

# TOWER HAMLETS HOUSING FORUM



TOWER HAMLETS  
HOUSING FORUM

2020-2021 Annual Report



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# Introduction

Welcome to the annual report of the Tower Hamlets Housing Forum (THHF), a group of registered social housing providers in the Borough of Tower Hamlets. We are committed to working in partnership across the Borough

The members of Tower Hamlets Housing Forum meet because we have a common interest - getting the best affordable housing for the communities of Tower Hamlets, and providing residents with high-quality, great standard services. As strategic partners who work together, we help the London Borough of Tower Hamlets (LBTH) deliver its overall housing strategy and get the best value for money for residents across housing services. Over the last year it feels like our role and our partnership with LBTH and each other has never been more important, and we are committed to continue this valuable forum.

Everyone has been affected by Covid 19 - the impact it has had on residents and communities has been immense. Public Health has been in demand like never before, and as representatives of the borough's housing providers, we've worked closely with the LBTH Public Health Team. But the pandemic has challenged beyond health on all fronts – jobs, finance, services, support, food, family and every aspect of day-to-day life - with so many people spending so much time at home, the value of a really good home has been highlighted as never before, and our remit has been brought into strong focus.



The year has been busy. Safeguarding and supporting residents starts with good communication, and to this end we created the Forum Pledge (see page 8), to assure all our residents that we are working closely together, keeping critical services going, looking after welfare and offering support and advice. This is a joint commitment that all the Forum members have signed up to. Together we work hard to improve the lives of residents through our community development and engagement work, and we have a shared commitment to making our estates and neighbourhoods great places to live for everyone

During the year we considered the **Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Strategy** for 2020-2024 and we have pledged our support and commitment to it, which will be delivered through the Community Involvement Network sub-group.

I was proud to represent Tower Hamlets Housing Forum at the **Tower Hamlets Inequalities Commission**, which was led by Councillor Asma Begum and was charged with tackling structural inequality and delivering tangible and practical solutions to improve the lives of BAME people in Tower Hamlets. The Forum has pledged our support to the Commission's wide-ranging

recommendations and we are determined to play our part in building back better and delivering a truly inclusive and anti-racist borough.

Another key focus for us this year has been building safety. The work is complex and significant, but we are making progress - we are investing in our homes and tapping into funding from the **Building Safety Fund**, the UK Government's funding to remove unsafe cladding from high-rise residential buildings.

It has been a privilege to serve a borough like Tower Hamlets, and one that we don't take for granted. We're committed to doing all we can to make sure that the residents of Tower Hamlets have the high quality, affordable housing that they deserve. We would like to thank the Council, the Mayor of Tower Hamlets, the London Fire Service, the local Police in Tower Hamlets, the Council Public Health Team and the voluntary sector for continuing to support our work with local communities in the Borough.

I hope you find this report a useful summary of the Forum's work. If you would like more information, then please get in touch.

