



# TOWER HAMLETS HOUSING FORUM



# Working together in Tower Hamlets

Tower Hamlets Housing Forum (THHF) is a partnership made up of Registered Providers who work in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets and the Council. The THHF Members work together to help the Council deliver its Community Plan, tackle the challenges of social housing provision in Tower Hamlets and offer additional services to help regenerate communities and improve the lives of local residents.

The Tower Hamlets Housing Forum Executive works at a strategic level to consider a range of subjects, which in the last year have included:-

- **The diversity of residents in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets**
- **Co-regulation and resident scrutiny of performance**
- **Local Community Ward Forums**
- **Community Champion Coordinators**
- **Homelessness**
- **The roll out of the welfare reform changes**
- **The work of the Tower Hamlets Fairness Commission**
- **The comparison of Registered Providers' performance and costs**
- **Disabled Facilities Grants**
- **Positive management of resident complaints**
- **Partnership working with the London Fire Brigade to maximise the safety of all residents**
- **Joint working to tackle social housing fraud**
- **How the THHF can support the Council to deliver its Health and Wellbeing Strategy**
- **Community safety and anti-social behaviour**

The Tower Hamlets Housing Forum Executive, currently chaired by Sandra Fawcett from Swan Housing Association, has a number of sub-groups, all of which are chaired by a Member of the Executive and have an action plan each year to focus on the improvement of key areas. The sub-groups and Chairs are:-

- **Development –Neal Hunt – Poplar HARCA**
- **Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) – Kevin Jones – Tower Hamlets Homes**
- **Common Housing Register Forum – Sandra Fawcett – Swan Housing Association**
- **Public Realm – Joe Joseph – Peabody Housing Association**
- **Benchmarking – Paul Bloss – Eastend Homes**
- **Housing Management – Sheron Carter – Gateway Housing Association**
- **Community Involvement Network (CIN) – Catherine Kyne – One Housing Group**
- **Asset Management –Tony Hughes – Southern Housing Group**

In addition to these sub-groups the Executive supports the Council's Welfare Reform Task Group to focus on ensuring that all Registered Providers are prepared for the roll out of the welfare reform changes, including getting ready for the introduction of Universal Credit and are able to offer joined up support to those residents in the borough who are affected.

THHF is also represented on the Council's Community Plan Delivery Groups as follows:-

- **A Great Place to Live – Tony Hughes – Southern Housing Group**
- **Community Safety Partnership – Kevin Jones – Tower Hamlets Homes**
- **Children & Families Partnership Board – Fiona Humphrey – Providence Row Housing Association**
- **Economic Task Force – Caroline Wagstaff – Genesis Housing Association**
- **Health and Wellbeing Board – Steve Stride – Poplar HARCA**

# What we achieved in 2013

## Development

We worked throughout the year in partnership with the Greater London Authority (GLA) and the Council to deliver the second year of the 2012-15 Affordable Housing Programme. Our work also included planning appeals and delivery of the apprenticeship programme in the borough for all large development and regeneration schemes.

We considered how the construction industry can employ local residents on apprenticeships and worked with the London Fire Brigade on its recommendations on learning from fires in high density housing. In addition 'The Green Grid' shared best practice around accessible open spaces, waterways and connections in between and we now have our own 'Green Grid Champion' who attends the liaison group.

'Project 120' which is an on-going programme to enable the provision of bespoke accessible and adapted homes for families with specific needs in this area, has been launched.

## Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)

Partnership working with the Police confirmed that all Registered Provider partners would make referrals to the Hate Incident Panel mandatory. In addition the Police now have access to estate storage cupboards as part of their drugs enforcement programme and a new procedure for Registered Providers to process disclosure requests for data sharing in relation to court cases. We were also consulted and gave feedback on the new Metropolitan Policing Plan and took part in the Police's ASB Summer Initiative – a prevention programme aiming to tackle ASB hot-spots and prevent ASB through diversionary activities.

