because of the cameras. The police use the cameras to identify those who commit offences and we use them to catch residents who dump bulk rubbish on our estates and recharge anyone we identify.