**Pam Bhamra**  
Tower Hamlets Housing Forum Chair

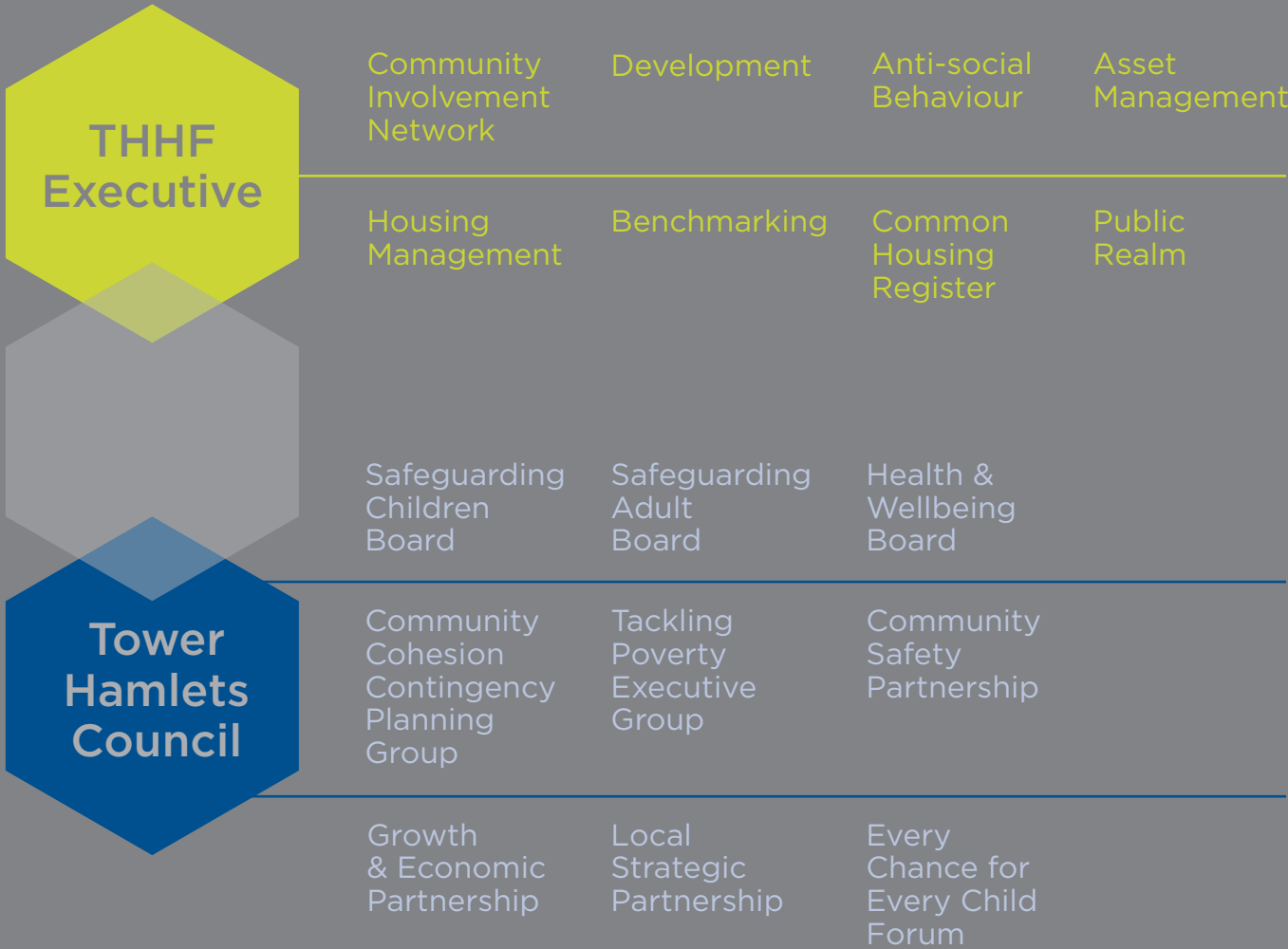


# How we work together

The Forum works closely with Tower Hamlets Council across all issues related to housing and the community in the borough.

The Executive Group meets five times a year and also holds an Annual General Meeting (AGM) each Autumn. Our work is supported by a range of sub groups looking at key areas of housing delivery, the provision of landlord services and community initiatives with local residents.

We have a clear focus on continued service improvement, sharing and implementing good practice and stretching ourselves to try new things. THHF also supports a range of Council Forums for strategy and delivery, with representation across a range of workstreams.



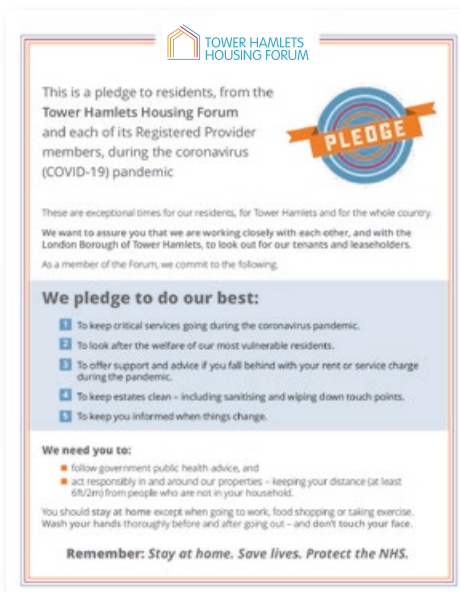
# Our response to Covid 19

Social housing organisations have a great responsibility, and helping the community to face the pandemic challenge has been a key priority during the year

Dealing with a pandemic has brought out the best in people and the country is rightly proud of our NHS and our vaccination programme. Covid 19 has impacted Tower Hamlets in the same way as all communities in the land, and keeping residents safe, continuing to provide the best quality housing and services, has been the priority for all members of the Forum. We have worked closely with the **LBTH Public Health Team** on communications, impact for residents, awareness raising of key messages and service issues.