THHF Partners hosted a joint working best practice programme which included Capital Conflict Management (a mediation organisation working on serious offences with the Police), No Place for Hate (an agreement not to tolerate hate crime) which all partners agreed to sign up to and Streetwise (a new approach to monitoring and managing ASB cases). We agreed to produce a joint newsletter for residents across the borough publicising the joint work to tackle ASB and will continue to work on this throughout 2014.



## Common Housing Register Forum

All partner Registered Providers are signed up to the Common Housing Register, through which all of their homes in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets are let. The Forum worked with the Council to revise the Tower Hamlets Lettings Policy and following agreement in 2013 implemented the revisions.

We have worked in partnership with the East London Housing Partnership, responding to their consultations and attending their regular lettings and homeless meetings. We continue to work to meet the targets of Housing Moves – Pan London Mobility Scheme, of which the Council is a member, working together to facilitate moves for residents across London.

A successful annual lettings open day took place on 23rd February 2013 and we piloted two area based mutual exchange events. A further lettings open day and more mutual exchange events are planned for 2014.

We worked in partnership with the Council to agree an appropriate contribution from Registered Provider partners to the upkeep costs of the Common Housing Register and continue to work with the Council to ensure that the Register provides value for money for residents.

The Forum considers all “decant” requests for major regeneration schemes in the borough and monitors progress against the scheme targets. New schemes agreed in the year included St John’s House (Gateway Housing Association), Chrisp Street Market Regeneration Scheme (Poplar HARCA) and St Paul’s Way Primary School (Poplar HARCA).

We revised the Overcrowding Reduction Strategy and worked throughout the year to implement items from the Strategy action plan.

New Under-Occupation proposals were developed setting targets for Registered Providers collectively to achieve 150 moves per year. The project included a new incentive scheme which has been launched to residents.

## Public Realm

We worked throughout the year to share best practice and ensure a borough wide joint approach for health and safety including preparations for Fireworks Night. We also worked in partnership with the Council to make preparations for winter, ensuring that all Registered Providers had sufficient supplies of grit and were able to help inform the Council’s plan for gritting estates across the borough. We are considering the feasibility of joint provision for services such as dog wardens and pest control and whether this would give better value for money for residents.

The first Tower Hamlets Estate Services Conference took place on 25th April and proved to be a big success. More than 100 caretakers attended from the members of THHF along with key personnel from the Police and Fire Brigade. It was an opportunity to share new ideas, good practice and improve services across the borough.

We worked with the London Reuse Network, who provide stores where residents can obtain good quality pre-used furniture and provide training for unemployed residents to enable them to run these stores themselves. Swan Housing Association gave us a presentation on their weekend Estate Action Days scheme where Caretakers volunteer their own time to spend a day on an estate providing services such as deep cleaning, removal of graffiti and carrying out minor repairs. This has proved successful with residents.

We also reviewed and compared our approach to resident controlled estate improvement budgets although all had a version of this resource.

## Benchmarking

The group collected core Key Performance Indicator (KPI) information for Registered Providers across London Borough of Tower Hamlets, providing both quarterly reports and an annual report on the results, analysing and comparing performance and cost. Detailed discussions were held comparing best practice for areas such as the letting of empty homes, repairs and maintenance, income collection and resident satisfaction. This helped Registered Providers learn from others to drive up customer service standards.

Performance information will now be included on the new refreshed Tower Hamlets Housing Forum website and are working on developing benchmarking information for leaseholders' service charges to enable cost comparison.

A revised Performance Management Framework for Registered Providers who are members of the Tower Hamlets Housing Forum or Preferred Development Partners in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets was launched during 2013. This will help better compare standards across housing providers in the borough.

## Housing Management

Ongoing partnership working has seen the sharing of best practice to mitigate the impact of the welfare reforms and support those residents affected. This included discussing potential income for residents from lodgers versus income from boarders, getting advice on the legal implications of this and sharing information on successful financial inclusion activities.

We provided advice to support the Resident Scrutiny Panel and gave feedback on their review of local offers. We also reviewed partner Registered Providers' approach to Tenant Complaint Panels and explored the feasibility of setting up a borough wide Panel.