We developed a pledge in April, to outline our commitment to all our residents, not only to demonstrate our support for our community, but to strengthen our bond with residents and stakeholders in the Borough.

Our teams have had to work and respond differently to the challenges presented by the pandemic - and they have shown great resilience and commitment to overcome difficulties. Together with our residents, local partners, and LBTH we have faced the pandemic head on and used our creativity to continue delivering community support. Among our special efforts have been checking in with elderly and vulnerable residents throughout the lockdown period, and supporting, facilitating, and delivering community projects to help residents that were vulnerable or self isolating at home.



## Case studies

### Tower Hamlets Community Housing

THCH supported Aishah Help through the use of their Tarling and Minerva Community Centre. Aishah Help used the centres as a base for distributing care packages to people who were vulnerable and isolated.

- 1,000 households received support
- 50 volunteers involved

### Tower Hamlets Homes (THH)

THH supported three community hubs throughout the pandemic resulting in over:

- 20,000 hot meals delivered
- 10,000 welfare phone calls
- 4,000 food parcels delivered
- 2,000 shopping trips

Their **Reducing Loneliness Programme** also made sure many of the same residents benefited from a befriending service. THH's response to the pandemic and its work on resident wellbeing were awarded distinctions in their accreditation by the **Housing Diversity Network**.

### EastEnd Homes

EastEnd Homes Staff have been contacting residents through their **'Safe and Well'** scheme during the national lockdown and this provided a real lifeline for people, particularly those who don't have family nearby.

### Poplar Harca

Poplar Harca worked with local mutual aid groups and Tower Hamlets Council to operate food banks and cook hot meals at their Neighbourhood Centres. Notable among them is the **Women's Inclusive Team** and the **Burdett Mutual Aid** group led by the **Burdett Football Club**. Volunteers delivered food parcels to vulnerable residents while school children collected them from our Centres during term breaks and summer holidays. They also worked with **Save the Children Fund** to offer families with children under five years up to £340 in food vouchers and other essential needs, including computers to support home learning.

### Gateway Housing

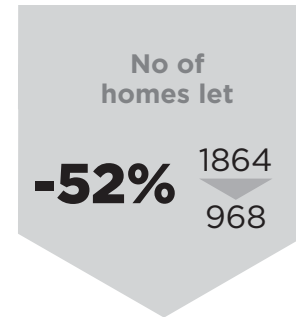
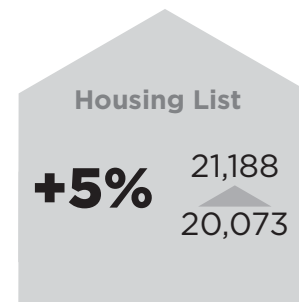
Gateway supported vulnerable residents across their older persons schemes and general needs stock by :

- Installing an 'Alertacall' system on request to ensure a call to residents several times a day, at the time of their choosing
- Food deliveries by their Homeworks (DLO) teams to vulnerable residents and the older people schemes
- Working with the health authority / LBTH to coordinate covid vaccination program at older people schemes

## Sub Groups

# Common Housing Register Partnership

We partnered with the Council in rehousing 1,864 households and making improvements to the lettings process



With Covid overwhelming us all in 2020, the value we place on home has been in sharp focus. Between April 2020 and April 2021 the housing list increased by 5%, while there was a 52% decrease in the number of homes let in the same period.

For Common Housing Register Partners, this has prompted a review of what we do and how we do it, to maximise the benefit of homes to our Tower Hamlets community. This year, the Partnership:

- Held training for all partners on new policy provisions and on information sharing
- Reviewed and clarified housing list eligibility criteria for anyone with a financial interest in a residential property
- Reviewed the local lettings plan framework
- Reviewed the overcrowding reduction strategy framework
- Set-up a policy sub-group to consider the detail of how we can make best use of available housing stock in-line with the prevailing policy
- Shared best working practices to let homes safely
- Tracked the progress of the Council's Housing Options Customer Access Review

## Sub Groups

# Community Involvement Network

To support stronger, more sustainable communities in the borough, the CIN is a strategic partnership that helps to deliver initiatives that promote cohesion and strengthen resident capacity



We contributed to the LBTH-led **Poverty Commission**, supporting councillors and colleagues from the community in discussion around key challenges faced by residents with a particular focus on housing affordability across all sectors and the impact of digital exclusion

The CIN focussed on

- Supporting the council to ensure key messages reached our residents relating to Covid
- Engaging with the **CVS network** to establish a shared partnership approach to boroughwide community priorities
- Understanding and brokering opportunities for our residents to be delivered through partner agencies so that our position as Housing Associations adds value to the lives of our residents



## Sub Groups

# Housing Management

The Group discusses sharing good practice, working in partnership and considering housing policy and legislation

The Housing Management group had a challenging year. The task was to bring together best practice around service delivery and communication with residents under the impact of Covid 19. We supported the Tower Hamlets Council Public Health Team and within the group we shared information and best practice regarding how we change the way we provide services in the face of the pandemic.

Representatives of the member associations shared information on how they were evolving and adapting their service offer, what changes on the ground were needed to housing management under rapidly changing circumstances, in and out of successive lockdowns, and then forward to recovery planning.

The group also considered, alongside the LBTH Civil Contingencies Team, how we could work better together in responding to local emergencies, mitigate the borough-wide impacts of incidents and how speedily keep residents safe and up-to-date.



## Sub Groups

# Public Realm

The group works with the Council and partners to provide attractive places for residents to live



The group's remit is large - it covers everything that impacts upon the daily lives of residents. During the year, the Public Realm group:

- Developed key relationships with council officers as part of the transition in waste management services. In addition we provided feedback on the effectiveness of the resident communication model, in respect of waste management
- Identified key themes for improving service delivery to residents and discussed solutions
- Shared examples of good practice and feedback among individual members, on new initiatives including parking schemes, recycling, public health, purchasing and many more
- Studied the impact of Covid across services related to public realm and found approaches being taken to try and minimise the impact on all our services

# Asset Management



The Asset Management group focuses on supporting well maintained safe and secure homes

The group has spent the year reviewing and sharing practice and policy on issues surrounding security, fire safety, housing design, standards, sustainability and everything that makes a safe and secure home environment for all our residents. We have worked on many issues, including:

- Reviewing the implications and requirements arising from progress of the **Fire Safety and Building Safety Bill** as the legislation progressed through parliament
- Considered the impact of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) form for Cladding External Wall System (EWS1), and how we were managing the challenge presented by the guidance
- Considered the key aspects of a successful Sustainability Strategy and reviewed examples of good practice
- Shared our experiences of high density living as part of the review of the Council's new design guide which sets out key design considerations for developers

# Development

The Development Group works in partnership with the Council's **Affordable Housing Development and Partnerships Team** and the **Greater London Authority (GLA)**, to deliver both the Affordable Housing Programme, the Council's Local Plan and the Mayor of London's Housing Strategy.

During the year the Group has:

- Helped develop **960 affordable homes** during the year
- Delivered **146 new accessible homes** for those waiting for specialist adapted accommodation under Project 120
- Contributed to the Council's **Housing Estate Regeneration Roadmap for Engagement with Social Landlords** to provide a standardised process
- Continued to review fire safety in new build housing with a particular focus on Government guidance on tall buildings
- Developed employment and training opportunities through new developments focusing on local labour
- Considered the benefits and challenges associated with **Building to Zero Carbon by 2050**
- Reviewed the Borough's emerging **Intermediate Housing Policy** and proposed new intermediate housing register
- Held an extraordinary meeting to review the **Affordable Homes Programme 2021-2026** and provided a collective response to the GLA with proposals to help ensure the funding round maximises delivery of affordable housing
- Worked on Council **Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs)**: Central Area Good Growth, Reuse, Recycling & Waste, High Density Living SPD

The group is concerned with the design and building of new affordable homes - we developed 960 affordable homes during the year





## Sub Groups

# Anti-Social Behaviour

During the year the group's meetings focused on strengthening our response to managing Anti-Social Behaviour, and particularly the impact of Covid-19 on changes to patterns of behaviour. We shared experiences and suggestions for problem-solving.