The "Better with Age" Practitioner's Seminar, held in June 2013, explored how Registered Providers can provide an enhanced management offer to older residents. We plan to make this an annual event and will run a further seminar in 2014. We also considered information on the "Getting on with Money" project run by the Bromley by Bow Centre, which aims to enhance processes and practices to better support vulnerable tenants, with several partners signing up to be a part of this project.

Learning presentations received throughout the year included the new Housing Complaints Procedure, a Lottery Financial Capability proposal, the Policis Report (providing advice on identifying those likely to be most affected by the welfare reform changes), the London Community Credit Union, the London Borough of Tower Hamlets Financial Inclusion Strategy and action plan, the Council's Older People's Statement and Assistive Technology which can help people with deteriorating health to remain in their homes safely for longer.

## Community Involvement Network (CIN)

In 2013 we worked with the Job Centre Plus to run a joint careers advice event. Our partnership working increased links with Public Health Managers and Locality Managers to promote healthy living and residents were trained to deliver mystery shopping exercises. A number of joint youth projects were delivered with the Borough and we developed multi-landlord training packages, increasing the number of courses available for residents around debt management, welfare reform and responsible saving. This was an opportunity for residents to meet and share experiences. We raised awareness of digital exclusion and looked at ways of tackling this.

The "STAR in the Community Awards" which recognises positive contributions made by community volunteers in Tower Hamlets was held in November 2012.

Learning presentations received included youth employment from City Gateway, apprenticeships and training, youth services and training from the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, Digital Financial Inclusion from the East London Business Alliance and Poplar HARCA on how their Community Engagement Strategy is driven through the use of volunteers.

## Asset Management

A Fire Strategy was developed to help the emergency services and an easy to read signage template agreed. This will give the London Fire Brigade all the essential information they need to know about each block of flats at a glance. This new signage is being trialled by Poplar HARCA. We are looking at standardising and supporting Registered Providers' approach to local training and employment initiatives as a requirement of their maintenance contracts.

A protocol to support effective working between the London Borough of Tower Hamlets and Registered Providers in relation to Disabled Facilities Grant administration has been agreed and will be launched in April 2014.

Learning presentations included the London Borough of Tower Hamlets' Affordable Warmth Strategy, the energy cooperative initiative, flood risk and collaborative working and GIS (Geographical Information Systems) stock mapping.

## Resident Scrutiny Panel

The THHF supported the formation of a Resident Scrutiny Panel that consists of 1 resident representative from each of the Registered Providers. The purpose of the group is to share best practice taking place within each of the Associations and participate in joint scrutiny activities that support the drive for continuous improvement.

The Scrutiny Panel is in its 2nd year and much of the last year has been spent training and consolidating the group with the help of an Independent Resident Mentor. This additional support enabled the Panel to successfully complete their first joint scrutiny exercise. The Panel chose to explore the effectiveness of the Mutual Exchange process across Registered Providers in light of the impact of recent welfare reform legislation. The key recommendations arising from their report will be discussed by the THHF Executive with a view to agreeing which elements of best practice can be implemented to improve the numbers of tenants being able to secure a transfer using this method.

The Panel have also been engaged in preparing and presenting the results of a number of Service Reviews across their respective Associations. This approach has helped them to gain a better understanding of how their landlords' business operates and improve their confidence so they feel better prepared to challenge their landlords to improve the way services are currently delivered.



# The Tower Hamlets Housing Forum Executive members are:



A2 Dominion



Eastend Homes



East Thames



Family Mosaic



Gallions HA



Gateway HA



Genesis HG



London & Quadrant



Network Housing



Old Ford HA



One Housing Group



Peabody Housing



Poplar HARCA



Providence Row HA



Southern Housing



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Spitalfields HA



Swan HA



Tower Hamlets Community Housing



Tower Hamlets Homes

For more information please go to <http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/> and search for Tower Hamlets Housing Forum.