Topics covered by the group in 2020-21 also included:

- Our joint responses to the **Councils Substance Misuse Strategy 2020-25**
- Studying and reviewing the impact of the **Nitrous Oxide Public Space Protection Order**
- A multi-landlord **Tackling Knife Crime Initiative**
- Reviewing the **Community Trigger Self-assessment** undertaken by landlords
- Considering the impact of the **Social Housing White Paper**

Tackling ASB is a key priority for housing providers and the Council, and the ASB group shares experience, policy and practice



## Sub Groups

# Benchmarking

The Benchmarking group compares costs and performance information, and shares best practice across the Borough on value for money and sound management



The group shared experiences of delivering services during the challenging periods linked to the pandemic and also new innovative ways of working that they were developing.

Much of the work for the year was primarily focused on reviewing and updating the THHF Key Performance Indicator dashboard and developing a revised approach with clear guidelines linked to HouseMark.

# Forum Members



## Clarion



The mission of Clarion Housing Group is to provide good quality, affordable homes and neighbourhoods to people failed by the market. With 125,000 properties and more than 350,000 residents, we are the largest housing association in the country. Clarion Housing owns and manages 5,800 homes in Tower Hamlets – most of them in the Bow area.

The past year has been challenging for all housing associations, however Clarion has worked hard to continue (since June 2020) to provide a full set of services which has included all housing management issues and repairs. We have continued to work with our residents in the Borough, listening to their needs so we can make improvements to the areas they live in such as increasing security measures on one of our estates to reduce anti-social behaviour and making improvements to our green spaces so they can be enjoyed by all. We have also invested in the local communities we work with and through our Old Ford Community Panel we have awarded £69,575 in grants to 14 local organisations. The grants have been used to deliver things like social activities, support for older people and foodbank support.

Clarion’s charitable foundation continues to support residents in Tower Hamlets getting them into work, improving their digital skills, accessing training and providing money and debt advice. Last year 209 residents were helped into employment

and 316 supported with formal training . We have also continued to help residents get online and improve their digital skills, for example last year we provided 25 Tower Hamlets residents with laptops and support. Clarion Futures continues to provide a range of community facilities including the Roman Road Adventure Playground – where local young people can go to play – and the Eastside Youth and Community Centre. Clarion Housing also runs the local garden centre, Growing Concerns, which also delivers the majority of grounds maintenance services in Bow.

## East End Homes



EastendHomes is an award-winning community focused housing association providing social, affordable and market rent homes primarily in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

It owns and manages 3,788 homes from the southern part of the Isle of Dogs through to the City of London fringe. Of this number 2,243 are social homes, 1,484 are leaseholder and 61 are either market rent or intermediate. To date, EastendHomes has invested over £145million in estate improvements, award winning regeneration schemes, community services and building new affordable homes. Over the next five years it plans to invest a further £33.9million into Tower Hamlets housing and spaces.

EastendHomes works in partnership with residents, volunteers and a wide range of corporate and public

partners to meet the needs, priorities and aspirations of all its residents. Its community focus facilitates a number of successful resident-led projects.

EastendHomes is a TPAS Accredited Landlord. In its 2019 review TPAS praised staff and residents for working ‘closely and well together’. TPAS is the only evidence-based accreditation scheme with a joint focus on resident involvement and value for money.

## Gateway



Based in the East End for nearly 100 years, Gateway is a community housing association with 3,000 homes in the heart of East London. Gateway provides rented and shared ownership homes across Hackney, Newham and Tower Hamlets and is the largest provider of older people’s housing in Tower Hamlets.

Gateway’s purpose is to provide great homes for people in East London and to support communities to thrive. It’s committed to offering affordable, desirable, well maintained and well managed homes.

Gateway has just launched its new three-year Strategy ‘Unlocking Performance’, with the core strategic objectives set out under the themes of Trust, Quality and Performance. With an ambitious development and resident engagement program, ultimately our vision is that people will want to live in a Gateway home, and people will want to work for Gateway as an organisation.

## L&Q



L&Q Group is one of the UK’s leading housing associations and one of London’s largest residential developers. The L&Q Group manages more than 90,000 homes across London and the South East, including almost 3,000 homes in Tower Hamlets. The L&Q Group is working towards delivering 100,000 quality new homes, half of which will be genuinely affordable and half for private rent or sale. Through the L&Q Foundation, it will also invest £250 million to improve the life chances of those who live in its homes and communities and to promote independence among residents. L&Q launched its care and support subsidiary, L&Q Living, in 2017.

## Notting Hill Genesis



Notting Hill Genesis is a leading provider of homes and services. The organisation was formed following the merger of Notting Hill and Genesis Housing Associations in April 2018. Both organisations have a long history within the housing sector having celebrated their 50th anniversaries.

Notting Hill Genesis own or manage around 55,000 units of all tenures, providing homes and services to over 170,000 people in more than 80 local authorities in London, Hertfordshire and the East of England.

Our stock portfolio includes a range of properties – from temporary housing, to private and social rent homes, homes for sale, to supported housing and key worker accommodation. Notting Hill Genesis is also part of the G15 group, London’s largest 15 housing associations, which between them provide homes for one in ten Londoners and a quarter of all new homes in the capital.

## One Housing



One Housing builds and maintains homes across London and the South East. Of the 17,000 properties we own and manage, over 5,000 are in Tower Hamlets. We offer a wide range of housing options to suit the needs of our 35,000 customers, including homes for social rent in partnership with local authorities, as well as homes for affordable rent, shared ownership, private rent and private sale.

We are one of London’s largest care providers, delivering a variety of accommodation-based and floating support services to 9,500 customers, enabling them to live as independently as possible at home. Our customers include older people, people with complex mental health needs, young people and people with learning disabilities. We also support people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless and manage Arlington, the UK’s largest homeless hostel. We work hard to make a positive difference to our customers’ lives, providing support so they can maintain their independence and well-being through a range of training, support and advice services.

We are committed to addressing the chronic shortage of affordable housing and have delivered more than 1,500 new homes since 2011. We are a member of the G15 group of London housing associations.



### Peabody



Peabody's mission is to help people make the most of their lives. We are now responsible for 66,000 homes across London and the South East. We build great quality places and have ambitious plans to develop more much needed social and affordable homes.

Making sure our homes are safe is our absolute priority. In 2018/19, we invested £27 million in building safety works on new and existing buildings and are early adopters of the government's building safety charter. This is in addition to our investment of £440 million in new and existing homes in 2018/19.

Most of our 133,000 residents live in London, predominantly in the inner boroughs including Tower Hamlets where we have around 3,500 homes and deliver a range of community services. Our communities are an integral part of our mission, and this year, we invested £7 million in supporting people through the Peabody Community Foundation. This includes helping 1,231 people into work, generating a return of £5 for every £1 invested. We also provide care and support services to over 18,300 people.

### Poplar HARCA



Poplar HARCA is a multi-award-winning housing association with an international reputation for innovation, regeneration and great services. Its mission is to create opportunities. With and for local residents, it is re-building its part of East London including new homes, schools and infrastructure; new retail, health and community provision; and great green spaces.

### Providence Row Housing Association



Providence Row HA is based in Tower Hamlets and provides mainly specialist supported accommodation and intensive support services for people with multiple support needs, histories of rough sleeping, mental health issues and young people.

We provide recovery-based programmes that help people return to mainstream accommodation and to reintegrate with local communities. Last year this benefited over 600 Tower Hamlets residents.

We also provide 133 units of unsupported accommodation most of which provides housing for local families.

We are a local employer and aim to provide local people with work experience and volunteering opportunities.

Partnerships with local voluntary groups have included childcare provision through the Early Years Network Tower Hamlets and gardening and environmental enhancement with the Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park.

### Southern Housing Group



Southern Housing Group was established in 1901 and has grown to become one of the largest housing associations in the south east of England. The Group houses almost 100,000 residents, owns and manages over 30,000 homes and properties and works with over 40 local authorities. It also employs over 1,000 people, offers a range of housing products for rent and sale and is committed to improving the lives of its customers.

The Group believes that investing in people and communities is as important as building homes and this philosophy has informed its activities for

more than 100 years. It aims to provide a first-class housing management service for its customers living in a range of tenures including social rent, affordable rent, private rent, sheltered housing, shared ownership and private sale. It also provides care and support services to over 500 people.

Southern Housing Group is a member of the G15, which represents London's largest housing associations. The G15 houses one in ten Londoners and builds a quarter of London's new homes. Together they work to solve the housing crisis by delivering good quality, affordable homes of all types.

### Spitalfields Housing Association



Spitalfields Housing Association (HA) is celebrating our '40 years of community housing'.

Spitalfields HA is the largest Bangladeshi led housing association in the UK. The Association was founded in 1979 by members of the Bangladeshi community in response to poor housing conditions in the Spitalfields area. It was originally set up as a co-operative, and concentrated on developing large family sized accommodation for Bangladeshi families.

The Association was registered with the Housing Corporation in 1979 and it began an ambitious development programme, where it refurbished and invested in what had been underdeveloped homes and into community facilities. It is now a general needs housing provider, providing good quality housing, and community services to those with the greatest needs in Tower Hamlets. The Association currently owns and manages over 850 properties with a target of getting to 1,000 homes in the near future. The Association also owns and manages a commercial property portfolio where the surplus is reinvested for the benefit of the community and social housing needs.

Spitalfields HA's mission is to "create places where people want to live". It is focussed on investing in the community and provided a wide range of non-housing services through selected partners in their purpose built Hason Raja Community Centre on Vallance Road. The centre is equipped to provide a comprehensive range of activities that their residents have requested and they endeavour to continue to offer youth activities, health and wellbeing, and employment and training services for the wider community.

## Swan Housing Association



For over 25 years Swan Housing Association has provided high-quality affordable homes, creating thriving communities for those who need it most. Primarily operating across East London and Essex, Swan manages over 11,500 homes with a secure development pipeline of over 8,000 homes. Through its in-house developer NU living, Swan builds new homes and regenerates communities using both traditional and offsite construction methods, precision engineering its own modular homes that are environmentally, socially and economically sustainable.

Swan Housing Association is focussed on achieving the biggest social impact whilst creating balanced neighbourhoods by specialising in social, affordable and private sale homes. Swan delivers a full range of housing services, in partnership with local authorities including London Borough of Tower Hamlets supporting those who need it most through our dedicated housing teams who are passionate about delivering our social purpose.

Customer Service Excellence and IPP Gold accredited, Swan's expert staff provide specialist

advice and deliver local services to our residents and stakeholders, whilst working closely with our Borough partners.

Tower Hamlets is home to our London Regional office, based at Blackwall Reach where we take an active role in Borough initiatives. From our flagship community facility 'The Reach' we have hosted hundreds of community events ranging from sewing classes to cooking classes, youth clubs to trampolining yoga.

We are committed to delivering much needed new homes in Tower Hamlets. Current schemes include Blackwall Reach which will create 1,500 homes, 50% of which will be affordable and Watts Grove E3, will deliver 65 new homes across a 100% affordable housing scheme.

Profits generated by Swan's commercial activity are reinvested by Swan to provide regenerated neighbourhoods, investment in communities and the delivery of more homes for social rent, shared ownership and sale, driven by our belief that everyone deserves to have somewhere to feel at home.

## Tower Hamlets Community Housing



Tower Hamlets Community Housing (THCH) is an independent, community focused housing provider managing 3,200 homes in Tower Hamlets.

Our vision is 'Building Connected Communities by:

- Creating vibrant and healthy places to live in Tower Hamlets
- Supporting people to achieve their goals
- Delivering great value services

We focus on providing great homes through modernising existing homes and improving safety, delivering excellent services, valuing our people and empowering residents and communities to thrive. Our values of openness, partnership, inclusive, integrity and empathy underpin the way that we work.

We provide a mix of quality, affordable housing as well as market sale, shared ownership and commercial property with a history of regeneration and delivering innovative housing developments.

THCH is a member of the PlaceShapers Group - a national network of more than 100 community based housing associations.

## Tower Hamlets Homes



Tower Hamlets Homes (THH) is an Arm's Length Management Organisation (ALMO) formed in 2008; a not-for-profit company delivering a full range of tenant and leasehold management services across 22,000 homes on behalf of Tower Hamlets Council.

The extension of the management agreement reflects marked increases in resident satisfaction and strong performance in areas such as tackling anti-social behaviour and fire safety management, together with a financial savings programme. An extensive customer transformation programme continues to drive up standards in all areas and highlights THH's ambitions for continuous improvement across all the services it delivers.

In May 2019 THH was awarded the prestigious Landlord of the Year Award at the Chartered Institute of Housing's UK Housing Awards and in June 2019 added the Housing Heroes Frontline Team of the Year award for their caretaking service. In September 2018 THH opened their Financial Health Centre, a multi-agency service which in the first year advised more than 1,200 residents, supporting 350 with employment and training sessions and securing employment for a further 120.





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